

# A JOURNEY OF FAITH

A Church Planter's Primer  
on Spiritual Formation

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GARY TEJA

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A Church Planter's Primer on Spiritual Formation

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## ENDORSEMENT

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*I just finished teaching another 8-week course (Monday evenings) in our church, using **A Journey of Faith**, as the principal text. The presence of God was with us in the classes, and the response of the students was phenomenal. There is a great and present need in the church for the biblical and theological principles of spiritual formation, and the practice of the spiritual disciplines, as outlined in the book.*

***A Journey of Faith** is one of the best books--if not the best in its category--that I've ever read and taught. The diagrams on the models of sanctification in the appendix, and the chapter on personality and spirituality are worth the cost of the book. The book is biblical, theological...and practical. At the end of class Monday night, a young lady said that she had never taken a class in which she sensed such a presence of the Lord.*

**Bishop Philip Pruitt**  
**Church of God of Prophecy, California**

*The author of this book has found a way to share profound truths in clear and understandable terms.*

*While it is acknowledged that there are numerous books on the vital topic of discipleship, the plan that is utilized in this book ensures that the readers have a clear sense of direction as they give their attention to the conceptual as well as the practical dimensions of Christian discipleship.*

*I wholeheartedly recommend this book to church groups and educational institutions whose goal it is to enable church members and ministry leaders to continue to grow in their relationship with the Lord and to be more effective as they serve Him.*

**Daniel R. Sanchez, DMin, PhD**  
**Associate Dean and Professor of Intercultural Studies,**  
**Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary**

*In **A Journey of Faith**, Gary Teja challenges church leaders to keep their eyes on God and keep spiritually healthy for the good of the church. He brings together the best of numerous theologians, scholars and practitioners on both the biblical foundations of spiritual formation as well as the practice of spiritual disciplines. Each chapter contains practical and personal examples to illustrate the concepts, and ends with discussion questions to help readers explore and apply the ideas. I especially commend him for highlighting the role of God as the primary actor in our spiritual lives, and for consistently avoiding the temptation to frame spiritual formation as a sort of mathematical equation. Instead, he embraces personality and cultural differences that will inevitably affect the disciplined life, even as he encourages us to explore biblical and historic disciplines that may be outside of our norm. He also rightly highlights the role of the broader believing community for accountability and encouragement. His transparency about his own walk demonstrates the vulnerability he is calling for. This book is helpful to us all, as he challenges us to seriously consider how to best follow Christ in our daily walk so that the life and mission of the church can flourish.*

**Lisa Hoozeboom, D.Min.,**

**Associate Professor of Biblical and Intercultural Studies at Kuyper College**

*I take it seriously when asked to write an endorsement for someone's book. It requires honesty and critical thinking on my behalf. **A Journey of Faith** by Dr. Gary Teja is a book that I highly recommend to the Christian community at large. Although the focus is on church planters, it can also be applied to the broader community of Christ-followers.*

*Three things stand out. First, the content has scope and depth. Dr. Teja draws from history, the Bible and contemporary sources to develop a balanced perspective on the spiritual disciplines. Secondly, the author's didactic writing style enhances the book's usefulness for a wide audience. Each chapter ends with a series of questions and action-points that challenge the reader to go deeper into the material. The third thing that stands out is that the book is eminently practical. Dr. Teja lives and breathes church planting and spiritual formation. He is not just a theoretician but a scholar who walks in the trenches with the workers. His passion and meticulous attention to details provide a treasure of experience that will equip the reader with tools for serving our Lord in church planting and spiritual development.*

**Nicholas A. Venditti, Ph.D.,**

**President, Inste Global Bible College**

## A Journey of Faith

*Dr. Gary Teja has produced a world class spiritual formation manual for authentic Christian living. I see it as a “life School” that points out the “how” of a victorious life of the Christian. Gary has indeed availed himself to be used by the Holy Spirit to put together this thought provoking master piece. He has painstakingly researched and came out with this invaluable resource for transformation making use of past experiences of great men of faith. I am particularly enthused by his in-depth treatment of the spiritual disciplines; that spiritual disciplines are not ends in themselves but rather means. As it were spiritual disciplines bring us to a place where God can see us clearly and act in our favor. This “must read” piece serves as a firm foundation for church planters and a manual for their mentors.*

*As you take time to “dig this treasure” I urge you to reflect meditatively on the summaries and use the questions to inductively draw closer to your Lord. Have a great reading experience.*

**Rev. Samuel Buenor Lawerteh**  
**District Superintendent, Presbyterian Church of Ghana**



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## DEDICATION

To the memory of my mentor and colleague in missions, Dr. Roger S. Greenway, whose passion for Christ and his church inspired many of us on the mission field and in the classroom. A scholar, a compassionate leader, a teller of humorous stories from his missionary days, Roger always found time for those who visited his office in spite of a busy schedule.

To Rev. Bernard (Bernie) Dokter, field leader, affectionately called Dr. Dokter, who kept me going through some very difficult times in my first years on the mission field. He had a calming effect on a high-strung, inexperienced young missionary.

To my many colleagues at Multiplication Network Ministries whose passion to see *More and Stronger Churches* energizes me each day to push ahead.

And finally, to my wife, Jackie Teja, without whose emotional and physical support I would not have lasted through nearly 50 years of ministry, nor would I have taken on the challenges that I have.

SOLI DEO GLORIA



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## PROLOGUE

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When I was first approached to write this book in Spanish, I asked myself “What do I really know about spiritual formation?” I had been involved in leadership development for more than 40 years, 35 of those years within the Christian Reformed Church through five different agencies. I was adept at preparing leaders and mentoring them in all areas except in spiritual formation where my emphasis had been less adequate. In fact, the end result of some of my leadership development was leaders with part of them missing, the truly spiritual part. They knew their theology; they could prepare sermons; they could evangelize and make pastoral visits. But some of these leaders for lack of a firm spiritual formation foundation, ended up falling into sin and being drummed out of ministry. Not that I take full responsibility for their actions, but I have come to realize that probably the most important element in their formation as leaders was under-emphasized. I’m reminded of a metaphor that was used by Ken Mulholland in the early days of TEE (theological education by extension). He drew a railroad track on a bed of stone and gravel. The rails of the track represented the cognitive side of leadership development, the part that deals with what a leader needs to know. (One could say one rail represented the cognitive and the other represented skills development if you want to have a fuller picture of leadership development.) The wooden supports underneath the rails to which these rails were nailed dealt with the reflection that needs to occur regarding what a leader is learning. But undergirding the track was a bed of gravel and stone, a firm foundation that keeps the track from moving or buckling. Mulholland called this spiritual formation.

I have used this illustration over the years, yet I would have to admit that I gave the least attention to this gravel base in all of these years of guiding others. It is only in the past 15-20 years or so that I have really recognized this deficiency in the way I do ministry. And I have had to come to grips with the fact that my own spiritual formation has not been what I would desire it to be. I could not model for others what I did not have myself.

The writing of this book, then, has been just as much a spiritual exercise for me as the completion of a task. It has given me time to reflect again on what is most important as we form leaders for ministry, especially those who sense the call to plant new churches and form new leaders.

This book, of course, begins with the need to “begin well” so that we can “end well.” Spiritual formation takes time. It is not something spontaneous as a result of our coming to Christ.

The second chapter gives a biblical/theological foundation to spiritual formation. Anything we would teach or attempt to transmit to others needs to find its roots in Scripture. We are “people of the Book,” and we hold to *Sola Scriptura* as our motto.

Chapter Three looks at the life of Jesus and what he did to keep spiritually fit and makes an initial application to us. This serves as an introduction to what we call the spiritual disciplines.

Chapter Four looks at the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and meditation, prayer, and fasting. These disciplines have often been lost in our fast-paced world, yet are spiritual habits which we need to practice as believers and as church planters in order to stay in tune with God as we seek to establish outposts of the kingdom.

Chapter Five continues on this theme by describing journaling, solitude and silence, and worship as three additional spiritual disciplines.

Chapter Six considers how our God-given personality affects the way(s) in which we approach him on a daily basis. God has created each one of us in a particular way. Our personality influences our approach to God and to others. This is something we need to understand about ourselves. This is not a navel-gazing exercise, but a time of introspection as we come to grips with how God has wired us and how this affects the way we come to God and to others.

Chapter Seven looks at the role of mentoring as a tool for spiritual formation. The mentoring of church planters and church planters' mentoring of others is crucial for the success of planting new communities of faith. The key element of mentoring needs to be in the spiritual realm.

Chapter Eight considers barriers to spiritual formation. Simply recognizing the existence of such barriers helps us to be able to move forward.

All of this is followed by a final chapter that attempts to bring it all together, giving final challenges to us regarding our spiritual formation. Each chapter has questions for reflection as well as action points to consider. Where possible, appropriate websites are cited in the end, and an extensive bibliography is provided for future reading. If this book is being used as a textbook, the action points will be particularly important to assign to the students.

There have always been those down through the centuries who have walked with God and have something to teach us. For this reason, where appropriate, I have quoted from these believers. They may not have been correct on every point of theology, but what they say through these pages are biblical truths and personal experiences that can edify us as we journey together into spiritual formation, into the presence of God as those who would lead others. Those quoted come from all Christian theological tendencies. I do not believe any one theological position or denomination has a corner on the market of biblical truth, even though I am a Calvinist through and through. In my many years of ministry and interacting with brothers and sisters of other denominations and theological persuasion, I have come to appreciate not only our commonality but also our differences, both theological and cultural. I have learned much from those who are different from my own denominational upbringing.

It is my hope and prayer that as you go through this book, seeking to be all that you can be as a church planter, you will be challenged to examine your own spiritual development, and to seek ways of deepening your faith walk with God so that he will be glorified and you will daily sense his loving presence in your life. Only then will you be equipped and capable of leading others, particularly other church planters, in spiritual maturation and transformation. Only then will they be able to imitate what you have modelled for them, in the lives of still others in the emerging churches.

Hear the challenge from a woman who centuries ago was imprisoned for her faith. Her words should serve as an inspiration to us as individual believers in Christ, but even more particularly, to those believers with the call to plant a church: “Our journey to God has its beginning, its progress, and its termination. The nearer we come to the end of the road, the further away is the beginning. We must leave one to arrive at another. Press on, press on, press on to know God!” (Guyon, 1984, p. 94).<sup>1</sup>

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1 Note that in this book I will often refer to “our” assumption, or other phrases using the plural. This book is not original with me, but is a composite of many ideas expressed ever more clearly by others, and is the sum total of experiences of many of my colleagues who made this journey at different times with me.

# I

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## DESCRIBED

### INTRODUCTION

We are going on a journey together, a journey of faith in which our goal is to “grow up into Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). Together we will learn what it means to be transformed by God into his image so that we can do his will lovingly and willingly, and to be effective transmitters of the truth of the gospel as we seek to plant a church among those who have been walking in darkness.

This is not an easy task nor is it one that we can do without guidance. Also, it is a journey that only those who have been regenerated by God’s Spirit can take. This is not a journey for non-believers. And so, our first assumption in writing this book is that you, the reader, the learner, the journeyman, have been called by God to salvation, having received the indwelling of his Spirit, and that you now desire to learn how to walk in Jesus’ steps, to imitate him and have a passion to know the will of his Father.

We will walk together side by side through this book, for in the writing of this book, I also will be learning. The Christian journey is a lifelong one. We never fully complete the journey until we have been glorified in Christ. Benner (Benner 2002:16) writes, “For Christians, the spiritual journey is at the core of the human journey. We believe that the ultimate fulfillment of our humanity is found in union with God through Christ. Nothing is therefore more important than discovering and actualizing the unique self-in-Christ that is my eternal destiny. This is the core of Christian spirituality.” Let us, therefore, covenant to learn together, to discover what God wants to teach us about being spiritually formed in him, for now and eternity.

### **First Steps**

With every journey there is a first step. We pack our suitcases, we map out our trip before we ever leave home. When it comes to spiritual formation, there is a first step as well. We will consider that first step by way of several metaphors or word pictures that follow.

*An ocean-going cruise ship* is planning to travel from New York to the Caribbean, through the Panama Canal and up the western coast of the United States. The captain of the ship has the responsibility of guiding that ship on its ocean-going journey. He cannot do this without a set of maps to guide him. No sane pilot would leave port without a set of maps, including maps of the currents. Cruise ships are also linked via satellite to a type of global positioning system (GPS), which transmits the ship's position in relation to existing maps so that the captain can see at all times where he is on the high seas. In early days, this was done with a simple compass and a sextant, using the stars as a guide. The captain must also be kept informed by maps that lay out where dangerous reefs and other obstacles may be so that the ship may avoid running aground on these obstructions.

*When we board a plane for a trip*, whether across a state or across country or across the ocean, we simply place our baggage above our heads in the overhead compartment, sit down and fasten our seatbelts, and await the time of departure. Before we even board the plane, the airlines put the plane through a detailed and lengthy checklist. The plane must go through a series of checks before ever leaving the tarmac. All systems must be checked to see that they are functioning well. The tires are checked, the wings are checked. The fuel levels are checked. All gauges are checked to make sure there is enough oil pressure or that the hydraulics are working. Food is brought on board for the passengers, all checked luggage must be placed underneath the plane in the hold. The pilot has a registered flight plan that he must follow. Weather reports are consulted, maps for the particular flight are brought out. Again, the pilot does not leave the tarmac until all preparations are made and he/she is sure that all systems are working and he/she knows exactly where



to take the plane to its destination.

*A contractor decides to build a new house* which he will offer for sale. He needs to have plans for that house drawn up by an architect. Those plans tell him where to place the studs, how far apart they must be, where to put in the plumbing and electrical systems, the heating and air conditioning systems, everything that goes into the building of the house. If this house is being built in an area annually plagued with hurricanes, it must be built in such a way as to offer some degree of protection to its future inhabitants. It can't fall with the first gusty wind.

Each system needs to be checked by inspectors before he is done with the house and can put the "for sale" sign out front. Probably the most important thing the contractor needs to do is build a strong foundation on which the house must stand. If he doesn't, the house shifts, the walls crack, and part of it ends up digging into the ground. Every day for years when I went for a walk, I passed by a house that was not built on a solid foundation. Half of it leans in one direction, and has sunk down into the ground. Now that we are living at our cottage, as we walk through the woods, we come across cabins that were built with a poor or no foundation. They, too, lean in one direction or the other. Concrete walls are cracked, chimneys have pulled away from the side of the buildings. One day, these structures will collapse completely for lack of a firm foundation.

Such preparatory steps become even more crucial when the contractor's goal is to build a skyscraper. He needs to put in steel pinions on solid rock, and the walls need to be built to withstand high winds and vibrations. If this skyscraper is being built in an active earthquake area, the foundation needs to be built earthquake-proof. A case in point is what was the old center of Managua, Nicaragua. In the early '70s, an earthquake struck the capital city. Houses and stores that did not have a firm foundation—that were not earthquake-proof- fell to the ground within seconds. The only building that escaped unscathed was the Rubén Darío National Theatre, built by Mexican architects to with-

stand tremors and quakes.

*An aspiring physicist* begins preparing for his position years before. Early on he studies basic arithmetic, the times tables, advancing to logarithms before ever attempting courses in physics, including courses on relativity and on quantum physics. Without the basic preparation, this person could never have become a physicist, and probably would have been like me, a dunce when it comes to the language of physics.

*A swimmer* does not get to the Olympic Games by sitting at home watching television. She needs to train daily for hours, perfecting her skills in several events. She also needs to strengthen her muscles by lifting weights, running, doing anything and everything that would build up her stamina and speed. No one would reach Olympic competition without this training. Paul writes, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training,” (1 Corinthians 9:25). The Olympic swimmer needs to start well if she is to finish well.

*If a soldier is going into battle*, he checks his weapon, puts on his helmet and flack vest, and everything else that he needs in order to survive. In today’s world of the professional soldier, this may even include special night goggles and an interactive communication system. A soldier would not think of going into battle unequipped. This is especially true when we talk about the Christian life. The Bible even talks about this in terms of our going into spiritual battle. Paul writes to the Ephesians, “Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the devil’s schemes” (Ephesians 6:11). The Christian ought not to venture out in life without his armor, “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms” (v. 12). The Christian equips himself, puts on the spiritual armor he/she needs in order to survive the spiritual battles raging around him/her. He/she must start well if there is the possibility of coming out of this thing alive. Verses 13-18 continue by describing this spiritual armor.

In the textbook *Conocimiento básico de la fe*, (Gritter and Marcos,

1989) the authors give their own primer on spiritual formation, comparing spiritual growth with physical growth. They remind us of five steps we all go through in our natural development as human beings: being born, being fed, learning to walk, growing, and reaching maturity. They compare this natural life to the spiritual life in which the believer needs to be born again, to be fed on the Word of God, to learn to walk in the way worthy of the Lord, to grow spiritually, and to reach maturity in the gospel, bearing fruit. In both cases, if one of the elements is missing, we are usually considered not fully formed, or malnourished, or missing out on a key element necessary for reaching full maturity. Much of what occurs in spiritual formation strengthens us for living our faith in the world and before God.

### **Starting well**

These first steps described above are really examples of “starting well.” Even so, much emphasis today in the area of Christian development, especially in the ministry, has been put on “finishing well.” Like Paul, we say in our hearts, “if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord has given me...” (Acts 20:24). We want to be able to say with Paul, “Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that... I myself will not be disqualified for the prize,” (1 Corinthians 9:26-27). Paul himself was able to say at the end of life, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day...” (2 Timothy 4:7-8). The writer to the Hebrews summarizes our goal well when he writes, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...” (Hebrews 12:1-2). A runner in those days shed his clothes so that he carried no unnecessary weight and so that nothing could make him stumble as he ran. He also kept his eye on the goal, the finish line. Our finish line is Jesus, to be like him, to reflect his image in this world.

In other words, there is a preoccupation with seeing a leader end

his/her career morally and emotionally successful, to see him or her end life well. There are many horror stories of Christian leaders who burn out like a falling star, crashing to earth after a glowing ministry. Many Christian leaders today have had very “successful” ministries, only to have their reputation and credibility tarnished by sins and indiscretions. Concern, then, for finishing well is legitimate in Christian circles, but probably even more important is a concern *for starting well*. All of the picture images given above speak to us about preparation, about *starting well*. This is because it makes logical sense that if we wish to finish well in whatever we do, we need to start well. For us, then, in this book, the emphasis is on starting well in the Christian life. This is what spiritual formation is all about, preparing us for this spiritual journey through life so that we can stand before Christ one day and joyfully hear the words, “Well done, good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:23). There is nothing more deflating for new believers than to have their pastor, the church planter, fail in his or her own walk with the Lord. Many new believers have fallen away because the one who led them to the feet of Christ failed along the way.

This “starting well” is what Paul is talking about when he encourages us to put on the spiritual armor. This is what Jesus himself was saying when he commended faithfulness in the parable of the talents. If we start well in our Christian walk, we develop the spiritual disciplines needed to guide us through life and we learn to set boundaries that will stand us well throughout life. Psalm 1 is a good starting point for considering ways of “starting well.” Consider the words of the Psalmist: “Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, *but whose delight is in the law of the Lord*, and who meditates on his law day and night.” (Italics mine. See also Proverbs 3:5-6.)

## **Spiritual formation and character development**

Clinton and Leavenworth (1994:ii) have written a book entitled *Starting Well*, in which they state “We believe that there are Biblical principles that if applied will help Christians to start, stay, and finish well in their Christian lives and ministries.” They go on to cite characteristics of those who finish well, barriers that hinder the Christian from finishing well, and enhancements that will help us to finish well. Among these enhancements are times of renewal, the practice of the spiritual disciplines, a learning posture before the Lord, and submission to mentoring relationships. Much of this will be further developed in this course on spiritual formation for church planting. Suffice it to say here that the authors are laying the foundations for a developing character. Spiritual formation can also be called character development. In fact, spiritual formation is character development that is guided by the Holy Spirit. It is the only form of character development that will help a believer to finish well. Understandably, Leavenworth (1994:59) points out, “Our leadership development revolves around the issue of character development. We as emerging leaders need to respond to God’s shaping hand and allow Him to transform our character. Effective ministry will flow out of a life that is firmly established in Godly character.”

Rick Warren (2002:173) writes, “God’s ultimate goal for your life is not comfort, but character development. He wants you to grow up spiritually and become like Christ. Becoming like Christ does not mean losing your personality or becoming a mindless clone. God created your uniqueness, so he certainly doesn’t want to destroy it. Christ-likeness is all about transforming your character, not your personality.”

In my early years as a church-planting missionary in Central America, I surrounded myself with a group of emerging leaders, men with whom I spent hours teaching and training in the art of pastoring. I made sure they had a firm foundation in the doctrines of the church. Many could also quote a large number of Scripture texts from memory. As time went on, many of these same leaders failed morally. As I looked back years

later, I realized I had dealt with the head (doctrine) and hands (ministry skills) without emphasizing the heart (character/spiritual formation). To my chagrin, I realized I had done them a disservice, preparing them for failure by not helping them to “start well.” I now know that emerging leaders need to be first fully grounded in God and later we can add the doctrines and skills. Their character needed to be formed first.

Thomas (1996:15) explains our situation well when he writes, “Many Christians have never been taught how to ‘feed’ themselves spiritually. They live on a starvation diet and then are surprised that they always seem so ‘hungry.’ ”

Let’s face it. If we do not eat well and exercise, we will not have healthy bodies. The same holds true for us spiritually. If we are not feeding ourselves spiritually and exercising our faith, we will not be healthy followers of Christ. Unhealthy followers, unhealthy church planters, will plant unhealthy churches. Our goal is to see healthy churches established by those who have prepared themselves to be on the frontlines, in the battle against Satan’s wiles.

## **Sanctification**

Among the doctrines of the church is the doctrine of sanctification. This particular doctrine has a lot to tell us about spiritual formation. Sanctification is the process of becoming Christ-like, of becoming like Jesus. Paul in addressing young Timothy, speaks of becoming sanctified. He writes, “In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble. If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work,” (2 Timothy 2:21). In other words, God wants to turn us into vessels for noble causes, made holy in his eyes. This is the work of sanctification, a process of making us holy and useful to the Master. Berkhof (1996:532-533) in his *Systematic Theology* describes sanctification, leaving no doubt that it is a super-

natural work of God, resulting in the dying of the old nature, and the generation of the new.

This is who we are in Christ, “sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy,” (1 Corinthians 1:2). There is a two-fold understanding of the word *sanctified*. It refers to being set aside and to be in a state of holiness. (See John 10:36.) Jesus, in answering those who accused him of blasphemy, asked, “What about the one whom the Father set apart as his very own and sent into the world?” The set apart is often translated as *sanctified*. According to Clinton and Leavenworth, “The word sanctify in the New Testament has the same root as the words holy and saint. In the Bible sanctification involves being set aside...” (p. 28). We have been separated from this world by our commitment to Christ and need to live out that commitment in a very real way. Sanctification is a process of becoming holy, of becoming like Christ, through the Spirit’s operation in our lives. Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.” Imagine that! As long as we remain “in him” we will bear much fruit. Apart from him, we can do nothing. Sanctification is the process of living “in him” and becoming more like him. Spiritual formation is the process by which we learn to live in him. (For different views on sanctification, see Alexander (1988) or Gundry (1987) or see John Wagenveld’s treatment on different interpretations of sanctification in the appendices).

Imagine looking into a fire pit where several logs are burning brightly. Remove one of the logs from the fire and slowly it dims, cools off, and dies out. As long as the log remained in the fire, it burned brightly. Apart from the fire, it could do nothing. Here’s another image. Look up at the moon tonight before you go to bed. See how brightly it shines. But the moon is a mere reflection of the light from the sun. Put the earth between it and the sun (a lunar eclipse) and the light disappears. We can only reflect God’s light as long as we remain in him, as long as we are being sanctified.

As followers of Christ and as those who would lead others, we have

been called “to be conformed to the likeness of his Son” (Romans 8:29), to “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the full measure of the fullness of Christ,” (Ephesians 4:13). Imagine becoming “adult in Christ” as it were! To become mature spiritually. This speaks of spiritual development. Words and phrases like “reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God,” “mature,” “attaining to the full measure” speak of the spiritual development of the believer, of you and of me. It is a striving after God, a passion to be like him, to reach this “full measure of the fullness of Christ.” Can you imagine reaching the point in your spiritual journey where you have reached this far shore and have the full measure of the fullness of Christ? This is something worth living for, something worth striving after; this is the process of sanctification, in which we are becoming more like Christ, being spiritually formed. To be spiritually formed or sanctified, then, means to “no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming,” (v. 14). If you stand along a shoreline, as the waves lap against the shore, you notice lots of garbage—leaves, twigs, empty cans, moving against the beach. A wave comes and washes all of this away, only to have it come back on the next wave. A speedboat without its motor running likewise is tossed about by the waves. And a rudderless sailboat is carried in every direction by the prevailing winds. We can overcome all of this as we become spiritually formed, sanctified, and become more like Christ in whose image or likeness we were called as believers to become.

Warren (2002) suggests that a study of the beatitudes of Jesus (Mt. 5:1-12) as well as the fruit of the Spirit (Ga. 5:22-23), together with a study of 1 Corinthians 13 and 2 Peter 1:5-8 serve as good descriptors of the character God wants to form in us.

This, then, is the adventure we have set out upon together. It is a



journey that hopefully will affect more than just your head; it is my prayer that this journey will also affect your heart and your hands as you learn what it means to be spiritually formed in Christ. Then and only then are we qualified to plant new churches, bringing others into this spiritual journey. Are you ready for this journey?

### **Questions**

1. Every journey begins with the first step. What do you think is the first step of spiritual formation?
2. Why is it important in the Christian life to “start well?”
3. How do you describe spiritual formation? What do you see as essential elements to being spiritually formed?
4. Cite at least three Bible texts, besides those shared by the author, that deal with spiritual formation.
5. When can we consider character development as spiritual formation?
6. How does spiritual formation—or the lack of it—affect our ability to lead others to Christ and to plant a new church?

### **Action Points**

1. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being intensely passionate, evaluate your own passion for being spiritually formed. Reflect on where you are spiritually. In all honesty, where do you want to be on the scale?

Write a paragraph or two in your journal regarding where you are and where you want to be. Consider ways of getting there.

2. Look at the beatitudes of Christ, the fruit of the Spirit, 1 Corinthians 13, as well as Paul's Ephesians passage mentioned by Warren in this chapter. Write down key words that jump out at you that will help you to develop your character for ministry.
3. Do a web search for no less than 30 minutes on "spiritual formation" or other variations of this theme. Make a note of the kinds of sites you find. Write a one-to-two-page paper on your findings. Discuss what they have in common and what is different about them. Look particularly for how "spirituality" is defined. How many sites are Christian? Non-Christian? New-age? Other?

## II

# THEOLOGICAL AND BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

We would be remiss in discussing this topic if we did not look for a theological and biblical foundation for spiritual formation. Since we are a people of the Bible, we look to this book to inform us about spiritual formation. Once we have established that the Bible indeed discusses spiritual formation, we develop a theology of spiritual formation.

### **Biblical Foundation**

Romans 12:2, which was mentioned in the previous chapter, is a key text that discusses what we are calling spiritual formation. The verse reads, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” In the midst of formation, we are spiritually transformed, our attitude toward God is being renewed. Galatians 4:19 reads, “My dear children, for whom I am again in pains of childbirth until Christ be formed in you...” Our lives ought to so reflect Christ that it is as if he were formed in us. Not only are we formed and transformed, but we become conformed. Romans 8:29 reads, “be conformed to the likeness of his Son.”

Colossians 2:6-7 says, “So, then, as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.” There are several key words which reflect this biblical understanding of spiritual formation: *living* in him, *rooted* in him, *built* up in him, *strengthened* in faith, *overflowing* with thankfulness. Do we express thankfulness to God on a daily basis? Do our lives really overflow with thanksgiving?

Do we sense ourselves living in him? Being rooted in him? Being built up in him? Being strengthened in faith? If not, maybe we have not begun this spiritual journey, or we have become stagnant somewhere along the way.

Continuing on this theme of rootedness, Horsfall (2002:23) writes, “A tree cannot grow upwards and produce fruit unless it first grows downwards and is nourished and supported by a healthy root system.”

Psalms 42:1-2 expresses what ought to be the passion in our belly: “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” The Psalmist expresses a deephearted desire to be in God’s presence. His soul pants, his soul thirsts. The number one question on his mind is “When?” When can he go and meet his God? A beautiful exposition of this Psalm can be found in Abraham Kuyper’s (1997: 234-235) devotional, *Near Unto God*. The concluding meditation is on Psalm 42 and is well worth your reading. Kuyper writes, “What arises in his heart comes only from the urgency of his own spiritual instinct, his –and our– deep need for God....How often do we authentically thirst for God?”

“BE TRANSFORMED BY THE  
RENEWING OF YOUR MIND.”

“BE CONFORMED TO THE  
LIKENESS OF HIS SON.”

“ROOTED AND BUILT UP.”

“LIVING IN HIM, ROOTED IN HIM, BUILT  
UP IN HIM, STRENGTHENED IN FAITH.”

Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians says, “For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory” (1 Thessalonians 2:11-12). In spiritual formation, we are encouraged along the way, we are comforted, and we are urged, yes, *urged* to “live lives worthy of God.”

But where did this process all begin? Psalm 139:13-16 gives us a clue. The passage says,

*For you created my inmost being; You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, Your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be*

This is how we were created. We were “fearfully and wonderfully made” in order to praise our Creator. But, sin entered the world, and this perfect communion with God was broken. Not only was this communion broken, we gained the wrath of God and death as the consequence of sin. In our state of sinfulness there is nothing that we could do to please God. Paul gives us a description of how far we have come from praising God. It is an extreme description, but one with which we can identify in part if not in totality.

*There is no one righteous, not even one; There is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. All have turned away, they have together become worthless; There is no one who does good, not even one.... There is no fear of God before their eyes (Romans 3:11-18).*

And so, God sent his own son to die for us so that we might once again live. Jesus said he had come to give us life in abundance (John 10:10). But this requires then our conversion, our regeneration, and our sanctification. The last point is a lifelong process of being spiritually formed in Christ. We are lifelong learners when it comes to spiritual formation. In fact, Anderson and Reese (1999) call spiritual formation “education of the heart” (p. 17).

## Theological Foundation

### *The Holy Spirit has a role to play*

Theologically, we understand spiritual formation in the context of pneumatology, or the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Spiritual formation cannot occur outside of the working of the Holy Spirit in our lives. This formation would not be spiritual if the Holy Spirit were absent from the equation. How does the Spirit manifest himself in this process? Lightner (Gagne and Wilhoit 1994) writes, “spiritual formation describes the continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer which conforms the child of God more and more to the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18). Leavenworth quotes Elwell (1991) who lists 25 ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer.

- |                                      |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Assistance in worship             | Philippians 3:3     |
| 2. Assurance of salvation            | Romans 8:16         |
| 3. Baptism into the body of Christ   | 1 Corinthians 12:13 |
| 4. Blessing for believers            | Galatians 6:8       |
| 5. Compels us towards God's will     | Acts 20:22          |
| 6. Controls mind                     | Romans 8:5          |
| 7. Dwells in the believer            | 1 Corinthians 3:16  |
| 8. Empowers                          | Acts 1:8            |
| 9. Equips for service                | 1 Corinthians 12:7  |
| 10. Fellowship with believers        | Philippians 2:1     |
| 11. Fights against the sinful nature | Galatians 5:17      |
| 12. Fills believers                  | Ephesians 5:18      |
| 13. Frees believers                  | Romans 8:2          |
| 14. A gift to believers              | 1 John 4:13         |
| 15. Gives access to the Father       | Ephesians 2:18      |
| 16. Glorifies Christ in the believer | John 16:13-14       |
| 17. Blessing for believers           | 2 Corinthians 5:5   |
| 18. Guides believers                 | Galatians 5:18, 25  |
| 19. Helps believers                  | Philippians 1:19    |
| 20. Prays for and with believers     | Romans 8:26-27      |

21. Regenerates believers	Titus 3:5
22. Seals believers	Ephesians 1:13
23. Speaks through believers	Mark 13:11
24. Teaches believers	John 14:26
25. Transforms believers	2 Corinthians 3:18

It is obvious from these texts that the believer in and of himself cannot bring about spiritual formation. He is totally dependent on the working of the Holy Spirit in his life. Nevertheless, paradoxically, this work of the Spirit is possible only as we cooperate with God by walking “in the light as He is in the light” (1 John 1:7); by setting our hearts “on things above” (Col. 3:1); by ridding ourselves of the deeds of the flesh (Col. 3:8); and by putting on a heart of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience” (Col. 3:12). (p. 39). The practice of the spiritual disciplines is “the endeavor to create space in my life in which God can act. Discipline means being intentional about preventing everything in my life from being filled up. The diligent watchfulness guards my soul from intrusions that crowd out God” (Anderson 2004: 87).

### *A dying to self*

Secondly, spiritual formation requires a dying to self if we are to put on Christ. Paul writes in Galatians 2:23, “For I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” We die to self and are born anew into Christ. Paul in Romans 6:2 asks “We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?” Jesus is our example. “The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive in Jesus Christ” (vss. 10-11). In other words, as those who have been regenerated, we need to die to self in order to be alive in Jesus. This is a daily occurrence as we live out our faith, being constantly formed. Paul did not say this only once. In similar words he speaks to the Colossians, saying, “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God” (Colossians 3:3). And in Ephesians 4:22-24, Paul reminds the believers “You were

taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness.” Loyola (Merriam 1993:78) writes, “Let him desire and seek nothing except the greater praise and glory of God our Lord as the aim of all he does. For everyone must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests.”

This dying to self is in order that we might live for God. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20). An old teaching confession of the church, the Heidelberg Catechism, helps us to understand this biblical truth. The Catechism is divided into three parts, simply explained as 1) sin 2) salvation and 3) service. As Christians, we recognize the sinfulness of our souls, the need for salvation. We find salvation only in Christ, the only name given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12; 1 Timothy 2:5). But it doesn’t stop there. Christ did not come and die solely that we might be saved, but that we might live lives that glorify God. This is the service part of the Catechism, which finds its roots in the Bible as well, exhibiting good deeds. And as church planters, what we want to see are lives lived out to the glory of God, acts that eventually transform the neighborhood or community in which they live.

In Lord’s Day 32, question and answer 86 we read:

Question 86. We have been delivered from our misery by God’s grace alone through Christ and not because we have earned it: why then must he still do good?



Answer: To be sure, Christ has redeemed us by his blood. But we do good because Christ by his spirit is also renewing us to be like himself, so that in all our living we may show that we are thankful to God for all he has done for us, and so that he may be praised through us. And we do good so that we may be assured of our faith by its fruits, and so that by our godly living our neighbors may be won over to Christ (Brink, 1987).

Lord's Day 33, Q&A 91 continue the discussion, asking:

Question 91. What do we do that is good?

Answer: Only that which arises out of true faith, conforms to God's law, and is done for his glory; and not that which is based on what we think is right or on established human tradition.

As the redeemed in Christ, we are called upon to live for him in service and gratitude. Paul in Romans 12:1 writes, "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship." Another version ends the verse saying, "which is your reasonable service." Dead to self; alive in Christ to serve him in all aspects of living.

In a similar vein, an early Spanish mystic of the 1500s writes about the proper response of the Christian in order to be spiritually formed: "The first is knowledge of the greatness of God.... The second is self-knowledge and humility at realizing how a thing like the soul, so base by comparison with One Who is the Creator of such greatness, has dared to offend Him and dares, to raise its eyes to Him" (Avila 1989:197).

### *A lifelong process*

Thirdly, spiritual formation is a lifelong process; it is progressive. Lightner (Gagne and Wilhoit 1994) points out that spiritual formation is progressive and incomplete until we either die or Christ returns (1 John 3:1-2; 1 Thessalonians 3:12-13). “Growth in grace takes time. Maturing in the things of God does not happen immediately. One does not become holy in a hurry.... When a baby is born a new life enters the world. As the baby receives nourishment there is growth into childhood and eventual adulthood. Salvation is birth; spiritual formation is growth” (p. 42). The Bible even says “grow in grace,” (2 Peter 3:18). Mulholland (1993) warns, “Spiritual formation is not an option! The inescapable conclusion is that life itself is a process of spiritual development. The only choice we have is whether that growth moves us toward wholeness in Christ or toward an increasingly dehumanized and destructive mode of being” (p. 24). Even more poignant are these words from Mulholland’s pen: “Every thought we hold, every decision we make, every action we take, every emotion we allow to shape our behavior, every response we make to the world around us, every relationship we enter into, every reaction we have toward the things that surround us and impinge upon our lives—all of these things, little by little, are shaping us into some kind of being. We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image...” (p. 23). Mulholland’s warning merits reading a second and third time until the truth of what he says takes shape in our minds and hearts.

Paul writes to the Philippians, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14). Francis Schaeffer (1971:5) in his book *True Spirituality* states “The important thing after being born

spiritually is to live. There is a new birth, and then there is the Christian life to be lived. This is the area of sanctification, from the time of the new birth, through this present life, until Jesus comes or until we die.”

*All of life affected*

Fourthly, spiritual formation sees God at work in all of life. This is a point we often miss as we journey through life. We attempt to compartmentalize our life, reserving the spiritual for one little corner of our life. Nevertheless, as Horsfall (2002:25) points out, “God is present in the circumstances of our lives, and his word is already written in our personal stories.” We are able to see “God has been at work in the past, is currently at work in the present...” and will be in the future (*Ibid.*).

All of life comes under the sovereign will of God. For the reformers, this speaks of a “world and life view,” in which our faith must be seen at work in all aspects of living. Multiplication Network Ministries, through its many teachings, points out the all-encompassing aspect of the believer’s faith. Particularly in *Take Your Church’s Pulse* (2014), Wagenveld and Koster point out that our faith is NOT to be compartmentalized, that our faith should affect every aspect of the believer’s life. We are not Sunday Christians only. Who we are in Christ should permeate all that we say, do and believe. How we vote, how we teach, how we interact with our neighbors, should be a transformative outpouring of Christ through us. Too many churches are planted that are citadels, fortresses AGAINST the world, instead of LIGHT AND SALT to a dying world. Often, the non-believer will only see the light and taste the salt as they see us interacting with them on a daily basis, living out our faith in tangible ways.

Ryken (Gagne and Wilhoit 1994: 50-51) gives us another view of what the Puritans were saying, seeing our work as a vocation, whatever it may be that we do for a living. He writes, “We can begin with attitudes towards work, by which the Puritans meant not only the job through which one earns a livelihood but also such daily tasks

as washing dishes and mowing the lawn. In kernel form, the Puritan doctrine of vocation, or calling, held that God calls people to their tasks and that the performance of these tasks can become a form of stewardship to God. The Puritan divine Richard Steele sounded the keynote when he wrote that ‘God doth call every man and woman... to serve him in some peculiar [particular] employment in this world, both for their own and the common good’.... The Puritan ideal was that a person might know that ‘his shop as well as his chapel is holy ground’.” A similar understanding of spirituality, or spiritual living, was shared by Teresa of Avila, one of the Spanish mystics of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and Brother Lawrence, both who were supposed to have said something to the effect that “God is present in the pots and pans.” As Ryken echoed this sentiment, he wrote, “Spirituality... is not so much the story of the soul’s seeking God as it is the story of seeing God—recognizing the presence of God in all of life” (p. 53).

How cognizant are we that whatever we do—pastor, church planter, carpenter, farmer, bricklayer, housewife, or teacher—this is a vocation, a calling from God, to be lived out to the best of our ability, with the help of God’s Spirit, lived out in God’s presence? This puts a whole new light on who we are occupationally and how we wake up each morning to another day of joyful “as if unto God” to 8-10 hours of drudgery.

In today’s world, fewer and fewer church planters are full-time. Many have “a job” that allows them to give some time to the planting of a new church. It becomes very easy to see this “job” as something other than a true calling. They may see church planting as the call and the job as a necessary activity to be able to live out their calling. Nevertheless, even this so-called “secular job” is a calling if we understand the meaning of vocation. Paul was a tent maker. This was part of his calling as a missionary/church planter. Without the tent making, he would not have been able to dedicate time to planting new churches. Also, his involvement in the “secular” aspects of life, afforded him opportunities to talk to people as he laid the groundwork for a new church.

In some cultures non-believers will not give a church planter the time of day if they do not see him as a contributing member of society. They may ask, "What do you do?" The church planter may respond, "I'm a missionary." Or "I'm a church planter." The neighbor comes back with, "But what do you do for a living?" This concept of a fulltime missionary or pastor is foreign to many, and may make the church planter appear to be a moocher, a sycophant. It is important, then, to affirm his vocation and that of others as they seek to grow in Christ.

*To God be the glory*

Fifthly, spiritual formation speaks of bringing glory to God. The Westminster Shorter Catechism asks in Q&A 1, "What is the chief end of man?" The response is "Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever." Piper (Gagne and Wilhoit 1994:74) writes, "The biblical aim of life is the glory of God: 'So whatever you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God' (1 Cor. 10:31)." As we grow in grace, as we are spiritually formed, God is honored and glorified. It should be our aim in spiritual formation to see God glorified. Paul says, "For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Ephesians 2:10). Jesus said of these good works, "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). Our good deeds are not so that others may praise us; our good deeds should bring glory to our God.

In John 15:8 Jesus says to his followers, "This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples." The way we live, then, can bring honor and glory to God. Paul exhorts the Corinthians "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your body" (1 Corinthians 6:20). This concept of our living out our faith bringing glory to God is further affirmed in 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 where our actions may bring glory to Christ. Such living can only occur because of our being restored to a right relationship with God through Christ. Spiritual formation can

occur only because we have been reconciled to God. God's image in us, distorted by sin, has been restored by the death and resurrection of Christ. God's Spirit continues to form us anew as part of this process of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation, therefore, is a work of the Triune God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God the Father so loved us that he sent his Son. This Son has left us the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete who advocates for us and also indwells us so that we can be conformed to the likeness of Christ.

## **Summary**

The theological framework for spiritual formation, then, is divided into five sections.

1. We see this as the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. It is not something we can do on our own. In and of ourselves we are powerless to come to Christ; in and of ourselves we are powerless to live the Christian life without the continual indwelling of God's Spirit. There is no spiritual formation apart from the Spirit.
2. Spiritual formation implies a dying to self as we are formed anew.
3. Spiritual formation is a lifelong process, what we often called sanctification. We are being made into the image of Christ. We have not fully arrived!
4. Spiritual formation implies that God is at work in us. As the popular bracelet says "Please be patient with me; God is not finished with me yet." We, in turn, live out our lives in the place where He has set us, so that everything we do and say transforms the world around us.
5. Spiritual formation brings glory to the Triune God. In all that we are, in all that we do, as we are spiritually formed, as God's image in us is being restored, God is glorified.

May God's name be glorified as we journey down this path of spiritual formation.

### **Questions**

1. What are the five points in our theological framework for spiritual formation?
2. How does this make you feel about spiritual formation? Does it give you comfort? Why or why not?
3. Evaluate to what extent you have “died to self.” What changes have occurred in your life since becoming a Christian? What areas in your life need to die yet? In what areas have you “come to life”?
4. Where do you see yourself on this journey of being transformed? Just starting out? Part way there? Having arrived?
5. How has the fact that whatever your profession, it is a holy vocation, a calling from God, to be lived out to its fullest?
6. Recall the quote early on in this chapter: “A tree cannot grow upwards and produce fruit unless it first grows downwards and is nourished and supported by a healthy root system.” What does this say about our need to be spiritually formed (grounded) in order to help others in their own formation?
7. What are the implications of this chapter for church planting? What does this say about how we lead those whom we would want to be part of the new church?

## Action Points

1. In your journal spend time reflecting on the biblical and theological foundations for spiritual formation. Were these things taught to you as you were growing up in the faith (or once you came to faith later in life, as the case may be)?
2. How would you go about doing spiritual formation in a church? What different contexts could be the locale for doing spiritual formation? Write on this in your journal: “I would lead others into spiritual formation in my local church by...”
3. Read a book on spiritual formation, for example, *The Christian Educator’s Handbook on Spiritual Formation*, and write a reflection paper of no more than five pages.



# III

## AN INTRODUCTION TO

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## THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

### **The Spiritual Disciplines and Jesus**

At the heart of spiritual formation are the spiritual disciplines. Dallas Willard (1988:ix) calls these “the way of Jesus... who *has* walked and now walks that path before us and invites us to simply follow him as that path leads us through our lives into eternity.” The disciplines are meant to be “the types of activities he engaged in, by arranging our whole lives around the activities he himself practiced in order to remain constantly at home in the fellowship of his Father.”

When we think of Jesus, we think of a life in relationship to his heavenly Father. In the New Testament there are many examples of Jesus in prayer to His Father or mentions of his relationship to the Father. Jesus did not come to the earth except that he was sent by the Father, blessed by the Father to carry out his earthly ministry, and then received back into heaven by the Father who placed him at His right hand. While on earth, Jesus practiced many activities which have become known as spiritual disciplines.

#### *Prayer*

Jesus had morning devotions. “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed” (Mk. 1:35). Jesus prayed in the evening. “After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray” (Mk. 6:46). Jesus sought to pray in solitude after being with the crowds. “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Lk. 5:15). Jesus was also known to pray all night long. “One of those days Jesus went out to a

mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God” (Lk. 6:12). Jesus prayed in a Seder prayer. “While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it” (Mt. 26:22). He gave advice on how to pray. “When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Mt. 6:6). He also told his disciples how *not* to pray. “And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them....” (Mt. 6:7). Jesus even taught his disciples a model prayer which we have come to know as The Lord’s Prayer (Mt.6:9-13). In John 17, we have what has become known as the High Priestly Prayer. Even at the crucifixion as he was dying, John writes, “He looked toward heaven and prayed” (Jn. 17:1). The Gospels, therefore, are resplendent with Jesus’ prayers and reports of Jesus praying.

### *In solitude*

When Jesus heard of the beheading of John, Matthew writes, “He withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place” (Mt. 14:13). He needed to be alone as he dealt with the death of his beloved friend and follower. In fact, it was Jesus’ practice to go off to be alone with God. Luke says this was a common practice of Jesus. He writes, “Jesus *often* withdrew to lonely places and prayed” (Lk. 5:16). As he faced imminent death, we read, “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed” (Mt. 26:39).

### *Meditation on God’s Word*

The Bible also shows us indirectly that Jesus meditated on the Word of God. He had to know the Word well since he often quoted it. When tempted by the devil, Jesus replies, “It is written ‘Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God’” (Mt. 4:4). A second time he responds, “It is also written, ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test’” (Mt. 4:7). A third time he responds to the devil, saying, “For it is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God, and

serve him only” (Mt. 6:10). Jesus attacked the money changers with these words: “It is written, ‘My house will be called a house of prayer,’ but you are making it a ‘den of robbers’” (Mt. 21:13). When Jesus was about to be betrayed, he showed his disciples from God’s Word that they would abandon him to his fate. “This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered’” (Mt. 26:31). He goes on to say, “It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’; and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment” (Lk. 22:37). Jesus quotes the Word to the Pharisees. “In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me” (Jn. 8:17-18). Only one who had meditated on the Word could possibly quote the Scripture as Jesus did.

### *Fasting*

The Bible also shows Jesus fasting. Matthew 4:1 begins the narrative of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness. Matthew begins with the words “After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry” (Mt. 4:2). After showing his disciples how to pray, Jesus turns to the topic of fasting. “When you fast, do not look somber as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting.... But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Mt. 6:16-18). Fasting was a part of Jesus’ normal practice, a practice he taught his disciples to follow.

### *Submission*

Submission has been named by some as a spiritual discipline. It may be because by an act of submission we seek to do God’s will and not our own. A life of submission to God, to his Word, to others, allows us to dwell not on ourselves but on God. Jesus practiced submission each

day of his life, submitting to the will of his Father. Jesus as a child said, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Lk. 2:49 KJV). Even Jesus’ words to Satan “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” (Mt. 4:10), are words that reflect this activity of submission. The prayer Jesus taught his disciples says, “Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt. 6:10). As Jesus wept in the Garden, praying that the cup of wrath be removed, even then he prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done” (Mt. 26:42). Jesus gives an example of submission even to those who would do us wrong. “If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. Give to everyone that asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back” (Lk. 6:29-31). Paul reflects on this submissive nature of Christ when he writes, “Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!” (Phil. 2:5-8).

Jesus tells his followers that only through submission can they truly find the lifting of the burdens of life. Jesus did the will of his Father. Now he calls on his followers to submit to him. He says, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt. 11:28-30). John reflects on this in his first epistle when he writes about submitting to God. He says, “This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (1 John 5:2-3).

## *Worship*

Worship has been defined as a spiritual discipline. Jesus prayed and fasted. Jesus meditated on the Word of God. Jesus submitted to the will of his Father. And through all of this, Jesus worshipped God. Jesus' model prayer is a form of worship, recognizing who God is, a holy God to be loved and obeyed. Jesus, in responding to the lawyer says that the great command was this: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" (Mt. 22:37). Jesus was found in attendance at the synagogue even as a child of twelve.

## **The Spiritual Disciplines and Us**

### *A lost practice*

For a time, it appeared as if the spiritual disciplines were lost on all but a few faithful, sometimes ascetic, sometimes mystical followers of Christ. These spiritual disciplines which were considered to be a normal practice of early Christians, later, were considered spiritual exercises only practiced by those we have come to consider more "saintly" than ourselves. The Spanish mystics, for one, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, and Luís of León, are held up as examples of believers who loved God wholeheartedly and practiced lives of meditation, submission, and service. We can think of others whose names are synonymous with the spiritual disciplines in one form or another: Thomas a Kempis, Madame Guyon, Brother Lawrence, John Wesley, and more recently, Richard Foster and Dallas Willard, to name a few.

Wesley bemoaned the loss of the practice of the spiritual disciplines. He writes, "It was a common saying among the Christians of the primitive church, 'The soul and the body make a man; the spirit and discipline make a Christian:' implying that none could be real Christians without the help of Christian discipline. But if this be so, is it any wonder that we find so few Christians; for where is Christian disci-

pline?” (Quoted in Willard, 1988, pp. 16-17). It has been only in the last twenty years or so that Protestant evangelicalism has been taking seriously the practice of spiritual disciplines. Budd (2002:20) states “Increasingly evangelical Christians are paying attention to matters of the soul....We want to love God passionately with all of our mind and all of our heart and soul. And we want our love to be growing deeper and more passionate as we grow older. We don’t want to look back with wistful longing on the passion we had for Christ when we first came to faith. Instead we want to be progressing, growing deeper. The spiritual disciplines are helping us with these matters of the soul.” Why the reluctance on the part of Protestantism to embrace the disciplines? In part, we have rejected anything that appeared to be reflective of Roman Catholicism, even though it may have been good. In part, many of us come from denominations that put heavy emphasis on right doctrine (orthodoxy) over against right practice (orthopraxis). Anything which touches the heart is suspect while what we can understand with the mind against the backdrop of Scripture is to be sought after. Yet, Benner (2003:30) confesses, “The Christian mystics offer tremendously rich resources for those seeking to deepen their life of prayer and intimacy with God. That help is most needed and yet most often resisted by those predisposed by background or personality to be overly intellectual in their life and faith.” As we go deeper in our spiritual formation, we come to recognize the importance of prayer, prayer that moves from the head to the heart.

### *A transformation of life*

Willard (1988:26) explains that it was the practice of the disciplines, of a life of true spirituality, that made the early Christians light and salt in the world in which they lived. “These disciplines alone can become for average Christians ‘the conditions upon which the spiritual life is made indubitably real.’ It’s true. And if this point can be made as convincingly as its truth and its importance deserve, the practical effects will be stunning. There will be a life-giving revolution in our personal lives and in our world.” Imagine a world of turned-on, passionate

Christians whose love for the world is only superseded by their love for God! For Willard and others, the spiritual disciplines allow us to be all that God intended us to be, and therefore, to be savor for a flavorless world and light for a darkened cosmos.

A church planter who practices the spiritual disciplines has a firm foundation upon which to reach out to others and to build a church. A church planter cannot expect to have a healthy church if he himself is not spiritually disciplined and, in turn, is teaching new believers to be spiritually disciplined. Only then can real transformation take place in the darkest corners of the world.

### *Open to all*

These disciplines are not just for an elect few; rather, the disciplines were intended for all Christians. They are the mark of the Christian. They reflect the deep spirituality of our faith. For those who seek after spiritual transformation, the disciplines play a key role in that process. “There is a way of spiritual transformation that is accessible to all people and it really does work in the contemporary world” (Willard 1988, Foreward). Like Willard, Foster (1998:1) sees the spiritual disciplines as being available to “average Christians”. “God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings; people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns.” In other words, God is present in the ordinariness of life as well as in those moments of great vision and ecstasy. Anderson and Reese (1999:39) write, “Pay attention... to the mundane. Honor the everyday. How inattentive we are to the fingerprints of the Almighty on the repetitious turning of the clock and calendar. How mute we believe God is, although the voice of the Lord whispers or shouts in the seeming randomness of the usual.” They further state, “God is not less present to us on Monday than on Sunday!” (p. 43)

*Purpose of the disciplines*

We know that the disciplines were intended to help us grow in our faith, to lead us deeper spiritually; to move from the mundane to the heavenly. Although we live in this world, we are not of this world. We are meant to be citizens of the heavenly city, Jerusalem. The disciplines help us to think “on heavenly things”. But until death overtakes us or Christ comes again, we are meant to live as believers in this world, and to continue to grow in our faith in “things unseen.” As Foster (1998:8) has written, “Spiritual growth is the purpose of the disciplines.” It is an invitation to greater depth of faith while we reside on this earth. So many Christians are living a shallow faith. They read their Bible from time to time, go to church with some regularity, pray when they find themselves in trouble. But this is a superficial faith, one that is not deeply rooted in Christ. Such deep living was/is the need of all Christians that Paul urged the early believers, “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, *continue to live in him*, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness” (Col. 2:6-7; italics mine). Paul did not say this only to the Colossians. We find the same sentiment reflected in Ephesians 3:14-19:

*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep in the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*



Do you feel his strength running through your inner being? Do you sense Christ's indwelling presence? Do you feel rooted in love? Do you feel his power, and do you comprehend the width and length and height and depth of his love? Have you reached the point in your spiritual walk of being "filled to the measure of all the fullness of God"? I know I have not reached that point. It was for this reason that the Psalmist talked about our soul panting for God as the deer pants for streams of water (Ps. 42:1). The rootedness in love speaks of our spirituality becoming deep, "to move beyond surface living into the depths. They invite us to explore the inner caverns of the spiritual realm" (Foster (1998:1). How can we reach that point? Read on and find out how.

*Spiritual disciplines require exercise*

Willard (1988:4-5) wrote, "A baseball player who expects to excel in the game without adequate exercise of his body is no more ridiculous than the Christian who hopes to be able to act in the manner of Christ when put to the test without the appropriate exercise in godly living." Loyola spoke of "spiritual exercises," recognizing the importance of exercising our faith. (For a succinct description of his particular exercises, see Horsfall (2002:68).) Others have called these "habits" of the heart. It is through this exercise or practice of the disciplines that "God's sanctifying grace utilizes the spiritual disciplines to facilitate the Spirit's work in us" (Lightner, in Gangel and Wilhoit 1994:43)). Foster (1998:7) explains this succinctly when he writes,

The apostle Paul says, "he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption; but he who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:8). Paul's analogy is instructive. A farmer is helpless to grow grain; all he can do is provide the right conditions for the growing of grain. He cultivates the ground, he plants the seed, he waters the plants, and then the natural forces of the earth take over and up comes the grain. This is

the way it is with the Spiritual Disciplines—they are a way of sowing to the Spirit. The disciplines are God’s way of getting us into the ground; they put us where he can work within us and transform us. By themselves the Spiritual Disciplines can do nothing; they can only get us to the place where something can be done. They are God’s means of grace. The inner righteousness we seek is not something that is poured out on our heads. God has ordained the Disciplines of the spiritual life by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.

Paul in his first epistle to Timothy writes, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, *train* yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (I Tim. 4:7-8; italics mine). Herrington (2003:133) explains, “The spiritual disciplines help us build up our spiritual muscles so that when life requires more of us, we can rise to the task.”

### *Spiritual disciplines are not mechanical*

We do not practice the spiritual disciplines in a mechanical way as if the practice of the disciplines would automatically result in our spiritual growth. There is not necessarily a right or wrong way of practicing the disciplines. In Acts 8 Simon the sorcerer was converted. When he saw the Holy Spirit being given by the laying on of hands, he tried to buy the gift of God as if the mechanics of laying on of hands were something that would bring forth the Holy Spirit. We may even attempt to practice the disciplines out of routine in order to provoke God to do wonders in our lives, but unless we practice the disciplines with a pure heart, we cannot expect to be grown, to be transformed. “To know the mechanics does not mean that we are practicing the Disciplines. The Spiritual Disciplines are an inward and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the mechanics for coming

into the reality of the spiritual life” (Foster 1998:3). In fact, “In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek” (*Ibid.*:110). Smith (Gangel and Wilhoit 1994:250) warns us that the spiritual disciplines can be practiced with wrong motives and end in “a deadly legalism”. Deison (*Ibid.*:278) agrees, saying “Practicing the right ‘activities’ does not guarantee growth in spiritual life. Right activities with wrong motives can feel like the real thing, but in actuality might keep us in complacent rebellion against God.” Dettoni (Gangel and Wilhoit 1994:18), regarding spiritual formation, affirms, “While we cannot earn this gift, we exert effort to receive it. Those involved in true spiritual formation are keenly aware that the disciplines are the catalyst for, but not the cause of, spiritual formation. Spiritual formation comes from God alone....”

## Summary

Benner (2003:32) describes spiritual formation as a spiritual journey that we all embark on. “Often it is depicted in terms of becoming Christ-like, acquiring the fruit of the Spirit or becoming holy. The Westminster Confession describes it as coming to know God and enjoying him forever. Eastern Orthodox Christians have frequently spoken of moving from imaging God to resembling him (thus emphasizing what Western Protestants have described as sanctification). Roman Catholics have typically spoken of the goal of the journey as union with God. Each of these captures important interrelated dimensions of the personal transformation that is a part of being a Christ follower.”

As Christians, then, we ought to seek after Christ, to be conformed to his image. The spiritual disciplines are a means and not an end in themselves. They are a means of bringing us closer to the presence of God himself. Do you, dear reader, desire to be brought closer to God? Then take up the practice of the spiritual life. Many have gone before us who have been spiritually formed and transformed through exercising these disciplines. Let God work in you as you develop these life-

long habits which will continue to bring you closer to the Father.

### **Questions**

1. Spiritual disciplines are sometimes called spiritual activities. What were some of the activities that Jesus practiced that we could make our own?
2. Why did we describe the spiritual disciplines as “a lost practice”?
3. Why are the disciplines important for us to engage in?
4. What is the difference between simply “going through the routine” and really living the disciplines?
5. Why is it that the spiritual disciplines are not considered “an end in themselves”?
6. How and when will you begin to teach the spiritual disciplines to those who start coming to your church plant?

### **Action Points**

1. In your journal, write down your own experience with the spiritual disciplines. If you have had none, examine your spiritual walk, asking yourself and imagining what your walk would be like if you were practicing them.
2. Do a web search on “spiritual disciplines”. Write a one-page report for your professor on your findings.
3. Read a book on the spiritual disciplines, for example, Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*, and decide which ones you want to implement in your own life, as well as in the emerging church.

# IV

## THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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### PART I

#### Introduction

Just what are the spiritual disciplines? In the last chapter we read about Jesus and some of his spiritual practices. These practices are what we call disciplines. Disciplines are activities we practice with regularity. They can also be called “habits of the soul.” If we follow the example of Jesus, then, we see such practices as prayer, meditation, fasting, submission, and worship as spiritual disciplines.

Some practitioners of the disciplines categorize them into various classifications. Foster (1998), for one, developed three categories of spiritual disciplines: 1) inward disciplines, 2) outward disciplines, and 3) corporate disciplines. We could do worse than to adopt Foster’s classifications. For Foster, the inward disciplines are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study, since these are inner activities of the soul. His list of outward disciplines, or those visible to others, are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. He classifies corporate disciplines as confession, worship, guidance, and celebration, those spiritual activities which involve other people.

FOSTER’S CLASSIFICATION OF THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES		
INWARD	OUTWARD	CORPORATE
MEDITATION	SIMPLICITY	CONFESSION
PRAYER	SOLITUDE	WORSHIP
FASTING	SUBMISSION	GUIDANCE
STUDY	SERVICE	CELEBRATION

Mulholland (1993) lists, together with many of those already mentioned by Foster, an additional spiritual discipline: spiritual reading, or *lectio divina*. Still others add silence and contemplation (as something distinct from meditation) and even journaling. Many of these are quite similar in nature and tend to be inward disciplines. For this exercise, we will be looking at the following disciplines: Bible reading and meditation, prayer, fasting, journaling, solitude, silence, and worship. In this chapter we will consider Bible reading and meditation, prayer and fasting. In the following chapter we will learn about journaling, solitude and silence and worship.

### *Bible reading and meditation*



It is almost impossible for us to discuss Bible reading without also discussing meditation. The two go hand in hand. It's like salt and pepper, left and right. One can read the Bible without necessarily meditating, but meditation gives depth to the Bible reading. One can also meditate without reading the Bible, but meditation means more when we begin to cogitate on God's Word. With Bible reading we could also include Bible memorization so that we truly begin to assimilate the Word of God into our hearts and being.

In the 1960s a movie called "Fahrenheit 451" was produced in which firemen were obligated to burn every book they found. The movie is based on a novel by the same title, written by Ray Bradbury in 1951. In a society which was attempting to eliminate all independent think-

ing, books were considered contraband and needed to be destroyed. Firemen, who normally put out fires, in this case started fires, throwing books into a heap and then igniting them. Book lovers, therefore, began memorizing books word for word. Each person committed to memory one book and, before he or she died, passed this book on to another human being who committed the same book to memory. In this way, the book hoarders hoped to keep civilization alive.

More recently I heard about Christians in China who have memorized entire books of the Bible in order to keep the Word alive in spite of persecution and in the absence of many Bibles. People became known as John or Malachi, Timothy or Acts because of the book they had put to memory. They in turn taught other John's and Malachi's so that the Word would continue to be known after they were gone.

The Bible talks about *memorizing the Word*. "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you" (Ps. 119:11). The RSV says "I have laid up thy word in my heart...." We often do not see the need to memorize Scripture until the Bible is taken away from us, as it has been done in some countries in different periods of time over the last 100 years. I often ask myself, "Do I have enough of the Bible memorized to see me through the darks times if the Bible were taken away from me?" So many Americans in particular have two or three Bibles in their possession while many in the world do not even have a New Testament. Oftentimes, these two or three Bibles sit on a shelf collecting dust. What if we took the Bible seriously and began memorizing it as Jesus had? A modern Bible scholar whose books and videos on the Holy Land have inspired a new generation of Bible memorizers, once in a Bible class mentioned how he went to New York to study at a Jewish school. Every classmate was able to quote their Torah from memory, putting him to shame. He began to memorize Scripture and passed this on to others who now do the same in their classes and in their pulpits. Imagine what message a church planter would be sending to his newly-formed flock if he were to recite God's Word from memory before expounding on it.

The Bible also talks about *meditating on God's Word*. Webster's dictionary defines meditate as "to ponder, to reflect on, to contemplate." The Psalmist calls us to such a task. Psalm 119:15 says, "I meditate on your precepts and consider your ways." Verse 97 declares, "Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long." Verse 99 reads, "I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes." Verse 148 says, "My eyes stay open through the watches of the night that I may meditate on your promises." The Psalmist writes in 48:9, "Within your temple, O God, we meditate on your unfailing love." Psalm 77:12 reads, "I will meditate on your works and consider all your mighty deeds." This word we meditate on "is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105). Paul declares in 2 Timothy 3:16-17, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, *so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*"

According to Herrington, Creech and Taylor (2003:164), meditation is "a form of listening to God. It usually involves sustained attention on a single passage of Scripture, a single word, or a single idea. When we meditate, we seek to hear the voice of God and to experience his presence." Meditation normally involves the Scriptures within which we can see God's "mighty deeds," his "precepts," "statutes," his "promises." Psalm 119:9 asks the question "How can a young man keep his way pure? By living according to your word." The reading of God's Word, the contemplation of God's Word, and the application of God's Word are vital in the spiritual formation of a believer. *Meditatio* from which we get our English word meditation, means to memorize, to repeat.

Rice (1991:15) in his study of Reformed spirituality looks at Baxter, a leading post-Puritan leader, who, like many other Reformers, saw value in meditation. "His solution to the question of identity and security of salvation was that the answer was to be found in meditation. Baxter was deeply interested in the subjects of prayer and meditation and utilized the Benedictine method of *lectio divina* as a Reformed method



of reflection and meditation upon scripture.” (See also Bajema 1998). The Calvinist Charles Hodge also found great value in meditation. His book *The Way of Life* explains his position.

Madame Guyon (1984:17-18) wrote about how to meditate on God’s Word. She was concerned that many were more interested in *volume* than *content*. In other words, some people in her day-and in ours as well- speed-read their way through the Bible, as if there were some merit in it. She warns, “Those who are fast readers gain no more advantage than a bee would by skimming the surface of a flower rather than penetrating it to extract its pollen.” We need to spend time in the Word, we need to *meditate* on the Word, as a cow that chews its cud or a man who chews on a piece of steak 20 times before swallowing it. How can we meditate? We can meditate, reading the Bible. We can meditate, praying. We can meditate in solitude and silence. We can read Scripture and meditate in a disciplined pattern. This pattern or method has been called spiritual reading or *lectio divina*.

Hear one explanation of this ancient spiritual discipline:

From the very earliest accounts of monastic practice-- dating back to the fourth century-- it is evident that a form of reading called *lectio divina* (“divine” or “spiritual reading”) was essential to any deliberate spiritual life. This kind of reading is quite different from that of scanning a text for useful facts and bits of information, or advancing along an exciting plot line to a climax in the action. It is, rather, a meditative approach, by which the reader seeks to taste and savor the beauty and truth of every phrase and passage. This process of contemplative reading has the effect of enkindling in the reader compunction for past behavior that has been less than beautiful and true. At the same time, it increases the desire to seek a realm where all that is lovely and unspoiled may be found. These are four steps in *lectio divina*: first to read, next to meditate, then to rest in the sense of God’s nearness, and, ultimately, to resolve to govern one’s ac-

tions in the light of new understanding. This kind of reading is itself an act of prayer. And, indeed, it is in prayer that God manifests His Presence to us. (Waddell 1998, pp. x-xi).

Jones (2003:39) confirms, in referring to those ascetics who have become known as “the desert fathers,” “Those who lived in the desert did hear from God, often through *lectio divina*. They didn’t have copies of the Bible to read, but they had committed large portions to memory, and they meditated on different passages, letting God speak to them through his Word.” The whole point of the *lectio divina* is to help us in our spiritual growth, “to be found in Christ,” as one writer put it.

The *lectio divina* is usually broken up into four distinct stages: *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. These stages, like the devotional method itself, are in Latin. Each speaks of a movement through which the devotee passes and the type of activity that occurs in each passage. It is not necessarily linear since one could back up a stage as he or she is in this devotional mode. Boa (2001:187) places the *lectio divina* in his chapter on devotional spirituality, which he calls “falling in love with God.” The intent is to allow the Word of God to indwell us. Historically, this is understood better by those of an Eastern Orthodox persuasion than those of Western Christianity.

“How can we allow ourselves to be led by the Spirit as we read the Word? The answer may be by praying the Bible—that is, using the words of Scripture as your prayer... After praying words of Scripture, stop to listen, to hear what God has to say to you in those infallible words. *Lectio divina* is a way of doing just that; and it is one good reason Christians have been doing *lectio divina* for over fifteen hundred years” (Jones, 2003:34).

Let’s take a quick look at the four stages of *lectio divina*. We’ll do this by selecting Psalm 23.

### *Lectio* (Reading)

We read Psalm 23 several times. Some have been known to even read it twenty times or more, allowing the words of that psalm to sink in. Besides reading it to ourselves, we can speak the words openly, hearing the Word and not just seeing the Word.

### *Meditatio* (Meditation)

We begin to meditate, or reflect, on the words in Psalm 23. In fact, a word or phrase may jump out at us. For example, “The Lord is my shepherd” may be the phrase that seems to surface most as I read this time. (Another time I do *lectio divina* on Psalm 23, it might be a different word or phrase.) We begin to ask ourselves questions about “The Lord is my shepherd”. We begin examining that phrase from its different aspects. “What is a shepherd like?” “What is the role of a shepherd?” “What is the relationship of the sheep to the shepherd?” “The Shepherd cares for each sheep. This passage reminds me of the “lost sheep” parable and how the shepherd went out of his way to find that one lost sheep.” “What does it mean that the Lord is my shepherd? How does he reveal that side of him to me? How do I respond to that side of God?” These and other questions help us to reflect on the passage. We have internalized the text.

### *Oratio* (Prayer)

In prayer, we come to the Shepherd Lord, with thanksgiving. We come to him asking for his protection, for his enfolding arms around us. We confess that like sheep we often wander from him, and confess our total need of his care and protection. We talk with God about what his Word is saying to us.

### *Contemplatio* (Contemplation)

Boa calls this step the most difficult. It “is the fruit of the dialogue of the first three elements; it is the communion born out of our reception of divine truth in our minds and hearts” (p. 97) This is the time when we simply “exist” in God. We don’t try to think, we simply try to be,

allowing God full rein. This is what some have called being in the presence of God. We open ourselves up to God to allow him to fill us, as he has promised. One writer says, “Simply rest in God’s presence. Stay open to God. Listen to God. Remain in peace and silence before God. How is God revealing himself to you?” (Peace 1998A:13)

Admittedly, *lectio divina* is not for everyone. I would encourage everyone to try it, but some may find their personalities simply will not allow them the contemplative time to truly accomplish the intent of this spiritual practice. The *lectio divina* at least challenges us to really dig deeply into the Word, allowing the Word to interpret itself to us, inviting us to internalize the text as Boa said. Jones (2003:44) reminds us of the purpose of this ancient practice: “Remember, *lectio divina* is about one thing: developing an intimate relationship with God by praying the Scripture he gave us.” Peace suggests four outcomes from practicing *lectio divina*: 1) “We learn to approach a passage in Scripture prayerfully, asking God to speak to us through it”; 2) “We learn to mull over what we hear in such a way that we identify how it connects with our lives”; 3) “We learn to offer what we discover to God in prayer”; and 4) “We learn to stay open to God in the silence of prayer” (pp. 101-102).

If this practice doesn’t accomplish these four things for you, then don’t do it. Take a look at Jones’ book, and you might even want to check out Thomas Keating’s (2000) website on contemplative prayer and *lectio divina*. (Available in both English and Spanish). Peace (1998A:11-20) in *Contemplative Bible Reading* gives a clear, brief history of *lectio divina*. This is one of several study guides in NavPress’ Spiritual Formation series. Boa wrote two books that are instructive in this method of combining prayer and the Word: *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Intimate Worship* and *Face to Face: Praying the Scriptures for Spiritual Growth*. In all of these resources we see how Bible reading and meditation can be combined in ways that will bring us closer to the heart of God as we internalize the Word.

Why am I spending so much time talking about Bible reading and meditation? The reason is simple: too often we study *about* the Word rather than study *the* Word. We learn all about the Word, but we don't let the Word penetrate our minds and hearts. Mulholland (1985) quoted in Boa (2001:156-157) for example, gives us a chart contrasting two forms of Bible reading. The one he calls *informational* reading and the other *formational* reading.

INFORMATIONAL READING	FORMATIONAL READING
SEEKS TO COVER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE	FOCUSES ON SMALL PORTIONS
A LINEAR PROCESS	AN IN-DEPTH PROCESS
SEEKS TO MASTER THE TEXT	ALLOWS THE TEXT TO MASTER US
THE TEXT IS AN OBJECT TO USE	THE TEXT AS A SUBJECT THAT SHAPES US
ANALYTICAL, CRITICAL, AND JUDGMENTAL APPROACH	HUMBLE, SUBMISSIVE, WILLING, LOVING APPROACH
PROBLEM-SOLVING MENTALITY	OPENNESS TO MYSTERY

Formational reading, such as in *lectio divina*, is different from the way we usually approach the Bible. In a traditional seminary setting or small group Bible study, we usually dissect the passage in many different ways. We look at the historical context, we consider the language in which the passage was originally written, but this method, although legitimate, can be a very dry exercise. It has its place. In the devotional life, though, a formational reading of Scripture may be more appropriate. We want the passage to speak to our hearts, and not just to our heads. Otherwise, we can fall into an academic exercise which Jones (2003:32-33) compares to dissecting a frog.

This is what we often do to the Bible... We deaden the liveliness of the Book God has given us when we spend more time reading the notes in our study Bibles than we spend reading the actual text. When we try to freeze the Bible in a certain time period, it becomes like an ancient relic soaked in embalming fluid... Because it's God-breathed, it has the ability to breathe God's

Spirit into us. Think of it this way: The belief of Christ-followers is that, though the Bible is done being written, it's not done writing. The Bible writes its truths on our hearts, speaking its words constantly into new situations, new times, and new cultures. God's Spirit is alive and well and enables us to read the Bible in faith. No other book can make that claim.

Jones continues, saying, "God's Word is alive—it always has new ideas, new meanings, and new ways it can inspire us to live a Christian life" (p.90). He is not promoting a kind of "open inspiration of Scripture" in which we can add new books to the Bible. He is, nevertheless, suggesting that God can use his inspired Word to give new ideas. The Word is always new to us, in that sense. Combined with prayer, God is always reaching out to us in new "teachable moments," as it were. Dr. Tremper Longman III (1997:66), professor of Old Testament at Westminster Seminary, writes, "With such quietness of heart and mind, we can come to the Word for profitable reading.... The Bible is a book to savor and think about.... Prayer combined with such contemplation leads to an open heart in God's presence."

Imagine how alive the Word would become to us in our own lives if we approached it from the standpoint of meditation and contemplation. Imagine how the lives of new believers in our emerging churches would be transformed, deepened in their faith, if they were to encounter the Word of God in this way. This is why we teach the inductive method to church planter. We ask them to let the Word of God speak to them and to their small group participants. We don't teach them about the Word; we allow the Word of God to speak for itself.

## **Prayer**

There is an old hymn in English that says:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire, unuttered or expressed,  
The motion of a hidden fire that trembles in the breast.*

*Prayer is the burden of a sigh, the falling of a tear.  
The upward glancing of the eye, when none but God is near.*

*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath, the Christian's native air,  
His watchword at the gates of death; he enters heaven with prayer.*

*Prayer is the contrite sinner's voice, returning from his ways,  
While angels in their songs rejoice and cry "Behold, he prays!"*

*O Thou by whom we come to God, the life, the truth, the way,  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod: Lord, teach us how to pray.  
(William H. Havergal, 1846)*

Prayer is a vital discipline practiced by Christians that puts us in contact with the One who created the heavens and the earth. Herrington, Creech and Taylor (2003:164) give us a working definition for prayer: "Communication with God, both talking and listening. We set aside a specific time for sustained prayer, and we also learn to talk and listen to God as we go about our normal lives. Prayer is an important part of our practice in all the other disciplines."

We have seen how Jesus himself prayed to his Father, and in turn he taught us how to pray. Prayer has also been described as the life-line between believer and God. Others have called it a conversation. Hybels has challenged us with the phrase, "Too busy NOT to pray." Prayer, combined with Bible reading, produces a powerful strength for the Christian.

In the mid-1600s, a woman in France by the name of Jeanne Guyon (1984) wrote a simple primer on prayer, a book that caused no small amount of controversy and suspicion among the religious leaders of her time. In fact, Madame Guyon, as she was commonly known, ended up incarcerated in the Bastille for seven years for her teachings on prayer. She was later banished from Paris by Louis XIV.

Her teachings influenced such notable religious leaders as John Wesley, Count Zinzendorf, George Fox, Hudson Taylor, and Watchman Nee. Each one of these modern heroes of the faith had a story to tell about how her teachings had helped them to “experience God through prayer.”

One of her supposedly heretical teachings was “Prayer is nothing more than turning our hearts toward God and receiving His love in turn” (p. 13). She challenged the common everyday Christian to dare approach the God of heaven and earth. Her prose below is an example of her passion for God:

Are you tired of feeling like a “*broken [cistern], that can hold no water*” (Jeremiah 2:13)?

Then come, you starving souls; come and be filled!

Come, bring your affliction, pain, and misery, and you will be comforted!

Come, you who are sick and filled with disease, and you will be healed!

Come, draw near to your Father who desires to embrace you in His loving arms!

Come, you poor, wandering sheep, back to the Shepherd!

Come, you who are uneducated in spiritual things! You are not incapable of praying!

Let everyone, without exception, come! For Jesus Christ has called all of you. (pp. 13-14)

She taught that the secret of effective prayer was very elementary: “The simple requirement is that you must learn to pray from your heart and not your head” (p. 15). At the same time, Madame Guyon detested formal prayers, prayers which were not from the heart of hearts. She writes, “Speak in your natural language. Although it may be simple and crude to you, it is not so to Him. An earthly father is more pleased to be addressed with love and respect because it comes from the heart rather than with dry, barren, elaborate words. Undisguised emotions of love are infinitely more expressive than all languages or reasoning” (p. 83).



God calls on us to be in communion with him, to communicate with him. This is accomplished through the discipline of prayer. We have no “direct line” to God via a red phone on our desk. We cannot email or Twitter God. The one and only way in which we can communicate with God is by way of prayer. In prayer, we express our joys, concerns, desires, frustrations and requests. We empty ourselves and wait for him to fill us, although often our prayers may appear to be ineffective as if the other side of the line were dead. Yet, the more we pray, the more we ought to sense that someone is at the other end listening. Is this not the desire of every one of us who prays, to hear God’s voice?

A colleague of mine, Keith Tanis, talks about “bended knee leadership” - leadership that is built on the practice of prayer. God uses us more when we are bent in prayer than when we sit upright at our planning calendar. We are called in this Christian life to “take it to the Lord in prayer.”

My wife and I began taking ballroom dance lessons about ten years ago. The first thing we needed to learn was who was to lead and who was to follow. In dance, the man leads and the woman follows his lead. That’s just the way it is! It’s not something up for negotiation. I had to be deliberate in my leading or my wife could not anticipate the next move. And if she took the lead, we fell out of rhythm and were unable to keep dancing.

Thomas (1996:184-185) talks about “dancing prayer.” He explains, “By ‘dancing’ I don’t mean bodily movements...; rather I mean that, just as the woman traditionally allows the man to lead in ballroom dancing, so we allow God to lead in our prayers.... Dancing prayer is prayer in which we allow God to lead; it is presumptuous to assume that we even know what most needs to be prayed about; how necessary it is, then, to let God take the lead.” So often we treat prayer as if it were indeed uni-directional. Prayer ought to be bi-directional. We speak/God hears; God speaks/we hear. How often, though, do we conclude our prayers with an “Amen” without taking time to listen to

God's response? When combined with contemplation, prayer becomes a tool for allowing God to direct us, to speak to us, not just listen to us. Consider how you would feel if you had a friend who did all the talking. What if she never let you get in a word? What if you only listened? How would you feel? What if you were a father or mother and your child never listened to you? God does not want to only hear us; he wants to respond to us. He wants to talk to us, to tell us how much he loves us and cares for us. He wants to explain why he allows certain things to happen in our lives. That's why prayer is often called "conversing with God." Conversing is a two-way street. Keep that in mind, and read on.

Whenever my wife sends me to the store, sometimes there is an item she needs that is not on the list. She tells me as I'm rushing out the door. I try to remember what that one item is by repeating it over and over again until I get to the store. Even then, I might come home with a bunch of bananas instead of a melon! When it does work, it is because I've focused on that one item. I've repeated it and have a mental image of what it is I need to pick up at the store. Contemplative prayer is similar to this, a very specific kind of praying. In contemplative prayer, a person focuses—or centers—on a word, for example, in order to clear the mind of other things. In *Spiritual Pathways* (Thomas 1996:185), the process is explained in simple language: "Repeat the word silently in your mind for a set amount of time (say, twenty minutes) until your heart seems to be repeating the word by itself, just as naturally and involuntarily as breathing. As your mind fills with thoughts of Jesus or the Father or another appropriate subject... you are protected from outside distractions. It is hard to describe this to the western mind. We think, 'Well, what do I do next?' But centering prayer is a contemplative act in which you don't do anything; you're simply resting in the presence of God." Do not confuse this with some form of eastern religion or transcendental meditation where you repeat a *mantra*. Contemplative prayer has been a part of Christianity for ages. It is a means by which we allow God to "lead the dance," making his will known to us. It is a way of hearing God, of being able to hear the "still small voice" of God

(1 Kings 19:12). In contemplative prayer, we are silencing ourselves to hear God speak to us. Interestingly, even the Reformers practiced contemplative prayer. Hear the words of Rice (1991:88) in *Reformed Spirituality*: “Inner quiet is a way of coming into the awareness of the presence of God by leaving behind our very full agendas. It is a way of emptying ourselves so that God can fill us. As we become quiet, we discover that prayer does not require words. Calvin says that ‘the best prayers are sometimes unspoken.’ The Puritans developed the practice of what they termed ‘extraordinary prayer’ as distinct from regular or ‘ordinary’ prayer, which took place at set times during the day. They suggested phrases or words upon which to fix one’s attention when praying, by repeating the name ‘Jesus,’ or the word ‘love,’ over and over. They even suggested that inward sighs and groans might be sufficient.”

In 1 Kings 19, Elijah the prophet flees for his life from the wicked Jezebel who desires to see him dead. He came to a place called Beersheba and then went a day’s journey into the desert. He sat down under a broom tree and prayed to God that he might die. Elijah falls asleep, and is awakened several times by an angel who provides him with food. With rest and nourishment, Elijah then is fortified to make a forty-day-and-night journey to Horeb, known as God’s mountain. He spends the night in a cave. Either that night or the next morning the Bible says “And the word of the Lord came to him: ‘What are you doing here, Elijah?’” Elijah protests that he alone among the prophets of God remains alive, that all the others have been killed. And God responds by telling him to go out of the cave because the Lord himself is about to pass by.

The Bible says, “Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave” (1 Kings 19: 11-13). We often expect to “hear” God in the monumental events, like hurricanes, and rainstorms, and

earthquakes. We want God to speak to us in a loud booming voice the way he did to Moses in Cecil B. de Mille's rendition of "The Ten Commandments." But when we pray, God usually speaks to us in "a gentle whisper," or, in other versions of the Bible, in "a still small voice." Are we often expecting the thunder and lightning encounter with God and missing when he does speak to us as we pray? Are we looking for the spectacular only to miss the ordinary or mundane ways in which God responds? As Christians, we pray believing that God does answer—in his timing and in his way.

James tells us how/when to pray. He writes in his epistle, "Is any one of you in trouble? He should pray. Is anyone happy? Let him sing songs of praise. Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him.... And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.... The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective" (James 5:13-16).

In the Bible there are at least 104 references to the word "pray." In the New Testament alone there are 64. Prayer is indeed the vital breath of every believer. The Bible says that Daniel, while in captivity, prayed three times a day. The Psalmist cries out, "Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray. In the morning, O Lord, you hear my voice; in the morning I lay my requests before you and wait in expectation" (Ps. 5:2-3). "But I call to God, and the Lord saves me. Evening, morning and noon I cry out in distress, and he hears my voice" (Ps. 55:16-17).

Paul tells us that when we don't even know what we ought to pray for, "the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express" (Ro. 8:26). 1 Thessalonians 5:17 says, "Pray continually," in other words, prayer ought to be a regularly practiced discipline. And Jesus himself in Matthew 6 gives us advice not only on how to pray but on what ought to be our attitude in prayer, concluding with an example of praying that has become known as the Lord's Prayer.

A century before Madame Guyon another woman lived a life of prayer second to none. Her devotion to Christ and her experience of “the inner life,” a life of constant prayer, became recognized by those who both sought such a life and those who were suspicious of it. In fact, for a time this devout woman of God came under the scrutiny of the Spanish Inquisition as did her mentee, John of the Cross. The woman I refer to was known as Teresa of Avila, and in other instances, as Teresa of Jesus. Avila refers to her place of birth and the residence where she was to spend most of her life; Jesus refers to the One in whom she had placed her faith and in whose name she so fervently prayed. A prolific writer, though not an erudite, Teresa became the second most famous writer in all of Spain, second only to the masterful Miguel de Cervantes. Her most famous work, and the one that deals in depth with prayer, is *The Interior Castle*. Berg in his introduction explains that the castle “is an image of the wholeness of the soul. It is the place for experiences of the whole person with God and in His indwelling presence, God being King of Kings whom Teresa fondly calls ‘His Majesty’ “ (St. Teresa of Avila: 1998: xiv).

Almost a hundred years before Berg’s statement, Whyte (1897:18-19) writes in an earlier translation of this work, “With Teresa it was prayer first, and prayer last, and prayer always. With Teresa literally all things were sanctified and sweetened, and made fruitful by prayer.”

One might ask what a Spanish mystic of the 16th Century would have to say to us today as we discuss spiritual formation. Too often we live disjointed lives in which we attempt to reinvent the wheel, as it were, when it comes to the spiritual disciplines. What Guyon has to say and what Teresa has to say are very applicable to us-- to me-- as we together attempt to put the discipline of prayer into regular practice. Together with such venerable Protestant leaders like Calvin and Bunyan, they can teach us a thing or two when it comes to living a spiritually-formed life of prayer and meditation. Perhaps we need to listen because we have become a people looking for “the quick fix.” We want a “Ten-Minute Manager on Prayer.” We want “Five Easy Steps to

Prayer.” We’d even buy a copy of *Prayer for Dummies* if it existed!

Edwards (1954) edited a book of excerpts from Calvin’s writings entitled *The Devotions and Prayers of John Calvin*, a wonderful small book that shows the human side of a great Reformer. Too often we



have a picture of Calvin as a cold, intellectual theologian rather than as a servant of God who yearned passionately to know the heart of his Lord. This book helps us to see this side of Calvin. Likewise, we can go to Book III, Chapter XX of Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which deals in depth with the topic of prayer. From these writings we gain a picture of a man of prayer. Unlike those who prayed in Latin, Calvin called believers to pray in their native tongue. Like Teresa of Avila and Madame

Guyon, he gave an exposition of the Lord’s Prayer, as does the Heidelberg Catechism (L.D. 45, Q&A 119-129). Prayer for Calvin was an act of faith, a “means of grace” (*means* being a “pattern by which we enable ourselves to be receptive to grace and remove the barriers...” (Rice (1991:87). We come to God, says Calvin, through Christ, “our Advocate and Mediator” (p. 165). Calvin assures us that although we may not receive what we ask for, we can be assured that God has heard and answered according to our need. “God will never abandon us... He alone will suffice for all” (p. 200). Says Rice in commenting on Calvin’s position, “God’s answer may take a form that is different from what we expected. ‘No’ is an answer to prayer” (p. 79).

Furthermore, for Calvin, Christians are called to pray so that we might have a burning desire to serve God; to clarify our wants and desires so that they truly bring honor to God; and so that we can enter into thanksgiving, receiving gifts from His hands. “Calvin’s reasons for prayer,” writes Rice, “can assist us to see prayer as a relationship with God more than as pleading for what we want. His theology of prayer is God-centered and more concerned about how we may be shaped into the people God wills us to be than with how we may change God to fulfill our desires” (pp. 79-80). Even Calvin’s motto *Cor Meum Tibi Offero Domine Prompte et Sincere* (I offer my heart to thee, o God, freely and sincerely) demonstrates Calvin’s passionate desire to know God deeply.

How do you pray-- for what you want or for “Thy will be done”? Is your prayer God-centered or self-centered? Do you exhibit Calvin’s same passion to know God?

The Heidelberg Catechism asks the question “Why do Christians need to pray?” The response given is “Because prayer is the most important part of the thankfulness God requires of us. And also because God gives his grace and Holy Spirit only to those who pray continually and groan inwardly, asking God for these gifts and thanking him for them” (L.D. 45, Q&A 116).

Maybe Berg’s (Houston and Berg 1998:xxiv) words from the last century still ring true in this new century: “We live in an age that opposes meditation, contemplation, and prayer.... To a great extent, all of us are faced with a mindset characterized by the success syndrome, pragmatic functionalism (if it works, it’s good), the myth of self-fulfillment, materialism, a fragmentation and impersonality of life, a frenetic pursuit of pleasure, and the tyranny of timepieces, schedules, computers, jet flights, and telephone.... A major problem we have is our failure to recognize that our God and heavenly Father is waiting, ready, and able to help us in our prayer to Him. All too often we fail to trust God and fail to realize the enabling power of His Spirit in and among us.” God’s Spirit, nevertheless, will guide us as we pray.

“Likewise,” says Paul, “the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Ro. 8:26-27, RSV). Boa (2001:83) wrote a textbook on spirituality. In it he defines prayer as follows: “It is a meeting place where we draw near to God to receive his grace, to release our burdens and fears, and to be honest with the Lord.” According to Boa (p. 94), prayer should become the centerpiece of our spiritual journey. He lists ten reasons for this, citing Scripture:

- Prayer enhances our fellowship and intimacy with God (Psalm 116:1-2; Jeremiah 33:2-3)
- The Scriptures command us to pray (Luke 18:1; Ephesians 6:18; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; 1 Timothy 2:1)
- When we pray, we follow the example of Christ and other great people in Scripture like Moses and Elijah (Mark 1:35; Numbers 11:2; 1 Kings 18:36-37)
- Prayer appropriates God’s power for our lives (John 15:5; Acts 4:31; Ephesians 3:16; Colossians 4:2-4)
- We receive special help from God when we pray (Hebrews 4:16)
- Prayer makes a genuine difference (Luke 11:9-10; James 5:16-18)
- Prayer develops our understanding and knowledge of God (Psalm 37:3-6; 63:1-8; Ephesians 1:16-19)
- Our prayers and God’s answers give us joy and peace in our hearts (John 16:23-23; Philippians 4:6-7)
- Prayer helps us understand and accomplish God’s purposes for our lives (Colossians 1:9-11)
- Prayer changes our attitudes and desires (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

Therefore, we need to make prayer a daily practice. I for one practiced “praying constantly” by praying when I drove 45 minutes to work in the morning. Now that I work from home in a virtual office, prayer should be easier. I can more easily concentrate without the distractions of traffic lights, cars cutting in, and deer jumping the fences to cross in



front of me; nevertheless, I still find the best time for prayer for me is when I do drive somewhere in the morning, like when I drive to our offices outside of Chicago.

Unfortunately, as church planters we can become so busy with ministry, with preparing for Bible studies, setting up a schedule for visiting contacts, that prayer often takes a backseat. I have even found those of a special theological persuasion for whom prayer is supposed to a powerful “constant” have often confessed in my workshops that they do not take the time necessary to prepare for the daily battle.

Recently a dear “saint” in our church passed away. I was her elder. Her husband commented that after she passed and he and their daughters spent time reading her journals. She had a “prayer chair” where she read her Bible, prayed, and wrote in her journals. Her journals were full of prayer requests, notes about people she needed to pray for, and answered prayers. She was a woman of prayer. Her love of Jesus can be seen in her husband, her daughters, and even her grandchildren. She approached death with a smile on her face and an excitement, even as she would have liked to stay here on earth longer. Would that those of us who knew her would take up where she left off, living prayerful lives that make a difference in us and those around us.

Rice, in commenting on prayer within the Reformed tradition, lists four balances in prayer that are needed (1991: 84-85):

1. “Prayer is both corporate and personal....”
2. “Prayer is both spontaneous and disciplined....”
3. “Prayer is an affair of the mind and of the heart....”
4. “We need to pray as both speakers and hearers.”

As believers, there is time to pray together and there is time for private, quiet, individual prayer. Prayer can leap from our souls at a moment’s notice when something wonderful happens, or it can be a regular, habitual act of faith. Prayer does not leave the mind at the gate, yet it also calls forth groanings from our heart. When we pray, we both speak to God and listen to God.

I often find myself rushing out the door in the morning and not having taken the time to read the Bible or to pray other than to give thanks for the bowl of oatmeal before me. Since moving to *café con leche* (coffee in hot milk), I find myself often not even thanking God for that!

I should, then, find another time of day for concerted prayer and Bible reading and meditation. Perhaps at noon, or in the evening before going to bed instead of sitting in front of the TV screen. Maybe I should take Huggett's words to heart: "If I am really serious about listening to God, I must fix my prayer time first and fit other things round it" (1986:44). What will you do to make prayer a daily occurrence? There are reasons for praying first thing in the morning or as the last thing you do at night, but more important is the act of praying than the time of prayer. Find the time. Make it a habit, a spiritual exercise or discipline. "A personal pattern of prayer that is meaningful does not develop by itself; it is the fruit of a commitment to regular times for prayer" (Rice. 1991:186). (As it was in the life of our dear sister from our church.) Prayer will help to form you spiritually for this life's journey in preparation for the journey to come. "Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence (boldly!), so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16).

You will find books written about meditative prayer and books written about contemplative prayer. For some, meditative prayer is what occurs as you enter into prayer from a state of meditation, as in *lectio divina*, while contemplative prayer is what happens as we move from this stage to the *contemplatio* stage in the same *lectio divina*. Two books that you will find helpful in understanding this spiritual discipline are Peace's (1998) *Meditative Prayer: Entering God's Presence*, and Thomas Merton's (1969) *Contemplative Prayer*. Leech (2001:133-181) also explains prayer in depth in chapters 4 and 5 of his book *Soul Friend*.

Before we go on to another discipline, I recently came across an interesting article in *Discipleship Journal* (January/February 2005:83-84) entitled "Music to God's Ears: Your hymnal can add welcome richness

to your prayers.” The author, Bob Hostetler, writes, “As a young man in love with Jesus, I discovered that my prayer vocabulary was poor. I was frequently frustrated by my inability to put words to the meditations of my heart. When it dawned on me that hymns could be not only sung but also spoken, I began to use my hymnal as a private prayer diary.... Praying the hymnal takes no practice and little preparation: Anyone can do it. Yet it’s a singularly enriching activity. It will help you express the deepest and highest longings of your heart in ways you otherwise may never have experienced. Over time, it will fill your prayers with rich phrases and stunning verses until your memory overflows with the lyrics of history’s poets, even when you’re not reading from the printed page.” Hostetler goes on to suggest a method for hymn-praying: Read the lyrics rather than sing them; contemporize the lyrics by replacing “thee” with “you”, etc.; then meditate on what you spoke. The article is worth reading if you want to try a new way of praying.

## **Fasting**

When I was first in Bible College eons ago, I had a professor who challenged us to make fasting a regular part of our spiritual regimen. I dismissed this as an activity that was neither enlightening nor exciting. I dare admit that I did not put his advice into practice. For one, I did not see that this was a practice of many Christians from my particular religious persuasion. I saw this as something others did, but not necessarily those who called themselves by my denominational affiliation. I say this, much to my chagrin, since this professor was a man I highly respected, and the one who later officiated at my wedding.

Years later, my wife would often fast when she had a difficult task to resolve or was in intensive prayer for a particular situation. Even so, I was not a practicing “faster.” It has only been of late as I have begun a pilgrimage into the spiritual disciplines and from time to time have gone on spiritual retreats that I have come to recognize fasting as a spiritual discipline that can help in one’s spiritual formation.

We will use the definition for fasting which Herrington, Creech and Taylor (2003:163) put forth. Fasting is “the experience of deliberately abstaining from food or some other indulgence to create space in one’s life for attending to God. In fasting, one learns to control various appetites and submit them to God.”

Towns (2002:66) describes two different kinds of food fasts: “First, there is the absolute fast when you don’t eat any solid foods or drink any liquids; the second is a normal fast,” he writes, “where you do not eat any solid foods, but drink water, juices, or other liquids.”

Fasts can be as short as one day or up to 40 days (See Towns 2002:82 for a more in-depth description of various fasts, as well as a medical warning).

As a discipline, fasting is both a physical and spiritual act. “As you allow your physical body to empty itself of food, make an intentional effort to empty your soul before God” (p. 20). Fasting is closely associated with prayer. In fact, we often refer to “prayer and fasting.” In fasting, we prepare our souls to be able to commune with God, although not all prayer is pre-conditioned by a period of fasting.

Towns has written two books that deal with this topic of fasting. *Fasting for Spiritual Breakthrough* (1996) which presents 9 biblical fasts for 9 different purposes and *Knowing God through Fasting* (2002). The latter describes for us the spirit of fasting. As we fast, we:

- Taste the goodness of God
- wait in God’s presence to become like Him
- come to Jesus to enjoy His presence
- drink from God’s presence to get spiritual satisfaction
- learn to discipline ourselves even as Jesus did
- grow spiritually into the image of Christ
- gain spiritual perception of God’s world
- enter God’s rest as we know His heart. (from the back cover)

For example, fasting serves as a means to taste God's goodness. "Fasting is anticipation of meeting God, knowing He will meet with you.... You turn away from earthly food, to feed on God" (*Ibid.*, p. 22).

Calvin listed three purposes of fasting: (1983, Book IV, 15, p. 462)

1. "to mortify and subdue the flesh, that it may not be wanton"
2. "to prepare the better for prayer and holy meditation"
3. "to give evidence of humbling ourselves before God, when we would confess our guilt before him"

Jonathan Edwards, the great Calvinist preacher of colonial New England, declared that fasting "is a duty that all professing Christians should practice, and *frequently* practice" (1983, p. 401, italics mine).

Fasting calls us to be in a state of waiting for the Lord. Many of us may find waiting a difficult task. I, for one, am not a patient wait-er. I travel extensively, and because of this, I enjoy certain travel perks from the airlines and car rental places. When I arrive at a crowded airport, there is usually a shorter line waiting for people like me at the check-in counter. If I don't even want to wait in that line, I can go online and print out my boarding passes before I ever leave home or I can go to a kiosk at the airport. Often at the security check point there is a special line reserved for frequent flyers, again permitting me not to have to wait long. And now with TSA Pre-check I don't even have to get half-undressed in order to go through the security screening process! When boarding the plane I am given preferential boarding privileges so that I can be among the first on board and can stow my carry-on luggage before all the overhead compartments are full. When I arrive at my destination, I can go directly to my rental car rather than stand in line to check in for a vehicle. This spoils me when I am not traveling on my particular airline or a partner airline. This spoils me too as I consider the task of fasting.

Fasting calls us to wait-- to wait on the Lord. Fasting is not a “rush activity.” Fasting is what one does when he quiets himself down, denies himself food or limits his food intake, and waits for God to speak. The Bible gives us several passages that speak about this “waiting”:

*“For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation”*  
(Ps. 62:1, RSV).

*“Blessed are all those who wait for him”*  
(Is. 30:18, RSV).

*“The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul that seeks him”*  
(Lam. 3:25, RSV).

We cannot overestimate the value of waiting as we fast. Fasting is a way of slowing us down, the same way solitude and silence help to slow us down. “What happens when you wait? You catch your breath, your muscles relax, and your pulse returns to normal. Waiting on God renews your spiritual strength. Are you drained? Then pray and wait on God while you fast. It will renew your strength” (Towns 2002, pp. 42-43).

Some time ago I had spent a very busy time sitting four days through meetings, then catching a plane to another city where I sat through three more days of intense meetings. On the morning before my flight back home, I took the morning to fast. I read Scripture, I prayed, I drank only water, and I waited for God. It was only an 8-hour fast, but I felt somewhat renewed. I did not get any special revelations, but I was more relaxed than I had been in over a week. And this was important to me because the morning after returning home I was to leave again on a trip, and in two days I'd be walking into a spiritual retreat. I did not want to be entering that retreat haggard and exhausted. I wanted to enter with a calmed spirit so that I could unwind even more and relax before the Lord. This turned out to be the best thing I could have done. I also found myself more patient with people and less grumpy. (I am a natural grump anyway according to my wife, and exhaustion just makes me even grumpier!)

At another time I flew to Houston to lead forty Hispanic church planters in a three-day training. I invited the pastor who had served as our contact person for this event for a quick lunch before we headed to the church. The pastor kindly thanked me but gently refused. He and several others were spending the day fasting for the success of the meetings. Read out loud several times Isaiah's promise to those who wait on the Lord: "But they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint" (RSV). What a promise! And, yes, this three-day event was one of the best I have experienced of the 45 similar events celebrated over the last nine years. Could it be because several brothers had covenanted together to pray and fast before the Lord?

Horsfall (2002:116) calls retreating a form of "soul care." He quotes Mark 6:3 where Jesus says, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest." Chapter Thirteen of Horsfall's book deals with "resting places," a worthwhile read for those interested in retreating. Remember what Herrington and her co-authors had to say about fasting: "abstaining from food or *some other indulgence...*"

Retreating can be a fast, time away from the usual. Giving up television for a week and spending that time in prayer, reading God's Word, communing with God in the great outdoors—these can be a form of fasting, a form of soul care.

Remember the example of Jesus in chapter three? Jesus also fasted. He began his ministry by fasting for forty days and nights (Mt. 4:2). He even gave instructions on how to fast (Mt. 6:16-18).

As we fast before the Lord, as we anticipate with expectancy his presence, God communes with us. It may not be a flash-of-light type of revelation but a quiet voice calling us to relax in him and to be renewed as we pray for his guidance and direction and for his loving care. As church planters, we need to distance ourselves at times from the daily tasks in order to wait on God for our next instructions. The church we

are planting is, anyway, God's church. He is building the church. We need to hear from him how we can partner in that church plant. Are you ready to fast?

## Questions

1. Besides the texts cited in this chapter, what other Bible passages come to mind when you think of God's Word? Write at least four.
2. Reflect on your prayer life as honestly as you can. Are you satisfied with your prayer life or could there be improvement? If so, what would you need to do to make your prayer life more enriching and meaningful?
3. Rice wrote "If we really seek depth in our relationship with God, we may need to begin to practice the discipline of waiting in silence.... Silent prayer involves us in attitudes of listening, waiting, and paying attention to God" (p. 89). Give your opinion about this kind of prayer, what some call a "listening prayer."
4. Explain the two different forms of fasting: absolute fast and normal fast.
5. How can you help new believers to experience the joys of a constant prayer life, accompanied by times of silent listening for God's voice?
6. How important do you feel prayer and fasting are for those who are planting new churches? Why or why not?



## Action Points

1. Try doing *lectio divina* for about a week. Set aside one hour each day. At the end of the week, write in your journal about your experience. What impressed you, positively or negatively? Is this a spiritual discipline you want to cultivate more? Why or why not?
2. Attempt a 12-hour fast. Go without food for 12 hours, only drinking liquids. Go about your work, but whenever the hunger pains hit or the stomach growls, say a prayer of thanksgiving to God for his many blessings to you.
3. If time permits, try another 12-hour fast, but this time go off into seclusion with only your Bible and liquids. Read a passage of Scripture every hour. The rest of the time, rest or walk. You can do this at a retreat center, out in the woods, at the beach, wherever you can go to be by yourself. Do not speak to anyone. When you return from this fasting retreat, share with another person what you experienced through this spiritual exercise.
4. Check the list of URLs in the back of this book. Look at no less than five sites from the list or other sites you come across dealing with one of the spiritual disciplines studied in this chapter. Write a review on these sites, date it, state what you liked, didn't like.



# V

## THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

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### PART II

#### **Introduction**

In the last chapter we looked at the spiritual disciplines of Bible reading and meditation (including *lectio divina*), prayer, and fasting. In this chapter we will concentrate our study on journaling, solitude and silence, and worship as additional spiritual disciplines that help in our spiritual formation as believers.

#### **Journaling**

I enjoy the discipline of writing. I have been a writer for many years. In my work in Latin America I wrote theological education by extension (TEE) materials for the people I was pastoring. You could say that writing is in my blood. When it came time to write my doctoral dissertation, I was in seventh heaven! I enjoyed the hours of reading and note taking. But it all came together gloriously when I actually began putting pen to paper. The writing of this book together with co-authoring a book on mentoring also have been joyous exercises for me.

There is a very special form of writing called journaling or journal keeping. It is a discipline, an exercise that I have yet to develop. I'm not sure why I have not done it. I remember getting a diary as a Christmas gift one year, but I don't believe I did much writing in it. The thought of undertaking the task of keeping a journal with my reflections today sends up a wall of resistance for some reason. But as I venture further into the discipline of journal keeping, I realize that someday soon I will need to give it a try.

Many famous people down through the ages have kept journals. Some of these people became famous simply because their journals were one day published.

Christopher Columbus kept a journal of his travels, as did many of the early explorers. Many of the early Christian mystics also journaled, or wrote letters which were later published singly or in compiled form. I doubt that many of those who kept journals ever expected that these would one day be published. In fact, some of the Puritan pietists left instructions that their journals were to be burned upon their deaths, partly, I'm sure, because their writing became known as the Puritan confessional (Peace 1998:128). Where would we be today, though, if it weren't for Anne Frank's diary and Jim Elliot's journals? Augustine's *Confessions* and Pascal's *Pensées* would never have seen the light of day.

Why journal? "Journaling," says Boa (2001:81) "enhances personal reflection, encourages us to record perspectives we have received from Scripture, and serves as another form of prayer."

Peace (1998:101) describes journaling in these terms:

Journaling is itself a spiritual discipline. It focuses mind and heart on the issues of growth with the aim of discerning what God is doing in one's life. By using a journal, we come in touch with our cutting edges of growth, those areas where questions exist or where there is need or longing. These are the areas in which the Holy Spirit often seems most active.

Journaling is also an aid to other spiritual disciplines. Writing down your insights is helpful in Bible study. Writing out your prayers helps you to communicate with God. Creating a poem that praises God is an act of worship. Journaling with others and sharing your work can create a spiritual community.

Budd (2002:14) in her book *Journal Keeping: Writing for Spiritual Growth*, says, “Keeping a journal helps me to live as a seeker.... I’m seeking, looking for God in the circumstances of my life, in the truths of Scriptures, in answers to prayer, in the beauty of nature, in the joy of a child.” Journaling allows us, then, the time to reflect on those circumstances of life, on what Scripture is saying as we read it, on the beauty we see around us, in the answers to prayer. “Writing...” she commented, “can be transformational” (p. 21). Journal keeping, she says, calls for honesty and intimacy. And through journaling, we discover our true feelings; we discover the voice of God; we discover the Lord in nature; we discover the Lord in the usual; we discover new insights; we discover the value of remembering, among other things. Budd has chapters on these themes and more.

Klug (2002:10-21) gives us a “how-to” on journal keeping. He writes that journaling, along with the other spiritual disciplines, is “a response to grace, not an alternative to it.” It is, he says, “a way of being open before God, of giving the Spirit a chance to work in us” (p. 10). He gives his own list of benefits from journal keeping:

- Growth in self understanding
- An aid to caring for your soul
- Guidance and decision making
- Making sense and order of life
- Releasing emotions and gaining perspective
- Greater awareness of daily life
- Self-expression and creativity
- Clarifying what you believe
- Setting goals and managing your time
- Working through problems

There is also great value in going back over one’s personal journal. Such review brings to light personal progress in the faith, refreshes biblical lessons learned, and even helps us to recall areas of growth still needed.

Consider these benefits and decide for yourself if journaling is a discipline you care to initiate in your life. Recognize that journal keeping will take time—time not only to write but time to reflect before and after. When combined with Scripture reading, it will let the creative juices flow and hopefully give you new insights into the passage you read and challenge you concerning things to change in your life. Your journal may never make the Bestseller list, but then, it's meant to be for *your* spiritual growth, your transformation, first and foremost. It is a private journal between you and God.

## Solitude

When we lived in Costa Rica, we used to drive to the coast on weekends for a Saturday outing so that our son could surf and our daughter could play in the sand. The closest beach was about an hour away, going up and down curvy mountain roads, finally to sea level and to the ocean. I found myself racing to get to the destination, my hands tightly gripping the steering wheel, feeling each and every curve and bump in the road. Once we arrived at the beach, I would take off my watch, and, listening to the ebb and flow of the waves, I would immediately relax. I could feel my muscles relaxing. I could sense my mind slowing down, and I soon found myself groggy for a snooze in the sun. The only sounds I heard were those of the lapping waves and an infrequent sea gull overhead.

I experience the same “slowing down” when I sit in my easy chair in the basement near the crackling fire in the wood stove. The penetrating heat, the glow of the fire, force me once again into a relaxed mode. In the quietness I can read, listen to music, or meditate. I undergo the same experience when I sit by a campfire outdoors in a park. Nothing is as soothing to me as looking at the fire, the glowing embers, smelling the smoke, and hearing the periodic crackle and sizzle of the logs.

At other times I find quietness hiking to the top of a hill and looking out over the valleys below. Walking through a forest, sitting on a log

and listening to the wind whistling through the trees brings peace and a sense of hope to a world-wearied body and soul.

There's something about us that needs—even demands—times of silence and solitude. And if we are to come into the presence of the Father, such times are very necessary. Even though I can pray constantly as I go about my day, I still sense a need for a quiet time when I force myself into a “slow-down mode” in order to hear the “still small voice” of God. Some call this their “quiet time.” Others call it a devotional time. It is a time when we either just listen for God to speak to our inner selves or it is a time when we meditate on his Word, expecting to hear him speak to us through that printed page. Yet so often we do not take the time to wind down, to quiet our souls and minds and bodies, in order to come into his presence and to hear his voice.

M. Basil Pennington in the preface to Hellen Waddell's (1998:xx1) *The Desert Fathers*, writes “We cannot hope to free ourselves from the false self that the values of this world encourage us to create, to escape the self-alienation that marks our lives from the womb and is constantly fostered by a worldly society, if we do not at times and even regularly seek periods of quietness. This is the goal of all authentic meditation practices.....”

Herrington, Keech and Taylor (2003:164) give us definitions of both silence and solitude:

Silence: “When we deliberately try to eliminate as many sources of unnecessary noise as possible, we are freed from external distraction and are better able to hear from God and from our own souls. We also forgo the use of words to distract and manipulate others.”

Solitude: “Choosing to withdraw from the company of other people teaches us to be alone with God. Solitude gives us the opportunity to reflect on the pressures of a relationship and our daily lives and reorient ourselves to the will of God.”

Silence and solitude need to become regular practices of the Christian. If we are to be spiritually formed, if we want to be used of God in planting a church, we need to be with God in such times of silence and solitude, for it is through such times that we are refreshed and renewed in body and soul. Rice (1991:88) states, “Solitude... is something to be sought after. It is an attitude of the heart and a willingness to lay ourselves open to God.” Sometimes this silence and solitude come through a spiritual retreat. Such a retreat may be scheduled and directed; at other times it could be spontaneous and without a schedule. It may be at a retreat center, or it may be out in God’s creation. Some have even been able to experience silence and solitude in their office by simply turning their chair away from their desk and computer. It may be for 15 minutes or it could be for a day or two.

Each person needs to experiment with different loci and find what place works best for them. I find going to a retreat center helps me the most. I can combine both walks in God’s creation as well as iconic symbols that help me to meditate on God’s activities through biblical history. At times I can find the same in an empty sanctuary.

When I travel to Quito, Ecuador, I often stay at Quinta Elim, a conference center run by a wonderful Christian couple. In the early mornings I leave my room and walk around the property. Wherever I look there are Bible verses painted on walls. These become for me evangelical “stations of the cross” as I read and repeat the verses and pray for my family back home, for the work in Ecuador, and the work going on around the world through our ministry partners.

We often associate such practices with monks in monasteries, as well we might. Both Thomas Merton and Thomas a Kempis, for example, practiced silence and solitude. But silence and solitude are spiritual disciplines for everyday believers as well. These disciplines were also practiced by the Puritans. Rice (1991:89) comments, “We need ways of developing the discipline of silence in our own lives. Such practices will assist us in turning off the flow of noise from within. The great



Puritan divines suggested that we use passages of scripture as guides for keeping our attention fixed on God. They also used pictures of biblical scenes which were carefully engraved in their Bibles and prayer books.” The Puritans often began their study of the Bible by first allowing for a time of silence before the Lord (See also p. 115).

At a retreat center in Miami some time ago I participated in a directed retreat. I did this with a group of church planters. We spent the sum total of a day in both directed activities and times of solitude and silence. In the directed activities we looked at a famous picture of the Trinity that came out of the 15th Century. We analyzed the colors used for each person of the Trinity, their postures, the focal point that offered an open spot for us. We discussed what the picture said to us, in light of Scripture. I have a small facsimile of this painting in my office, and whenever I happen to look at it, it reminds me of that time when I retreated—a time that was truly refreshing and renewing. It makes me anxious to do it again, and again, and again, but always with the goal of returning to my life and ministry.

Some people have gone to what we might consider today as extremes in order to find silence and solitude. They separated themselves from society, from the hustle and bustle of their day, in order to commune with God. These were known as the desert fathers, ascetics, or hermits, although some actually lived in communities. Pennington (Waddell 1998:vxii-xviii) explains, “So they went apart, separating themselves from the society of this world.... But they were not haters of their fellow humans.... The fathers and mothers showed an immensely loving and truly touching care not only for newcomers who came into their midst and for the venerable ancients among them but for any troubled one.” I don’t see myself going off to the desert to find God, but I can appreciate those who have. Admittedly there were some folks who went to extremes-- living in the bottom of wells, for example-- but most were ordinary men and women who wanted to have a closer relationship with God, to live a simple lifestyle, and to be at peace with themselves. We certainly could learn a few things from these devout men and wom-

en by doing away with some of the “things” we have accumulated over time that get in our way of relying on God, by slowing down, and by seeking to hear the still small voice in quietness and solitude.

Here’s a truism: God sometimes has to force us into moments of solitude and silence. We want to keep going. We feel we need to be “doing” rather than “being.” In fact, Boa (2001:255) says we are quickly becoming human *doings* than human *beings*! We have a high sense of our self-importance and often feel things will fall apart at work or at home if we don’t “keep on keeping on.” This falls flat in the face of the stark truth: “The world tells us that what we achieve and accomplish determines who we are, but the Scriptures teach us that who we are in Christ should be the basis for what we do”. To be spiritually formed, we cannot keep up the hectic schedules that we do. We need to learn to “be.” While living in Nicaragua, God slowed me down, quickly! I had a bout of hepatitis that laid me low for a month. The world did not end. Ministry continued without me. I learned I was not indispensable. I began learning “to be” rather than “to do.” Yet, years later, I’m back in the rat race: I know I’m too busy when I find myself sitting in meetings, dead tired, cranky, and having a hard time concentrating. When I first wrote this, I was just coming out of four days of meetings in Grand Rapids. I rushed to catch a plane for Phoenix (rushing for no good reason since the next two flights I took were both late in leaving anyway!) In Phoenix I sat through 3 more days of meetings. As I sat in those meetings, I found my mind wandering, writing down in a matter of minutes a list of 17 different things to do when I got back. And getting back would not be for over 10 days! In two days I was scheduled to arrive home at 11:15 p.m., drive an hour back home, then leave the house at 5 a.m. the next morning to get back to the airport for a 7 a.m. flight to Miami to make it to-- of all things!-- a spiritual retreat with other pastors for whom I wanted to model the spiritual disciplines. Talk about running on empty!!!! Who am I kidding with all this activity? I don’t want to rush through this life and not “take time to smell the roses,” only to have them sing at my funeral “It is Well with my Soul,” when I missed out on the best that God had to offer me because of

my stubborn work ethic or ego. Benner (2002:96) expressed the same concern this way: “God constantly reaches out, seeking our attention, seeking to be known. We walk through this world oblivious, failing to notice him. *We are so wrapped up in ourselves—our plans, our worries, our activities—that we fail to see him.*”

The Bible calls us away from this busyness. See what Psalm 127:2 has to say: “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.” What would my life be like if I really took these words seriously? Would I be up as early as I am, rushing to the office or to the next plane? Would I find myself sitting up late at night in meetings or, when home, in front of the TV? Would I be gulping down my food without much true enjoyment and then regretting the extra pounds it puts on my flesh? If I really believed these words would I drink less caffeine to keep going and instead, take time to rest? Would I be less inclined to fill my planner with meetings and other activities, and instead leave some open spots to relax, even in the office? Who am I trying to impress with all of my busyness and my scurrying from one plane to the next? My team leader? My colleagues? Myself? Or even God? Especially if the latter, this is not what God is asking of me. Rather, he is saying to me and to you, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.... you will find rest for your souls.” Look at an event between Jesus and his disciples: “The apostles returned to Jesus, and told him all that they had done and taught. And he said to them, ‘Come away by yourselves to a lonely place, and rest a while.’ For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat” (Mark 6:31-32). Ever feel that busy and wound up that you don’t even have time to eat, or at least to savor the foods you do eat? And when you sleep, are you as tired when you wake up as when you went to bed? Why is it so difficult for us to say with the Psalmist, “In silence my soul waits for you alone, O God”?

Not only is God not impressed with my busy efforts; I was missing the point that I already have his love as his redeemed child. I do not have to perform in order to gain his love-- I already have it! And he

invites me to come apart to rest in his presence. “The more we are involved in the busyness of daily life, even if it is in service to others, the more we need to care for our own inner selves. This is why spiritual mentoring often takes place in the context of retreats or quiet days. This *gives us permission* to reflect and think more deeply about what is happening to us, where we are going, and whether we are living in accordance with our true values” (Horsfall, 2002:23)

We have had enough experiences in planting churches over the years that many of us have recognized the need for these moments of silence and solitude, combined with regular mentoring sessions. As we work with denominational leaders, we are concerned not only with training their trainers who will work with church planters. We also encourage them to develop a culture of mentoring in which the mother church pastor will meet monthly with his church planter to ask the hard questions about life. How is it with their soul? Are they taking the time to be silent before the Lord, or are they trying to do ministry “in the flesh?”

Why is it that we are reluctant to be silent and in solitude before the Lord? Many practitioners of these two disciplines have confessed to a sense of fear-- fear of the unknown of what God might reveal to them; fear that they will not be able to quiet down to the point of eliminating mental distractions; fear of being “out of the loop” in their daily lives while they seek to be alone with God; but the greatest fear expressed seems to be the fear of being out of control. Like the boy who prays, “God I want patience, and I want it now,” we want to orchestrate our spirituality. We want to somehow be in control of the process, without recognizing that there is very little we can do on our own. God invites us to participate in his working out our formation through his Spirit and his Word.

Many of us have the temptation each morning of reaching first for our planner or cell phone instead of reaching for the Bible. We somehow think we are really in control of what will happen that day simply

because we have “planned our day.” Instead, we need to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread,” and place the day in God’s control.

I have had more than one church planter confess that they too have given in to the “urgent” things of this world instead of slowing down to be with God. For this reason, a colleague and I developed a mentor training workshop in which we put priority on asking questions about a planter’s spiritual life, his family life, and lastly, his ministry. Ministry will be for naught if both God and family are ignored or placed last in the life of a church planter.

In our spiritual formation, as followers of Christ and as church planters, it is so important to recognize WHO is in control, lest we fall into the mistake of the wealthy farmer who planned his life to the nth degree, estimating the costs of building more buildings, planting more crops, only to find that by the end of the day God was calling him to the other side of life. We-- I-- too often let the planner be our guide for the day rather than the Bible. Times of solitude and silence, then, are disciplines that force us to put aside that active part of us in order to wind down and allow us to be in God’s presence without so much interference, without so many distractions, and, believe me, brothers and sisters, this is something we sorely need whether we recognize it or not. I want to get to the point where the words of the old Celtic hymn are not merely mouthed but come from the innermost part of my being:

*Be thou my Vision, O Lord of my heart;  
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art  
Thou my best Thought, by day and by night,  
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light.*

*Be thou my Wisdom, and Thou my true Word;  
I ever with Thee and Thou with me, Lord;  
Thou my great Father, I Thy true son;  
Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one.*

Also pertinent to this theme is Psalm 131:2: “But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a child quieted at its mother’s breast.” Notice how the baby relaxes and even sleeps while it suckles, contented, trusting, fully rested and satisfied at his/her mother’s breast. How many times weren’t we as children comforted in the embrace of a parent? How many times did we not fall asleep in the arms of a grandmother? Nothing more stirred the paternal instinct in me, the protective, caring side of me, than to have one of my grandchildren curled up alongside me in the easy chair, and to sense their relaxing and falling asleep at my side. Imagine how God must feel when we come to Him in solitude and quiet and rest in Him. I’m sitting on a plane flying from New Delhi to London. In Economy class, the first set of seats in the middle are reserved for mothers. Basinets can be placed on a fold-down table and secured, allowing the babies to sleep during the entire trip. But on this particular flight, both mothers had babies that did not want to spend their time in these cradles. They wanted to be held by their mothers. It was a sight to see as both babies nestled in the arms of their mothers and slept the entire trip. They were quieted at the breast of their mothers. And so it should be with us before the Lord. Slowly I am learning to rest in the Lord. Perhaps it’s my age—nearly 68—that I find I don’t need to prove myself, that I don’t need to work 60 hours a week to feel fulfilled. I even take a 20-minute nap every day that I can, even when traveling. More and more I realize who is in control and I simply try to keep up with Him.

I would like to talk about solitude, then, by looking at three themes: solitude itself as a spiritual discipline, solitude combined with the Word and prayer, solitude combined with silence.

### *Solitude by itself*

It is a separating of oneself from others in order to avoid interruptions and distractions. There are indeed times when we need to get away from others if we are to have space for clear thinking, meditating, waiting on God, without the interruptions that naturally come into our lives on a daily basis. This means we need to turn off the cell phone,

radio, TV. We cloister ourselves away from other humans as much as possible. We don't need to go off to a desert or to a retreat center, but we do need to somehow limit our human contact.

### *Solitude and the Word*

When combined with reading God's Word, solitude allows us time to ingest anew truths which we may have forgotten, and to read things we didn't even know were in the Bible. Without outside distraction, we have time to allow the Word to become a part of us. Combined with prayer, we ask God to illumine our hearts and minds through his Word.

### *Solitude and Silence*

Barton (2004:18) describes solitude and silence as "an invitation to enter more deeply into the intimacy of relationship with the One who waits just outside the noise and busyness of our lives.... it is an invitation from his very heart to the depths of our being."

In the denominational tradition of which I have been a member for the past 40-plus years, many of the older sanctuaries have the following words emblazoned somewhere on the walls: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silent before him." I mistook this passage for years as simply a way of saying "Shhh! You're in the House of God. Stop talking!"; but the older I get, the more I have come to realize that this is referring to an attitude, a posture if you would, of silent reverence before God. It follows closely the mandate of another Old Testament verse "Be still and know...." What are we to know? "Be still and know *that I am God.*"

In solitude mixed with silence, we come reverently before God. Solitude and silence and prayer allow us to experience God in ways we could not if we did not quiet ourselves down.

All of this seems to run in the face of a plaster plaque that someone had placed over a work station in the dorm of the Bible College I at-

tended when I first got out of high school. The plaque read “Only one life, will soon be past; only what’s done for Christ will last.” What this said to me was, “Work, you sluggard! Time is short. Don’t sit around in silence. Get out there and do something for Christ!” Yet it is in solitude and silence that we can best find God when our hearts are conditioned to listen for his voice; and *then* we are equipped, prepared, and fortified to “go out there.” MacDonald (1997:73) reflects on this lack of silence in our world, a silence which prepares the heart for growing deeper in Christ. “There are so few in whom the Presence is sensed. It takes a life lived more in the context of silence than noise to produce such spirituality. Noise has intruded itself far beyond our ears and has reached the level of the soul.... And in the silences God found easy freedom to whisper His promises and his purposes into the synapses of the soul.” Pennington (Waddell 1998:xx1) writes, “We cannot hope to free ourselves from the false self that the values of this world encourage us to create, to escape the self-alienation that marks our lives from the womb and is constantly fostered by a worldly society, if we do not at times and even regularly seek periods of quietness. This is the goal of all authentic meditation practices...”

As we rush through life and don’t take the time to be quiet before the Lord, we can quickly lose sight of who really is in control, and our relationship with God is on again/off again at best. We do not reap all the benefits from our relationship with the Lord that we could.

Also, we raise havoc on our bodies for lack of rest and from over-eating (or eating the wrong things, like fast foods). Our defenses are down and we more easily give in to temptations. We find ourselves unfortified, vulnerable, and with a low level of resistance to both physical and spiritual/moral illnesses. We often fail to even practice Christian character of patience, kindness, gentleness toward one another; instead we demonstrate moments of impatience, anger, frustration, criticism, gossiping and insulting. We find ourselves looking forward to what we call a “well-earned vacation,” a time to relax and “be ourselves,” and if we recognize that this busyness does not allow us to “be ourselves,” why



is it we continue to do the same thing over and over again if it won't give us the results we really want?

I don't want to look back over my life filled only with regrets and "if only's". My work will soon pass and what I've accomplished will soon be forgotten anyway. What is more important than "doing,"-- and I have to keep coming back to this-- is "being." Who I am in the Lord is more important than what I do for the Lord. And one way of developing that "me" is to take time to separate myself from distractions and to give God my undivided attention, like a mother who says to an overly active child, "Stop what you are doing and look me in the eyes so you can hear me!" Solitude and silence are disciplines that can help me do this.

Barton (2004:20-21) speaks for many of us when she writes, "We are a very busy, *wordy* and *heady* faith tradition. Yet we are desperate to find ways to open ourselves to our God who is, in the end, beyond all of our human constructs and human agendas. With all of our emphasis on theology and Word, cognition and service-- as important as these are-- we are starved for mystery, to know this God as One who is totally Other to experience reverence in his presence".

Barton (34-35) gives us an explanation of why solitude and silence are so important. "To enter into solitude and silence is to take the spiritual life seriously. It is to take seriously our need to quiet the noise of our lives, to cease the constant striving of human effort, to pull away from our absorption in human relationships for a time in order to give God our undivided attention. In solitude God begins to free us from our bondage to human expectations, for there we experience God as our ultimate reality-- the One in whom we live and move and have our being. In solitude our thoughts and our mind, our will and our desires are reoriented Godward so we become less and less attracted by external forces and can be more deeply responsive to God's desire and prayer in us.

“Silence deepens the experience of solitude. In silence we not only withdraw from the demands of life in the company of others but also allow the noise of our own thoughts, strivings and compulsions to settle down so we can hear a truer and more reliable Voice.... It is in silence that we habitually release our own agendas and our need to control and become more willing and able to give ourselves to God’s loving initiative. In silence we create space for God’s activity rather than filling every minute with our own.”

There were times years ago when I found I could get more done at home than by going into the office. Why? Because at the office there were many people competing for my time. There were phone calls that interrupted the silence. There were people at the door with a question. There were emails flashing on my computer screen, urgently calling me to open them and respond. Thus, I found that if I really wanted to get in an extended period of uninterrupted time for a project or for some reading, I had to decide to stay home and work out of my home office. For undistracted time with God, I likewise need to separate myself from other people and I need to be silent before the Lord to allow him to speak. At other times, I need to read and meditate on the Word, I need to pray openly to God. Yes, I need to be with other Christians also, but I definitely need these times alone.

My wife invited me to accompany her to a friend’s cottage in the woods outside of Holland, Michigan. We enjoyed the evening together, going for a stroll, watching a video together, doing some reading with quiet music playing in the background. But after a hearty breakfast in the home of our hosts the next morning, I left for work, and they left her to her solitude where she was able to spend the day in quiet meditation and reflection-- just she and God. It would not have been the same had I been there, as much as we enjoy each other’s company. It simply would have been one too many.

Barton, at the end of each chapter of her book in the section called “Practice”, gives us helpful ideas on how to begin establishing times of

solitude and silence and what to do to nurture those moments. Check other relevant helps in the bibliography and website reference section of this book.

Hear these last citations on solitude and silence that speak powerfully to those who would initiate the practice:

“Paying attention... is learning to listen to the voice of God, which can be more real than the audible tones of other sounds that surround us and assault us all day, everyday” (Anderson and Reese (1999:92)).

Listen “to the thunder of God’s silence” (Foster 1998, p. 108).

“Listen to God’s speech in his wondrous, terrible, gentle, loving, all-embracing silence” (Doherty 1974, p. 216).

“Rest in the silence of God’s presence” (Anderson and Reese 1999, p. 88).

Amen! So let it be!

Many in the Russian Orthodox Church have practiced an ancient form of silence and solitude by going off to a makeshift shanty in the woods. Called a *poustinia*, this one-room building, often with a bed and a woodstove for warmth, becomes a quiet place away from the hustle and bustle of life where one can truly come away to be with God. In another case, a recent movie “The War Room,” makes reference to a closet in an elderly woman’s home where she goes to pray. She recognizes she is at war with Satan, and finds the silence and solitude of this closet as a place to pray and meditate.

Where is your *poustinia*? Where is your war room? Can you effectively do battle against Satan, can you effectively plant his church, without such a place in your life?

## **Worship**

“You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being” (Rev. 4:11). With this doxology, we enter into the discipline of worship. Worship as a spiritual discipline, or exercise of the everyday Christian is not something to be ignored. When we read the Word, when we pray and meditate, we enter into a form of worship, a worship which is private, between us and God. This is one aspect of the discipline of worship. But worship is also corporate. We can also read the Word in public worship. We can pray in public worship.

Herrington, Creech and Taylor (2003:164) describe worship for us: “In worship, we adore God and celebrate his attributes. Whether we worship with other believers or individually, worship focuses on the glory of God and our role in honoring him.”

Rice (1991:188-189) adds, “As we participate in worship we open ourselves to the leading of God’s Holy Spirit. Gathering with other believers to praise God, to hear God’s Word read and interpreted, to pray, and to offer our lives in dedication to God’s service, we are letting down our barriers to God. We consciously expose ourselves to the strength of the corporate community of faith. We subject ourselves to the power of encouragement that we receive from others and to the presence of God in the Word, spoken, preached, sung, and enacted in the sacraments.... The discipline of worship establishes a rhythm to life. The pattern of examining our lives with others in the family of faith is important for our spiritual development.”

Webber (1982:11) describes worship as “a meeting between God and His people.” Gangel (2002:113-114) defines worship as: 1) affirmation, 2) conservation, 3) edification, and 4) celebration. It is an affirmation or acknowledgment of who God is. It is conservation in that worship “preserves and transmits the faith” (*Ibid.*, p. 113). It is edification in that the believer has greater understanding of God. “Proper

worship teaches theology” (*Ibid.*, p. 114). Worship is celebration of God’s people with each other before him. According to Gangel, “In all four of these components worship shows itself a true spiritual discipline” (*Ibid.*). Our worship should be both corporate and individual. We corporately gather as God’s people, and we also worship God in solitude and silence. He further points out that worship should result in service.

Worship as service describes people allowing God to work through them in order to create a spiritual community. Worship as service involves the understanding and application of spiritual gifts and their role in the body of Christ (Rom. 12:6-8). The unity, diversity, and mutuality of the church abound when worshipers serve and servants worship. The worship affirmation in Romans 11:33-36 is followed by an appeal in 12:1 for “reasonable service” (NKJV) or “logical liturgy” (“spiritual worship”). The apostle then describes the unity of Christ’s body (“each member belongs to all the others,” 12:5), details some of the spiritual gifts which carry out this worship-service, and discusses the whole lifestyle of the church active in worship and service. (p. 122)

Foster (1998:158, 162, 166) in *Celebration of Discipline* states “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community.... While living out the demands of the day, we are filled with inward worship and adoration. We work and play and eat and sleep, yet we are listening, ever listening to our Teacher.... One reason worship should be considered a Spiritual Discipline is because it is an ordered way of acting and living that sets us before God so he can transform us.”

This concept of God transforming us goes back to the very beginning of this book. We looked at Romans 12:1-2: “... *Do not conform... but be transformed...*” The goal of the spiritual disciplines is to help us

be transformed. In describing this Bible passage, McNeil and Richardson (2004:62-63) write, "According to Paul, worship is more than an event; it is a lifestyle of submission and self-sacrifice motivated by a desire to please God.... He calls us to a lifestyle of worship so that we no longer 'conform... to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of [our] mind'. "Worship, therefore, helps us in this transformational process, and therefore ought to rightly be considered a spiritual discipline.

Horsfall (2002:21) writes, "We are called to follow Christ in becoming like him in our thoughts, words, character and actions. This has been called the transformational or inner journey, and it reminds us that as we travel through life we are meant to change." Worship can put us in the mood for transformation as we focus on God and not on ourselves.

Hosea 6:6 says, "*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.*" Too often what we want to bring to God are the peripherals of our faith and not the depth of faith. We go through the motions of worship rather than worship from the depths of our hearts. And God easily sees through our charade. How often haven't I gone to church and "gone through the motions?" There have been times I've gone to church without a deep desire to worship him. Fortunately, it is usually in those low times that God speaks to me in powerful ways through the hymns or through a drama or through the preaching of the Word. God is always ready to meet me in worship even when I am not overly enthusiastic about meeting him.

Jesus says to the woman at the well, "*Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth*" (Jn. 4:24). Worship requires "our all." It is to be done in spirit and in truth, with frankness, honesty, transparency before the Lord. Worship cannot be a show. God sees us as we are, and accepts our feeble efforts to worship him if we do

so without pretension. Paul tells the Corinthians “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). All of life for the Christian should be a form of worship. How we live determines if God is glorified or not. We read in 1 Peter 2:12 “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good works and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

There is nothing in church planting that calls the attention of non-believers more than to see Christians who truly love one another and joyfully gather weekly for a time of worship of a God they, the unbelievers, still do not know. If our worship is “in Spirit and in truth” it cannot do anything other than to attract others to come and find out what is different about these people.

In all things, we must worship and trust in God our Father. Calvin (1983:Book II, Chapt. VII, 10). writes, “Various diseases ever and anon attack us.... Frost and hail... cause sterility.... The believer must in these things also contemplate the mercy and truly paternal indulgence of God. Accordingly, should he see his house by the removal of kindred reduced to solitude, even then he will not cease to bless the Lord.... If his crops are blasted, mildewed, or cut off by frost, or struck down by hail, and he sees famine before him, he will not however despond or murmur against God, but maintain his confidence in him.... If he is afflicted with disease, the sharpness of the pain will not so overcome him, as to make him break out with impatience, and expostulate with God.... In short, whatever happens, knowing that it is ordered by the Lord, he will receive it with a placid and grateful mind, and will not contumaciously resist the government of him, at whose disposal he has placed himself and all that he has”. What powerful words. Come what may, we worship God who created the world and us, recognizing that *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him who have been called according to his purpose”* (Ro. 8:28). This is the depths of worship, to worship even when life seems to be going all wrong!

I'm sure most of us can point to saintly people we have met in our lifetime who exhibit this kind of worshipful spirit in spite of afflictions, downturns in the economy, rejection by family members, or a myriad other things that would force us to the floor. Through all of these things, they remain steadfast in their love of God who “works for their good.”

## **Summary**

We have looked at several disciplines that can help us to grow in our faith, to be spiritually formed. Worship is the last of these disciplines to be examined. Are you faithful in gathering with other believers? Do you sense the communion of other believers as you worship? We are warned “Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:25). As that Day approaches, let us be prepared to give an account of ourselves, being transformed daily through God’s Spirit, through Bible reading and meditation, prayer, fasting, journaling, solitude and silence, and last but not least, private and corporate worship.

## **Questions**

1. Explain how journal keeping can be transformational.
2. Differentiate between solitude and silence.
3. Name and describe the different forms of solitude listed in this chapter.
4. Cite four Bible texts that speak about worship.
5. Reflect on how silence and solitude can prepare you “for the battle.”
6. Consider how worship can be a strong witness to those who are not yet believers.



### **Action Points**

1. Read a book on journaling (See the bibliography.) and submit a book report on what you read.
2. Find four web sites that deal with solitude and silence. Evaluate these sites as to content and spiritual perspective.
3. Spend a weekend in solitude and silence. Keep a journal during this time, writing in it at least three times a day.
4. Reflect in a one-page paper what it means to celebrate worship as a spiritual discipline.



# VI

## SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## AND PERSONALITY STYLES

### **Introduction**

We have described the various spiritual disciplines that can influence our spiritual formation. Before we go on to a new topic, mentoring for spiritual formation, I want to take some time on the topic of how our personality style(s) can influence the way we live out our spirituality in everyday life. This revelation was slow in coming. I was probably in my 50s before I discovered through the writings of others how our personality type influences the way we approach God. Our personality has a lot to do with the way we are spiritually formed throughout life. This becomes very helpful information to know as we attempt to reach out to others. It helps us to see the need to be multi-orbed in our approaches in order that those who come into the emerging church can find God through their own personality type and spirituality.

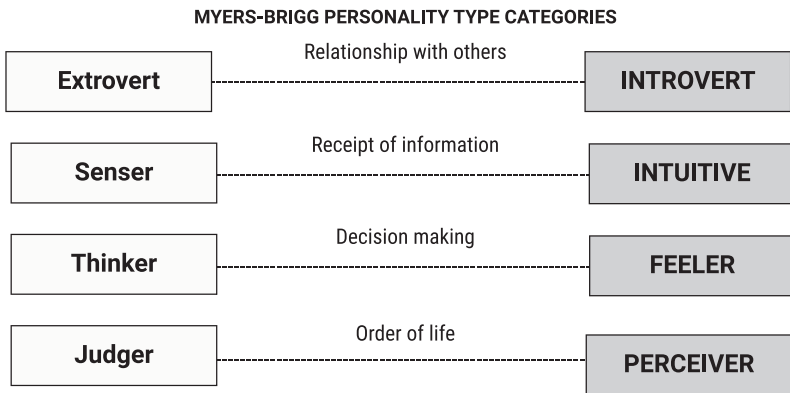
### **Myers-Brigg Personality Test**

Many of you are acquainted with the personality test developed by Myers and Brigg. Its purpose is to help us understand how we:

- Relate to others (extraversion/introversion)
- Take in information (sensing/intuition)
- Make decisions (thinking/feeling)
- Order our lives (judging/perceiving).

This test is best known as the Myers-Brigg (named after mother and daughter researchers) Type Indicator. It puts all human personality into the four different camps listed above, and two functions for each camp (e.g. extraversion, sensing, etc.) for a total of 16 different personality types!

How do we explain *introversion* and *extroversion*, *sensing* and *feeling*, *thinking* and *feeling*, and *judging* and *perceiving*? To fully understand these 16 personality types, one would need to be a certified administrator of the test. Nevertheless, these pairs of terms for each of the four activities previously mentioned (relating to others, taking in information, making decisions, ordering our lives) can be simply explained by a simple mind like mine. See each pair as opposites on a pole.



**Extroverts** are expressive, outgoing, people-lovers, people who love to be in crowds. They are energized by their contacts with other warm bodies. They like to work in teams, and usually have many friends. The list of descriptors goes on and on.

**Introverts**, on the other hand, prefer to be by themselves. They do not like crowds. They are usually quiet and shy. They prefer smaller groups of people to large crowds. They may appear stand-offish in their desire to be alone. They are energized by the “inner life.”

**Sensors** have five strong senses that they readily utilize. They focus on what they can see, touch, feel, smell, and taste. In other words, they live in a real, physical world. They are what we have often termed “down-to-earth”, practical people.

**Intuitives**, on the other hand, live in a non-physical world. Their reality is not based on what they can see, touch, feel, smell, taste (the five senses); rather their reality is based on a “sixth sense.” They are more abstract than concrete, idealistic rather than realistic, imaginative instead of practical.

**Thinkers** employ logic, reasoning, in making decisions. They are rational beings, to the point of sometimes being considered “cold.” Mr. Spock on “Star Trek” fits this category.

**Feelers**, on the other hand, employ feeling in making their decisions. They can “feel” what others feel, are often passionate and compassionate. Where thinkers (“I think that...”), look at a topic with objectivity a feeler (“I feel that...”) looks at it with subjectivity. The former can be discerning while the latter can be empathetic.

**Judgers** tend to make quick decisions. They are organized, dislike surprises, and prefer routine. They can be close-minded and controlling.

**Perceivers**, on the other hand, try to gather in as much information as possible before making a decision or leave it open-ended. They may appear more carefree and disorganized than the judger. They are also more spontaneous and unpredictable than the judgers.

Do you see yourself in one of each of these pairs? When combined together, they form a four-point combination of a personality type. Humans, then, can be found with a four-point combination. Some are ESTJ’s (extraverted, sensing, thinking, judging) while others are ISTJ, and so forth. Each one of these combinations is explained in behaviors that we exhibit due to the personality type we tend to be at the moment.

I say “at the moment” because we sometimes exhibit different characteristics under radically different circumstances. Also, our personality type can change over time due to many different factors. Keirsey and Bates (1984) developed a temperament sorter using Myers-Brigg’s type indicator. This has since been updated in *Please Understand Me II* (See <http://keirsey.com/pumll.html>). There have been adaptations of these two tests to help us understand our spiritual personalities.

Why is this important to know? This informs the ways in which we approach other people. Understanding their personality type aids us in knowing how to deal with people, especially those with a personality type different from our own. This is very meaningful as we plant a church. We cannot treat everyone in the same way since people respond differently to our own personality type based on their personality type. Their needs are expressed differently. What speaks to them comes through different sensors. Therefore, if we are to be effective, especially with different personality types, say, in a small group, this understanding of “difference” becomes crucial. You will not treat the extrovert in the same way you would an introvert, an intellectual or an intuitive person.

## What Others Say

Other books such as Tim LaHaye’s (1966) *Spirit-controlled Temperament* and Gary Smalley/John Trent’s (1992) *The Treasure Tree*, have been very helpful for Christians in understanding their personalities. LaHaye looks at four different temperaments: sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic.

The **Sanguine** is gregarious and out-going, the center of the party. He is popular and talkative. He exudes warmth and caring. Sincere and spontaneous, he sometimes speaks before thinking. He can be distracted easily from the task.

The **Choleric** is much more practical and down-to-earth. She is hard-working, and thrives on getting tasks accomplished, no matter what. She is often the born leader in the crowd, and responsible. She'll solve your problems one way or another.

The **Melancholy** loves to work on details. Give him details and he's in his glory. He's systematic, analytical, and tends to be introverted. He could work in the stacks of a library all day doing research and be completely content. He can be self-sacrificing, have only a few friends with whom he demonstrates a strong sense of faithfulness and loyalty. He can become gloomy and depressed.

The **Phlegmatic** is easy-going, fun to have around. He lives life to its fullest. He can be laid back and does not easily get ruffled. He usually has everyone in stitches. He usually watches from the sidelines until he gets a burst of energy for something he feels is worth his time.

These are, of course, stereotypes of the four temperaments. They speak more of tendencies than gospel truths. Each of these temperaments needs to be brought under the control of the Holy Spirit in order to play off the pluses of the particular temperament rather than the minuses. LaHaye wrote a second book entitled *Transformed Temperaments*. This book takes a closer look at these four temperaments through the lives of four biblical characters: Peter the Sanguine, Paul the Choleric, Moses the Melancholy, and Abraham the Phlegmatic.

Smalley's book is a rather humorous explanation of personalities. He describes four personality types in terms of animals: the Lion, the Otter, the Golden Retriever, and the Beaver. For a brief introduction to these four types, go to <http://www.new-life.net/persnty.htm>.

Two books that look at spiritual formation in tandem with personality types are Mulholland's (1993) *Invitation to a Journey* (chapters 5-7) and Thomas' (1996) *Sacred Paths* (the whole book). Mulholland's premise is that how we approach the spiritual disciplines depends on

our personality. Our personality forces us to tend to appreciate certain spiritual disciplines over others. For example, if I happen to be an extrovert, I will probably be more comfortable-- and naturally drawn to—a type of worship that is more expressive, surrounded by people. I probably also enjoy the intimacy of being in a small group, in praying out loud together with others; but don't force me to go off on my own to meditate in solitude! The result, though, is what Mulholland terms a “one-sided spirituality,” if we “play” to our preferences. He warns, “The results of such one-sided spirituality can be devastating to our spiritual pilgrimage. The undernourished shadow side will, sooner or later, demand equal time” (p. 58). We need to work on those disciplines which are not our natural tendencies, and we also need to surround ourselves with people whose personalities are different from our own in order to have a “holistic spirituality.” I strongly recommend your reading Mulholland's three chapters.

Thomas' approach is a bit different. He recognizes that we have different temperaments, but he does not refer to Myers-Brigg as does Mulholland. What he puts forth is an understanding that there is not a one-size-fits-all spirituality. Instead, he encourages us to find our own “spiritual pathway,” which he describes as “the way we relate to God, how we draw near to him” (p. 21). He goes on to say, “Most of us... will naturally have a certain predisposition for relating to God which is our predominant spiritual temperament” (pp. 21-22).

- Thomas lists nine sacred pathways, or spiritual temperaments:
- Naturalists: loving God out of doors
- Sensates: loving God with the senses
- Traditionalists: loving God through ritual and symbol
- Ascetics: loving God in solitude and simplicity
- Activists: loving God through confrontation
- Caregivers: loving God by loving others
- Enthusiasts: loving God with mystery and celebration
- Contemplatives: loving God through adoration
- Intellectuals: loving God with the mind



We'll give one quote from Thomas for each of the nine sacred pathways.

**Naturalists:** "These Christians believe that nature clearly proclaims 'God is!' They may learn more from watching an ant colony or looking at a peaceful lake than from reading a book or listening to a sermon, though they may find fulfilling thoughts from the parables of Christ, which are based on nature, or the Psalms" (p. 22). They enjoy being out in creation, what Thomas has termed "God's cathedral" (p. 36).

**Sensates:** "Sensate Christians want to be lost in the awe, beauty, and splendor of God. They are drawn particularly to the liturgical, the majestic, the grand. When these Christians worship, they want to be filled with sights, sounds, and smells that overwhelm them. Incense, intricate architecture, classical music, and formal language send their hearts soaring" (p. 23).

**Traditionalists:** "Traditionalists are fed by what are often termed the historic dimensions of faith: rituals, symbols, sacraments, and sacrifice. These Christians tend to have a disciplined life of faith. Some may be seen by others as legalists, defining their faith largely by matters of conduct. Frequently they enjoy regular attendance at church services, tithing, keeping the Sabbath, and so on" (p. 24).

**Ascetics:** "Ascetics want nothing more than to be left alone in prayer. Take away the liturgy, the trappings of religion, the noise of the outside world.... Ascetics live a fundamentally internal existence. Even when they are part of a group of people, they might seem to be isolated from the others. Frequently introspective, sometimes to a fault, they are uncomfortable in any environment that keeps them from 'listening to the quiet'" (p. 25).

**Activists:** "Activists serve a God of justice.... Activists may adopt either social or evangelistic causes, but they find their home in the rough-and-tumble world of confrontation" (p. 26).

**Caregivers:** “Caregivers serve God by serving others..... Such Christians may find the devotional lives of contemplatives and enthusiasts as selfish. Whereas caring for others might wear many of us down, this recharges a caregiver’s batteries” (p. 27).

**Enthusiasts:** “Excitement and mystery in worship is the spiritual lifeblood of enthusiasts... These Christians are cheerleaders for God and the Christian life. Let them clap their hands, shout ‘Amen!’ and dance in their excitement.... If their hearts aren’t moved, if they don’t experience God’s power, something is missing. They don’t want to know the concepts, but to experience them, to feel them, and to be moved by them” (p. 28).

**Contemplatives:** “Comtemplatives refer to God as their lover, and images of a loving Father and Bridegroom predominate their view of God.... The focus is not necessarily on serving God, doing his will, accomplishing great things in his name, or even obeying. Rather, these Christians seek to love God with the purest, deepest, and brightest love imaginable” (p. 28).

**Intellectuals:** “Intellectuals might be skeptics or committed believers, but in either case, they are likely to be studying (and, in some instances, arguing either for or against) doctrines like Calvinism, infant baptism, ordination of women, and predestination. These Christians live in a world of concepts” (p. 29).

Lest we see ourselves in one or more of these temperaments and feel justified to continue through life just as we are, Thomas explains that it is important for us, nevertheless, to understand the other temperaments, even going so far as to say, “all of us could learn a great deal from how others are nourished by God and how others meet and love God” (p. 30). Thomas goes on to say, “If you are in a spiritual malaise, it might be that you just need a change in your spiritual diet” (p. 30). Like Mulholland, Thomas points out the danger of being one-sided in our approach to God. We need to develop our spiritual temperament,

even checking out those we think we do not have. They may even be under-developed temperaments we need in order to become more fully in tune with God.

I have given the Thomas test to many different groups over the past ten years. Most recently I used it in Ecuador with our Latin American operations team. It was very revealing. This is a high-powered work-oriented team that accomplishes tremendous results, especially when put under pressure or a short turn-around deadline. It was not surprising, then, to find that for most of the team, they scored very high as activists and caregivers. Their service to God is through their high production in the ministry, and their willingness to pitch in and to help each other accomplish the pressing goals.

Shortly before I did this test with our Quito team, we went through this as a council and then as a congregation in my home church. The pastor and I both are keen on sacred pathways, whether using Thomas or another version of this survey, an *Ordinary Day with Jesus* (Ortberg and Barton. 2001:66-90). The results were very telling in these two contexts as well.

As a church planter, you can use this survey to help guide you in providing different worship experiences. Pastor Greg, for example, has formed a kayaking club that goes out several Sunday afternoons a month because he is aware that there are some in the congregation—as well as those we are trying to reach—who best commune with God by being out in his creation. In this natural and unintimidating context, conversations can quickly turn to spiritual things where in other contexts, such participants would clam up.

There certainly are other books that could be helpful to you in understanding these types, temperaments and spiritual pathways and how this knowledge can be used to your advantage as a church planter. Goldsmith (1997) has written a book exploring the spiritual applications of Myers-Brigg. Keating (1987) likewise wrote a book on ap-

plying Myers-Brigg to our spirituality. His was an attempt to “match personality and spirituality,” to help us overcome the spiritual hunger many of us feel for lacking the right spiritual “food.” For Keating, without the proper diet, without the proper match between personality and form of spirituality, we remain “spiritual dwarfs.”

A more comprehensive work is Kise, Stark and Hirsh’s (1996) *Life Keys* which also helps the reader to discover his or her talents, spiritual gifting, passions and values through stories, inventories, self-tests and other user-friendly exercises. Hirsch has been a prolific writer. Two other relevant books are *Soul Types: Finding the Spiritual Path that is Right for You* (1998) and *Looking at Type and Spirituality* (1997).

Several writers contend that our personality type even influences how we pray. Bryant (1983) has penned a volume on how different people using different personality types approach prayer, entitled *Prayer and Different Types of People*. Michael and Norrissey (1991) have published a more recent book called *Prayer and Temperament: Different Prayer Forms for Different Personality Types*. Another helpful book is *Pray your Way: Your Personality and God*, written by Bruce Duncan (1993). Many of these last-mentioned books are available through <http://www.capt.org>.

We also know that our personality can influence how we worship. Let’s take another look at Myers-Brigg for a moment. Those who are high in the area of thinker would probably fit well in a church that places high value on the preached Word and on doctrinal teachings. Those who are feelers probably prefer worship that is more spontaneous, outgoing, celebrative with hands raised and with ‘Amen!’ interjected from time to time. Introverts may find solace in the solemnity of a highly liturgical worship service, in contemplative worship, in moments of silence for reflection. Extraverts will seek out others for worship, will want to move with the crowd in an expressive worship, open to praying out loud in groups, holding hands in the worship service. Sensors will look forward to a worshipful experience that encompasses the five senses. They look for a tactile, olfactory, visual, auditory experience, to

“taste” God’s presence. Perhaps his is an over-simplification; nevertheless this gives us an idea of how our personality type can play into our preference for worship style as well. And what “works for me” may not “work for you.” Perhaps Thomas (1996:20-21) explains it better when he writes:

Unfortunately, some Christians have a tendency to question the legitimacy of any experience that may not particularly interest them. Instead of saying, “That’s not for me,” they proclaim, “That shouldn’t be for anybody.”

This is not unlike an attitude expressed one time by my home schooled daughter as she was struggling with a math problem that her mother had assigned her. Allison lamented, “This is too hard. It’s not fair! In fact, I’m quite sure it’s unbiblical!”

Of course, there is nothing “unbiblical” about math, but this same attack is often adopted when we question experiences that other Christians have—particularly experiences that strike us as “weird.” I’m talking about “theologically neutral” practices here. For instance, one woman may discover that incense helps her to pray, while another woman thinks using incense is just plain weird. The two can agree to disagree without making a theological issue out of a doctrinally neutral worship preference.

*God has given us different personalities and temperaments. It’s only natural that these differences should be reflected in our worship. (italics mine).*

There is room for each of us to worship God in the way in which He has made us. In fact, Thomas writes, “Every true spiritual path has Christ at its center, but in Christ there are many ways for us to express our faith” (p. 221). The venerable Dutch pastor, Abraham Kuyper

(1997:193) has written, “God comes to us in different ways. He knows our needs in every period of life and meets them. Those who try to standardize a single approach to God, make one way *the* way, not only discount our individual differences but limit God’s hands. Attempts to universalize the Christian experience are not only bound for failure; they’re plain sin.... The Son of God, like the sun in the heavens, works his way individually on the souls he brings to God.”

Due to our different temperaments, when it comes to the spiritual disciplines, one size does NOT fit all. “We must resist the temptation to take on the spiritual disciplines in cookie-cutter fashion, trying to conform to the experiences of others. Some leaders find it easy to fast, while others find solitude to be soothing and comfortable; some find their stride as they serve the practical needs of others. The spiritual disciplines offer us a variety of paths to enlarge our spiritual lives and heighten our experiences of God’s grace. Although the disciplines require that we regularly take on activities that are neither easy nor comfortable for us, we do not all need to travel the same path, or all travel it the same way” ((Herrington, Creech et al. 2003:140).

I guess I have become eclectic over the years when it comes to worship. Even though my personality would tend to look for the intellectual in worship and solitude of meeting God in nature, my involvement with people of a freer, more expressive form of worship, has influenced and transformed me. I find myself able to raise my hands in worship, to even move my body in worship even as I seek out the solemnity of a cathedral (natural or otherwise) or enjoy the centrality of the preached Word in other instances.

In summary, God has given to each of us a personality type which is then reflected in our spiritual temperament. “All do not travel by one road” (Teresa of Avila: *Way of Perfection*, 24:2) and “God leads each by a different way” (John of the Cross: *Living Flame of Love*, 3:59). This spiritual temperament shows itself through our spiritual preferences when it comes to the disciplines, when it comes to the path we choose

to come to him, when it comes to worship, when it comes to prayer. Let us not deny who we are in God's presence. Each is a unique being known by Him by name. Let us worship Him and grow in Him, and be formed in Him, in Spirit and in truth according to the way He made us.

### **Questions**

1. List Myers-Brigg's four main personality styles.
2. Enumerate Thomas' 9 different sacred pathways and write one sentence to describe each.
3. Does one approach to God fit all Christian believers? Explain your answer.
4. How does this knowledge of different personality types and different sacred pathways inform your approach to planting a church?

### **Action Points**

1. Take the Myers-Brigg Type Indicator or the Keirsey Temperament Sorter to determine your dominant personality mix. What aspects of spirituality probably come easier to you? Which ones probably come harder for you? What does this say to you about what you need to do to compensate for your personality?
2. Write about your discoveries in your journal for this week.





# VII

## MENTORING

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### FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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#### **Introduction**

Over the past several years as I have been involved again with church planting, I have come to the conclusion that mentoring has not been an element in the training of most church planters. More than one pastor, no matter whether in Latin America or in Africa, has mentioned to me that he himself had never been mentored. These pastors, therefore, felt ill at ease in attempting to mentor someone else. Time and again I heard, “This is what our church planters need!”

Together with a dear friend from the Assemblies of God I have written a mentor training workshop that is used globally for training those who work with church planters. Most of these mentors are pastors of the mother church while a few are lay people from these churches. In this chapter we will look at the relationship between mentoring and spiritual formation so that, as church planters, you will recognize the importance of mentoring those believers who are emerging into leadership roles in your new church even if you yourself have never been mentored!

#### **Definition of mentoring**

Before we can define mentoring for spiritual formation we must first define mentoring in general. Since time immemorial, humans have found themselves in mentoring relationships, relationships in which a wiser, older person, passed on his or her knowledge and skills to a younger person. Sometimes we called this younger person an appren-

tice. Other times this person was called a protégé. In today's language we call this person a mentee.

The word *mentor* comes from an epic poem by Homer called “The Odyssey.” In this poem the Greek warrior Odysseus sets sail to destroy Troy, leaving his young son, Telemachus, in the capable hands of a slave/teacher named Mentor. Mentor's role was to train Telemachus in the ways of the Greeks, to be a surrogate father and teacher. In today's world, a mentor is this and much more. A mentor is a guide (Daloz 1999), a midwife (Vogel 2000), an educator-as-journeyman-architect, coach, and trail-blazer (Taylor, Marienu et al. 2000), a people grower (Elmore 1995, Shea 1999), or an inspirer of others (Tice 1997). Schein (1978) describes the mentor as confidant, teacher, sponsor, role model, developer of talent, opener of doors, protector and successful leader. A popular, earthy definition has been provided by John Crosby in Engstrom's (1989:43) book, *The Fine Art of Mentoring*: “Mentoring is a brain to pick, a shoulder to cry on, and a kick in the pants.”

Levinson (1978:98), an early adult educator and mentoring specialist also saw the mentor in terms of many of the words listed above, but also as host, moral supporter in times of stress, and exemplar. Aelred of Rievaulx calls him a “spiritual friend.”

The following chart is a good summary of the different roles of the mentor as described thus far.

WHAT IS A MENTOR?		
COUNSELOR	TEACHER	SPONSOR
PROTECTOR	GUIDE	FRIEND
MIDWIFE	MORAL SUPPORTER	PEOPLE-GROWER
ENCOURAGER	CRITIC	ROLE MODEL
LISTENER	COACH	LIFEGUARD

Stanley and Clinton (1992) list five characteristics of a good mentor: 1) the ability to readily see potential in a person; 2) tolerance with mistakes, etc.; 3) flexibility; 4) patience, knowing that time and experience are needed for development; 5) perspective; and 6) gifts and abilities to utilize and pass on.

In a mentoring relationship, then, a mentor leads and guides the younger person or the neophyte in his/her growth in knowledge, skills, and character. Parks (2000:127) describes this relationship as “an intentional, mutually demanding, and meaningful relationship between two individuals.” Daloz (1986:xxiv), an expert mentor trainer, gives us an interesting description of mentoring. He calls it a “passionate and fertile relationship.” Shea (1994:13), someone else well known in the mentoring arena, calls this a “developmental, caring, sharing, and helping relationship” in which the mentor “invests time, know-how, and effort in enhancing another person’s growth, knowledge, and skills, and responds to critical needs in the life of that person in ways that prepare the individual for greater productivity or achievement in the future.” Let’s focus in on those words *developmental*, *caring*, *sharing* and *helping*. This relationship implies an investment on the part of the mentor, no less than it does on the part of the mentee. This relationship should result, then, in greater productivity and achievement. Imagine what the eternal results can be if this mentor is a spiritual mentor!

### **Spiritual mentoring**

When we speak of spiritual mentoring, we have added a dimension not found in secular, professional mentoring. The descriptions given above take on special significance when applied to the spiritual growth of an individual.

In spiritual mentoring—or mentoring for spiritual formation-- we are dealing with spiritual things because the Holy Spirit is present as an active participant. Anderson and Reese (1999:12) describe spiritual mentoring as “a triadic relationship between mentor, mentoree and the

Holy Spirit.” The authors go on to describe six distinctives of spiritual mentoring:

- A means to enhance intimacy with God
- A way to recognize the present activity of God in the life of the mentee
- An effective model for character formation of the mentee
- An effective way to discern God’s direction
- A historically proven diet for the faith journey



They go on to say, “Spiritual formation is nurtured most profoundly when disciples are ‘apprenticed’ to a spiritual mentor who will partner with God’s Holy Spirit toward spiritual development.... Mentoring is not about telling. It is about listening—to the Holy Spirit and the life of the other” (pp. 27- 28).

English (2000:12) describes mentoring as one of the strategies contributing to adults’ religious development. Clinton defines spiritual mentoring as “a relational experience through which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources.” According to Clinton’s definition, spiritual mentoring requires a relationship

between two people, one sharing from his resources and experiences that he himself has experienced at the hand of God. Proverbs 27:17 provides us with a similar description: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.” This is a good, succinct description of what spiritual mentoring is all about, the sharpening of a believer in his or her faith through a relationship with another believer. According to Hendricks (1999:24), “There is no substitute for knowing and being known by another human being. There is no other way to experience what deep down we really want as people—to be heard, to be understood, to be affirmed, to be valued. God has put into each of us a longing to be significant, to feel that our life counts.” Anderson and Reese (1999:27) add to this discussion by saying “a relationship with a spiritual mentor is one of the best ways to progress in the lifelong work of spiritual formation.”

Spiritual mentoring, therefore, has a role to play in the spiritual formation of an individual, a truth which every church planter needs to recognize. The church planter himself needs to be mentored as he plants the church. At the same time, he learns how to apply mentoring in the context of the leaders who are emerging in his new church.

For some individuals, mentoring may be called spiritual direction, a very direct form of mentoring which will be discussed later in this chapter. For others, spiritual mentoring will be more of a discipling relationship between an experienced follower of Jesus and a new believer who is being shaped and formed or of a more experienced believer with an emerging leader. For others, spiritual mentoring will take the form of a peer relationship between two equally formed believers, each sharpening the other. In all of these different forms, spiritual mentoring has as its goal the continuing spiritual formation of an individual or individuals, seeking to see this person or persons grow in their faith, putting down roots in Christ. For Jim Osterhouse and me in our book *Masterful Mentoring* (2014), mentoring is what we do with emerging leaders, a more advanced form of discipleship, or discipleship 401, if you will.

As Hendricks (1999:25) states, “A mentor (1) promotes genuine growth, (2) is a model to follow, (3) helps you efficiently reach your goals, (4) plays a key role in God’s pattern for your growth, and (5) benefits other people in your life.”

Horsfall (2002:41) states that mentoring “is to help individuals discover the will of God for their lives and then respond in obedience. We want to help people find their unique place in God’s plan and purpose,” to find God’s footprints (*Ibid.*: 24).

### **Scriptural References to Spiritual Mentoring**

Even though most pastors with whom we have had in our mentor training workshops confess they themselves have never been mentored, they quickly give us examples from the Scriptures of mentoring relationships. In the Jewish historical books of First and Second Kings, for example, Elisha was spiritually mentored by Elijah (1 Kings 19:19). Elisha was first his attendant, observing all that Elijah said and did. Elisha then succeeded him as the prophet (2 Kings 2:11-15), taking on the cloak of Elijah. In the New Testament, Paul of Tarsus, who was formerly known as Saul, was mentored by Barnabas. (Note: This was more than Discipleship 101, given the fact that Paul was already a leader among the Jewish religious officials. His was a Discipleship 401 as an emerging *Christian leader*.) Barnabas served as Paul’s sponsor, his advocate, his door-opener, among the Christian leadership in Jerusalem. Acts 9:26-27 says, “When he came to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he really was a disciple. *But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. He told them how Saul on his journey had seen the Lord...*” Verse 29 says, “So Saul stayed with them and moved about freely in Jerusalem...” Paul’s spiritual mentoring continued for a period of time before he went out on his first missionary journey. Raab and Clinton (1985:6-7) consider Barnabas’ mentoring role of Paul and John Mark of vital importance for the expansion of Christianity in the early church. They describe Barnabas as an “encouraging exhorter”. As a good mentor, Barnabas

knew when to disappear into the shadows. In the initial references to Barnabas and Paul in the book of Acts, it is always “Barnabas and Paul” in that order. Fourteen years after Barnabas began mentoring Paul, it is now Paul who is in the leadership role (Galatians 2:1). Later, having learned his lessons well, Paul even criticizes his former mentor’s failings (Galatians 2:3-3:1).

Elmore (1995:17) suggests that the mentoring between Paul and Barnabas clearly delineates ways in which mentors and mentees relates: (1) He mentions Paul’s ability to read potential in Timothy; (2) Paul is tolerant with Timothy in his mistakes; (3) he shows flexibility with people in different situations; (4) he is patient with Timothy whom he knows will mature over time; (5) he sees the future ahead of Timothy and helps him to set vision; (6) he encourages Timothy through his letters; and (7) like a good mentor, he provides Timothy with other resources. Hendricks and Hendricks (1999:180-188; 191-192) also give a summarized citing of biblical examples of mentoring.

In the Scriptures it is clear that Paul in turn became mentor to others, the first being Timothy. In 1 Corinthians 4:17 Paul refers to Timothy as “my son”; 2 Corinthians 1:1 as “our brother”; 1 Timothy 1:2 as “my true son”; and 2 Timothy 1:2 as “my dear son”. By Philippians 2:22 the mentor (Paul) is able to say of the mentee “Timothy has proved himself”. 1 Timothy 1:18-19 is an example of Paul’s exhortative mentoring of Timothy. He counsels Timothy, “And the things which you’ve received from me, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others, also” (2 Timothy 2:2). What we see happening here is a passing on to new generations. Mentoring, and the truths that are transmitted from one to another, do not stop with that original mentoring pair; the mentoring continues on in the lives of others. Nevertheless, no mentor is perfect. Take the case of Paul who refused to continue working with John Mark. Abandoned on his first missionary journey by this young apprentice, Paul wanted to wash his hands to him. Notwithstanding, Barnabas saw something in John Mark that was worth redeeming. He took John under his wings while Paul traveled on

with Timothy. In the end Paul had to admit that John Mark was useful to the furtherance of the gospel.

I'm sure many of us would have liked having a Paul or a Barnabas mentor us. My own mentors were few and far between, and nothing of the caliber of mentoring which Timothy received. The Paul-Timothy mentoring relationship stands out in the Bible as a mentoring relationship *par excellence*. It is something to be admired and imitated. Although little is said of the mentoring between Barnabas and John Mark, we know it resulted in the restoration of an emerging leader.

Simon (2001) in *Mentoring* looks at spiritual mentoring also through various biblical characters. In this concise piece, Simon describes mentoring as a shared experience by looking at Jethro and Moses, of Moses and Joshua (pp. 26-34), of Priscilla and Aquilla and Apollos (pp. pp. 64-73), and of Paul and John Mark (pp. 74-84). He sees the relationship between Jethro and Moses as preparation for leadership. (Likewise between Paul and Timothy). The relationship between Moses and Joshua is seen as preparation for leadership. Mentoring for growth in the faith is seen in the relationship of Priscilla, Aquilla and Apollos. Mentoring as sponsorship is seen in the relationship between Barnabas and Paul. Mentoring as a process with both risks and benefits is seen in the relationship between Demas and Luke. The relationship between Paul and John Mark is seen as a sometimes conflictive process, another point suggested in the literature.

Jan McCormack (2002), professor of mentoring at Denver Seminary, presents several other biblical examples of types of mentoring: Jehoshaba and Jehoida to King Joash in II Kings 11:1-12:2; Eli to Samuel in I Samuel 3; of Hilkiah to King Josiah in II Kings 22-23; of Naomi to Ruth in the Book of Ruth; and of Elizabeth to Mary in Luke 1:39-45.

As we have seen, in both the Old and New Testaments the Bible is full of examples of spiritual mentoring. There is no dearth of examples for us to follow! At the same time, history also gives us examples of



spiritual mentoring, from the early church through the time of the Reformation.

## **Historical Examples of Spiritual Mentoring**

The early Christian church is replete with examples of spiritual mentoring. English (1998:27-57) gives historical evidence of this mentoring from earlier primary documents. For example, the desert dwellers in Egypt in the fourth century were all required to have a spiritual mentor (spiritual director). These mentors were known as desert elders. English (1998:30) writes, "Though not educated in a traditional sense, these abbas/ammass enjoyed a reputation for wisdom and for using this wisdom to mentor others. A foundational source of spirituality and holiness resulted from the efforts of the early monks to reflect on Scripture and the word and to integrate this reflection into their lives. The disciple/mentee usually sought out the person who would become his mentor or elder. "Having accepted the responsibility, whether willingly or unwillingly, the elder then took on the mentoring role wholeheartedly. One of the crucial tasks of the abba/amma was to assist the disciples to carry their burdens by listening to them and counseling them" (*Ibid.*:33). The mentee had certain responsibilities to fulfill, "beginning with seeking out compatible spiritual guides. In some cases such a search constituted a formidable task and was complicated by the fact that once the disciples found guides, they were expected to remain faithful to them for life. Furthermore, the desert disciples were expected to display openness of heart by disclosing their thoughts to the director.... The key to the success of the mentoring process was that the mentor and mentee worked diligently to integrate spirituality into daily life....The quality of discernment, in particular, is integral to the mentorship role because it asks the mentor and mentee to reflect on how God is active in their lives and how they can respond to this call from God in different situations" (*Ibid.*:34).

According to English (*Ibid.*:35), a similar spiritual mentoring occurred in the following century among the female mystics at Helfta,

Germany. “The lives of these women highlighted the fivefold key mentoring functions: befriender, counselor, encourager, sponsor, and teacher.” English’s treatment of the mystics of Helfta shows a mentoring succession: Mechtild of Hackeborn mentoring Gertrude of Helfta, who in turn mentored many nuns and even monks.

Corcoran (English 1998:4) discusses spiritual mentoring in the Twelfth Century. In one document he describes the mentor as both spiritual guide and midwife, terms describing the mentor already noted in this study.

The Catholic mystic, Teresa of Avila, lived in 16<sup>th</sup> Century Spain. According to history, Teresa mentored John of the Cross as well as Jerónimo Gratián (*Ibid.*:3). Teresa herself had been mentored by Peter of Alcántara (*Ibid.*:50-52). In fact, we ought not to underestimate the contributions of both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross to the ministry of spiritual formation. See what Anderson and Reese (1999:103) have to say:

“Two of the most influential voices for our understanding and practice of spiritual mentoring are Teresa of Avila... and John of the Cross... [they] have influenced Christian spirituality by helping us understand the mysteries of the faith journey and the importance of responsiveness in unlocking those mysteries.” And these words of affirmation come from two evangelical leaders!

Also, Weisel (English 1998:3) writes about the Hasidic masters who functioned as spiritual mentors in their day. Spiritual mentoring, therefore, has a long history, predating the mentoring practices in the 70’s and 80’s in the workplace and education that have become the common examples of mentoring as we know it. Spiritual mentoring has much to inform spiritual formation. It is a process of transmitting spiritual truths, helping guide the emerging leader in his/her spiritual maturation, and preparing those who in turn will mentor and speak

into the lives of even other emerging leaders. Church planting itself would remain a one-on-one process if church planters did not catch the vision of the need to mentor those whom they are developing as leaders. Those same pastors who were not mentored-if they now begin to mentor church planters-will see generations to come being mentored by their mentees, and their mentees' mentees. We want to see mentoring of church planters become part of the DNA of the denominations with whom we work. And some of them have caught the vision and are doing excellent work in this area, contextualizing the training in ways that we could not. One prime example is Bishop Rafael Alvino, overseer for the Church of God of Prophecy in Peru. Not only has he established the mentoring of church planters as the norm in his denomination in Peru, but he has taken it to other countries in South America where the Church of God of Prophecy is actively ministering. Another is Luis Alonso Gutierrez Lazo in El Salvador, Central America. Lovingly referred to as "El Profe" (The Professor), Luis Alonso has established a mentoring DNA among church planters in his denomination in El Salvador and has made himself available to MNM's national coordinators in Central America to help with mentor training.

Dr. Juan Carlos Melo, Latin America director for MNM, has named regional mentors for MNM's national coordinators who in turn work with denominational trainers. Several years ago this concept of mentoring was unheard of in MNM. We have yet to see mentoring become part and parcel of the efforts of our church planting partners in Africa and Asia, but it will come.

## **Confrontation in Spiritual Mentoring**

Spiritual mentoring requires both confrontation and accountability if the mentee is to grow spiritually. There are at least six Bible passages which deal with confrontation:

1. 2 Corinthians 10:4-5—"The tools of our trade are divinely powerful, to challenge people's thinking."
2. 1 Thessalonians 5:14—"Remind, warn, admonish, and encourage the faint hearted."
3. 2 Timothy 3:16—"Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training."
4. 2 Timothy 4:2-4—"Preach, reprove, rebuke, and exhort."
5. Colossians 1:28—"Admonish (warn by reminding) people."
6. Titus 1:13—"Reprove severely that they may be sound in faith."

Earlier we mentioned Paul's need to confront his former mentor, Barnabas, and even Peter, a pillar of the early church. The scriptural texts given above speak to the commonness of confrontation within the early Christian church. Part of spiritual formation occurs when we are confronted with our shortcomings, our weaknesses, our sins by a brother or sister in the faith. Whether we call it confrontation or challenge or calling our attention to an issue or failing, we are carrying out an important aspect of spiritual mentoring in the life of a believer. Perhaps it is time to put this book down, grab a cup of coffee, tea or mate, and answer the following questions reflectively:

1. Have you been confronted for a wrongdoing?
2. Did you grow from this experience?
3. What about a time when you were confronted for procrastination?
4. Did it help you to get back on track?

Some of my greatest moments of spiritual growth have come during those times when I was confronted by a fellow Christian. I was being held accountable to someone else. For this reason, I am a firm believer in accountability groups in which Christians meet regularly and hold each other accountable. This is a trait that a church planter needs to learn. Unfortunately, church planters often get caught up in the "numbers game," trying to increase their number of members or people in small groups. This is sometimes done at the cost of being honest on the part of the church planter and confrontational on the part of his/her mentor

when the church planter is doing wrong. If we do not challenge when it is necessary, the church becomes full of weak and misshapen believers, similar to a tree that is allowed to grow on its own without a stake to help it grow straight in its first few years.

There are some biblical examples of accountability that we should consider. Joseph saw himself accountable to Potiphar for his actions and therefore would not compromise his integrity with Potiphar's wife (Gn. 39:8-10). Samuel rebuked Saul for taking matters into his own hands (1 S. 13:10-11). Nathan called David, the king, to task for his sins (2 S. 9-10). Timothy was accountable to Paul. These few examples from the Bible help us to see the importance of accountability in general, and even more so in a mentoring situation such as Paul had with Timothy (1 and 2 Timothy).

### **Seeking God's will**

Mentors are often faced with the temptation of guiding a mentee more than he or she should. Mentoring is, first and foremost, a seeking after God's will, of guiding another person based on how God is leading that person. It is not creating something new, but revealing what is already there from God. It is not an activity done in isolation from discovering where God is leading. Anderson and Reese (1999) describe this as "coming alongside" spirituality in partnership with the Holy Spirit (p. 44). It is, again, the Triadic principle at play.

What does it change if we understand that God initiates and we respond, that what we believe we have created is in fact our response to God's already active presence? It changes everything! God's heart has already felt and loved and hoped before we ever arrived. The songs of our soul have already been whispered and sung into our souls.... [t]he work of the mentor is not to create but to notice, not to invent but to discern. Spiritual mentoring invites us to discover holy ground that is all around us

and within, welcoming us to pay attention to the already present action of God (p. 44).

Anderson and Reese present us, then, with four “practical and strategic implications” of this truth (p. 46):

- Responsibility for spiritual growth is properly held in the hands of God’s Holy Spirit, not in the hands of any human mentor.
- The initiative for spiritual growth is in the heart of God, not in the heart of the mentor.
- The ministry of spiritual mentoring is primarily a ministry of discernment, attention-getting and attention-giving, not of creating or forcing growth.
- Strategies for spiritual formation, however, may include assertive and forceful intervention in the life of the mentee, but always with attention to the movement of God’s Spirit.

A good mentor of church planters, then, will be a person who senses this responsibility for the ongoing spiritual growth of his mentee, recognizing that the Holy Spirit is at work. It is God who desires to see this growth, and the mentor is only an agent to help realize this God-shaped desire. The good mentor will look for signs of the Spirit’s working in the life of his church planting mentee, and will intervene when intervention is necessary.

### **Spiritual Mentors and Spiritual Mentees**

Anderson and Reese (1999, p. 12) list characteristics for both the mentor and mentee which are important to take into account if you are considering entering such a relationship. Since spiritual mentoring can have eternal consequences, it is not something to be entered into lightly. When I consider the blunders I made in the past in equipping emerging leaders for ministry, I enter spiritual mentoring with great

humbleness and fear, humbled by the great calling to mentor another and fear of being ill-equipped for the task. You and I both ought to take seriously what Anderson and Reese have to say about the mentor and the mentee (here called the “mentoree”).

The mentor is described as:

- one who creates a hospitable space of trust and intimacy
- one who is able to discern the already present action of God in the mentoree
- one who recognizes potential in people
- one with an experience in spirituality who is affirmed by others for having a life worthy of emulation
- one who seeks to live a life of authentic holiness, spiritual maturity, biblical knowledge and wisdom
- one who is familiar with contemplative prayer, listening and other spiritual disciplines

It only makes sense that the spiritual mentor would be all of the above, and particularly versed in the spiritual disciplines himself if he is to lead others in their spiritual formation. How many of us would fit the bill perfectly? Few, I imagine. Let us, nevertheless, seek to be that kind of mentor. Christians in general and church planters in particular need this kind of mentor. There is a lot at stake. Biehl (1997:15) in a passionate book on the subject of spiritual mentoring, wrote, “Mentoring is the bridge that will connect, strengthen, and stabilize future generations of Christians in an increasingly complex and threatening world.” No truer words have been spoken! Such passionate mentoring needs to occur in the lives of church planters and other emerging leaders if the church generationally is to be strong and vibrant, alive and healthy, and reproducing!

Matthaei (1996:76) calls the mentor a “faith mentor.” At times this faith mentor functions as a mediator. She writes, “A faith mentor is a mediator, the one who stands between—between who we are and

who we hope to be. A mediator helps us expand our educational development. A faith mentor is a mediator of faith who facilitates connections and provides us an opportunity to clarify our relationship with God, to focus our life direction, and to share our faith witness.” Think back over time to those who have served you as a faith mentor or spiritual mediator. Are there those who have filled this function in your life? In the midst of planting a church, a church planter normally will reach a point where he begins to doubt his relationship with God, especially if he or she is not seeing the expected fruit or growth. A faith mentor can help us to get back on track. I needed the support of a fellow missionary who lived one country away. Whenever he came to visit, I had a thousand questions to raise and I needed to pour my heart out. He was much older than I and much more experienced in church planting, Bernie Dokter helped me to have confidence in myself and trust in God as I sought to plant churches in Nicaragua. Had he not made periodic visits and guided me in reflection, I probably would have thrown in the towel and left the mission field. Bernie, in many ways, was laid back, always with a smile and a laugh. I was high-strung and probably took myself too seriously. Bernie was the person I needed at that particular time.

Bernie, like a good mentor, did not tell me what to do or what to be. He was that “guide on the side” and not the “sage on the stage.” Our role is to help our mentee – whether church planter or emerging leader in the new church—to become all he can be and to learn to do the things that will help him in his spiritual growth. This is a hard lesson for those who come from a culture where learning is based on being told rather than through facilitating learning, through the asking of questions resulting in discovering what God wants.

Moving on to the church planter as mentee, (or mentoree, as Anderson and Reese call him) he is:

- one who desires spiritual growth and maturity
- one who is vulnerable in sharing intimate issues of life



- one who is responsive and respectful to the directives of the mentor
- one who is teachable, submissive, faithful and obedient
- one who desires to serve God with his or her life

In other words, the mentee is one who willingly submits to the guidance and counsel of one whom he or she recognizes as being more spiritually mature and walking in step with God. How many of us have found such a mentor in whom we can confide and trust, whose counsel and guidance we seek? Not many, and yet each one of us ought to be in a mentoring relationship. In church planting, the church planter needs such a person. He, in turn, needs to be that kind of a person to the emerging leaders in the new church.

Fowler (1995:3) in the beginning of his book on faith development, gives us six questions that a mentee ought to ask himself, or if guided by a mentor, six questions that the mentor ought to ask the mentee. These are called “questions of faith.”

- *What are you spending and being spent for? What commands and receives your best time, your best energy?*
- *What causes, dreams, goals or institutions are you pouring out your life for?*
- *As you live your life, what power or powers do you fear or dread? What power or powers do you rely on and trust?*
- *To what or whom are you committed in life? In death?*
- *With whom or what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love?*
- *What are these most sacred hopes, these most compelling goals and purposes in your life?*

The answers to these questions tell both the mentor and the mentee a lot about what we have set as priorities in our life. The answers to these questions tell us a lot about our spiritual development. Notice again that the emphasis is on the one being mentored. He needs to

be proactive in this relationship and not passive. As one experienced mentor reminds us, “The journey belongs to the traveler,” who in this case is the mentee.

Although these are excellent questions to ask any emerging leader, think how these questions can have a tremendous impact in the life of a church planter. They help the church planter to focus on what is important, and helps him to see how his own spiritual development is essential for the future development of others under his care.

## **The Challenge**

Houston, in his Foreword to Anderson and Reese, wrote these radical words: “If you bemoan the absence of a spiritual mentor in your life, then be one! This book will help you be what you long to have. It is to be more godly, more Christlike” (p. 10). The challenge we each face, then, is to be in a mentoring relationship with another in order that we/they may grow deep into Christ’s love, and reflect his image. We ought to seek those who can mentor us spiritually at the same time that we ourselves seek to be mentors to others. It is through such a relationship that “iron sharpens iron” and, consequently, we become formed in Christ. Spiritual mentoring is one vehicle that God uses for our spiritual formation. As Hendricks (1999:25) points out, “The goal of every mentor should be the emotional, social, and spiritual growth of... the person he mentors.” Or as Horsfall (2002:13) describes it, “... promoting the work of God in the life of another.”

A new church is being planted in Miami by my former pastor and associate pastor. The associate pastor was mentored by both myself and Jim, co-author of the book on mentoring mentioned earlier. Both are themselves excellent disciplers and now are mentoring these new believers as they begin to emerge as leaders in the new church. No church plant can survive solely on the church planter but requires the new believers to go deeper in their faith and to take responsibility for various facets of the ministry as they mature spiritually. This is indeed a

challenge for all of us who would plant a new church—to make it not dependent on ourselves, but to flourish under the leadership of those who come to faith and seek to serve.

Whether it is early on in our spiritual pilgrimage (discipleship), or later on as emerging leaders (mentoring proper) or even later as religious practitioners, ministers or pastors (coaching), we need to be mentored and to mentor. Our life in Christ is not in isolation from others. We are part of a community, the Body of Christ, the church. It is through this Body that we can grow in our faith, be challenged, be confronted, be held accountable. Paul grew spiritually because of the mentorship practiced by Barnabas. Peter was challenged by Paul when he needed to be confronted for his legalism. John of the Cross became the God-lover that he was because of submitting to the mentorship of Teresa of Avila. Who will be your mentor? And more importantly, whom will you mentor to be a leader for this “increasingly complex and threatening world”?

## Questions

1. How does mentoring differ from spiritual mentoring?
2. List at least seven words that describe or define a mentor.
3. Explain why Anderson and Reese described spiritual mentoring as a “triadic relationship”.
4. Why is confrontation sometimes necessary in a mentoring relationship? How is this related to accountability?
5. Consider the description of a spiritual mentor laid out by Anderson and Reese. Do you see yourself qualifying to be such a mentor? Explain.

6. To what degree are you willing to submit yourself to the counsel and guidance of another when it comes to your spiritual walk?
7. Why is mentoring so important in the context of a church plant?

### **Action Points**

1. Do a web search on “spiritual mentoring.” Take notes on what you find. Share these with your professor in a one-page paper.
2. Can you think of anyone who has been a mentor to you? Reflect on this in your journal. How was this person a mentor to you? What did you learn from your mentor? When and how did the mentoring relationship begin? When did the mentoring relationship end? Why?
3. Interview someone whom you know to be a mentor at this time. Find out what has worked for them in establishing a mentoring relationship and what things have led to failure in the past.
4. Read a book on spiritual mentoring and write a reflection paper for your professor of not more than five pages. One good chapter is found in Rice (Rice 1991) chapter 5 “Consultation: Spiritual Guidance in the Reformed Tradition.”

## VIII

# BARRIERS TO

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# SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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Even though we attempt to practice the spiritual disciplines and we seek to be mentored, growth does not seem to come; or it comes in spurts and in small steps. The same can be said about the emerging leaders we're helping to form in our new churches. The truth of the matter is that we often put barriers in front of us which prevent us from being spiritually formed. Even with all of our good intentions, there are times that we don't seem to be growing. Often this is a result of a spiritual barrier that we have erected, knowingly or unknowingly. The same holds true for those we are training for leadership roles in the emerging church. Those in whom we have invested so much time do not seem to grow and mature. We have identified at least five barriers that inhibit, if not prevent, our continued spiritual growth.

### **Barrier 1: Worshipping the creation**

We mentioned early on how many believers find God in nature, that as they walk in the fields, as they look up into the night skies, as they see the intricacies of a flower, they see God. The Psalmist wrote: "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows his handiwork." Paul wrote to the Romans: "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made." God is evident in nature all around us. It's like walking out into a cold wintry morning to a new-fallen snow and finding footprints already there. God has left his footprint in all of creation!

But even as we contemplate God in nature, there is the danger of worshipping the *created* and not the *Creator*, thus moving us away from God into idolatry. The ancients often did this. They developed a theology, a worldview, in which God became identified with his creation. This was called pantheism (*pan* (everything, all) *theos* (God)). Their motto was “God in everything and everything is God.” This pantheistic philosophy is repeated today in the worship of “Mother Earth” or “Earth Mother.” This is common in much Native American Religion and in the New Age Movement. Here is a quote from just one site:

Earth healing is not about trying to heal a being that is much vaster than ourselves. It is about healing ourselves. All of us are, along with the animals, vegetables, minerals, liquids, and gases, a collective planetary being. We can all be a part of that healing and by doing so, help in healing the Earth Mother. All that is required is your conscious, focused attention on healing (Healing the Earth, 2004).

Notice in this quote the way in which we become one with nature and nature is worshipped over the one who created it all.

Others in more scientific terms talk about Gaia. One website proclaims that the earth is alive, breathing, going back to ancient times when Gaia, in fact, devoured her own. Many of these sites have links to prayer mantras for Gaia, as well as psychic readings and sites that promote pantheism as a religion of science. In one site, Gorbachev, the former Soviet leader, is quoted as saying,

I believe in the cosmos. All of us are linked to the cosmos.  
So nature is my god. To me, nature is sacred, trees are my  
temples and forests are my cathedrals”  
(Forest Elementals, 2004).

In another site the writer asks:

Do you find it impossible to believe in supernatural beings, and difficult to conceive of anything more worthy of reverence than the beauty of nature or the power of the universe?

If you answered yes to these questions, then you will feel thoroughly at home in the World Pantheist Movement. Our caring and celebratory approach focuses on nature rather than the supernatural, on what we can see and do and live out rather than on invisible entities that we can only imagine. (Pantheism 2004).

How much more blatant an example of worshipping the created over the Creator can we find?!

Thomas (1996:48) who even promotes a naturalist approach to worshipping God, warns, “God is not materially in nature, but his concern for detail, his overwhelming creativity, his orderliness, and much, much more are clearly present to the discerning eye. It can be so intoxicating. Without the Holy Spirit we, too, might be led to cross the idolatrous lie into pantheism. But with sound doctrine to instruct us and the Holy Spirit to guide us, we can appreciate nature’s message that ‘God is’ without falling into the heresy of pantheism.” Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, was particularly keen on recognizing God everywhere, but without falling into the pantheist trap. Anderson and Reese (1999:144) write, “Ignatius was especially insistent... that we learn to see God in all things, to notice the presence of God in every place, to hear, see, smell, touch and taste with a new awareness, a new carefulness and a deepened alertness.” Are you alert to God’s presence in all things without falling into pantheism?

Similar to Ignatius' awareness and alertness to God, Horsfall (2002:57-62) says that in spiritual mentoring, our goal is to develop spiritual awareness regarding God:

- God in the world around us
- God in our daily lives
- God at work in circumstances
- God in other people

## **Barrier 2: Too Busy**

This second barrier is so common among Christians that it is pathetic! How often haven't I said "I just can't find the time"? How many times have you said it? It soon becomes our standard disclaimer for not having a devotional time. Not only does it become Excuse Number One, but we use it as if it were a legitimate excuse. It sometimes goes something like this: "I'm so busy doing the Lord's Work that I don't have time for my own spiritual walk." I don't believe for one minute that God is happy when he hears this coming from my lips, especially from one who is involved in "fulltime ministry."

What would we say about a doctor who never cracks another textbook, never practices his surgical skills, never reads up on the latest medicines? We would probably go down the street to a different doctor. As ministry practitioners—and even as individual Christians-- the last thing we should do is ignore our need for a personal ongoing time with God. It would be as if we cut ourselves off from our source of food and expected to remain healthy and strong. It just cannot be done.

We cannot expect to grow spiritually if we do not take the time to practice the spiritual disciplines, to read the Word, to meditate on the Word, to pray to God, to seek Him out in moments of solitude. As busy a life as Jesus led, he took time to go off to be with his Father. And so should we.



MacDonald (1997:203) expresses a similar concern about the lack of time we give to developing our spirituality. He writes, "I am bothered by the thought that silence, time, touch with the spiritual ancients, self-disclosure in a journal, and patience are not commodities in great supply today. And if not, then prayer may take the form of shallow words, empty cliches, quick-burst comments, and religious soliloquies. Give me soul-talk!... Soul-talk is what comes from the bottom of one's inner world.... Where one will come to understand that every minute spent in the divine Presence is worth much more than an ounce of gold."

Hybels (1998) wrote a book on the subject of taking time for God, of eliminating the excuses. It is aptly titled *Too Busy Not to Pray*. And many of us fail to pray as we should.

Herrington, Creech and Taylor (2003:3) write, "Far too many are fatigued and spiritually empty. The day-to-day stress... robs them of their personal spiritual vitality." For this reason, we are too busy NOT to pray, to NOT read God's Word, to NOT meditate, to NOT find silence and solitude, to NOT worship God.

One way to overcome this barrier is to set reasonable boundaries. A book by this title (Cloud and Townsend 1992) calls us to be disciplined in our commitments. Many times we can over-commit. The subtitle, "When to Say YES When to Say NO To Take Control of Your Life," says it all. We need to take control of our lives in the sense of not letting others or things control our lives for us. This book goes way beyond dealing with time issues. We need to set many different kinds of boundaries: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. Each of these has its own control issues that we need to be aware of. Boundaries "help us 'guard our heart with all diligence.' We need to keep things that will nurture us inside our fences and keep things that will harm us outside. In short, *boundaries help us keep the good in and the bad out*" (p. 31). Consider how to help church planters to set appropriate boundaries in their own lives in order to practice those things most important for their spiritual maturing and development as leaders.

Another way of looking at this barrier is by examining the stages of life all adults go through. There have been many papers and books written on the life cycles, stages, and/or phases, that adults pass through during the course of living. These are often divided into three main stages: early adulthood, middle adulthood and later adulthood. The exact divisions differ from psychologist to psychologist. For our purposes, we'll look at the first phase as "The Age of Becoming," the second stage as "The Age of Contributing," and the third stage as "The Age of Investing."

EARLY ADULTHOOD	MIDDLE ADULTHOOD	LATER ADULTHOOD
Ages 18-30	Ages 31-50	Ages 51 and up
"Age of becoming"	"Age of contributing"	"Age of investing"

In early *adulthood*, we are busy trying to find our identity and place in society, in the church. We are looking for a marriage partner, someone with whom we can spend our adult life. This is the age of becoming the person we will be. It is hoped that before this period or during this period we will have been formed spiritually and we will have developed our character. Discipling, followed by mentoring, is very important during this phase in our psychological development. By the time we have reached *middle adulthood*, it is hoped that we have a fully developed character and that we have been at least initially spiritually formed, while recognizing that spiritual formation is a lifelong process. It is during this period we contribute to our church, to society, to family and friends based on whom we have become. During the last phase, *later adulthood*, we begin to invest in others. We recognize that we have reached a point where we need to consider passing on to another generation what we have acquired as far as wisdom, knowledge, wealth, etc., if we have not already begun doing so. Many books have been written about this. Buford has written several of these from a Christian perspective, all with enticing titles: *Winning Strategies for the Second Half of Your Life*; *Halftime: Changing Your Game Plan from Success to Significance*; *Stuck in Halftime: Reinvesting Your One and Only Life*.

Now that I am in my 60s, I find myself being very intentional in the relationships I form and in determining in whom I wish to invest my time, energy, and wisdom. I am beginning to identify those who will carry the baton once I am no longer able to do so. I may even turn over the baton earlier rather than later, step aside, and watch with satisfaction and joy those who move out in front. This can only happen if I am not too busy to spend my time becoming, contributing, and now investing.

I experience much joy as I invest in the lives of others. I do not try to shape them into my image, but exhilarate in seeing them develop according to their own personalities, based on their own experiences, and living out their own dreams for the future. One such “mentee” has gone on to pastor his second church. Another is in seminary with his whole life ahead of him. Soon I will need to begin looking for the one who will replace me at MNM in my role as vice president of ministry. This is probably the hardest mentoring that I will do as it forces me to see my own mortality and decreased strength and lucidness. Nevertheless, I am grateful to God for what I have been able to contribute to the development of the Kingdom. I have not always walked in step with God, but when I have, there has been great satisfaction.

Unfortunately, many reach their 50s and wonder, “What have I accomplished?” “Who will carry on when I am gone?” Many have not cared for their souls, developed their character, contributed out of this richness, in order to now invest in others. During each phase of life, take the time! Take the time to become! Take the time to contribute! Take the time to invest in others! This is all part of being a follower of Christ. Don’t be too busy!

### **Barrier #3: Compartmentalizing our lives**

We tend to compartmentalize our lives as if there were a spiritual side and a non-spiritual side to our beings. We think in terms of blocks of time: time to work, time to play, time to worship, as if we

could turn on and turn off the spiritual part of us. Herrington *et al.* (2003:138-140) explain it in these terms:

Most of us are very good at living our lives in “parts.” There is the part of our attention we devote to the family, and the part we give to our work. Another part goes to leisure time, and still another part is devoted to our spiritual life. No wonder we feel so fragmented so much of the time.

The spiritual disciplines work against this temptation to compartmentalize our life. By praying, fasting, meditating, retreating, or celebrating, we remind ourselves of the constant, pervasive nearness of God. Rather than assigning to God a part of our day, we teach ourselves to notice God at work throughout the day. In *Your God is Too Safe*, Mark Buchanan writes, “The problem is not that God is distant and needs to be wooed or badgered into coming near; the problem is that God is ever present, ever near, and that some of us seek ways of escape.... God does not need to be invoked, we do. We need to be called to our senses, to be as present to God as God is to us.”

In other words, Herrington and Buchanan are both pointing out the need to “practice the presence of God.” Instead of isolating him to certain times of the day or to certain parts of our lives, our whole being ought to recognize God’s existence and presence. In the words of the Psalmist, “In thy presence there is fullness of joy” (Ps. 16:11, RSV). This joy was the theme of Brother Lawrence’s (2004:9) book entitled *The Practice of the Presence of God*, written in 1666 by a barefooted Carmelite monk in Paris. Brother Lawrence recognized that God was Lord of all. There is nothing too majestic or too lowly to come under God’s sovereign control. He is present at all times. An example of this practice is found in what has been called A Pilgrim’s Prayer:

Lord of all pots and pans and things...  
Make me a saint by getting meals  
And washing up the plates!

Brother Lawrence wrote, “The time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer, and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great a tranquility as if I were on my knees...” (*Ibid.*:11). Few of us will attain the high degree of “presence practice” that Brother Lawrence attained. He even went so far as to say, “I drove away from my mind everything that was capable of interrupting my thoughts of God” (*Ibid.*:32). By such practice, Brother Lawrence was able to habitually practice the presence of God as if it were natural. He learned to walk “before God, simply, in faith, with humility and with love, and I apply myself diligently to do nothing and think nothing which may displease Him.... And I make it my business only to persevere in His holy presence, wherein I keep myself by a simple attention, and a general fond regard for God which I may call an actual presence of God; or, to speak better, an habitual, silent, and secret conversation of the soul with God” (*Ibid.*:35-36). He goes on to say that sometimes the joy of that conversation is so exhilarating that he cannot contain it within himself. But Brother Lawrence recognized the importance of going before the Lord to be judged by him. Brother Lawrence did not paint a picture of himself as a perfect saint, but as one in need of God’s forgiveness. Part of practicing the presence of God is going before him, asking him to reveal our shortcomings, our sins. Beg God’s forgiveness, and then “rising after my falls,” to get on with the business at hand, “with acts of faith and love,” (*Ibid.*:30). Stevens (2003:12, 63) echoes this sentiment by writing, “Everyday life... is the spiritual discipline in which God continuously and graciously meets us.” He goes on to say that we ought to live life “in the center of everyday things, rather than at the circumference in retreats and religious activities.” His study on Jacob, *Down-to-Earth Spirituality: Encountering God in the Ordinary, Boring Stuff of Life*, helps us to see the “everyday-ness” of our spiritual walk.

The Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper (1997:127) expressed being in God's presence as "near unto God." In one of his meditations he writes, "But to be near unto God means living robustly in his grace, so that his nearness permeates our feelings, our sensations, our thinking, our imagining, our wills, our acts, and every last word that comes from our hearts and mouths."

Warren (2002:87s) deals with this theme in some detail in a chapter entitled "Becoming Best Friends with God." He writes, "You can carry on a continuous, open-ended conversation with him throughout your day, talking with him about whatever you are doing or thinking *at that moment*." This is what Warren calls becoming a best friend of God through constant conversation.

In addition, many Catholic and Reformed theologians discussed what they called *coram deo*, loosely translated as "In his presence." Several websites discuss this concept in more detail.

In Bill Myers' novel *The Face of God* (2002), Pastor Daniel Lawson comes face to face with a terrorist bent on the destruction of the non-Islamic powers. They dialogue on their similarities of pursuing God's righteousness. Daniel comes to a realization similar to what we've been discussing here. Let's listen in to this dialogue.

"I am no longer pursuing God's holiness. Instead I am pursuing his presence."

The man's mouth closed. He clenched his jaws, then released them. "You are wrong. You do not say what you mean."

Daniel's answer was gentle but firm. "Yes, I do. And that is the great difference between our faiths. I pursue God and he fills me with his presence. You pursue his laws and are filled with his law."

The man's eyes narrowed. "This is blasphemy. God cannot dwell in man."

Calmly holding his ground, Daniel answered, "Oh, but he did. You certainly know of Christ's claim to deity."

"The Infinite cannot become finite."

"He did it once, my friend. And as I seek him, he does it again... not in Christ but inside me. Daily. Changing me. Making me like him. Not by his rules... but by his presence." (p. 317)

Munger (2004) wrote a booklet 50 years ago that is still in print called *My Heart-Christ's Home*. The booklet also tells us that we ought to allow Christ into every room of our body, our "home." The heart needs to be occupied, indwelt, by God. Everything else must be emptied out so that God is in control. Brother Lawrence (2004:43-44) similarly expressed this metaphor, saying, "I know that for the right practice of it the heart must be empty of all other things, because God will possess the heart alone... so neither can He act there, and do in it what He pleases, unless it be left vacant to Him." Nouwen (1981:76) speaks similar words when he writes in *The Way of the Heart*, "Thus we enter through our heart into the heart of God, who embraces all of history with his eternally creative and recreative love." Others have also practiced the presence of God in their lives. Others have recognized that they ought to be in constant communion with our Lord. I find myself as I drive to work—when not commuting with colleagues-- often praying within myself. As I feel myself protected from a possible accident, I verbally thank God for his presence and protection. Nevertheless, there are other times when I would rather God were not present, or, as Buchanan puts it, there are times when I seek a way of escape from his presence for a time. Such times make it that much harder to be in tune with God and to return to his presence. Our desire to compartmentalize our lives makes it difficult to truly practice his presence, and this desire, therefore, interferes with our continued, uninterrupted spiritual formation.

#### **Barrier 4: Living with unresolved sin**

We cannot expect to be spiritually formed if we continue to live in sin. John in his first epistle writes, “We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin” (1 Jn. 5:18). John in his third epistle wrote to his friend Gaius about his joy because of “your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth” (3 Jn. 1:3). In both of these verses, the emphasis is on the word *continue*. It describes a continuing action. In the same way in which John rejoices over Gaius’ continuing to walk in the truth, he also reminds us that no believer ought to continue to live a life full of sin. Sin we will have—we do not believe in a doctrine of perfection in this mortal life—but we ought to be putting off our sins so that God can work in us.

Some of you may live in cold climates where there is a lot of snow. I did as a child. Now that I am now in my 60s, after 16-plus years of living in the tropics, I am once again living in a place that gets cold in the winter. I remember as a child having my mother bundle me up for going outside. She put thermal underwear on me, then a shirt, then what we called “snowpants,” then a jacket, then a hat, then gloves, and finally boots. By the time she was done, I could hardly walk. I was encumbered by all of the clothes I had on. When I came back in from playing in the snow, off would come these clothes, layer by layer, until I had full freedom of movement to run around the house. Our lives are covered by layers of sin which need to be removed if we are to be unencumbered, and open to God’s indwelling and continual filling and nurture. But we often want to put layers back on. This slows our spiritual growth; this inhibits our ability to receive from God. Our desire to continue to live in sin or to deal with unresolved sin, prevents us from enjoying all that God has for us. It becomes a barrier to our spiritual growth.



## **Barrier 5: Substituting ministry for soul care**

We can mistake spiritual experiences for true spirituality. MacDonald (1997) teaches that there is a difference between spirituality (soul care) and spiritual experiences. Spirituality he defines as “a journey in the company of the Creator in which He is permitted to guide the way, provide the traveling strength, and offer the necessary sustenance...” (p. 48). He continues, “Spirituality means taking one’s cues not from the world around but from the inner world out of which bubbles heavenly discernment, conviction and decision. It means a soul in which the Spirit of God is invited to dwell” (*Ibid.*). In reading this, I am forced to ask myself, with whom am I walking on a daily basis? Who is guiding my way through this tough and sometimes difficult life? Who gives me strength for traveling this journey? Where do my convictions and decisions come from?

The spiritual experiences we have ought not to be confused with spirituality, yet the things we do—even in ministry—can sometimes become a substitute for soul care. They may give us a “spiritual high,” but highs are never long-lasting. Many of us go through life living this shallow existence, going from one spiritual experience to another, but never really coming into full and constant, meaningful contact with the source of true spirituality. We never get to the point of what Thomas a Kempis calls “walking inwardly,” or what Macdonald calls “soul-talk.” Many of us mistakenly confused spiritual experiences for true spirituality and assume what we do for God is spirituality. Note how MacDonald (1997:49) defines spiritual experience: “Having offered some definitions of spirituality, let me state what spirituality is not. It is not knowing more Bible stories and memorizing more Bible verses than anyone else in church school.... It is not being hyperactive in church activities. And it is not possessing a highly defined doctrinal position regarding biblical issues. Oh, and spirituality is not tied up in being an evangelist, a missionary, a preacher/teacher, or a lay leader in a congregation. These are all noble and praiseworthy ventures, but they are not necessarily tied to whether one lives out of the soul or not.” Ouch! MacDonald could have been talking directly to me. Let me explain.

I spent almost two decades as a missionary in Central America. During that time, I found myself wrapped up in ministry. I had sermons to write, people to visit, meetings to attend, classes to teach. On top of that, I also served for a time as our mission's field director for all of Central America. This took me away from home to visit other missionaries, other churches, attend more meetings. I often found myself with emotional and physical burnout. In the busy-ness of ministry, I often found myself working under my own strength. In other words, I was more concerned about *doing* than I was in *being*. I was more involved in doing ministry in Christ's name than I was in developing my character, in "being conformed to the likeness of Christ."

My time with God was short and often sporadic. I also discovered that I was not alone. As I visited other missionaries, they repeated the same woe. Some 20 years later, was no different. Still busy in ministry, I found my life as busy as before in ministry, and ditto for my colleagues. We have been so busy caring for others' souls that we have often neglected our own. We have allowed spiritual experiences to substitute for true spirituality! And so, this book—as much therapeutic for me as edifying for you, has been written. Together we need to covenant to NOT let ministry become our god. We need to covenant to NOT allow ministry to take priority and for the care of our souls to take a backseat. In fact, Nouwen (1981:73) suggests that as we care for our souls, as we practice living in the presence of God, our own ministry will become more fruitful: "And before we speak any words, the Spirit of God, praying in us, will make his presence known and gather people into a new body, the body of Christ Himself."

Do you hear what Nouwen is saying? We cannot minister to others, we cannot plant a church on our own. It has to be done under the Spirit's leading in our own lives first, before we reach out to others.

Anderson (2004) shares from his own frustration of busyness. He calls it "running on empty." He confesses, "My life was filled with doing things for God rather than pursuing intimacy with God. I had

perfected busyness but failed miserably at stillness.... I had confidence in my ability to do the work of God, but I was clueless when it came to letting God work in me.... The thought of being alone with God was enough to keep me occupied with the demands of ministry.... My soul was hemorrhaging” (pp. 5-6). Have you ever felt this way? I certainly have. I can remember many a time in Costa Rica driving faster and faster, yet still feeling as if I were behind in my tasks. I would go from one appointment to another, from one meeting to another, from one pastoral visit to another, feeling exhausted—almost a zombie—empty and on auto-pilot. Yet I kept reminding myself that “I am doing the Lord’s work!” And the sad thing is that I saw many of my missionary colleagues doing the same thing. Frazee (2003:119) in *Making Room for Life* warns us, “For those who look to their work for a sense of identity (instead of expressing their identity through their work), their lives can become as pitiful as that of dogs begging for table scraps. It is a shameless pursuit.” Wow! It kind of hits you right between the eyes, doesn’t it?

Only one missionary I knew was attempting to “make space for God” by studying a wonderful book by this title (Postema, 1983). This author had also written a book on sabbath rest (1997). I remember looking at him askance, wondering why he would take time out for such an exercise when we were called to do ministry. Perhaps it was really a sense of guilt and envy on my part. I had what Anderson (2004:146) describes as GADD--God Attention Deficit Disorder.

If you asked me why I was so busy “doing ministry” instead of learning to “be” in God’s presence, I probably could not tell you. Maybe there was a psychological reason similar to Anderson’s. Maybe I was trying to please God and make up for all of the failures I felt in my own spiritual life. I had always felt like the underdog and that I needed to overachieve in order to be recognized. No matter what my accomplishments or honors, I always found myself feeling somewhat inferior, partly due to my “shortness of stature” (I’m 5 foot 3 1/2 inches tall on a good day) in an ethnic denomination in which most of my colleagues were/are over 6 feet.

Anderson (*Ibid.*:37) in his own psychoanalysis writes, “My default nature is set to believe that God’s acceptance, love, and care for me is directly proportional to my level of activity for God. This belief system—the more I do for God, the more God will love me—has dictated my every waking activity more than anything else. And it has threatened to starve my soul.” I highly recommend Anderson’s book. The back cover tells it all: “Learning to live *with* God instead of *for* God.... You can exchange the fatigue and emptiness of productivity for the warm embrace of God’s relentless love.”

Johnson and Ridley (2004:91) conducted scholarly research on mentoring, reading over a thousand publications on the subject in the fields of education, psychology and business. One of their findings was this: “Mentors who fail to care for themselves may reach a point where they are unable to care for their protégés.... Mentors who endure over the long haul attend to their personal needs and consistently practice self-care.”

Sanders (2004:9) in his book on mentoring writes,

When observing emerging leaders, whether they are interns, recent college graduates, seminary students, ministerial hopefuls or evangelist wannabes, it is nearly impossible to predict who will be highly effective, who will be faithful to his or her calling, marriage or church and who will finish well. Two key indicators that seem to point people to a successful end in the development of life, faithfulness and effectiveness are: 1) the lifelong pursuit of character formation throughout the various stages of life; and 2) the presence of a mentor(s) to guide them.

We have dealt with both of these issues in this course—character development and mentoring. We have emphasized the importance of the latter to help attain the former. Character is not formed in isolation. It requires a commitment to be spiritually formed, and it requires

a willingness to be accountable to another or to others. A mentoring relationship can serve as a form of accountability. Both are required if we are to finish the race well. We need to take time to be mentored, to see our character developed. It all comes down to this: Don't let ministry become a stumbling block to your own spiritual growth. The time will come when you have nothing more to give because you have been doing it in your own strength. Your spiritual acts may, in fact, be carnal in nature because of the lack of sufficient spirituality. Take time for caring for your soul—meditating on God's Word, taking time out for some silence and solitude to hear God's voice, praying and fasting as God calls you to, worshipping him and celebrating him and the life he has given you. Then, refreshed and re-energized, "go into all the world!" - but not before!!!!

### **Barrier 6: Retreating instead of Advancing**

I always wanted to be a spelunker, a person whose hobby is going into deep, dark caves and caverns with a light on my helmet, searching out stalactites and stalagmites. I never did take this up as a hobby, but I read quite a few books on the subject. In one book I remember reading about an albino salamander that spent its whole life in the dark. It no longer had eyes that functioned and it had no coloration at all. It was, for all intents and purposes, a blind albino. This creature had adapted to its surroundings for so long that it can no longer function in the light of day. The albino salamander reminds me of some Christians who retreat from the world, only to find themselves incapable of being of any help to those who most need it. We isolate ourselves from non-Christians. We may even isolate ourselves from other Christians in our attempt to be close to God.

We can sometimes be so concerned about having a right relationship with God, of being in his presence, that we ignore the rest of the world. Someone once spoke of seeing "the world going to hell in a bushel basket," while we sit idly by, contemplating God's goodness and mercy to us. This reminds me of Jesus' parable about the Good Samar-

itan. I think of the priest who kept his distance. He was about “more important” matters. And some might even accuse contemplative souls of being “too heavenly minded for any earthly good.” Even the best contemplatives that I know recognize the need to mix their deep communion with God with down-to-earth ministry. They have discovered that one of the best ways to worship God is to be involved in this world of need. Thomas (1996:183) speaks of doing “secret acts of devotion.” These acts demonstrate one’s love for God in very practical ways.

There are Christian groups that have attempted to keep themselves undefiled by shutting themselves up in their own communes and communities, considering any contact with “others” as contamination. They may, indeed, find ways of preventing themselves from being contaminated by the world, but they also avoid being “light” and “salt” to this contaminated world. Like the salamander, they no longer have any pigmentation, and are blind to the world. Retreat is not always a positive action. One of the best known Reformed theologians, Abraham Kuyper (1997:17) wrote, “To run away and hide, even for purposes of seeking God, is to flee from our calling and task. . . . To know that, to seek him passionately, and to find him, face to face, in the middle of our travail here on earth—all of that makes us testify with the psalmist, ‘I love you.’ ” Kuyper further writes in another meditation, “Our love for God is unique because his love, as obsessed as we can be with him, does not distract us from the world. Instead, it sends us out into it, full of heavenly vision and burgeoning thanksgiving. In all time and all things, our thanks rises from our acts in this world” (*Ibid.*:129)

Kuyper in another meditation writes about the Holy Spirit putting down roots in our hearts. But the Spirit’s indwelling, according to Kuyper, is not an end in itself. It is only a means by which we can live our lives as transformed Christians in the context of the world. “We discover God in the presence of the Holy Spirit, who takes compassion on us. That knowledge carries us back into our lives with a firm sense of comfort and commitment. Our life outside—in business, profession, marriage, and family—begins to echo the music God creates

in our souls. The two worlds mingle and permeate each other until we reach a point when our inner consciousness of God glows through everything we do, morning until night, with the Spirit's quickening strength" (*Ibid.*: 155).

Certainly, we need times of retreat, times when we can truly be in silence and solitude with God, away from the cares of the world. But these times only prepare us-- re-energize us-- for the earthly tasks at hand. Jesus retreated, but he always came back to the crowds. Many of the best examples of Christians who combined the spiritual with the worldly are the early monks whose monasteries were "hospitals," rest areas for pilgrims and clinics for the sick.

One of the concepts that we teach in our training modules at Multiplication Network Ministries is the importance of establishing churches that help to transform their communities. In *Take Your Church's Pulse*, Koster and Wagenveld (2014:138) describe three models of the relationship of a church to its community. The first model was one of escapism where the church stays away from the world lest it become contaminated. The second model is one of accommodation where the church identifies so closely with the world that its gospel message and the church's distinctiveness become lost. The third model is the preferred one: that of engagement. In this last model the church is involved with the world—"engaged"—but its gospel message is not lost. Its engagement is attributed to the truth of the gospel which compels the church to be active in the world, bringing about reconciliation and restoration. Each one of us needs to be engaged in this world. This is what church planters need to do—engage the world rather than simply try to "rescue" people from the world.

On another note, some people spend their time navel-gazing, trying to enter into themselves and become part of the Cosmic Force, or some other impersonal essence. It can be an attempt to rid oneself of one's own material body-- of one's humanity—in favor of union with the Cosmos. This is true of many Eastern religions. Benner (2002:35)

reminds us, though, “The goal of the Christian spiritual journey is not to become less human and more divine; it is to become more fully human. Salvation is not to rescue us from our humanity; it is to redeem our humanity.... Spirituality not grounded in humanness is no earthly good.... The authentic journey of Christian spirituality must always involve redemption of our humanity, never its denial, or attempted crucifixion.” John Calvin (1983:37-39) in the opening words of Book I of the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, writes these words: “Our wisdom, in so far as it ought to be deemed true and solid wisdom, consists almost entirely of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves.... For, in the first place, no man can survey himself without forthwith turning his thoughts towards the God in whom he lives and moves.... On the other hand, it is evident that man never attains to a true self-knowledge until he has previously contemplated the face of God, and come down after such contemplation to look into himself.... The knowledge of God and the knowledge of ourselves are bound together by a mutual tie.” In other words, we need both our humanness and our spiritual side if we are to experience what Benner calls “holiness and wholeness.”

Yes, contemplation mixed with acts of kindness—retreat mixed with advancing-- can keep us from becoming one-sided in our spirituality--stunted in our growth, or albino in color.

## Summary

We have looked at only six barriers to spiritual formation: worshipping the creation, being too busy, compartmentalizing our lives, living with unresolved sin, substituting ministry for soul caring, and retreating instead of advancing. There are other barriers that could be named, yet these will suffice to demonstrate that we can stunt our spiritual growth, that we can slow our spiritual formation. Being conformed to the image of Christ is not easy. It requires effort on our part. It requires diligence. It requires a right attitude. Let us, therefore, put forth the effort with diligence and fortitude. God will reward our efforts in ways we cannot even imagine!



Let me leave you with one concrete example of what can happen when individuals seek to know God's will and break down barriers. I know of a church that was on the point of dying. It had been around for over 40 years. This church had dwindled to about 20 congregants. A new pastor came. He was not a person who, by looking at him, you would say would turn the world upside down. He was not even thoroughly "schooled" and did not have the academic credentials that many pastors have. Yet he came to this dying church asking God to do a miracle. He prayed, he taught others to pray. With the few faithful who were left in that church, he asked God to make his will known in a powerful way. Even as they tried to discern that will, the pastor sent his members outside to walk the 40 acres and practice what he called "listening prayer." After about a half hour of silence and simply being open to God's voice, each one came back to the sanctuary with the same message from God. God had said two things clearly to each one:

1. "Stay firmly rooted in Me."
2. "I will take care of evangelism."

In six months' time, the church tripled in size as each member invited friends and many more people simply walked in off the streets, curious to see what was going on in this small church after so many years.

The pastor remarked to me about his own spiritual transformation, the transformation that had occurred in the life of the previous pastor who retired and stayed on to help, and the emerging leaders in this congregation. "We spend about half of our council meetings either discussing prayer or praying. We're just trying to keep up with what God is doing!" In a separate conversation, his wife said the same thing to me. "We're moving out of the way so that God can do his thing. It's truly a God-thing."

God can and does transform lives. As we become more and more conformed to Christ's image, not allowing obstacles to become barriers to our spiritual growth, we see God at work in marvelous ways. Don't

let one of these barriers prevent you from experiencing all that God has in store for you, His child! Don't let these barriers stand in the way of seeing God's Church extended in your community, in your state, in your nation, and around the world.

### **Questions**

1. Name one or two other barriers to spiritual formation that come to mind.
2. In what ways can Christians become too busy to practice self-care?
3. What is the proper place for "retreat" in the Christian's life?
4. Explain how it is possible to fall into the trap of pantheism.
5. Describe how these barriers can affect the healthy planting of a new church.

### **Action Points**

1. In your journal, comment on Ignatius' perspective of seeing and hearing God in all things. When have you sensed God's presence or existence as you go about your daily life?
2. Take time to get away for a half day of silence and solitude. Ask God to reveal any unresolved sins in your life that may be preventing you from being all that you can be in Christ.
3. Write down at least five ways in which you (or a new church) can be Christ's hands in a world of need.

# IV

## SINNERS

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### SAVED BY GRACE

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In this short chapter we will attempt to bring all the pieces together. Having gone through this journey together, it would be easy for us to feel that we cannot attain to this deep level of spirituality in our own lives, let alone help others to attain a higher degree of spiritual maturity. We look at those who appear to have attained this higher spiritual plane—people like Teresa of Avila, Thomas a Kempis—and we ask ourselves if we ever will. We know in our heart of hearts that we are sinners saved by grace, but nonetheless sinners. Lest you become discouraged from attempting to become more spiritually formed, let me remind you that spiritual formation is, indeed, a lifelong process. In a sense, we are lifelong learners on the road to greater spirituality. Even “saints” like those mentioned above continually confessed their imperfections before a perfect but loving God.

Isaiah, standing before the Holy God, admitted, “Woe to me!” I cried. ‘I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty’” (Is. 6:5).

Paul himself wrote, “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:12-14). Paul confesses, as must we, that we have not obtained this state of perfection that we hope for. Nevertheless, we keep on trying, we keep on pressing forward. We call this sanctification, knowing

full well that we will not be perfected until we reach heaven. That is when we obtain what we call glorification.

Knowing this, we must still persevere. Paul continues in this epistle, saying, “All of us who are mature should take such a view of things.... Only let us live up to what we have already attained” (vv. 15-16). In other words, let us keep being spiritually formed, growing spiritually, live holy lives to the extent that we can. Let us not hypocritically declare that “we have arrived” when we know we have not. But at the same time, let us not live in our sins but continually live as we ought, not looking back.



Paul’s words are an analogy of our running a race and reaching out toward the prize. It is a continuous race. We looked at 1 Corinthians 9:24 early on in this book. This and the following three verses describe exercising and running toward the prize, a prize each one of us needs to run towards. Hebrews 12:1 reads, “therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything

that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” Like the early Greeks and Romans who threw off their clothes and oiled their bodies, they raced with no hindrances, no encumbrances. The writer of this letter tells us that our sins are hindrances that entangle us, make us trip as we race toward the goal. He does not say we are without sins, but admits they are there but need to be put aside. Paul in his epistle to the Romans wrote, “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin *reign* in your mortal body so that you obey

its evil desires... Rather offer yourselves to God *as those who have been brought from death to life*; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For *sin shall not be your master*, because you are not under law, but under grace” (Ro. 6:11-14).

Our goal is to one day be able to say when we stand before God, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:7). The result will be what we read in verse 8: “Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award me on that day—and not only me, but also to all who have longed for his appearance.”

For some of you, the day of finishing the race may seem a long way off. You are young and the whole world appears to be in front of you. More than once, though, we have seen how life can come to a quick end—disease, an accident, any number of events that can end this physical life as we know it. And for those of us who are now in what some have called “the third age,” or “the golden years,” we recognize the finality of our earthly existence, of coming closer to the finish line. It give us pause and forces us to look at the things that truly matter.

When I was a young student in Bible college, I was introduced by my professor mentor, Rev. Schaal, to a Swiss physician/theologian, Paul Tournier. One of his books which I have not read yet is *Learning to Grow Old*. Maybe one of these days I will get ahold of a copy and read it. Yet, in an earlier book he also makes reference to this idea of growing old and finishing the race, and being forced to come face to face with the things that really matter. In *The Seasons of Life* (1965:55), Tournier writes “It is the true meaning of life that needs to be discovered...[W]ith the drawing near of death and the new scale of values that it gives, that true values are sifted out, the enduring ones... when life has become privation and earthly treasures have lost their glitter.”

## How do we get there?

This is an interesting question. Since we know we “have not yet attained” but know what awaits the faithful, how do we get there? How do we get from Point A to Point Z?

### *In community*

It is important to realize that this is something we do “in community,” as part of the Body of Christ. In one sense salvation is indeed an individual thing, but in another sense, once saved, we are incorporated into a body of believers to live out our faith before men. We live “in covenant” with God and with our fellow believers. We live under the covenant of grace and all the rights and privileges that come with it, and all of the obligations as well. We raise our children as covenant children. We teach them the ways of the Lord as did the ancient Hebrews. We recognize that we are sinners saved by grace, and in need of fellowship, accountability, confrontation, confession, and submission if we are to grow in our faith. It is nearly impossible, then, for us to be in this process of spiritual formation apart from other believers. This is why the writer to the Hebrews warns, “Let us not give up meeting together as some are in the habit of doing...” (Heb. 10:25). Why? “*but let us encourage one another*—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.” Likewise, the preceding verses: “Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider *how we may spur one another on* toward love and good deeds” (vv. 23-24, italics mine). This can only be done in community. Ephesians 4:1-16 is a wonderful passage to read regarding being in community. Each person has his or her place in the Body and should strive for unity of the body.

This is why church planting is so important. As we evangelize and people come to faith in Jesus, they need to be incorporated into a local church. To leave them stranded would be doing them great harm. The church is the place where new believers can be spiritually fed, encour-

aged, and grow to the point of service. What we want for ourselves—spiritual maturity—is what we should want for those with whom we have shared the Good News.

Anderson and Reese (1999:21) write, “We are persons, face to face, in community, not separate individuals; we are a people in community who need others to bring us to spiritual maturity. We discover our identity in the context of community. We learn best *together* with the help of other people.”

Likewise, Doug Pagitt (Reed, 2005:46), pastor of Solomon’s Porch in Minneapolis, writes, “... Christianity, while it’s extremely personal, is not individual. Christianity is about community, and so are the disciplines. We forget that the people who created the disciplines did so in community and practiced them in community.”

### *Confessing to one another*

In community we are called upon to confess our sins to each other. This is not a topic many of us like to hear. We may wear a button that says PBPGITWY (an acrostic for “Please Be Patient, God Isn’t Through With Me Yet”), but we don’t act like we really mean it. Saved by grace, we oftentimes become hypocrites by saying everything is fine when we know in the depths of our souls that we are still fighting the old nature (Ro. 7:14-19). Therefore, James tells us to be honest with each other about our moral failings, our sins. He writes, “Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed” (Jas. 5:16). The tense of the verb *confess* is one of continual action: “continue to confess your sins.” It’s not a one-time act on our part as sinning is not a one-time action on our part. Why confess it to another? “The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective” (the last part of verse 16). Bonhoeffer (1952:16) explains that “A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my

sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light” (p. 116). And John, writing to believers, wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:8-9).

### *Submitting to one another*

Besides confessing in community and living in community, we must also submit in community. James says, “Submit yourselves, then, to God” (Jas. 4:7). But we are also called on to submit to each other. Submission is an act of self-denial. We put others first. Jesus submitted to his Father’s will over his own desires (Mt. 26:39). Paul says of Jesus’ self-denial, “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor” (2 Cor. 8:9). “I am not seeking after my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved. Follow my example, as I follow the example [of self-denial] of Christ” (1 Cor. 10:33-11:1, [of self-denial] added).

Jesus called Peter to deny himself and to follow him (Jn. 21:19). Perhaps the greatest example of self-denial is found in Jesus’ words to his disciples about the need to be ready to give up everything for his sake. He said, “Anyone who does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his *life for my sake* will find it” (Mt. 10:38-39). Paul tells the Philippians, “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3-4). And to the Corinthians he writes, “Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others” (1 Cor. 10:24).

Submission as an act of putting ourselves under the authority of others, was a common practice of the early church. Paul in his personal remarks to the church in Corinth talked about submitting to those in



authority. He writes, "I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it" (1 Cor. 16:15-16). Paul even appointed elders in the local church who were to have spiritual authority over believers (1 Tim. 4:14; 5:17; Tit. 1:5).

MacDonald (1997:74) succinctly expresses this need of journeying together in our quest for greater spirituality. He writes, "No one can journey alone-- much less grow-- in the pursuit of spirituality. Everyone must be submitted to someone in a relationship where there is freedom to ask questions that penetrate to the soul and examine values, choices, motives, and affections."

Few would argue that God has used anyone as powerfully as He has Billy Graham. Now in his late 90s, this servant of God is waiting patiently for his "home-going." No one, not even the most cynical journalist, has ever written anything in the press to besmirch the name and reputation of this evangelist. He continues to be on America's list of the 10 Most Respected Individuals. Where others have failed and fallen, Billy Graham has continued to be a spiritual giant. When asked the secret of his humility and his untaintedness, he responded that he had a group of men who held him accountable. Any one of them could call him to task if he showed pride or the hint of a moral failure. Also, when travelling across the U.S., he usually had a staff person staying with him. This was his way of submitting to his closest friends and colleagues for the sake of the gospel.

### *With intentionality*

Spiritual purity, spiritual formation, do not occur without a conscious effort on our part. In cooperation with the Holy Spirit, we need to intentionally seek to live as a follower of Christ, practicing the spiritual disciplines, testifying the Good News to those with whom we come in contact, and living together in community (the church) as sinners saved by grace.

This intentionality goes beyond our efforts to be personally spiritually-formed to desiring to help others to attain this same level of formation. Therefore, as church planters, desire not only to be a reflection of Christ's image in yourself, but desire to see more Christ image-bearers multiplied through the planting of new churches. If we truly live, letting our light shine, like moths attracted to the light, those on a spiritual journey will naturally be attracted to us and desire to have what we have.

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## CONCLUSION

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We have taken a journey together, learning what spiritual formation is all about. We have seen that a goal for us is to start well in the Christian faith. This we do as we are disciplined in the basics of the Christian faith. Spiritual formation involves moving into the disciplines—fasting, prayer, meditation, silence and solitude, among others. It involves living out the spiritual gifts which are manifestations of our becoming formed. James 4:8 gives us the promise “Draw near to God and he will draw near to you.” For many, spiritual formation continues as we are mentored by others. Our goal, then, is to finish well in Christ. It is my prayer that you have learned, as I have, how to grow deeper in Christ. May you begin to put the spiritual disciplines into practice. May you live your life in community with other believers, confessing to one another, submitting to one another. May new churches be birthed through your efforts and the efforts of those whom you reach with the gospel, resulting in transformation.

Early on in our study we asked what is our purpose on earth? We answered it by turning to the Westminster Shorter Catechism, saying “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” As we are spiritually formed, may we together truly glorify Him and enjoy Him forever. Remember the challenge of Madame Guyon at the beginning of this book: “Press on, press on, press on to know God!”

*Soli Deo Gloria*

## Multiplication Network Ministries

# 5 MODELS OF SANCTIFICATION

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## APPENDIX A

John Wagenveld

### Introduction

The word “**holy**” or the phrase “**to sanctify**” means to set apart or consecrate. In the Bible it usually means to separate *from* sin or the profane and to separate *for* service to and a relationship with God. Most ecclesiastical traditions would agree with these statements. However, the way this key biblical concept has been fleshed out varies greatly. In the following paper I will summarize the five main models approached in the Models of Sanctification class: Wesleyan, Reformed, Pentecostal, Keswick and Contemplative. I will organize the paper by first providing a brief description of the model and then outlining the biblical basis upon which it stands.

### WESLEYAN MODEL

#### Description of the Model

The Wesleyan Model is called thus thanks to the influence of John Wesley and the Methodist movement in England and America. This model was greatly influenced by the pietistic and holiness movement of the eighteenth century. Wesleyans called Christians to holiness then and still now so as to “become in reality what already is ours in Christ through the new birth” (Alexander, p. 96). It is characterized by the striving for growth in grace in an ethical faith that emphasizes relationship, rather than the definitions of doctrine or propositional truth. The most distinguishing mark of this perspective, and also the most controversial, is the belief that one can achieve what Wesley called “Christian perfection”, also known as “entire sanctification.” While the process of

sanctification begins at the moment of conversion and regeneration, entire sanctification is a particular experience of achieving perfect love for God and a complete surrender to his Word and will. It is recognized that this is only possible because of God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit working in the life of the Christian. Entire sanctification and Christian perfection is distinguished from absolute perfection (also termed Adamic or angelic perfection). This distinction has to do with the definition of holiness presented by the Wesleyan movement where one voluntarily obeys the known will of God in the ethical dimension of sanctification. It is admitted that involuntary mistakes can still occur, that one can sin unaware of the sin, or that one cannot reach the perfection of having the fullness of Christ or participation in the divine nature in this life. The gift of "perfect love", however, is achievable in this life and must be sought after by every serious disciple of Jesus. This achievement was termed "a second blessing" or a "second work of grace" and is the mark of having "union with Christ" and occurs at a specific crisis moment in a person's life. The historical event of Pentecost must also become personalized in one's own history so as to have fullness of the Spirit. Fletcher, who systematized Wesleyan theology, pointed to stages in spiritual maturity and compared it to the natural stages of growth in physical life as something to be expected. The highest stage is entire sanctification.

Wesley fuses some Reformation principles of justification by faith with some Arminian concepts of human freedom. As Dieter says, Christians "would never be free from the possibility of deliberate, willful sinning in this life. They could, however, be delivered from the necessity of voluntary transgressions by living in moment-by-moment obedience to God's will (Gundry, p.14)." It is this belief in the attainment of a relationship of divine love that "marks the dividing line of commitment for those who seek to be Wesleyan (p.21)." Wesleyans accept the doctrines of justification and adoption (objective salvation/imputed righteousness), but emphasize regeneration and sanctification (subjective salvation/imparted righteousness).

## **Biblical Basis for the Model**

According to Wesley there is biblical support for this model in both the Old and New Testament, but very particularly in the Pauline epistles. The call to holiness of Wesleyans rests on many of the same Scriptures that will be presented by other perspectives, but the concept of “entire sanctification” finds specific support in passages like 1 Thessalonians 5:23, “and the very God of peace sanctify you *entirely*. And I pray God your *entire* body and soul and spirit be preserved blameless.” In Genesis 17:1 it says “walk before me, and be thou perfect”. Wesleyans point out the intention of the heart and the condition of the relationship, not to faultless perfection. They also look to Ephesians 4:11-13 where “attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ” seems to be made possible. Colossians 1:28 encourages us “to present everyone perfect in Christ.” John 8: 34-36 “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin...So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” These and many others texts, such as Romans 8, are used widely in Wesleyan literature on the topic.

## **REFORMED MODEL**

### **Description of the Model**

The Reformed perspective takes its name from the Reformation of the sixteenth century and the work and writings of the Reformers, namely Martin Luther and John Calvin. Anthony Hoekema defines sanctification as “the work of God by which He makes us holy.... that gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, involving our responsible participation, by which He delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to Him (Gundry, p. 61).” Ferguson says, “Sanctification is therefore the consistent practical outworking of what it means to belong to the new creation in Christ (Alexander, p. 60).”

The Reformed model defines sin in two categories: the condition of sin in a fallen world and the particular sins that are committed because of that condition. Hoekema refers to this in terms of a state of corruption and the products of corruption. Christ's atoning work on the cross justifies us by faith and declares us saints or holy (holiness is one of the attributes of the Church) before the Father. The process of sanctification is rooted in justification, but includes a life long process of becoming more like Christ, powered by the Holy Spirit, overcoming sin and being increasingly dedicated to live lives that are pleasing to God. So it is a historical and eschatological truth that we already are holy because of Christ's work. But we also have a present responsibility to make that claim real in our daily lives. God's *gift* is also our *task*.

Reformed theologians speak of positional sanctification ("definitive sanctification" in Hoekema's nomenclature) and progressive sanctification. The first one, according to John Murray, indicates that we have been placed into a new relationship with Christ that can never be undone. He says: "This means that there is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provisions of grace (Gundry, p.73)." This happened objectively with Christ's atonement on the cross, but subjectively when by faith we accepted Christ as Lord and Savior. Hoekema says that, "to do full justice to biblical teaching, therefore, we must stress both aspects.... the past historical and the present experiential."

The second one, progressive sanctification, is a necessity because there still is sin in the world and in our lives. Biblically and experientially we will continue to struggle with sin and therefore sanctification will be a life long process. The main Reformed thrust is that of constant growth and maturity in Christ, without any emphasis on a second blessing, a special gift or even the possibility of achieving perfection in this lifetime. Resting assured in the positional sanctification the believer strives continually to mature in Christ and to make experiential that which is already true in a cosmic sense. Ferguson writes: "Rather



than view Christians first and foremost in the microcosmic context of their own progress, the Reformed doctrine first of all sets them in the macrocosm of God's activity in redemptive history (Alexander, p. 59).” Hoekema says that we are “genuinely new, though not yet totally new (Gundry, p.74).”

Sanctification, in Reformed understanding, is to live lives that are patterned after Christ. Sanctification is part of the process that counters the effects of the Fall, so as to restore the image of Christ in us, to demonstrate union with Christ, and develop the mind of Christ. Ferguson reminds us that Christ himself is our sanctification and that through union with Him sanctification is also accomplished in us (Alexander, p. 48).

### **Biblical Basis for the Model**

The two elements of sanctification, first that we are declared holy by God when the triune God saves us and second, that this begins a process of maturity is clearly seen in Philippians 2:12-13: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed...continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.” Hoekema interprets this well, saying: “Paul is asking his readers to continue to “work out” what God in his grace has “worked in.” There is a dynamic tension between these two realities. 1 Corinthians 1:2 and 1 Corinthians 6:11 are also used to explain that “those sanctified in Christ Jesus” must also make this verb a continuing process. 1 Kings 8:46, Psalm 19:12 and Proverbs 20:9 are some examples of biblical passages which show that sin is still present and therefore progressive sanctification is still necessary.

## PENTECOSTAL MODEL

### Description of the Model

Stanley Horton quotes Myer Pearlman with the following definition for sanctification:

“(1) Separation from sin and the world and (2) dedication, or consecration, to the fellowship and service of God through Christ.... while the primary meaning of holy is that of separation unto service, the idea of purification is also involved.” In many ways the Pentecostal views of sanctification are similar to the previously mentioned perspectives. The main distinctive is that the Pentecostal movement, as expressed in the groups formed after the Azusa Street Mission experiences, emphasizes the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Horton writes: “The early Pentecostals continued to teach sanctification as a second definite work of grace, believing that the baptism in the Holy Spirit represented a third experience (Gundry, p. 107).” Because of the Wesleyan influence (described above) on the holiness movements, the initial Pentecostal groups taught that God would do a second definite work of grace that cleansed from sin in a way that had not happened at conversion and was therefore necessary. This opened up the possibility of now being filled with the Holy Spirit. The order would look like this:

Conversion  
Sanctification crisis experience  
Filling of the Holy Spirit

The teachings of William Durham brought a sharp division in the Pentecostal world that continues to this day. The holiness Pentecostals teach the need of a crisis experience of sanctification as a prerequisite to Holy Spirit baptism. Durham’s followers, Pentecostals out of a baptistic or Reformed circle, however, focus more on positional sanctification in the finished work of Calvary and insist that after conversion maturity is a life long process. Conversion is the only prerequisite for the

Baptism in the Holy Spirit, which is a posterior event. At conversion Christ has fulfilled his work of sanctification at the same time as the task of growing in grace begins. The order would look like this:

Conversion/Sanctification Process  
Filling of the Holy Spirit

Pearlman, an Assemblies of God writer, argues that many who might feel that they go through a second definite work in their lives might simply be awakening to the fact that they already are sanctified in Christ (Gundry, p.111).

What both groups hold in common is the requirement of speaking in tongues at the moment of receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. Some require that this continue throughout one's lifetime and for some it is only a required initial blessing that does not endure in everyone. Spittler indicates: "what decisively marked off the Pentecostals from the holiness bodies was the acceptance of speaking in tongues, as a legitimate, and even necessary, variety of Christian experience (Alexander, p.135)." He goes on to define the spiritual person as someone who is "open to the things of the Spirit, fully consecrated to God, endowed perhaps with one or two spiritual gifts besides speaking in tongues (which would be assumed)-perhaps the gifts of healing, knowledge, discernment or wisdom (Alexander, p. 140)." Personal experience is of the highest possible value in the Pentecostal spiritual pilgrimage. Those things that are experienced by the believer first hand define the process of sanctification. Most Pentecostals agree that ultimate perfection cannot be achieved in this life. Nevertheless, the pursuit of holiness must be the hallmark of the serious disciple of Jesus and this is one of the main reasons God empowered us with the Holy Spirit.

### **Biblical Basis for the Model**

Acts 2:4 and the book of Acts in general is a key biblical support that is given for the Pentecostal experience and for the argument that the

baptism of the Holy Spirit can come as a posterior event to the conversion experience. The ninth point of the Statement of Fundamental Truths of the Assemblies of God says: "The Scriptures teach a life of holiness without which no man shall see the Lord. By the power of the Holy Ghost we are able to obey the command, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Entire sanctification is the will of God for all believers, and should be earnestly pursued by walking in obedience to God's Word (Gundry, p.110)." It then cites the following texts: Hebrews 12:14, 1 Peter 1:15-16, 1 Thess. 5:23,24 and 1 John 2:6. Isaiah 6 , 1 Cor 1:2; 6:11, 2 Peter 3:18 are other passages that are often quoted by Pentecostals.

## **KESWICK MODEL**

### **Description of the Model**

J. Robertson McQuilkin introduces the Keswick Model of sanctification by saying:

"Much of the controversy over sanctification, or how to live successfully a normal Christian life, stems from stress on God's part to the neglect of human responsibility or from stress on human responsibility to the neglect of divine initiative. The so-called Keswick approach, however, seeks to provide a mediating and biblically balanced solution to the problem of subnormal Christian experience."

S. Barabas, in the Evangelical Dictionary of Theology (edited by Elwell, p. 604), indicates that the Keswick model gets its name from the Keswick Convention, which takes place annually in England. It began in 1875 and has always had the purpose of helping Christians deepen and strengthen their spiritual life. The progressive order of the 5-day convention is as follows:

Monday:

focus on the disabling spiritual effects of sin in the life of the believer

Tuesday:

focus on the provision of God to deal with sin by way of the cross

Wednesday:

focus on the human response by way of consecration to the Lord

Thursday:

focus on the Spirit-filled life

Friday:

focus on serving the world in ministry and missionary service

McQuilkin shows that the Keswick perspective has much in common with the other views presented, but is distinct in that it does not teach human perfectibility in this lifetime, but does teach “the possibility of consistent success in resisting the temptation to violate deliberately the known will of God (Gundry, p. 155).” An area of contention is that this view sounds like Wesley’s perfectionism to some. Even though they do not have a specific “written doctrine” related to this matter, the teaching has been clear: one is able not to sin in known infractions of God’s law, but is not able to eradicate the natural proclivity to sin, which remains in this lifetime. Barabas, a student of the movement, has written: “Keswick does not teach the possibility of the eradication of the sin nature or the attainability of sinlessness in this life (Elwell, p. 604).”

While there are no uniform answers, the general Keswick teaching also emphasizes that the old nature, meaning the sinful flesh, remains in the person, who can now struggle victoriously against sin by the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit.

McQuilkin proposes three stages in the process of sanctification:

1. **Positional Sanctification:** First a person is forgiven, justified and regenerated by God. He is set apart from sin and consecrated to God.
2. **Experiential Sanctification:** A person is now able to walk in such a way as to complete or perfect the measure of holiness he has.
3. **Permanent Sanctification:** This is also known as “glorification.” Total transformation takes place into the likeness of Christ.

The focus of the process of sanctification in this perspective focuses on what can be done in the second stage to increase Christ-likeness, union with God, and separation from sinfulness. The cause of a sub-normal Christian experience can be identified in unbelief, ignorance, disobedience (which can be active or what McQuilkin terms “passive drift”) or lack of trust. To counteract this type of experience, the author recommends focusing on the relationship with Christ and becoming filled with the Holy Spirit. It is this relationship that should be grasped by mind, heart and will. The authentic Christian will surrender to the will of God for their lives. The means of grace that are available to the growing Christian are prayer, scripture, the church and suffering.

### **Biblical Basis for the Model**

Romans 6 is hailed as the Magna Carta of the Soul and the Emancipation Proclamation of the Christian believer in Gundry’s book (p. 155). This chapter is pivotal because it describes the new creation in Christ as “dead to sin” and now “alive in Christ.”

Here Paul calls all believers away from sin and explains the relationship of sin and grace and how the Christian is now a slave to righteousness. For lack of space we will cite only these other texts used: Phil. 1:6, John 10:28-29 and Romans 8: 31-39.

## CONTEMPLATIVE OR MYSTICAL MODEL

### Description of the Model

The name *contemplative* and *mystical* give away the fact that this perspective on spirituality takes a disciple into the interior life, as the specific place where growth and maturity with God happens. Glenn Hinson describes a “secret communion” that is carried out between God and the disciple that opens himself up to the presence of God. He continues with a brief definition of what the contemplative tradition intends to do: “Our task is to open ourselves to God’s gracious energies (Alexander, p. 174).” The chief end of the contemplative spirituality is to have union with God and purity of heart. To attain this he prescribes that we must “surrender, abandon ourselves, submit, yield, humble ourselves, give ourselves over to God (Alexander, p. 177).” Hinson, in his response to the Pentecostal Perspective, admits that the Contemplative view has much in common with the Pentecostal emphasis on personal experience. In fact, he admits: “both emphasize personal experience more than theological precision (Alexander, p. 168).” In this respect, it is fair to say that the mystic tradition is heavily subjective and focuses more on arriving to God through contemplation than through the atonement and Christ’s work of salvation on the cross. Rather than emphasizing the God who reveals himself to man, it is man who, through spiritual exercises and contemplation disciplines finds God.

In *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, Harvey Egan defines contemplation as a way of life where the seeker is becoming fully authentic by uniting with God by loving him perfectly. This is done by renouncing to self and practicing spiritual disciplines of contemplation, which ultimately are works of grace in a person’s life. He describes four stages:

1. **The purgative stage:** the believer is purged of self-love and sensuality
2. **The illuminative stage:** the believer discovers intimacy with God
3. **The mystical death stage:** one goes through the dark night of the soul
4. **The unitive life stage:** the mystic becomes God by participation in His life

Once the unitive life stage is attained, a person will seek to selflessly focus moment by moment on God through contemplation of God and by serving others in ministry to the world. Egan makes quite a claim by stating, “mystics are the most impressive servants of humanity the world has ever seen (Egan, p. xix).” The idea is that the perfect loving of God will bring transformative power to the mystic who can now serve others. Bernard of Clairvaux pointed out four stages in the love of God (Alexander, p. 180):

1. love of self for self’s sake
2. love of God for self’s sake
3. love of God for God’s sake
4. love of self for God’s sake

At the unitive stage self love would only be the deep love of God since the mystic has become “God by participation,” the highest possible point in the spiritual growth of the contemplative. It is within human nature itself to talk about God’s self -communication. Egan argues that we have a spark of the divine within us because we were created this way. This spark is used by God to bring us closer to him:

“The genuine mystic is purified and illuminated by, and eventually united to, a personal God. From this loving union flows a loving knowledge, a “secret wisdom” that



short-circuits the memory and stupefies the intellect because it surpasses abstract, conceptual knowledge. Although we can dispose ourselves to receive it, human effort alone cannot bring it about because it is strictly God's gift (Egan, p. xxiii)."

### **Biblical Basis for the Model**

The language that was evident, particularly in the readings from the *Anthology of Christian Mysticism*, is highly metaphorical. From the Church Fathers on we notice that different texts of Scripture are used, often in allegorical ways. A book that surfaced again and again in the readings was the Song of Songs. Mystics find ample support for their perspective of knowing God by loving Him (and sometimes by unknowing) in this book. Other passages that are often used include: Psalm 19, Psalm 139, Mt. 5:3, Mk. 8:34, 1 Peter 5:6, and Phil. 2:5. Another key text that would represent this perspective well is Acts 17:28 "In him we live and move and have our being." (a quotation from Epimenides)



# DISCIPLING BMBs FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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## APPENDIX B

### A CALL TO DISCIPLING CONVERTS FROM ISLAM

#### **Introduction**

Islam over the past 20 years has moved from Muslim-dominated countries to countries where Islam was unheard of. Due to business, wars and tourism, Muslims have emigrated in large numbers to every major country in Western Europe, Scandinavia, as well as to North, Central, and South America. Mosques have begun dotting the horizon of many non-Muslim-dominated cities. Madrassas, or Islamic schools, as well as Islamic centers have begun appearing in places like Grand Rapids, Michigan; Caracas, Venezuela; Quito, Ecuador; and Oslo, Norway.

Church planters no longer need to travel to countries like Mauritania, Egypt or Niger to evangelize and disciple Muslims. The world of Islam has come to their door step, wherever that door step is.

With this new opportunity comes the need to understand discipleship and spiritual formation to a religious group previously closed to the gospel. In many cases traditional forms of evangelism have not worked. Discipleship takes on a special bent due to the nature of Islamic religiosity.

## **The Status Quo of Believers of Muslim Background<sup>1</sup>**

Much evangelism of the past was conducted with the sole purpose of “getting someone into heaven.” Little emphasis was placed on the discipling of the new believer. Perhaps it was assumed that the spiritual walk was something that would be “caught” by the believer. In some cases, the lack of discipling, though, is the result of the church planter himself never having been properly disciplined. As I have travelled extensively throughout Latin America and Africa, I have heard more than one pastor bemoan the fact that he was never disciplined well (if at all!), or that he was never mentored as an emerging leader. It is difficult, then, to inculcate a practice that you yourself have never undergone.

In other cases, the church planter has used methods that do not speak to the Muslim or has promoted a process that, on its own, does not lead the Muslim convert into spiritual maturity.

We recognize that there has been great attrition as “believers” revert to former religious practices or become secularists, rejecting all forms of spirituality and religiosity. It has been said in certain consultations dealing with Muslim conversion that the percentage of recidivism is as high as 85%. That is a statistic that needs to be changed! What causes this? The answers given: 1) Lack of proper discipling that leads to a worldview change which leads to spiritual maturity, 2) not counting the cost of converting from Islam—leaving all behind—and coming to a personal relationship with Jesus, or 3) lack of immediate incorporation into a body of believers. (More on this later).

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<sup>1</sup> We refer to Muslim converts as Believers of Muslim Background (BMBs). Also widely used is the term Muslim Background Believers (MBBs). We have opted for the first term since the emphasis is on being a believer and not emphasizing one’s former “Muslim-ness.” I credit this to a BMB whom I have known for more than 25 years, who has a major impact on the lives of former Muslims and who is still active in sharing the Good News of Jesus the Messiah with Muslims worldwide. At the same time, Christians in a Muslim-dominated world are referred to as Believers of Christian Background (BCBs).

Little in his book, *Effective Discipling of Muslim Communities* (2015)<sup>2</sup>, points out that a convert from Islam is having a worldview transformation. Under Islam, the Muslim only needs to conform to a set of religious practices and to guard himself from bringing shame on his community and family (137). There is no heart transformation in Islam nor is God viewed as a God of love. For true transformation to occur, the Holy Spirit needs to work in the new believer—as he does in all believers—to give up the old life in favor of the new and all it implies. This can be very difficult. In fact, Little points out, “[d]iscipling a BMB is often like teaching someone to swim in the ocean in the middle of a fierce storm” (*Ibid.*, 128).

### **Obstacles Facing BMBs as they come to Faith**

The spiritual formation of a BMB is difficult from the get-go. It does not come easy. Muller (2013)<sup>3</sup> speaks about the transformation that needs to occur in the life of a BMB.

He points out that initially, though, the Muslim convert to Jesus is a person with two identities: a Muslim face and a Christian face (81-82). The BMB lives a schizophrenic life until he can come to grips with his new-found faith, can reconcile it with his former faith and see the “old man” transformed into a “new man” (Romans 6:6-14, cf. Colossians 3:9-10.) This is probably the first obstacle that a BMB must overcome, or at least begin to deal with, as he takes his first baby steps as a follower of Jesus.

Atallah (2017: 180)<sup>4</sup> shares an interesting story about the transformation that needs to occur. It doesn’t happen overnight. In fact, as the following citation shows, it can take years to undo old habits even as one declares a new identity.

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2 Little, Don, (2015). *Effective Discipling in Muslim Communities*. Downers Grove: IVP Academic.

3 Muller, Roland, (2013). *The Messenger, The Message, the Community: Three Critical Issues for the Cross-Cultural Church Planter*. Third Edition. Surrey, British Columbia: CanBooks.

4 Atallah, Abu and Kent Van Til, (2017). *From Cairo to Christ*. Downers Grove: IVP Books.

The first time I went back to a Muslim country after living in the United States, I spent a night in a hotel. At five in the morning I heard the clear call of the muezzin.... I rose and knelt by the side of my bed. Then it occurred to me—you're no longer a Muslim, you haven't been for over twenty years, and you don't need to pray to the Muslim's Allah. But the urge was powerful. I had been accustomed to performing this ritual throughout my entire childhood and young adulthood. Islam soaks into the fabric of every Arab's identity, and its tint remains even years after a person has converted.

Little (180) lists 18 glaring obstacles Muslim converts may face. 14 deal with Islam and 4 deal with Christianity. We will cover some of these in this article.

### **The Christian community**

One would expect that a Christian community of faith would welcome a new believer with open arms, such as we read in Scripture regarding the angels of heaven (Luke 15:7, 10). Unfortunately, such is not usually the case. In his study, Little notes a lack of trust by the faith community. There is usually suspicion on the part of the church. One asks, "Is this believer a 'plant' disguised as a new believer?" In conversations over the years with BMBs and BCBs in Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon (and at a major annual gathering at an undisclosed location), time and again the lack of trust by the Christian church in Muslim-dominated countries came to the top of the list of obstacles faced by Muslim converts. Second to this is fear. "Will our church (a BCB congregation) come under persecution if we receive a BMB into our community of faith?" Oftentimes, guards are posted at the entrance of Christian fellowships for the express purpose of checking the IDs of visitors. If their ID shows them to be Muslim (if even a former Muslim), they are often turned away to prevent problems with the local authorities. This makes the discipling of a BMB very difficult if the only source for discipleship is to come from reluctant Christians.

Likewise, the Muslim is used to performing deeds in order to merit Allah's favor when death comes. His life is full of rituals. His offered prayers, his alms-giving, his pilgrimage to Mecca, are oftentimes performed in order to "accumulate points" rather than being due to a genuine spirituality. (NOTE: Sufis may be an exception.) In contrast to this deed-doing, the BMB learns that the Christian life is a life in response to God's love. We pray, we give our tithes and offerings, we serve others, out of gratitude to God for our new-found faith in Jesus. This requires a mindset change, an attitude change in how we do these things. There is a freedom spoken of in Galatians which is oftentimes difficult for a new believer coming from a very tightly-controlled religion to grasp, a freedom that permits the new believer to express his faith and to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:24).

### **Islamic Obstacles to Growth**

There are also obstacles inherent within Islam itself which make conversion and discipling difficult.

According to Little, the number one obstacle is, understandably, *opposition from family*. This opposition can be anything from low pressure to cutting one off from the family, to actual torture and persecution. Especially if one is single, the BMB is totally dependent on his family. This kind of pressure to remain or return to the faith can be very tempting.

Likewise, *the community, once it gets word of the conversion of the BMB*, may also exert pressure. This may even result in open hostility or expulsion from the community. I know of cases where new believers were forced to flee their villages and start a new life in a place where they were not known. This might be in their own country or even in another country. A good friend of mine talks about his having to flee from his family and village once they became aware of his faith. Decades later, he can visit his family at night. His family even visits him in the States, but they remain Muslim. The social pressure exerted on

a new believer makes his discipling difficult, especially if he had not counted the cost before making his decision to follow and openly declare his faith in Jesus.

Another friend, a key evangelical leader in West Africa writes<sup>5</sup>:

When I accepted Christ, I was alienated by my family and friends. As is the case with many Muslims who convert to Christianity, many of my familial ties were severed. My wife left me, taking our two children with her. This painful experience has given me empathy for the sacrifice Muslims make to choose to follow Christ.

He may be a Christian in his heart, but, as Jonathan Andrews (2016)<sup>6</sup> points out, *his identity card may still say he is a Muslim*. This makes him an apostate, open to being persecuted or killed by Islamists who follow the Qur'an to the letter. Also, if he is married to a Muslim, his spouse can divorce him and the children remain Muslim even with his protestations. If he is unmarried, he has the difficulty of finding a believing spouse. If he does and marries and has children, there exists the fear that the children will be given a Muslim identity card.

Not knowing other believers, he finds it difficult to cope with such issues and *oftentimes considers himself the only Muslim who has ever converted*. He may even feel he is insane, or may even have thoughts of suicide. The sense of "aloneness" cannot be underestimated when one walks away (or is pushed away) from all you know: family, community, rituals, etc.

Atallah (2017:40, 41) writes:

*If I were to become a Christian, it would mean not only changing my*

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5 June 2017, from an MNM flyer, name withheld for security reasons.

6 Andrews, Jonathan, (2016). *Identity crisis: religious registration in the Middle East*. UK: Gilead Books Publishing.



*religion but changing my whole identity and bringing shame upon my family. My whole family is Muslim, and my society and culture was Muslim. My religion was not an afterthought about what life after death might be like, but a holistic understanding of what life is now. The air I breathed was Islamic. Changing from Islam to Christianity would mess up my life forever.... How could I leave country, family, and religion behind? It was as if I would no longer exist. Becoming a Christian would be truly crazy.*

Hiebert considers that 80-85% of Muslims are practicing folk Islam. This means that a Muslim's life is surrounded by evil spirits (*jinni*, A.K.A. *genies*,) evil eye, demonic forces, hatred, fear, deception, misogyny, and lust among other manifestations. *A Muslim who comes to faith needs to deal with these demonic issues in their spiritual formation if they are to live a Spirit-filled, joyful life.* These obstacles are like a tall wall that needs to be scaled in order to liberate the BMB from the past.

*Many BMBs have an integrity problem.* Due to the culture of Islam, there is no shame in deceiving others, cheating them, robbing from them, as long as you are not found out. They need to understand that God is a holy God who requires his people to live in integrity.

In the discipling of a Muslim, *he needs to overcome the obstacle of thinking of God is unreachable, unknowable.* Christian literature is replete with books on knowing God, but you will not find such literature in Muslim countries. Allah is unknowable. Allah does not relate to humans. He simply demands submission, obedience, to the rules established in the Qur'an and in other Islamic writings. In Christianity, we have a God who has revealed himself in Scriptures and even in his Son, the Word incarnate and through illumination by the Holy Spirit. God can be known. God can be reached. He is a God who "hears the cries of his people." (Exodus 2:24-25). It takes time for a BMB to understand this God who is radically different from Allah of Islam.

Faced with so many obstacles, the BMB *needs someone who is willing to come alongside* him and to help him make the transition from a Muslim face to a Christian face. In “Understanding Muslims,” (2005: No page number)<sup>7</sup> a group of practitioners mentioned the dire need of care giving to the Muslim convert. They write, “Often local *churches can be unaware* of the intensity of the issues facing new believers from Muslim backgrounds and they may reject new believers out of their lack of understanding, adding to the sense of isolation which they may already feel.

“*It is a special calling to care for new believers* from a Muslim background.... Whole congregations also need to embrace this calling whenever Muslims respond to the gospel and come to among them [sic] seeking a spiritual family to belong to. The risk that local churches are not places of safety, love and nurture for new believers is all too real.”

This is a crucial challenge since, as soon as possible, the BMB *needs to replace his former community of faith* with a new a community of faith to help replace what he has lost, or senses that he has lost.

## **Discipling of a Believer of Muslim Background**

So what does the discipling of a Believer of Muslim Background need to look like? There have been many books written on discipleship. Some have put heavy emphasis on KNOWLEDGE. The premise is that a new believer needs to know certain doctrines in order to be a follower of Jesus (orthodoxy). Others put heavy emphasis on the practice of religion, the spiritual disciplines, for example (orthopraxis). To be biblical, discipleship needs to include both. There are certain truths we need to accept if we would be called Christians, but there are also practices that demonstrate our spiritual transformation and exhibit a

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7 Claydon, David, ed. (2005). “Understanding Muslims,” Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 49.

spiritual walk with God. I will not attempt to deal with that here as this has been amply covered in the rest of this book. For a Muslim who becomes a follower of Christ, we certainly need to see a combination of the two sides of discipleship perhaps in an even greater way than we see in other new believers.

According to Little, BMBs need to:

1. Develop a strong personal relationship with God
2. Learn how to pray and spend significant time in the Word of God
3. Share their new-found faith early and often
4. Develop the spiritual gift of serving others
5. Receive Scriptural teaching that renews their minds

All of this is necessary, according to Little, so that they are prepared to endure whatever hardship or persecution will come their way. They will be equipped to endure as they fully recognize and internalize the truth that God is a loving God who cares for them and walks with them even through the hard moments that confront them as followers of Jesus in an environment which is hostile to such conversion.

## **The Need for Corporate Discipleship**

In this book we have dealt with the areas of spiritual disciplines and the need to be spiritually transformed. Reading the Bible, praying to God, having journeys of solitude and silence, etc. help us in our spiritual formation. At the same time, the new believer recognizes that, although he has a vertical relationship with the Father, he also recognizes that the Father has other children, other sons and daughters. For this reason, as we have already stated, the new believer needs to be incorporated into a worshiping body of believers, a community of faith, the horizontal relationship which helps cement a new believer in his new-found faith. Whether it is into a group of BMBs or into an existing church made up predominantly of BCBs, quickly the new follower must find a place where he can be loved on, cared for, admonished, instructed; a place where his spiritual gifts can be developed and used.

Therefore, as a church planter works with a new believer, he needs to begin demonstrating the value of being part of a new community, a new *umma*. In the old community one only needed to practice certain rituals (5 tenets of Islam) and not bring shame on the community; in the new community, one learns to serve others and learns to be served. The “one anothers” of the New Testament epistles come into play. They demonstrate that we are not on this spiritual journey alone. Like several logs placed in a fire pit, we burn brightly and long. Separate the logs, and it doesn’t take much time for the fire to go out and for the embers to get cold. We need each other, and all the more if we are BMBs who have left everything familiar behind.

The literature on BMB discipling points out the need to accompany the new believer daily. It becomes an intensive, proactive form of discipleship that few disciplers are willing to do. It is life engaging life. If one is committed to evangelizing Muslims, then he must also be *committed* to a long-term relationship, *modeling* for the BMB what a Christian is and does, and *answering* his many questions.

Without this community of faith, many new followers lose their zeal for Christ, question their conversion, or suffer emotional trauma. Without this community of faith, the new believer is awash on the sea with no anchor, no lighthouse, no northern star.

As we have already stated, all of these doubts and lack of a caring Christian community contribute to the high recidivism that occurs. Muller points out:

The Eastern model of community is quite different from the Western concept of community. For instance, when a young man desires to find work, he turns to his extended family/community, and expects to find work within that community, if at all possible. He will initially look to his uncles and to distant relatives to see who might employ him in one of the family businesses. In his mind, em-

ployment within the tribal community is best, for he can participate in the building of this community, as well as gaining a salary (2013:209).

When there is no community, no immediate family because of being cut off, the new believer is at a loss of where to turn for help for the basic necessities of life. This is very problematic, very traumatic for the person leaving Islam. There is therefore an urgent need for someone to be able to speak into the life of a new BMB, of helping him to take those first steps and to help him understand that there are those, even whole “clouds of witnesses” (Hebrews 12:1) that have taken that step before them. He needs to know that there are those ready to embrace him and walk alongside him for weeks, months, even years as he learns what it means to be a follower of Jesus.

### **Discipleship content**

We have already touched on the need for the new BMB to learn how to pray meaningfully and not by rote. We have discussed the need to read the Bible to understand who God is and the great love he has for his people and not simply memorize the Scripture in order to gain favor.

The BMB needs to stay close to other believers (either BMBs or BCBs) in order to ward off depression, a sense of failure, and in order to have his questions answered.

As we said before, a combination of biblical truths and spiritual disciplines will help to spiritually form the new believer. Studies dealing with one’s character, how to relate to spouse, to children would also be very helpful. There is so much in Islam that mitigates against a healthy marriage or a healthy family. These issues need to be dealt with, using Scripture that shows what positive relationships can be like.

Bible studies appropriate for a person coming out of Islam would serve well. For example, there is a need for a study of Bible passages that speak of:

1. God's Personhood, his knowability,
2. Jesus's power and Sonship,
3. the role of the Holy Spirit in our everyday lives,
4. the high cost of following Jesus,
5. how we relate to other believers, non-believers, and to spouse and children.

These topics would help pave the way for transition from a new babe in Christ to a mature follower of Jesus.

MNM has developed a series of Bible studies for just such an occasion (These can be downloaded free from [www.multiplicationnetwork.org](http://www.multiplicationnetwork.org)). Others have also developed biblically-based studies, even lessons that walk a person from Genesis through Revelation so that a person can have a full understanding of God and his plan to redeem and restore a fallen people.

## **Conclusion**

This appendix is just the tip of the iceberg regarding the discipling and spiritual formation of a BMB. Many excellent resources are available to help the church planter who wishes to work with Muslims. The caveat is that the planter must recognize that this will be a long-term relationship. So much needs to be “unlearned and unpractised.” This is not an overnight process. This may be the reason so much discipling among Muslims has failed. The planter does not realize oftentimes the high cost for the Muslim who comes out, or is unwilling to be there when needed, or is frustrated with the longevity of the discipling and of the spiritual ups and downs and failings in the life of this new believer.

May you be faithful in helping a BMB to come to full faith in Jesus. He in turn will be able to reach his own people in his own cultural nuances, in a way that no Westerner can do





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## +NT WEBSITES

**Note:** These are just a few of the many websites that deal with spiritual formation in general and more specifically spiritual disciplines, mentoring, etc. As with any website or book, you the student need to be able to evaluate the veracity of the resource, its scholarship, and its value to you. Not all sites necessarily reflect the theology of your particular denomination; nevertheless, there are many gems to be gleaned from these sites. Like anything you read, you need to separate “the wheat from the chaff.” Any book you read—and I would add website you visit - should be done with spiritual discernment.

### **John Calvin**

[www.johncalvin.com](http://www.johncalvin.com)

[www.calvin.edu/about/about\\_jc.htm](http://www.calvin.edu/about/about_jc.htm)

[www.ccel.org/c/calvin](http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin)

### **Jonathan Edwards**

[www.edwardscentre.ca/page0002.htm](http://www.edwardscentre.ca/page0002.htm)

### **Madame Guyon**

[www.newadvent.org/cathen/07092b.htm](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07092b.htm)

### **Thomas Merton**

[www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9702/articles/revessay.html](http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft9702/articles/revessay.html)

This article shows the human side of Thomas Merton. Like the rest of us, Merton struggled spiritually and emotionally.

[www.merton.org](http://www.merton.org)

A listing of many other sites on Merton and contemplation

[www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/mys/merton.htm](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/mys/merton.htm)

**Thomas Merton resources.**

### **Henry Nouwen**

[www.hendrinouwen.org](http://www.hendrinouwen.org)

A site where you can subscribe to a daily e-devotional from *Bread for the Journey*.

### **John of the Cross**

[www.csbj.edu/library/internet/theospir.html](http://www.csbj.edu/library/internet/theospir.html)

A site regarding this early Spanish Christian mystic, in both English and Spanish. This site also has “De los nombres de Cristo” (On the names of Christ) by Luis de Leon.

### **Christian mysticism**

[www.innerexplorations.com/chmystext/christia.htm](http://www.innerexplorations.com/chmystext/christia.htm)

Many sites listed dealing with Christian mysticism

[www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/mys/music.htm](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/mys/music.htm)

Music, especially Gregorian chants

[www.ancientfutureworship.com](http://www.ancientfutureworship.com)

Webber’s site for worship resources, including worship, evangelism and spiritual formation.

[www.reformworship.com](http://www.reformworship.com)

A website of Reformed worship resources

[www.iona.org/uk](http://www.iona.org/uk)

The site of the Inona community, a Christian ecumenical community committed to daily prayer, mutual accountability, and social action.

## **Reformed spirituality**

[www.sanjosephby.org/Refmsprt.html](http://www.sanjosephby.org/Refmsprt.html)

A paper presented to presbytery for the formation of a spirituality center. Gives a good description of spiritual formation.

[www.reformedworship.org](http://www.reformedworship.org)

A website of a magazine/journal of the same name, published by CRC Publications.

[www.calvin.edu/worship](http://www.calvin.edu/worship)

The website of the Calvin Institute of Worship, whose goal is “to promote the scholarly study of the theology, history, and practice of Christian worship and the renewal of worship in worshipping communities across North America and beyond.”

[www.spiritualdisciplines.org](http://www.spiritualdisciplines.org)

This is an excellent site on biblical spirituality especially in the church context. This site also promotes the book *Entranced Vision of All Things: The Legacy of Jonathan Edwards*. One of the chapters is entitled “Pursuing a Passion for God through spiritual Disciplines: Learning from Jonathan Edwards.”

[www.loganwv.presbychurch.org/spiritualprachtm](http://www.loganwv.presbychurch.org/spiritualprachtm)

A Reformed presentation of lectio divina, prayer journaling, and other spiritual practices.

## **Spiritual disciplines**

<http://spiritualcornerstones.com/SD.htm>

This is a good site for answers on the spiritual disciplines.

[www.saginaw.org/prayer\\_vontemp.html](http://www.saginaw.org/prayer_vontemp.html)

A site on contemplative prayer

[www.prayerfoundation.edu](http://www.prayerfoundation.edu)

The site of a Protestant monastery, calling itself a movement promoting “a total, Bible-based, Christ-centered, born-again evangelical lay monastic lifestyle.”

[www.precious-christian-dailydevotionals.com](http://www.precious-christian-dailydevotionals.com)

An introduction to the “why” of daily devotions.

[www.buildingchurch.net/discipline.htm](http://www.buildingchurch.net/discipline.htm)

A safe site on the spiritual disciplines, with descriptions of each discipline a la Foster (internal and external).

[www.spirithome.com/spirdisc.html](http://www.spirithome.com/spirdisc.html)

A site on the spiritual disciplines with links to other sites as well.

[www.new-life.net/fasting.htm](http://www.new-life.net/fasting.htm)

A site on fasting

[www.solascriptura-tt.org/VidaDosCrentes/CumDeus/BiblicalFasting-Cloud.htm](http://www.solascriptura-tt.org/VidaDosCrentes/CumDeus/BiblicalFasting-Cloud.htm)

Another site on fasting

[www.parousianetwork.com/Fasting\\_Chapter\\_3.htm](http://www.parousianetwork.com/Fasting_Chapter_3.htm)

Christian fasting

[www.findthedivine.com](http://www.findthedivine.com)

A site listing spiritual retreat centers by state and province. Not all information at this site is Christ-focused. The page “The Benefits of Spiritual Retreats” is helpful.

### **Spiritual formation**

[www.buildingchurchleaders.com](http://www.buildingchurchleaders.com)

A site where you can download a spiritual formation course from *Leadership Resources*.

<http://fm2.forministry.com/qryArticlePrint.asp?Record=1602>  
An article on spiritual formation by Dallas Willard

[www.erickeck.com/discuss/msgReader\\$63](http://www.erickeck.com/discuss/msgReader$63)  
“Spiritual Formation in Christ” by Dallas Willard.  
[www.dwillard.org/articles/](http://www.dwillard.org/articles/)  
A good place to go for articles by Dallas Willard. Several of the spiritual disciplines and one called “Spiritual Formation in Christ: A Perspective on What it is and How it Might be Done”

[www.spiritualformationforum.org/sff\\_documents.htm](http://www.spiritualformationforum.org/sff_documents.htm)  
Three .pdf files on spiritual formation: “Foundations of Christian spiritual formation,” “Descriptors of ‘Biblical Spiritual Formation’”, and “Spirituality and Spiritual Formation”

[www.theooze.com/articles/print.cfm?id=744](http://www.theooze.com/articles/print.cfm?id=744)  
An article on spiritual formation by Richard Foster

[//homepage.mac.com/kentonanderson/preaching.org/spiform.html](http://homepage.mac.com/kentonanderson/preaching.org/spiform.html)  
A short article on preaching and spiritual formation

[www.ministrydevelopment.org/foster-spirituality.html](http://www.ministrydevelopment.org/foster-spirituality.html)  
An article entitled “Spirituality for Leadership: History, Conflict and Challenge.” The article looks at spiritual formation from its historical development, various approaches to spiritual formation, spiritual formation in seminaries, and its various dimensions.

[www.iclnet.org/pub/facdialogue/Issue26/Smith.html](http://www.iclnet.org/pub/facdialogue/Issue26/Smith.html)  
“Spiritual Formation in the Academy: A Unifying Model” by Gordon Smith of the Canadian Bible College and Theological Seminary.

[www.intervarsity.org/news.php?item\\_id=326](http://www.intervarsity.org/news.php?item_id=326)  
A brief news report on spiritual formation, December 24, 2002 from InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. The article begins by explaining

IVCF's fourth core commitment: "Spiritual formation—We cultivate intimacy with God and growth in Christ-like character through personal and corporate spiritual disciplines, empowered by the Spirit."

### **Lectio divina**

[www.osb.org/lectio/about.html](http://www.osb.org/lectio/about.html)

Lectio divina explained by the Order of St. Benedictine

[www.rc.net/saginaw/srsclare/lectio.html](http://www.rc.net/saginaw/srsclare/lectio.html)

Lectio divina explained in a Roman Catholic setting.

[www.centeringprayer.com/021dbib.htm](http://www.centeringprayer.com/021dbib.htm)

A bibliography on lectio divina

[www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html](http://www.valyermo.com/ld-art.html)

A site describing private lectio divina as well as lectio divina as a group exercise and how to do it.

### **Spiritual blogging**

A new form of journaling? See what you think

[www.e-church.com/blog-detail.asp?EntryID=342&BloggerID=1](http://www.e-church.com/blog-detail.asp?EntryID=342&BloggerID=1)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

GARY TEJA is the offspring of a Castillian Spaniard and a New England Yankee from Vermont. In 1967 he attended the Reformed Bible Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan, before going on the mission field for Christian Reformed World Missions. For 16 years he and his wife, Jackie, served in Central America in church planting and theological education by extension (TEE). They lived half of that time in Nicaragua and the other half in Costa Rica.

Gary also worked as director of distance education for the Missiological Institute of the Americas in San Jose, Costa Rica. Eventually he moved back to the States with his family and for 16 years worked for Christian Reformed Home Missions as director of Hispanic ministries, regional director of Classis Southeast U.S., and part of the time overseeing church planting in the U.S. and Canada. Eventually, Gary became associate professor of cross-cultural studies and dean of distance education at Kuyper College (formerly the Bible institute which he attended 40 years prior to becoming a professor). He also oversaw Calvin Seminary's online master's program in church planting.

Gary served in various positions with Bible League International, including Senior Director for the Americas and for the Middle East, Senior director for Eastern Europe, and more recently as director of program development for the Muslim world. Today Gary is Vice President of Ministry for Multiplication Network Ministries.

Gary has extensive cross-cultural experience in mentoring pastors and emerging leaders, among Hispanics and Southeast Asians. He is also the author of about a dozen TEE textbooks and several other books, the most recent one published in Spain on spiritual formation. He has taught courses and led seminars in over 20 countries.

Gary holds a B.A. in Spanish and Latin American studies from Western Michigan University, an M.A. in missions and intercultural studies from Wheaton College Graduate School, and a Ph.D. in distance education and adult learning from Michigan State University.

Gary is the proud grandfather of seven grandchildren. He resides with his wife Jackie in Bitely Michigan.

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Multiplication Network Ministries envisions a healthy church representing the Kingdom of God in every community. To do this, Christian leaders are trained and equipped to strengthen and multiply healthy churches.



If you would like to contact the author, please visit  
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or call 708-414-1050.

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