

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

AWAKENING THE CHRISTIAN IMAGINATION
WITHIN THE PRACTICE OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES:
A DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS FOR YOUNG ADULTS AT
TAYLOR CHRISTIAN CENTER IN TAYLOR, MICHIGAN

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ABSTRACT

The transition from modernism to postmodernism is a transition from rationalism and empiricism to relativism and experientialism. For the past three hundred years, a logical, left-brained approach to life has dominated the cultural landscape of the West, but the entire worldview now sees life through a seemingly more irrational, right-brained lens. Subjectivity replaces objectivity; images replace words. These changes significantly shape emerging generations, yet the Church seems ill-equipped to provide a holistic spirituality that is able to bridge the rational and emotional centers of human existence.

This project sought to forge a broader path of Pentecostal spirituality by surveying the role of imagination in facilitating the practice of spiritual disciplines. It modeled a discipleship process for young adults that incorporated methods of prayer inclined toward imaginative engagement, namely *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation, and that explored ways in which art and creativity serve as spiritual practices.

The participants who completed the process each conveyed a renewed sense of nearness to God through the practice of these disciplines. Scripture became a living document that opened their hearts to hear the Spirit speak today. The sights and sounds of Scripture not only led participants to sense a nearness to God but also inspired one young lady to express that inward work of the Spirit through poetry. To these ends, the project was successful in broadening the understanding of what it means to pursue a life lived in Christ and to create space through spiritual disciplines for the heart to be transformed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The twelfth-century theologian John of Salisbury once compared himself and his contemporaries to dwarfs perched on the shoulders of giants. He wrote, “We see more and farther than our predecessors, not because we have keener vision or greater height, but because we are lifted up and borne aloft on their gigantic stature.”¹ So too, anything that I have to offer exists only because of the support of others and for them I am deeply grateful.

Clearly, this project is not possible without the constant support of Dr. Cheryl Taylor, Director; Dr. Ava Oleson, Program Coordinator; and Dr. Lois Olena, Project Coordinator, of the AGTS Doctor of Ministry team. I would never have entered the program without their gentle prodding, and I would never have finished without their patience and encouragement. I greatly appreciate their commitment to the success of every student who enters their halls.

This project is graced by the thoughtfulness and guidance of Catherine McGee, editor; Dr. David Clark, biblical adviser; and Dr. Carolyn Tennant, project adviser. Catherine’s diligent work made me sound better than I could on my own. Her contributions not only in syntax but also in content were invaluable. Dr. Clark’s

¹ John of Salisbury, *The Metalogicon of John of Salisbury: A Twelfth-Century Defense of the Verbal and Logical Arts of the Trivium*, trans. Daniel McGarry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1955), 167.

scholarship filled many gaps, and his enthusiasm often strengthened my weary mind. I credit the entire premise of this project to Dr. Tennant, for it was born out of a week spent under her tutelage, discussing C. S. Lewis and the Inklings. When it comes to spiritual formation, she is a practitioner who brought to this project what no one else could, a rare combination of vast knowledge and genuine experience.

I am blessed to serve the people of Taylor Christian Center. The staff and church board have been a constant source of support, investing more in me than I deserve. And of course, the project could only be completed by the enthusiastic participation of those who were able and willing to serve as test subjects in the laboratory of this mad scientist.

For my wife and seven children, I am forever grateful. We have walked this road together. They have never known a husband or father who was not in some way distracted by the demands of higher education. I am indebted to them for their constant outpouring of grace and love. They have my heart ... always!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Context

Understanding the context of this project first requires some insight into the narrative of its author. To begin, I grew up in an Assemblies of God church in rural Oklahoma. My mother and I showed up nearly every time the church doors opened. I graduated through the ranks of Sunday school and participated in all the extracurricular activities such as summer camps and quiz bowls. I had pastors who loved and encouraged me along the path of spiritual maturity. So influential were these pastors in my life that I wanted to join their ranks, helping others know God the same way they had helped me.

One obstacle I could never seem to overcome was a narrow view regarding the path of spiritual maturity. From my childhood perspective, the disciplines of spiritual formation were two-fold: prayer and Bible reading. While these practices are like oceans within the world of spirituality, my mind held them within the confines of two small buckets. I had perceived that prayer, when done properly, consisted of one hour filled with segments of various kinds of talking at God (e.g., praise, thanksgiving, petition, intercession, etc.). In my understanding, Bible reading, at its best, involved a systematic reading through the Bible in a specified time frame, and each completion of the Bible counted as another rung up the ladder of spiritual advancement.

This narrow understanding remained with me into adulthood, which may not have presented too much difficulty had it not been for my achievement-oriented personality. I had taken my childhood understanding and set before myself ideals of spiritual maturity

to which I could never perfectly attain. I cannot count the number of times I began a “Bible in 90 days” reading plan but never made it past Leviticus—or the times I tried to fill an hour with prayer but got too distracted to finish. Over the course of time, the practice of spiritual disciplines felt more like a scourging, reminding me of my insufficiency, rather than a means of encountering the transforming presence of God.

Sadly, I found myself as a thirty-something pastor who secretly struggled with intense feelings of guilt and inadequacy regarding my own spiritual formation. A seismic shift took place within my soul, however, when I began doctoral studies at the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary. There, I began to read more widely and discovered a vast stream of Christian spirituality. I realized that I had only been splashing my feet at the water’s surface while sitting on the riverbank, but the Holy Spirit was inviting me to dive into the overwhelming current. While I still sometimes fight against those old feelings of deficiency, I have discovered a broader path of Christian, and also Pentecostal, spirituality on which the Holy Spirit invites me to walk with Him. I have explored many methods of engaging God through both prayer and Scripture. My life and ministry have been significantly enriched.

In my twenty years of pastoral ministry, I have served three congregations as either youth pastor or lead pastor. Since 2013, I have served as the lead pastor of Taylor Christian Center in Taylor, Michigan, an Assemblies of God church of nearly 100 adherents. Taylor is in the Downriver area of metropolitan Detroit and has a population of 63,131. The church was founded sixty-eight years ago but within the past three years has undergone a significant culture shift as the congregation has focused squarely upon three core values: spirituality, community, and mission. Adding to the change in culture,

the church launched a Saturday worship service geared primarily toward twenty-somethings. As a result, individuals ranging in age from eighteen to thirty-five make up over one-third of our congregation. When I see them, I see my younger self, struggling to fit into an unrealistic mold of my own creation. My desire is to provide a path of spiritual formation in which these young people do not have to wait until the second half of life to discover greater fulfillment and closeness with Jesus.

The Problem

As children of the Age of Reason, churches founded in late modernity (1900-1989) often struggled to find their places in this world of reason and, therefore, developed a more scientific study of God. Even while opposing liberalism, many Christians have drifted into the assumptions of modernity that science and reason are public and objective facts while religion and imagination are private and subjective matters of faith. This has led to many knowing only a clinical or intellectual kind of spirituality.

Additionally, Americans live in a goal-oriented society that tries to reduce the entirety of life to a list, allowing people to simply check the box as they accomplish each goal. In its education system, for example, everyone is evaluated on the basis of students' test scores. Administrators pressure teachers for better scores, teachers only take the time to teach those items on which students will be tested, and students go on to college continually asking the age-old question, "Will that be on the test?" This principle permeates the entire society and often creeps into the church. I fear that the Christian faith has often been reduced to a checklist of beliefs and behaviors. However, just as being educated means more than acquiring certain skills and knowledge, being Christian

must mean more than living according to a narrow set of propositional truths and mundane disciplines.

As the young adult demographic of Taylor Christian Center has grown, I have seen an increasing interest in creativity and the arts, a revival of imagination. Yet, these young people see imagination as disconnected from the faith rather than as a tool for spiritual formation that can bridge the rational and the emotional centers of their beings. If the church could work toward the awakening and employing of the Christian imagination, these emerging believers have the potential of breaking free from a merely clinical Christianity and pursuing a deeper relationship with God, equipping them to significantly impact this postmodern world.

The Purpose

The purpose of this project is to conduct a seminar and four-week discipleship process to explore the role of imagination in facilitating the practice of spiritual disciplines and to forge a path toward a Pentecostal spirituality that allows right-brained believers to flourish in their faith.

Definition of Terms

Aesthetic. The creation and appreciation of beauty and art.

Creativity. The ability to generate new ideas and new connections between ideas.

With regard to spiritual formation, this includes connecting one's experiences with God to the practice of one's faith and communicating those connections to others in meaningful ways.

Imagination. The human faculty that evokes mental images.

Modernism. An era marked philosophically by rationalism and empiricism and socially by industrialization, in which methods of industry became mechanical, predictable, calculated, and mass-produced.

Postmodernism. In contrast to modernism, an era increasingly marked by decentralization, relativism, experientialism, pluralism, and irrationality.

Spiritual Disciplines. Practices around which a believer orders his or her life in the pursuit of spiritual formation.

Spiritual Formation. The transformation of the character to be like Christ and of the actions to conform to God's will.

Description of the Proposed Project

Scope of the Project

Members of Taylor Christian Center between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five will participate in a four-week discipleship process. Prior to the seminar, each participant must take the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment.¹ The assessment provides a clear and descriptive evaluation of each individual's personal level of Christian discipleship. I am particularly interested in four outcomes of the assessment's spiritual formation dimension: (1) loving the Word of God, (2) praying without ceasing, (3) listening to the voice of God, and (4) cultivating solitude. The results of this assessment will then be used to tailor a discipleship process that facilitates a growing relationship with God.

The process will begin with a two identical seminars, each three hours long. These will be held July 19 and July 23, 2016, in the commons room of Taylor Christian

¹“About the Assessment,” Discipleship Dynamics, accessed June 2, 2015, <https://discipleshipdynamics.com/about-the-assessment/>.

Center. The seminar will include alternating times of teaching and discussion or reflection. Teaching segments will bring together the biblical-theological and general literature reviews, explaining to the participants the role of a Christian imagination and its use in the spiritual disciplines. Particular attention will be given to a biblical approach toward the practices of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation. Participants will also discover how to incorporate the arts as creative outlets for these moments of prayer and worship. Times of discussion and reflection will provide opportunity to practice these methods of prayer and learn from one another's experiences.

Each participant will receive a journal to use during the retreat and throughout the following four weeks. The journal will provide Scripture readings, prayers, and devotional thoughts to establish a common direction for the group. It will also encourage the imaginative approach to spiritual disciplines and the discovery of creative outlets through which they can express the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives throughout this process. Participants will commit to practicing the disciplines covered in the seminar a minimum of three times per week for those four weeks. They will record reflections on their experiences in the journal.

At the conclusion of the four-week process, participants will have the opportunity to share how an imaginative approach to the disciplines has enriched their times with God by returning the journals in which they have recorded their reflections. They will also be encouraged to submit any creative art pieces produced during this process. I will not only ask for access to whatever journal entries each would be willing to share but also for permission to print those entries in the project as a form of evaluation. Following the four weeks, each participant will take the Discipleship Dynamics Assessment for a second

time. Results of the assessment should indicate whether participants experienced any significant growth in the outcomes of spiritual formation over the preceding four weeks, providing material for quantitative analysis. The journals will provide a means for qualitative analysis.

Though an imaginative approach to the spiritual disciplines may have wide appeal among the young adults of the congregation, the scope of the project requires that the number of participants be limited to twelve. If the number of participants were too large, it would limit the amount of individual participation during the seminar and potentially hinder my ability to guide individuals through the follow-up. Additionally, this project is limited to the study of spiritual disciplines as practiced by individuals. Another study could explore engaging the imagination within the context of spiritual disciplines practiced corporately.

Phases of the Project

The design of this project will incorporate five phases: research, planning, implementation, evaluation, and writing. Some phases will occur consecutively while others will occur concurrently. The research for the biblical-theological and general literature reviews will take place prior to the actual ministry intervention, thereby informing the content of the intervention itself.

Research

The research phase will occur in two stages. The first stage is a review of the biblical-theological foundations regarding the role of imagination in spiritual formation. The second stage examines contemporary literature, looking for an intersection between imagination and Christian spirituality.

Biblical-Theological Review

Chapter 2 will explore three broad topics in seeking to learn more about the ways in which a redeemed imagination can benefit spiritual formation. First, the biblical-theological review will consider the ways in which the Bible as a whole engages the human imagination through the use of literary device. Second, this chapter will explore the topic of sensate worship as a means for engaging the entire being in relationship with God. Third, this review will examine the lives of the prophets and the way God captured their imaginations and the imaginations of His people. The research of chapter 2 will occur from November 2015 through January 2016.

General Literature Review

The general literature review (chapter 3) will consider three primary topics of study. First, it will explore the potential dangers as well as benefits of the human imagination within Christian spirituality. Second, it will consider some spiritual disciplines in which imaginative engagement may prove useful as well as criteria for making that determination. Third, this review will survey the topic of Christian aesthetic and explore ways in which art may benefit the spiritual formation of the artist. The research and writing of chapter 3 will occur from March through May 2016.

Planning

Planning for this project will include the recruitment of no more than twelve participants and the coordination of having each participant take the pre-intervention discipleship assessment. It will also require drawing from the research phase to develop relevant teaching material for the seminar and a means for supporting the four-week follow-up process. The ministry intervention itself will require logistical preparation such

as scheduling and setting up the space in which the seminar will occur. Finally, the project will require the management and analysis of the quantitative and qualitative post-assessment data. Preparation for the ministry intervention will occur in May and June 2016.

Implementation

Implementation will begin with recruiting participants via email and announcements during the worship services throughout the month of June 2016. When an individual registers for participation in the project, a link to the online pre-assessment will be sent with instructions to complete the assessment prior to the seminar. The ministry intervention itself will include two identical three-hour seminars to take place on July 19 and July 23, 2016. Four weeks of individual practice and reflection on the part of the participants will follow. The implementation phase will conclude the week of August 21, 2016.

Evaluation

Upon its conclusion, the ministry intervention will employ means for both quantitatively and qualitatively measuring results. A quantitative evaluation will rely upon participants completing the online discipleship assessment a second time. Results of both assessments will be submitted to Dr. Jeff Fulks of Evangel University for statistical analysis. A qualitative evaluation will rely upon participants submitting their written reflections as well as any artwork resulting from the process. If successful, the intervention will produce participants who will understand how their naturally right-brained approach to life can apply to their pursuit of healthy spirituality. They will have been equipped with new spiritual disciplines that feel natural and draw them into closer

relationship with Christ, and they will be able to converge the creative and discipleship processes.

Writing

The writing phase of this project will be spread out over the duration of the previous phases. The biblical-theological review (chapter 2) will be written in January and February 2016 and the general literature review (chapter 3) in May and June. Both reviews will be completed by the time of the ministry intervention in July and August. A description of the intervention (chapter 4) will be written in September. A project summary (chapter 5) and all other material will be completed in October 2016.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Since the rise of scientific methods and of Western dependency on rationalism and empiricism, Christian spirituality has tended to gravitate toward the intellectual. The Church often approaches the Bible as a specimen to be dissected, manipulated, and experimented upon in the laboratories of historical-grammatical schools of thought. This has not always been the case, however. The pre-Enlightenment church and pockets of Christianity since have viewed the Bible as a living word, animated in an ongoing way by the Holy Spirit. Scripture, in their opinion, was not written once to remain fossilized in its historical form but contains inspired words that continue to reveal the wisdom of God's desires for this world at each moment in time.

The premise of this project is that the imagination serves as the God-given bridge between the intellect and the emotion, between the head and the heart. God seeks to redeem the imagination that through it people may pursue a more holistic spirituality. This chapter explores the ways in which Scripture bears this out. First, it examines the Bible's overall use of literary device, seeking to move the reader at an emotional level rather than convincing the intellect alone. Second, it explores the ways in which corporate worship in Scripture offered a multisensory experience that drew the whole person into communion with God. Third, this chapter examines the lives of the prophets, the ways in which God often spoke to them through image rather than word and in which

the prophets sought to engage the people's imaginations in their attempts at capturing their hearts for God.

Literary Devices in Scripture

Thou art a figurative, a metaphorical God too; a God in whose words there is such a height of figures, such voyages, such peregrinations to fetch remote and precious metaphors, such extensions, such spreadings, such curtains of allegories, such third heavens of hyperboles, so harmonious elocutions, so retired and so reserved expressions, so commanding persuasions, so persuading commandments, such sinews even in thy milk, and such things in thy words, as all profane authors seem of the seed of the serpent that creeps, thou art the Dove that flies. O, what words but thine can express the inexpressible texture and composition of thy word.¹

With these words, John Donne captures what many modern American Christians seem to forget. The language of divine revelation utilizes literary devices that address the human imagination far more than they address the faculties of either reason or conscience. In fact, according to Brian Godawa's calculations, "Roughly thirty percent of the Bible is rational propositional truth and laws, while seventy percent of the Bible is story, vision, symbol, and narrative—that is, image."² Clyde Kilby asserts, then, two indisputable facts regarding the Bible. First, it belongs to literature, for it is a work of art. Second, "because one—and possibly the greatest—ingredient of literature is imagination, we must say that the Bible is an imaginative book."³

¹ John Donne, "Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions," Christian Classics Ethereal Library, accessed October 27, 2016, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/donne/devotions.iv.iii.xix.ii.html>.

² Brian Godawa, *Word Pictures: Knowing God through Story and Imagination* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 53.

³ Clyde S. Kilby, "The Bible as a Work of Imagination," in *The Christian Imagination*, ed. Leland Ryken (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2002), 105.

In a Christian culture that often distrusts literature and relies heavily upon the abstract theological passages of Scripture, Leland Ryken notes how “the preponderance of literary writing in the Bible shows that God trusted literature as a medium for conveying truth.”⁴ Thus, when most people reason with another, they aim for the opponent’s intellect through concepts and propositions. When God reasons with His people, however, He speaks in symbol, metaphor, and narrative. The prophet Isaiah illustrates this well: “Come now, let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool” (Isa. 1:18).⁵

In turning to the tools of literature, the biblical authors sought to offer more than propositional truths. “Much more important,” says Peter Macky, “was their intention to move readers, to change them, to attract them to a Lord, a community, and a way of life.”⁶ This required an appeal to emotion via the imagination. In addition, the biblical authors often sought to communicate “a burden of meaning greater than [themselves]” and found it necessary to present that meaning through “images of experience.”⁷ The literature of the Bible, therefore, most often enacts rather than states. For example, instead of providing a list of virtues or vices, the author presents a story of good or evil

⁴ Leland Ryken, “‘Words of Delight’: The Bible as Literature,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 585 (March 1990): 10.

⁵ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the English Standard Version.

⁶ Peter W. Macky, *The Centrality of Metaphors to Biblical Thought: A Method for Interpreting the Bible* (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1990), 2.

⁷ Robert A. Weathers, “Leland Ryken’s Literary Approach to Biblical Interpretation: An Evangelical Model,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37, no. 1 (March 1994): 121.

people in action. The narratives of Scripture are both descriptive and prescriptive in that they demonstrate the kind of life lived within the reality of God's kingdom through the sharing of positive and negative examples.

A literary approach to Scripture places a clear burden upon the reader. Through an awareness of the literary devices employed by the biblical authors, the reader must use the imaginative process to identify patterns and structures, to make sense of and respond to the writing. As Katherine Sakenfield says, "The Bible calls for imaginative engagement and reflection. To allow it to impact our thinking, our version of reality, and our actions calls for an engaged and open imagination."⁸ The purpose of this section is to explore a few of the literary devices found in Scripture and to consider the risks and rewards of a literary approach to the Word of God.

Metaphor in Scripture

Metaphor is a figure of speech containing an implied comparison or analogy in which a word or phrase normally applied to one thing is used to describe something entirely different. Scripture employs a seemingly endless variety of figures of speech—chiasmus, hyperbole, personification, and pun to name a few—but the comparison found in metaphor serves as the primary road leading from the known to the unknown. According to G. B. Caird, not only does metaphor encompass a large part of a person's daily speech but also comprises almost all the language of theology. He writes, "Man has no language but analogy for speaking about God, however inadequate it may be."⁹

⁸ Katherine Doob Sakenfield, ed., *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 22.

⁹ G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1980), 144.

Good metaphor is more than a creative word picture, more than a simple juxtaposition of two images. It is an invitation to engage both heart and head. Paul Avis asserts, “Metaphor is not just naming one thing in terms of another, but seeing, experiencing and intellectualizing one thing in light of another.”¹⁰ While dead metaphors fill modern dialogue (e.g. “the arm of the chair” or “she pecks at her food”), scriptural metaphors bring spiritual realities to light. As Sallie McFague explains, these living metaphors “move us to see our ordinary world in an extraordinary way.”¹¹

Only through metaphor does Scripture find the language necessary to describe an incomprehensible God. For example, Psalm 18:2 says, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress.” Here, the psalmist describes God, who is living spirit (John 4:24), as a geological formation and a military installation. If taken literally, the comparison makes no sense, but at the metaphorical level, the reader discovers a profound truth regarding God’s reliability as deliverer and protector of those in danger. Throughout the Bible, God provides pictures and likenesses that communicate something of himself to the reader. He is a lion (Hos. 5:14), an eagle (Jer. 49:22), and a lamb (Rev. 21:22). He is a gardener (Ps. 80:8), a potter (Isa. 64:8), and a shepherd (Ps. 23:1). In each case, the known sheds light on the unknown.

While on earth, Jesus himself often employed metaphor. The Gospel of John records seven self-revelatory statements of Jesus, often referred to as His “I Am” statements. Each one illustrates the importance of metaphor in knowing God. Jesus

¹⁰ Paul D. L. Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 97.

¹¹ Sallie McFague, “Parable, Metaphor, and Theology,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 42, no. 4 (1974): 631.

describes himself as the bread of life, the light of the world, the door, the good shepherd, the resurrection and the life, the way, and the true vine (John 6:35; 8:12; 10:9, 11; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1). Taken literally, these statements appear beyond ridiculous; Jesus is not a literal door. At the metaphorical level, however, He is the entry point for a life lived in the kingdom of God.

Metaphor plays an essential role not only in divine revelation but in communicating all abstract spiritual realities. Scripture uses many comparisons to describe humanity, especially mankind's relationship with God. For example, if God is the potter, His people are the clay in His hands: "We are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isa. 6:8). If Jesus is a good shepherd, His people are His sheep: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Additionally, the New Testament authors make extensive use of metaphor to describe the church, a list that includes comparing the church to a body (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 10:17; 12:12; Eph. 5:30), a bride (2 Cor. 11:12; Rev. 19:7-8; 21:9), a family (Matt. 12:49-50; 2 Cor. 6:18; Gal. 6:10; Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 5:1), and a temple built of living stones (1 Cor. 3:16-17; Eph. 2:19-22; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Blake Wassell and Stephen Llewelyn provide another example of the Scripture's use of metaphor in communicating abstract ideas, showing how sin "can be understood either in terms of dirt, a more tangible and embodied reality, or again in terms of a dangerous animal that is ready to devour the unprepared, or again in terms of a weight to be carried."¹² The psalmist speaks of sin in terms of dirt when he wishes to speak of its

¹² Blake E. Wassell and Stephen R. Llewelyn, "'Fishers of Humans,' the Contemporary Theory of Metaphor, and Conceptual Blending Theory," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 133, no. 3 (2014): 628.

removal: “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” (Ps. 51:2). An understanding of sin as a dangerous animal or a snare communicates human vulnerability: “And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at your door. Its desire is for you” (Gen. 4:7). Finally, an author may describe sin as a weight when he or she wishes to communicate the consequences of sin upon a person: “Let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Heb. 12:1).

Exploring further the Genesis 4:7 reference, one observes how, from the beginning, language could help a person grasp realities not present to the physical senses, such as sin described as an animal of prey. Perhaps Peter had this very picture in mind when he wrote, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet. 5:8). Since time began, people have animated objects and personified animals for the sake of comparison. Unfortunately, in its sinful state, humanity can go the opposite direction as well, objectifying people in an effort to enslave them for personal gain.

A further look at Jesus’ words shows a particular fondness of metaphor. When He invites Peter and Andrew into discipleship, He compares their current vocation to their new identity in Christ with the words, “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19). In a conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus compares himself to the bronze serpent of Numbers 21:9, saying, “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up” (John 3:14). Jesus also continually spoke of the kingdom in terms of metaphor. In Matthew 13 alone, He compares the kingdom of God

to a grain of mustard seed (v. 31), leaven (v. 33), a hidden treasure (v. 44), a valuable pearl (v. 45), and a fishing net (v. 47).

Every sampling of metaphor in Scripture reveals the bifocal nature of such language, both rational and imaginative foci. This imposes quite the demand upon the reader. He or she must first identify and experience the literal image of the metaphor. Ryken insists, “Metaphors are images or pictures first of all. Their impact depends on letting the literal level sink into one’s consciousness before carrying over the meaning into a figurative or second level.”¹³ Understanding the first level ensures the reader has “allowed the Bible to speak to [his or her] ‘right brain’—that part of us that responds to concrete realities that the Bible records,” and understanding the second level leads “to an awareness of connotations, associations, and significance.”¹⁴ A failure to grasp either of these levels leads to an impoverished experience of Scripture.

In summary, the human mind instinctively explores reality through comparisons, assimilating the less familiar to the more familiar or the unknown to the known. Scripture’s primary means of communicating spiritual realities, therefore, is metaphor and other figures of speech. This imaginative engagement seems to be the best means of capturing not simply the intellect but the entire human being. As Warren Wiersbe says, hearing and understanding a living metaphor, as found in Scripture, “is a transaction that involves more than intellect and can lead to a changed perspective on life. [It is] an

¹³ Leland Ryken, “‘I Have Used Similitudes’: The Poetry of the Bible,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147, no. 587 (September 1990): 263.

¹⁴ Leland Ryken, Jim C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III, eds., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), xiv.

emotional and spiritual experience that makes the truth of the metaphor a part of our inner person.”¹⁵

Genre in Scripture

The Bible’s use of a variety of genre is another literary device and another way to engage the human imagination. A genre is a type of literature characterized by specific form, content, and style. Each genre possesses particular features and functions that distinguish it from others. Knowing to which category of genre a text belongs assists the reader in understanding the message it conveys. Donald Bloesch writes, “With the rise of genre criticism we are becoming more keenly aware of the remarkable diversity of narrative forms in the Bible. We encounter saga, legend, epic, poetry, novella, fable, historical narrative, narrated history and parable.”¹⁶

As a genre in Scripture, saga refers to those texts involved in “the recounting of deeds and experiences that have shaped the destiny of a particular people or of humanity as a whole.”¹⁷ The focus of saga rests less on the historical events themselves and more on the broader significance of those events in the shaping of a people’s social or spiritual identity. The first eleven chapters of Genesis fit within this framework. Similarly, biblical legend refers to “stories about historical figures or events that are passed on from one generation to another.”¹⁸ Following the first eleven chapters, for example, Genesis

¹⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, ed., *Developing a Christian Imagination: An Interpretive Anthology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1995), 25.

¹⁶ Donald G. Bloesch, *Holy Scripture: Revelation, Inspiration and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 263.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 264.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 356.

recounts the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Though many relate saga and legend to fictional writing, their use, as it pertains to Scripture, in no way suggests that these stories are non-historical.

Poetry is a widely employed biblical genre. According to Andrew Hill and John Walton, “Poetry comprises about one third of the Hebrew Old Testament.”¹⁹ The genre of Hebrew poetry possesses two distinctive features, the first of which is rhythm of thought. Rhythm of thought is “the balancing of ideas in a structured or systematic form,” primarily through the use of parallelism.²⁰ Psalm 1 employs a variety of parallelism:

¹ Blessed is the man
 who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,
 nor stands in the way of sinners,
 nor sits in the seat of scoffers;
² but his delight is in the law of the Lord,
 and on his law he meditates day and night.
³ He is like a tree
 planted by streams of water
 that yields its fruit in its season,
 and its leaf does not wither.
 In all that he does, he prospers.
⁴ The wicked are not so,
 but are like chaff that the wind drives away.
⁵ Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
 nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;
⁶ for the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
 but the way of the wicked will perish.

Verse 1 illustrates synthetic or climactic parallelism in which subsequent lines add to or complete the thought of the first. Verses 2 and 4 use synonymous parallelism where the poet essentially says the same thing twice. Verse 3 uses emblematic parallelism, one line

¹⁹ Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1991), 248.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 252.

expressing a literal thought (e.g., “in all that he does, he prospers”) while the other line repeats or builds on it in figurative terms (e.g., “he is like a tree planted by streams of water”). Finally, verse 6 employs antithetic parallelism in which the first line is contrasted by the second.

The second distinctive feature of Hebrew poetry is rhythm of sound. For example, the Old Testament contains thirteen alphabet acrostics, where the initial letters of consecutive lines form the complete Hebrew alphabet.²¹ The poetry of Scripture also employs alliteration and assonance, the repetition of consonant and vowel sounds. Psalm 118 illustrates another common device, the *inclusio*, where the author returns to the starting point by repeating a key word or phrase: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever” (vv. 1, 29). Regardless of which particular poetic device an author may choose, the goal remains the same—engaging the human imagination to bridge the gap between head and heart, bringing the whole person into an encounter with the Divine.

The goal of imaginative engagement explains why Ezekiel used the genre of fable, spinning the tale of an eagle and a vine (Ezek. 17:1-10). It is also why Jesus so often spoke in the genre of parable, drawing analogies from ordinary life to describe the kingdom of God. Regarding his use of parable, Kenneth Bailey names Jesus a metaphorical theologian. He writes, “His primary method of creating meaning was through metaphor, simile, parable and dramatic action rather than through logic and reasoning. He created meaning like a dramatist and a poet rather than like a

²¹ Pss. 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145; Prov. 31:10-31; Lam. 1, 2, 3, 4.

philosopher.”²² Through this particular genre, the storyteller invites the listener to examine the human predicament through the worldview created by the parable. The story becomes a lens through which the speaker encourages a person to see the world, a work, in part, of the imagination.

In Luke 10:25-37, for example, Jesus takes his audience on an imaginative journey through the parable of the Good Samaritan. This story conveys both ethical and theological truths to the person willing to engage. First, through the parable, the lawyer is given an impossible standard and in the process discovers that eternal life is a gift from God rather than something a person earns. Second, the lawyer asks, “Who is my neighbor” (v. 29). The parable teaches that the listener’s neighbor is anyone in need, regardless of ethnicity or religion. Third, the story demonstrates that the law, observed as it was by the priest and the Levite, has its limits and that compassion reaches beyond the letter of the law. Fourth, Jesus’ parable boldly confronts the racism of his day as a hated Samaritan rescues the dying Jew. Fifth, the story speaks to a proper Christology. Bailey writes, “After the failure of the listeners’ religious leaders, the saving agent breaks in from the outside to save, disregarding the cost of that salvation. Jesus is talking about himself.”²³ Through the actions of the Samaritan, Jesus reveals something about himself. The narrative of the Good Samaritan demonstrates the power of this particular genre in communicating significant spiritual truths.

²² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 279.

²³ *Ibid.*, 297.

Avis's description of Jesus' motivation in utilizing parable also speaks more broadly to the use of literary devices through the entirety of Scripture: "His gospel was addressed to the whole person in its depth and integrity—to the heart as well as the head, to children to whom the kingdom of heaven belonged as well as to the intelligentsia of scribes and Pharisees, to the alienated and outcast as well as to the aristocracy of the Sadducees."²⁴ Through the use of literary device, from figures of speech to genre, Scripture seeks to evoke a response from the whole person and from every person.

Dangers of a Literary Approach to Scripture

A literary approach to the Bible is not without risk. One danger involves a misunderstanding of genre. With strong convictions regarding the authority and infallibility of God's Word, evangelical Christians often fear that a literary approach to Scripture requires a belief that the biblical narratives are untrue. Fiction, however, comprises only one aspect of literature, not its entirety. Ryken explains, "The properties that make a text literary are unaffected by the historicity or fictionality of the material. A literary approach depends on a writer's selectivity and molding of material, regardless of whether the details actually happened or are made up."²⁵ In other words, historicity and literature do not conflict. Those who fear that a literary approach to Scripture somehow fails to view the Bible as God's Word or to take His words seriously, fail to understand this truth.

²⁴ Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*, 66.

²⁵ Ryken, "'Words of Delight': The Bible as Literature," 7.

In actuality, no one interprets the entire Bible literally: “Even the staunchest literalist does not believe that Jesus is really a door, or that following him literally involves building a house on a rock.”²⁶ When evangelicals claim to always interpret the Bible literally, they largely intend to assert their belief that the historical narratives of the Bible record the facts of events that actually occurred. Through a failure to embrace a literary approach, however, evangelicals may fail to see the ways in which they also believe that the Bible employs literary devices like figures of speech and diverse genres. Eugene Peterson quips, “The Bible is chock full of metaphor, which means that if we assume that ‘literal’ is the only means to ‘serious’ we are going to be in trouble much of the time, for metaphor is literally a lie.”²⁷ It is entirely possible that the person who accepts a literary approach may take the language of Scripture even more seriously than the one who rejects it.

Another danger of a literary approach to Scripture involves the possibility that a metaphor, one of the primary vehicles of theological language, may fail. Caird cites two reasons for this, the first of which deals with the move in metaphor from the known to the unknown. He writes, “As a means of proceeding from the known to the unknown, [a metaphor] may fail if what the speaker assumes to be known is in fact not known to his audience.”²⁸ In this case, the reader would fail to grasp the literal sense, making it impossible to grasp the figurative sense. The second reason a metaphor may fail is even

²⁶ Ryken, “‘I Have Used Similitudes’: The Poetry of the Bible,” 266.

²⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 94.

²⁸ Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, 145.

more important. Caird says, “There is an intended point of comparison on which we are being asked to concentrate to the exclusion of all irrelevant fact; and communication breaks down, with ludicrous and even disastrous effect, if we wrongly identify it.”²⁹ In other words, when two things are compared, they are not alike in every way, leaving room for the reader to make the wrong connections between the two.

For example, cinnabar, also called mercury sulfide, is the single most toxic mineral to handle on the planet. In the Middle Ages, a person assigned to work in Spanish mines containing cinnabar formations had often been handed a death sentence. Spaniards of the Middle Ages who read the psalmist’s words, “The Lord is my rock,” (Ps. 18:2) may have incorrectly compared God to their experiences in the quarry and concluded that any relationship with Him was perilous and best avoided at all cost. Though an extreme example, it illustrates the danger present when a metaphor fails in the mind of the reader.

Even with the potential of misunderstanding, however, Jesus and the writers of Scripture trusted literary forms to express theological truth. Ryken asserts, “They operated on the literary premise that the imagination (‘image-making’) serves as a powerful vehicle for expressing truth. They were not afraid of the indirection of metaphor or symbol, even though these literary forms require the interpretation of a reader to complete their meaning.”³⁰ In Psalm 23, for example, the psalmist trusted the reader to draw the right conclusions about what God is like when compared to a shepherd, seeing Him as a most compassionate provider and a noble protector. Moreover, the Church has

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Leland Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination: Thinking Christianly about the Arts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 42.

received the wonderful gift of the Holy Spirit, whom Jesus said would “guide you into all the truth” (John 16:13), and believers should never underestimate the Spirit’s ability to do just that as they seek to encounter God in Scripture.

This whole-person, transformative encounter with God is, in fact, the reward that comes with the imaginative engagement of embracing a literary approach to the Bible. Mary Karita Ivancic claims, “Neither an exercise in fantasy nor an indulgence in unreality, the biblical imagination is an encounter with the ultimate reality of God in faith by means of the metaphorical language of Scripture.”³¹ Intellectual propositions certainly may lay claim to truth, but propositions alone could never have the necessary impact on the human heart. As David Brown observes, “Metaphors and images invite engagement and interaction, and so theology becomes what it should fundamentally be—in service of a practiced religion.”³²

The Bible offers something more valuable than facts to ponder. John Gibson writes that the Bible, above all, offers “an imaginative vision of God and his dealings with human beings to which to cling. It is the stories and poetry of Scripture and especially perhaps its figurative language which create that vision.”³³ Without a literary approach to the Bible, the Church may fail to grasp this ultimate vision of God, thereby missing out on a more vibrant Christian existence in this life.

³¹ Mary Karita Ivancic, “Imagining Faith: The Biblical Imagination in Theory and Practice,” *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006): 132.

³² David Brown, “The Power of Image to Effect Change,” *ARTS* 25, no. 2 (2014): 17.

³³ John C. L. Gibson, *Language and Imagery in the Old Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1998), 13.

Sensate Worship in Scripture

A thousand years ago, Prince Vladimir the Great sought a religion that would unify the people of Russia. He sent envoys to investigate the faiths of the surrounding regions. Upon their return, they delivered their reports. Some discovered bleak and bland religions, while others reported finding rather abstract and theoretical religions. The envoys that had investigated Christianity in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople, however, testified, “Then we went to Constantinople and they led us to the place where they worship their God, and we knew not whether we were in heaven or earth, for on earth there is no such vision nor beauty, and we do not know how to describe it; we only know that God dwells among men. We cannot forget that beauty.”³⁴

Upon receiving this report from the Constantinople delegation of the beauty they had witnessed in Christian worship, Vladimir adopted Christianity as the new faith for the Russian people. In reflecting upon this account, Brian Zahnd writes, “What impressed the envoys and persuaded Prince Vladimir to embrace Christianity was not its apologetics or ethics, but its aesthetics—its beauty. Thus we might say it was beauty that brought salvation to the Russian people.”³⁵

Even the most casual reader of Scripture observes the ways in which worship, especially in the Old Testament, consisted of more than just some cerebral exercise of intellectual assent. The Israelites experienced worship through all the senses, which is another form of imaginative engagement. This section will survey the calling and

³⁴ *Primary Chronicle of the Sent by Prince Vladimir of Kiev-Rus to Constantinople*, as quoted by David Bentley Hart, *The Story of Christianity* (London: Quercus Books, 2008), 125.

³⁵ Brian Zahnd, *Beauty Will Save the World* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2012), xiv.

equipping of the first artists in Scripture and proceed to explore the ways in which art created a multi-sensory worship experience.

The Artist

Exodus 35:30-36:2 establishes the standard for artistic calling in Scripture:

Then Moses said to the people of Israel, “See, the Lord has called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah; and he has filled him with the Spirit of God, with skill, with intelligence, with knowledge, and with all craftsmanship, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold and silver and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, for work in every skilled craft. And he has inspired him to teach, both him and Oholiab the son of Ahisamach of the tribe of Dan. He has filled them with skill to do every sort of work done by an engraver or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue and purple and scarlet yarns and fine twined linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of workman or skilled designer (35:30-35).

“Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whom the Lord has put skill and intelligence to know how to do any work in the construction of the sanctuary shall work in accordance with all that the Lord has commanded.” And Moses called Bezalel and Oholiab and every craftsman in whose mind the Lord had put skill, everyone whose heart stirred him up to come to do the work (36:1-2).

A few points stand out as significant in this passage. First, art appears here as a calling from God: “The Lord has called by name” (v. 30). This was not a generalized calling, addressed to the masses, but a special one addressed to specific individuals. This assures the reader that God may call a person to be an artist. Second, this passage indicates that artistic ability is God’s gift to the individual. Gene Veith writes, “Artistic talent is not to be thought of as some innate human ability, nor as the accomplishment of individual genius, but as a function of grace.”³⁶ One should not interpret Veith’s words in too restrictive a manner. Certainly, artistic ability may be a seemingly more natural product

³⁶ Gene Edward Veith, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 19.

of heredity or environment, yet even then, it is a grace from God. Third, from a Pentecostal perspective, it is significant that the first recorded instance of someone being filled with the Spirit was for artistic purposes.

Ideally, the artist would always use his or her God-given ability for the glory of the Giver, but Scripture illustrates that art may just as easily go awry. In Exodus 32, for example, the people offer their gold jewelry for the fashioning of an idol. Veith says, “The people who would so generously bring their possessions as offerings for the adornment of the Tabernacle here bring them for the casting of an idol. Aaron, the eloquent high priest, uses his gifts and his office to proclaim the worship of a god he has made.”³⁷ This is a picture of art and worship misdirected. More often, however, Scripture provides a picture of art as an important part of the worship experience.

The Sensory Experience of Worship

Worship in Scripture offered the participant an immersive sensory experience, engaging the whole being in relationship to God. The instructions for presenting a burnt offering in Leviticus 1 demonstrate a few of the senses involved. The worshipper would feel the head of the animal under his or her hands (v. 4), hear the sounds of the animals and the roar of the fire, see the blood sprinkled on the altar (v. 5), and smell the burning sacrifice (v. 9). Throughout Scripture, the sights and sounds of worship play an important role within the overall experience.

³⁷ Ibid., 30.

Music in Worship

Scripture continually references the important role of music in the lives of God's people. In the Old Testament, "Moses and the people of Israel sang [a] song to the Lord" following their deliverance from the Egyptians (Exod. 15:1). People sang as they worked, whether digging wells (Num. 21:16-18) or harvesting the vineyards (Isa. 16:10). Trumpets played at Jericho (Josh. 6:20) and at Gideon's defeat of the Midianites (Judg. 7:20-21). David played his lyre to soothe the tormented soul of King Saul (1 Sam. 16:23).

Later in his life, David provided some of the most formal and organized music in Scripture. He employed professionals to accompany the return of the ark to Jerusalem. The program included "singers who should play loudly on musical instruments, on harps and lyres and cymbals, to raise sounds of joy" (1 Chron. 15:16). This program continued as a regular part of temple worship so that "the number of them along with their brothers, who were trained in singing to the Lord, all who were skillful, was 288" (25:7). Psalm 150:3-5 offers a list of instruments used in this ministry: "Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with sounding cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals!"

New Testament authors also make frequent references to music, particularly to the hymns of the Early Church. Unlike the temple worship of the Old Testament, Ryken observes, "Music in the New Testament ... is no longer priestly and professional. It is solidly social, congregational, and 'amateur.'"³⁸ In regard to worship within the church,

³⁸ Ryken, *The Liberated Imagination*, 51.

then, the Apostle Paul asserts, “When you come together, each one has a hymn” (1 Cor. 12:26). Ephesians 5:19 expands on this, suggesting that those filled with the Spirit will find themselves “addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart,” words repeated in Colossians 3:16 of those within whom the word of Christ dwells richly. No list of this nature would be complete without reference to the marvelous hymns of worship recorded in the Book of Revelation. For example, the twenty-four elders fall before the One seated on the throne, casting their crowns at his feet and singing out, “Worthy are you, our Lord and God to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created” (Rev. 4:11). Other hymns of worship recorded by John include Revelation 5:9-10, 11:17-18, 15:3-4, and 19:1-8.

Visual Arts in Worship

As with the category of music, the Old Testament tabernacle and temple contain the premier examples of visual art in Scripture. They contained three kinds of art—symbolic, representational, and nonrepresentational. Symbolic art uses a concrete, physical form to stand for an abstract, spiritual reality. Ryken offers two examples of symbolic art: “The Ark of the Covenant symbolized atonement and the golden lampstands symbolized the light of God’s glory and grace.”³⁹

Representational art uses images to imitate life, representing the seen and the unseen world. In Exodus 25, for example, God commands the fashioning of sculptures portraying a representation of otherwise unseen angels: “And you shall make two

³⁹ Philip Graham Ryken, *Art for God’s Sake: A Call to Recover the Arts* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), 173, Kindle.

cherubim of gold; of hammered work shall you make them, on the two ends of the mercy seat” (v. 18). Later, God orders representations of nature like branches and blossoms—things of beauty that are seen in nature (vv. 31-33). Nonrepresentational art, on the other hand, is abstract art or pure form. Francis Schaeffer sees the pillars of Jachin and Boaz in 2 Chronicles 3:15-17 as examples of this kind of art. He writes, “Here are two free-standing columns. They supported no architectural weight and have no utilitarian engineering significance. They were there only because God said they should be there as a thing of beauty. Upon the capitals of those columns were pomegranates fastened upon chains. Artwork upon artwork.”⁴⁰

Beautiful sensate imagery forms the heart of Old Testament worship. The visual and audible elements combined immersed the worshipper in an image-rich experience with God. This realization makes splendid sense of the psalmist’s words: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord” (Ps. 27:4).

The New Testament adds little to the discussion of visual art since the Church had no buildings of its own. The ordinances of water baptism and communion, however, are powerful and rich images that belong to Christian worship. Godawa writes, “Baptism is an experiential image of death to sin and resurrection in Christ (Romans 6:1-7), a cleansing of sin (1 Peter 3:18-21). The Lord’s Supper is a memorial image of uniting with God through symbolically consuming him (John 6:48-58).”⁴¹ Together these ordinances

⁴⁰ Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 27.

⁴¹ Godawa, *Word Pictures*, 78.

engage all five senses of the participant, drawing him or her into an experience of and with God.

The Prophets and Imaginative Engagement

The prophets stand as shining examples of those whose relationship with God consumed their entire beings. They not only reflect upon the heart of God but also are somehow caught up into it. This in no way suggests that prophetic inspiration is a simple matter of emotional experience. Abraham Heschel insists that it is a matter of inner receptivity: “It is experienced as a divine act which takes place not within but beyond, as an event which happens in one’s view rather than in one’s heart. The prophet does not merely feel it; he faces it.”⁴² The prophet speaks in the name of a divine encounter.

The Scriptures bear witness to the fact that when God wanted to capture the hearts of the prophets, He went for their imaginations. He spoke to them in visions, symbols, and dreams. The prophets then went after the imaginations of the people. For Heschel, the prophetic imagination distinguishes the prophet from the ordinary person: “Like a poet, he is endowed with sensibility, enthusiasm, and tenderness, and above all, with a way of thinking imaginatively. Prophecy is the product of poetic imagination.”⁴³ This section explores the role imagination played in the relationships between God and prophet and between prophet and people.

⁴² Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Perennial, 2001), 554.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 469.

The Prophets and God

Of the four Hebrew words used to describe prophets in the Old Testament, two of them, *ra'ah* and *chozeh*, may be translated “seer,” a designation seemingly applied to individuals capable of seeing things that the average person cannot. The prophets are not just hearers of God’s word; they are visionaries for whom divine revelation often came by way of prophetic visions, visible or visualized experiences. Samuel Meier notes, “This special vision is so fundamental that for many of the literary prophets, the introductory rubric or opening sentence for the entire book employs words associated with the act of seeing.”⁴⁴ For example, the Book of Isaiah opens with these words: “The vision of Isaiah the son of Amoz, which he saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem” (Isa. 1:1). From the first line, Isaiah refers to the entire work as a book of vision that contained the things he had seen.

Similarly, Ezekiel’s opening line declares, “As I was among the exiles by the Chebar canal, the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God” (Ezek. 1:1). Ezekiel uses the plural, *visions*, implying that the experience of God’s calling in the first chapter was only the beginning of a series of experiences or visions. In addition, Amos, Micah, Nahum, Habbakuk, and Obadiah all begin with a reference to visual experiences, the things they saw. Ben Witherington argues, “While the auditory dimension of prophecy is by no means left behind, nevertheless the visual or visionary prophetic experience comes

⁴⁴ Samuel A. Meier, *Themes and Transformations in Old Testament Prophecy* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 43-44.

much more to the fore. Whether one thinks of tours of the Otherworld or images of cosmic transformation of this world, there is a constant presentation of visual stimuli.”⁴⁵

On occasion, the prophets report seeing ordinary things. For example, Jeremiah says, “And the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Jeremiah, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘I see an almond branch.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘You have seen well, for I am watching over my word to perform it’” (Jer. 1:11-12). Andrew Dearman explains how this particular oracle turns on Hebrew wordplay: “The Hebrew word for almond tree sounds like the Hebrew verb to watch.”⁴⁶ Jeremiah’s ability to rightly perceive the almond branch enabled him to understand the message that God is watching over his word to bring it to fulfillment.

Similarly, Amos 8:1-2 says, “This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, a basket of summer fruit. And he said, ‘Amos, what do you see?’ And I said, ‘A basket of summer fruit.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘The end has come upon my people Israel; I will never again pass by them.’” Again, the relaying of the message depended upon the prophet seeing rightly. To perceive that this was a bowl of *summer* fruit was imperative because the oracle once more turns on Hebrew wordplay. Gary Smith explains, “The ripe summer fruit in the vision involves a wordplay between *qayts* (summer, summer fruit) in the visionary images and *qets* (end) in the explanation of the vision.”⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ben Witherington, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 165-166.

⁴⁶ J. Andrew Dearman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 50.

⁴⁷ Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 381.

Throughout, Scripture suggests a strong visual element in the communications the prophets received from God. Witherington summarizes, “The prophet is expected to reflect on the meaning of images. Sometimes the significance of such visions lies in word association, sometimes in the pictographic symbol itself.”⁴⁸ Likewise, Meier observes, “The prophet was one who could see the specific relevance of an event, an object, a comment in terms of what Yahweh was trying to accomplish.”⁴⁹ This kind of seeing took place as God engaged the eyes of the prophets’ imaginations.

The prophets did not always see ordinary objects. They also saw extraordinary things. For example, Amos sees fire consuming both land and sea: “This is what the Lord God showed me: behold, the Lord God was calling for a judgment by fire, and it devoured the great deep and was eating up the land” (Amos 7:4). Zechariah sees a giant book soaring through the air: “Again I lifted my eyes and saw, and behold, a flying scroll! And he said to me, ‘What do you see?’ I answered, ‘I see a flying scroll. Its length is twenty cubits, and its width ten cubits’” (Zech. 5:1-2). Ezekiel sees a bizarre collection of half-animal, half-human figures (Ezek. 1:4-14). On occasion, prophets even see God, often enthroned: “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple” (Isa. 6:1). Though these visions are more surreal than an almond branch or basket of fruit, God nonetheless is communicating through image and symbol, an engagement with the prophets’ imaginations.

⁴⁸ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 144.

⁴⁹ Meier, *Themes and Transformations in Old Testament Prophecy*, 40.

The Prophets and the People

After capturing their imaginations, God called upon the prophets to communicate what they had seen to the people. The prophets, in turn, went after the imaginations of the people in an effort to turn their hearts toward God. The spoken oracle served as the most common prophetic medium to achieve this goal. The prophets employed every literary device at their disposal and turned them into the cinematic images of prophetic discourse. As Wiersbe notes, “It’s by using metaphorical language that you turn people’s ears into eyes and help them see the truth.”⁵⁰

The Prophets as Wordsmiths

The prophets, as consummate poets, employed the devices of Hebrew literature and poetry to take hold of the hearers’ attention, to challenge them, and even to surprise them. They use words to paint colorful pictures for the mind’s eye. As Daniel Hays writes, “Like master artists, they use figures of speech, wordplay, and verbal nuances, along with structural elements, to paint the complex interacting shades of color that proclaim their message.”⁵¹ Galen Goldsmith adds, “Their vocabulary, diction, and syntax can all be analyzed as drama, both for literary value and for oral effect. They are all economical with words as is poetry; they work with memorable reiterations of similar sounding words; and, they employ simple imagery through which any listener can

⁵⁰ Wiersbe, *Developing a Christian Imagination: An Interpretive Anthology*, 21.

⁵¹ J. Daniel Hays, *Message of the Prophets: A Survey of the Prophetic and Apocalyptic Books of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 52.

interpret public, moral and spiritual life.”⁵² Understanding the prophets’ mission and message requires an equal understanding of their various techniques of communication, which are almost always highly metaphorical and full of images. Brent Sandy summarizes well, saying, “If biblical prophecy had been written devoid of figures of speech, all that the prophets said could be reduced to a few pages. If we fail to grasp the inherent metaphorical nature of language, we will fail to understand prophecy.”⁵³

The prophets did more than offer poetic oracles, however. Witherington observes, “Prophets could offer up not only oracles but songs, not only songs but various forms of *meshalim* or metaphorical speech ranging from riddles, to taunts, to aphorisms, to proverbs, and even to the occasional parable.”⁵⁴ Isaiah 5:1-7 provides an example of a prophetic song:

Let me sing for my beloved
 my love song concerning his vineyard:
 My beloved had a vineyard
 on a very fertile hill.
 He dug it and cleared it of stones,
 and planted it with choice vines;
 he built a watchtower in the midst of it,
 and hewed out a wine vat in it;
 and he looked for it to yield grapes,
 but it yielded wild grapes.

And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem
 and men of Judah,
 judge between me and my vineyard.
 What more was there to do for my vineyard,
 that I have not done in it?

⁵² Galen L. Goldsmith, “The Cutting Edge of Prophetic Imagery,” *Journal of Biblical and Pneumatological Research* 3 (2011): 18.

⁵³ D. Brent Sandy, *Plowshares and Pruning Hooks: Rethinking the Language of Biblical Prophecy and Apocalyptic* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 58-59.

⁵⁴ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 143.

When I looked for it to yield grapes,
 why did it yield wild grapes?

And now I will tell you
 what I will do to my vineyard.
 I will remove its hedge,
 and it shall be devoured;
 I will break down its wall,
 and it shall be trampled down.
 I will make it a waste;
 it shall not be pruned or hoed,
 and briars and thorns shall grow up;
 I will also command the clouds
 that they rain no rain upon it.

For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts
 is the house of Israel,
 and the men of Judah
 are his pleasant planting;
 and he looked for justice,
 but behold, bloodshed;
 for righteousness,
 but behold, an outcry!

This song serves a parabolic purpose. In fact, Isaiah's song of the vineyard is a close parallel to Jesus' parable of the wicked tenants (Matt. 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-18) in that both spell out judgment upon Israel for its rebelliousness. God planted and tended the vineyard, doing everything within His power to see it succeed in bearing much fruit, but his efforts were futile. The vineyard refused to bear good fruit, so the Lord would no longer protect it from the earth.

As for prophetic narrative, one widely known example is seen in Nathan's confrontation with King David following his tangled affair with Bathsheba. Second Samuel 12:1-4 records Nathan's parable about the rich man who took the only sheep of the poor man. The prophet had so captured David's imagination through this story that Scripture says, "David's anger was greatly kindled against the man" (v. 5). Nathan's

subsequent revelation that “you are the man” (v. 6) led David to a response of repentance and sorrow.

Words are to a prophet what paints are to an artist. The art of the prophets is their poetry, their narrative, their use of metaphor, and their rhetorical use of dialogue, to name a few. Walter Brueggemann notes how the prophet “uses his artistic gifts to overthrow the deadly technique and unexamined ideology of his society.”⁵⁵ In regard to these artistic gifts and forms, Mark Boda and J. G. McConville add, “That these were used for effect is clear because they were sometimes extreme and shocking. No holds were barred in the prophets’ methods of persuasion.”⁵⁶ Nowhere is this more evident than in the prophets’ symbolic and dramatized acts.

The Prophets as Performers

Sometimes, the prophet dramatized the message. Daniel Block calls these “sign-acts, best interpreted as dramatic performance designed to visualize a message and in the process enhance its persuasive force.”⁵⁷ These symbolic acts, however, did not merely serve as a visual aid, secondary to verbal instruction. They were the dramatic equivalent to the spoken oracle or, as Morna Hooker puts it, “the dramatic embodiment of the divine purpose, which otherwise might well be at present hidden.”⁵⁸ Witherington states, “Sign

⁵⁵ Walter Brueggemann, “The Book of Jeremiah: Portrait of the Prophet,” *Interpretation* 37, no. 2 (April 1983): 137.

⁵⁶ Mark J. Boda and J. G. McConville, eds., *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Prophets* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), xxv.

⁵⁷ Daniel Isaac Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 166.

⁵⁸ Morna Hooker, *The Signs of a Prophet: The Prophetic Actions of Jesus* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), 39.

acts are revelations of God’s will or plan or purpose. As such, these signs should not be seen as either magic or merely acted parables but, rather, dramatic presentations of the truth—of the way things are or are about to be.”⁵⁹

The earliest sign act was that of Ahijah of Shiloh in 1 Kings 11:29-39. Ahijah tore his cloak into twelve pieces, handing ten of them to Jeroboam. This act signified that God would give Jeroboam rule over ten tribes of Israel while the other two tribes would go to Solomon’s son Rehoboam. Thus began the tradition of prophetic symbolism, which would increase in use among the later prophets.

Other prophets known for their sign acts include Isaiah, whom God commanded to walk around naked and barefoot for three years “as a sign and a portent against Egypt and Cush” (Isa. 20:3). Regarding this act, David Peterson notes, “We are not told that Isaiah was to proclaim anything. Action, rather than words, provides the key element.”⁶⁰ Additionally, Isaiah’s naming of his son in the eighth chapter could be seen as a symbolic act: “And the Lord said to me, ‘Name him Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz’” (v. 3). The child’s name means “quick to the plunder, swift to the spoil” and speaks of the way in which Assyria will sweep through Canaan, bringing destruction upon Israel and the surrounding nations.⁶¹

Jeremiah also performed prophetic sign acts. In Jeremiah 13, for example, God instructs Jeremiah to purchase a linen belt, wear it around his waist, and subsequently

⁵⁹ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 119.

⁶⁰ David L. Petersen, *The Prophetic Literature: An Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 20.

⁶¹ John Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 150.

bury it in the crevice of a rock. Verses 6 and 7 read, “And after many days the Lord said to me, ‘Arise, go to the Euphrates, and take from there the loincloth that I commanded you to hide there.’ Then I went to the Euphrates, and dug, and I took the loincloth from the place where I had hidden it. And behold, the loincloth was spoiled; it was good for nothing.” Jack Lundbom notes, “The two oracles following indicate that this act was to symbolize the ruined pride of Judah and Jerusalem, which at the time were pinning hopes on Assyria rather than listening to Yahweh’s voice and obeying his commands.”⁶² Other symbolic acts of Jeremiah include smashing a piece of pottery on the ground (19:1-13), presenting a cup of wine to the rulers of Judah and the surrounding nations (25:15-29), wearing a yoke upon his neck (27:1-28:16), purchasing a field at Anathoth (32:6-15), and placing large stones in the mortar of the pavement at the entrance of Pharaoh’s palace (43:8-13).

Ezekiel was another prophet given especially to symbolic behavior.⁶³ So outrageous were some of his acts that Lundbom writes, “In the modern-day they would be regarded as signs of mental illness, or at least nervous derangement. But this prophet is nevertheless a credible figure acting under the inspiration of God.”⁶⁴ Ezekiel 4 serves as a prime example of this unusual behavior:

And you, son of man, take a brick and lay it before you, and engrave on it a city, even Jerusalem. And put siegeworks against it, and build a siege wall against it, and cast up a mound against it. Set camps also against it, and plant battering rams against it all around. And you, take an iron griddle, and place it as an iron wall

⁶² Jack R. Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2010), 213.

⁶³ Ezekiel’s symbolic acts include 3:22-27; 4:1-3; 4:4-17; 5:1-17; 6:11-14; 8:1-18; 12:1-16; 12:17-20; 20:45-21:7; 21:8-17; 21:18-23; 37:15-28.

⁶⁴ Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 215.

between you and the city; and set your face toward it, and let it be in a state of siege, and press the siege against it. This is a sign for the house of Israel (vv. 1-3).

Here, God asks Ezekiel to enact a drama portraying the siege of Jerusalem using homemade backdrops and household utensils. In subsequent verses, Ezekiel plays the role of the besieged, and he is to lie on his left side for over a year and on his right for forty days, representing the years of Israel's rebellion and the years of her exile (vv. 4-8). During this time, he is to eat small daily rations (i.e., siege rations) of a poor quality bread (vv. 9-11). Iain Duguid explains, "The latter is a near-starvation diet, a mere eight ounces per day of an unpalatable mixture of grains and legumes, a mere eight ounces per day of water."⁶⁵ According to Moshe Greenberg, the mixture symbolizes a situation where the scarcity was such that no single grain was plentiful enough on its own to make a whole loaf.⁶⁶ Not only were the rations small and unsatisfying but also cooked over human excrement, a ceremonially unclean method of preparation symbolizing the defiled food that the Israelites would eat in exile (vv. 12-13). As a priest, Ezekiel protests because he has never eaten unclean food, so the Lord amends the instructions, allowing cow manure to replace the human waste (vv. 14-15). All the while, Ezekiel is to be prophesying against Jerusalem (v. 7).

Block interprets the actions of Ezekiel, saying, "By means of a series of disturbing but rhetorically powerful sign-acts, he is to address head-on the inevitable fate

⁶⁵ Iain M. Duguid, *Ezekiel*, The NIV Application Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 89.

⁶⁶ Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 1-20*, The Anchor Yale Bible Commentaries (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 106.

of Jerusalem.”⁶⁷ The actions clearly conveyed the message that God would bring judgment upon Jerusalem and sought to effect an acknowledgement of God by the people. Regarding this dramatized oracle, and others like it, Witherington observes, “Such symbolic acts are not, in principle, different in function from the telling of a parable or allegory, for they serve to reveal some truth about Israel’s relationship with God and God’s will for it.”⁶⁸ Symbolic action was, therefore, a natural extension of prophetic preaching.

The Prophets Themselves as the Sign

Perhaps the fullest expression of divine prophecy comes when the life of the prophet itself becomes the symbol. Beyond symbolically acting out the oracle of God, the prophet here lives the message in a very personal and often difficult way. For example, Hosea himself becomes the symbol in a marriage that was broken and then reestablished (Hos. 1-3). Lundbom says of Jeremiah that “the greatest poem is his life.”⁶⁹ At times, God refers to Ezekiel himself as a sign to the people so that when his wife dies, for example, he is prohibited from mourning her in a traditional fashion (Ezek. 24:15-24). Of Ezekiel, Block writes, “What other prophets spoke of, Ezekiel suffers. Ezekiel is a mopet, ‘sign, portent’ (12:6, 11; 24:24, 27), carrying in his body the oracles he proclaims and redefining the adage, ‘the medium is the message.’”⁷⁰ As a result, the people ask, “Will

⁶⁷ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, 164.

⁶⁸ Witherington, *Jesus the Seer*, 176.

⁶⁹ Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 217.

⁷⁰ Block, *The Book of Ezekiel, Chapters 1-24*, 11.

you not tell us what these things mean for us, that you are acting thus” (Ezek. 24:19). One can imagine such a question being posed after prophets had performed symbolic actions, which was, of course, the aim.

In summary, the prophets exhibited extraordinary creativity in delivering oftentimes forceful messages from God. They were visionaries, poets, spinners of tales, dramatists, and sometimes the message incarnate. Their rhetorical strategies are “both visual and aural, all designed to penetrate the hardened minds of [their] hearers.”⁷¹ God had captured their imaginations and thereby their hearts. They in turn went after the hearts of the people through an appeal to the same human faculty of imagination.

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to show from Scripture that God’s means of reaching the human heart is most often through the imagination, leading to a more holistic spirituality that engages every faculty in relationship with God. This premise was first explored through a look at the language of Scripture itself. As literature, much of the Bible is aimed at the imagination in an effort of moving the reader’s heart, as demonstrated, for example, through the centrality of metaphor and the use of various genres. A literary approach to Scripture is not without danger, but when navigated wisely, imaginative engagement offers the reward of whole-person encounter with God, encounters through which God works to bring about transformation and people experience full life in Christ.

⁷¹ Ibid.

The importance of imagination is also seen in the sensate worship of Scripture. God demonstrates an interest in aesthetics by calling and equipping artists and by commissioning the use of art in worship. The multisensory experience of worship at the temple offered the sounds of music, the smell of incense, and the sights of all kinds of art. Even within the context of the New Testament, water baptism and communion engage the senses. Worship in Scripture is holistic in that it possesses physical, intellectual, and emotional dimensions. A person should engage with God with the body, the mind, and the soul.

Imaginative engagement was also observed in this chapter by exploring the lives of the prophets. The prophets were set apart by their ability to think imaginatively and to see what others could not see. Therefore, God spoke to them through image, visions and dreams, and they began to imagine life as God desired, life as it could be if people fully acknowledged God. The prophets delivered the oracles of God, not as propositions but as poetry and drama. They were not mathematicians teaching an equation; they were artists painting a picture. The people of God did not need a new idea but rather a transformation of the heart. Out of their own divine encounter, they learned that the road from the head to the heart passed through the human imagination.

Imagination plays an important role in both the composition of Scripture and in its aim. Imagination must also play an important role in the lives of those who desire a holistic approach to relationship with God. The next chapter will explore the practical implications of what this means for Christian spirituality, especially within the context of a postmodern society in which the church often struggles to connect with younger generations in any kind of ongoing fashion.

CHAPTER 3: GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The current American church culture, still firmly rooted in the scientific methods of modernity, threatens limiting Christian spirituality to a mostly clinical endeavor. The church too often narrows the faith to a checklist of propositional truths and mundane responsibilities. As demonstrated in the previous chapter, the faith illustrated in Scripture involved a vibrant and holistic encounter with God. The language of that faith swelled with imagery and metaphor that fully engaged the imagination. Temple worship offered a sensory experience, drawing the worshipper in as participant rather than spectator. That kind of spirituality seems particularly fitting in a postmodern culture that tends to reject the rationalism and empiricism of the previous age and that embraces the mysterious and experiential.

This chapter will explore a broadened spirituality that goes beyond the confines of purely intellectual matter and seeks to engage the whole person. It begins with an examination of the imagination, both the challenges and the potential present in this often-neglected faculty of the human mind. The chapter will go on to consider the role of a redeemed imagination within spiritual formation, specifically within the practice of spiritual disciplines. After suggesting criteria for judging spiritual disciplines as acceptable Christian practice, it will investigate two historically Christian methods of imaginative prayer and will explore as spiritual discipline participation in the creative

arts, giving special attention to the ways in which a Pentecostal spirituality contributes to this approach.

The Human Imagination

Albert Einstein once said, “I am enough of an artist to draw freely upon my imagination. Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.”¹ While most would picture Einstein within the context of an MIT think tank rather than a group of Disney Imagineers, research indicates that he was as much a creative genius as a mathematical one: “Einstein’s impressive insights tended to come from visual images he conjured up intuitively, then translated into the language of mathematics (the theory of special relativity, for example, was triggered by his musings on what it would be like to ride through space on a beam of light).”² The most brilliant mathematical equation in history was not born in a laboratory but in a daydream. In fact, “Einstein liked to talk about the gift of ‘fantasy’ as being essential to the work he did.”³

Most people equate imagination with the imaginary. The human mind, however, works by metaphor and image, which makes imagination an integral part of everyday life. Gene Veith defines imagination as “the power of the mind to form a mental image,

¹ George Sylvester Veireck, “What Life Means to Einstein,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, October 26, 1929, accessed April 25, 2016, http://www.saturdayeveningpost.com/wp-content/uploads/satevepost/what_life_means_to_einstein.pdf.

² Michael D. Lemonick, “Was Einstein’s Brain Built for Brilliance?” *Time*, June 20, 1999, accessed March 16, 2016, <http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,27180,00.html>.

³ Leonard I. Sweet, *Carpe Mañana: Is Your Church Ready to Seize Tomorrow?* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 79.

that is, to think in pictures or other sensory representations.”⁴ Similarly, Gregory Boyd writes, “We don’t typically think with abstract information; we think by imaginatively replicating reality in our minds. Imagination is simply the mind’s ability to evoke images of things that aren’t physically present.”⁵ If, for example, someone asks a new homeowner about his or her recently acquired asset, the homeowner brings to mind an image of the house and from that provides a description. Sandra Levy takes this definition further, suggesting that imagination is more than images held in the mind. She defines imagination as “the inherent human power to transcend the concrete, to create new images and ideas that can open up new possibility and promise.”⁶ Returning to the homeowner illustration, the individual possesses not only the ability to recall the present condition of the house but also the ability to imagine how it might look if renovated.

Altogether, these definitions demonstrate how fundamental imagination is to all human activity. Christine Paintner and Amy Wyatt conclude, “Exercising imagination is the creative and critical, intuitive and integrative process central to human becoming. It gives us power to remember the past, to shape our desires, and to project possibilities for the future.”⁷ Unlike the rest of creation, humans possess the unique ability to translate imagined possibilities into reality. This particular attribute leads Erwin McManus to

⁴ Gene Edward Veith and Matthew P. Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed: Glorifying God with a Neglected Part of Your Mind* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 13, Kindle.

⁵ Gregory A. Boyd, *Seeing Is Believing: Experience Jesus through Imaginative Prayer* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 72.

⁶ Sandra M. Levy, *Imagination and the Journey of Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 3.

⁷ Christine Valters Paintner and Amy Wyatt, “Creativity as a Christian Spiritual Practice: Foundations and Explorations for Ministry,” *Journal of Supervision and Training in Ministry* 26 (2006): 78.

suggest, “The human imagination is perhaps the most distinct, unique, and valuable expression of being human.”⁸ Many species instinctively build, whether the beaver’s dam, the bee’s hive, or the ant’s colony, but humans are not simple creatures of instinct: “Humans create futures that exist only in the imagination. Every species builds, but humans create.”⁹

Imagination also serves as the locus of meaning in life. C. S. Lewis once said, “For me, reason is the natural organ of truth, but imagination is the organ of meaning. Imagination . . . is not the cause of truth, but its condition.”¹⁰ In other words, a person will not grasp the meaning of a word or concept until he or she has a clear image with which to connect it. The imagination facilitates this process. James Smith agrees that the imagination is the faculty by which people make sense of the world, but he clarifies that this happens in “a pre-conscious kind of reflection.”¹¹ Much of the imagination’s work occurs imperceptibly. In fact, Paintner and Betsy Beckman reference psychoanalyst Carl Jung, who believed that “our symbolic, [imaginative] knowing comes before rational thought. He suggests that only after first experiencing symbolic images are we able to then claim them, express them verbally, and come to understand them.”¹² Therefore, the

⁸ Erwin Raphael McManus, *The Artisan Soul: Crafting Your Life into a Work of Art* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 2014), 95.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

¹⁰ Michael Ward, “How Lewis Lit the Way: Why the Path to Reasonable Faith Begins with Story and Imagination,” *Christianity Today* 57, no. 9 (November 2013): 38.

¹¹ James K. A. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom: How Worship Works*, Cultural Liturgies, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 19.

¹² Christine Valters Paintner and Betsy Beckman, *Awakening the Creative Spirit: Bringing the Arts to Spiritual Direction* (New York: Morehouse, 2010), 9-10.

work of the imagination in the process of thought and in the development of meaning goes deeper than a person's conscious awareness.

The faculty of imagination allows a person to relive the past, make sense of the present, and anticipate the future. It is not the only faculty of the human mind, but it is certainly a significant one. Veith underscores the importance of imagination, saying, "In practice, the different faculties of our mind work together seamlessly, and the imagination plays an important role in integrating our ideas and our feelings, the outer world and our inmost selves. Imagination bridges the rational powers and the emotional center of our being."¹³ The various facets of the human mind—intellect, emotion, imagination, volition, etc.—work together so intricately that no one should try to divorce one faculty from another. Unfortunately, this has not always been the case in Christian history.

The False Dichotomy between Imagination and Reason

The Enlightenment of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries passed on to the modern world a dichotomy between reason and imagination, a tension between word and image. Paul Avis describes it as a dichotomy that privileges *logos* over against *eidos*. Of this, he writes, "The former is hailed as the vehicle of knowledge, mastery and progress; the latter dismissed as the source of ignorance, superstition and illusion. The first is the path of truth; the second to falsity."¹⁴ Ward plainly summarizes the predominant mindset

¹³ Veith and Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed*, 16.

¹⁴ Paul D. L. Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 22.

of modernity: “Reasonable people don’t need imagination. Imaginative people don’t need reason.”¹⁵ This also describes the predominant mentality of the church, particularly Protestant Evangelicalism, to the present time. A broad sweep through church history demonstrates how this came to be.

For the first two centuries, the church encouraged artists and craftsmen who came to the faith to continue to use their gifts in the everyday world. In opposition to Rome’s polytheism and its penchant for images or idols, however, Christians refrained from visually portraying God or Christ. William Dyrness observes that overtly religious art did not exist at this time. Instead, Christians made use of Greek imagery: “The shepherd resembled Apollo but reminded Christians of the Great Shepherd. An athlete’s palm, the Greco-Roman reward for athletic victory, recalled Paul’s reference to competing for the prize of the high calling of Christ.”¹⁶ With this approach, though, the untrained eye could not discern the intent of the image. The church, then, provided Christians with a new way to see the world and interpret the images around them.

The Roman Empire’s adoption of Christianity gave way to the idea of art being particularly Christian. Steve Turner notes, “The power of Rome had been reinforced through images and majestic architecture, and Constantine was keen that the Christian church should follow suit.”¹⁷ In the centuries following, however, the church took diverging paths: “The Eastern Church did more to develop its own iconic vocabulary,

¹⁵ Ward, “How Lewis Lit the Way,” 38.

¹⁶ William A. Dyrness, *Visual Faith: Art, Theology, and Worship in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 26.

¹⁷ Steve Turner, *Imagine: A Vision for Christians in the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 25.

while the Western Church did more to adapt the images and practices from the surrounding culture.”¹⁸ The advancement of art and image eventually led to the iconoclasm of the eighth and ninth centuries. Iconoclasts believed that art had gone too far and that images or representations of particularly holy people invited superstition and even idolatry. Iconodules, on the other hand, believed that objects and images could reveal the Divine, “inviting his presence, even if in an incomplete and mediated fashion.”¹⁹ The divide between East and West deepened as the East took more interest in the access to God that images provided while the Western tradition placed greater emphasis on the didactic value of art.

In the Western Church, the Renaissance brought a revival of art. Christians viewed painting, sculpture, and music as vehicles for expressing the glory of God. Luci Shaw describes it as a time when “art and religion were truly married.”²⁰ During this time, the church even sponsored many pieces of art, which gave the world some of the most famous frescos such as the “The Creation of Adam” by Michelangelo and “The Last Supper” by Leonardo da Vinci. Though incredibly beautiful, the great works of art created a problem. They left the impression that “Christian art” should make an explicit reference to Scripture and that creativity was the work of the imaginative elite. Common people, then, would better spend their time in the world of pragmatism. As Turner states,

¹⁸ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 32.

¹⁹ Robin Margaret Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004), 58.

²⁰ Luci Shaw, “Art and Christian Spirituality: Companions in the Way,” *Direction* 27, no. 2 (Fall 1998): 113.

“There was a gap between the everyday experiences of ordinary believers and these overtly religious paintings.”²¹

The Reformation largely solidified the dichotomy between reason and imagination. The reformers focused primarily on the words of the Bible and individual piety. Robin Jensen describes the prevailing mentality as one in which the source of revelation was contained in Scripture and the purest form of worship was with the heart, head, and mouth rather than with the eye. The reformers emphasized “the invisible and the textual over against the visible and sense-able—word over image.”²² Of the most well-known Reformation figures, Luther was the most open to the use of images or art in worship and private devotion. Calvin took a more moderate stance, allowing only some art. Zwingli, however, was a staunch objector and wanted to do away with art and image altogether. Dyrness provides a summary of Zwingli’s position: “The prime symbol of true belief is the word, invisible and heard; the prime symbol of false belief is the image, visible and seen.”²³ Moving into the eighteenth century, American puritanism held tightly to Reformed opposition of imagination and image. In the New World, the church developed a clear and plain method for everything from hermeneutics to revival. Dyrness concludes, “By the end of the 19th century, a church was more likely to contain a chart outlining the ages of salvation history than a print or painting. Only in the form of a chart

²¹ Turner, *Imagine*, 26.

²² Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 60.

²³ Dyrness, *Visual Faith*, 55.

could the order of the world be made clear in Christian terms.”²⁴ This opposition has largely remained with the Protestant Evangelical church into the twenty-first century.

In light of the case being made here for awakening the Christian imagination, the Church’s responsibility is not to follow postmodernity in reversing the dichotomy, privileging image over word, but to realize that it is a false dichotomy. As Avis argues, “Rational discourse and imagistic thinking are not mutually exclusive but actually entail each other, because discourse is composed of images and metaphors are the stuff of thought.”²⁵ Brian Godawa seeks to demonstrate this reality by appealing to the doctrine of the incarnation. As the incarnate Word of God, Jesus is not some timeless principle of reason or propositional syllogism. Godawa writes, “At the heart of Christianity is not merely a philosophy or worldview but an incarnate person. Christian theology should maintain an equal ultimacy of both word *and* image because at the core of our faith is this equal ultimacy in the incarnation: Word made flesh.”²⁶ The church should not pit reason against imagination but should seek the redemption of the entire person, every faculty of the mind and soul.

The Redeemed Imagination

Many Christians today believe the imagination is either the child’s world of make-believe or the heathen’s instrument of evil. Certainly, imagination may facilitate both. In fact, one could argue that the sin of Adam and Eve began within the imagination.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁵ Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*, 22.

²⁶ Brian Godawa, *Word Pictures: Knowing God through Story and Imagination* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 102.

Edmund Rybarczyk writes, “Because the Genesis account affirms that emotion is rooted in the creative order, the temptation variously appealed to their olfactory and visual senses, as well as their imagination on what it could mean to be like God.”²⁷ In other words, emotion and the imagination are the core level at which Satan approached the man and woman. Garrett Green, then, concludes that the Fall included the marring of the imagination. He states, “The sinner, while retaining the ability to image, has forfeited the basis on which to image God.”²⁸

Humanity tends to abuse and misuse the imagination. Worry, for example, misuses this faculty as the individual brings to mind images of the worst possible outcome in any given situation. In some cases, obsessively dwelling upon those outcomes could lead a person to precipitate the very things he or she most fears. Ambition could be another form of imaginative abuse. Here, the individual imagines the world in terms of the advances he or she could possibly make. Whatever form the abuse takes, the misuse of imagination leaves one filled with anxiety, anger, and self-absorption. Mark Edmundson poignantly speaks to the dangers of a fallen and dormant imagination:

Imagination is perilous, fair enough. But a person without imagination has no real capacity to envision a more humane and rich future and then try to create it. He’ll be unequipped to understand how his life could be turned into something better than it is. He’s unlikely to be able to see the world from anyone’s point of view but his own. He’s unlikely to live anywhere, actually, than in the immediacy of his own wants. He’ll be self-centered, grasping, and pragmatic—a creature who

²⁷ Edmund J. Rybarczyk, “Pentecostalism, Human Nature, and Aesthetics: Twenty-First Century Engagement,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 21, no. 2 (2012): 247.

²⁸ Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 89.

inhabits the state that Blake calls selfhood. I'm interested, then, in what one might call a redeemed imagination as a possible cure for a damaged or following one.²⁹

The issue is not whether imagination is good or bad, useful or not. It is, in fact, the way God created the mind to function. A person cannot help but use his or her imagination. Certainly, the imagination can produce idolatry and sin, but Christians do not have the option to simply ignore it for that reason. Instead, the church should seek for the redemption, the sanctifying, and the discipling of the imagination. Green asserts, "Salvation must take the form of something that can release the imagination from its bondage to false images."³⁰ According to Erwin McManus, discipleship is "less about gathering information than it is about expanding imagination."³¹ Shaw sees this illustrated in the Annunciation: "It has been said that faith is 'a certain widening of the imagination.' At the Annunciation (Luke 1:34), when Mary asked the angel, 'How shall these things be,' she was asking God to widen her imagination."³²

The redeemed imagination is that place where transformation happens, where the Word of God becomes effective in human lives. In the imagination, God gives believers the ability to see as He sees. Mary Ivancic calls for a healthy respect of imagination as the means by which a person comes to know reality: "This is especially true of the Ultimate Reality that is inaccessible to empirical investigation."³³ The redeemed imagination

²⁹ Mark Edmundson, "Imagination: Powers and Perils," *Raritan* 32, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 153.

³⁰ Green, *Imagining God*, 90.

³¹ McManus, *The Artisan Soul*, 101.

³² Shaw, "Art and Christian Spirituality," 112.

³³ Mary Karita Ivancic, "Imagining Faith: The Biblical Imagination in Theory and Practice," *Theological Education* 41, no. 2 (2006): 132.

possesses the capacity to see the reality of the kingdom of heaven, a kingdom that has come upon this world in dramatic fashion through the person and work of Jesus Christ. Smith writes, “We become people who desire the kingdom insofar as we are people who have been trained to imagine the kingdom in a certain way.”³⁴ This is not to suggest that one’s ability to imagine is his or her basis of faith or that subjective imagining trumps the revelation of God in Scripture and through Christ. As Green makes clear, “[Imagination] is not the ‘foundation,’ the ‘ground,’ the ‘pre-understanding,’ or the ‘ontological basis’ for revelation; it is simply the place where it happens—better, the way in which it happens.”³⁵ Imagination serves as one significant component of an individual’s spiritual formation.

The same imagination that possesses the ability to misshape a person in unhealthy and ungodly ways is the imagination that also possesses the ability to transform him or her in healthy and godly ways. Veith states, “To put all this in the phraseology of the Apostle Paul, both the old Adamic self and the new self in Christ prevail upon one’s imagination. There is a set of fallen and corrupt imaginations inside the Christian, and there is a set of resurrected, God-honoring, life-giving imaginations.”³⁶ The Christian must identify and turn from the first while identifying and developing the second. Boyd asserts, “We need to go directly against the current of our culture and begin to acknowledge the truth that our imaginations, when guided by the Holy Spirit and

³⁴ Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 125.

³⁵ Green, *Imagining God*, 40.

³⁶ Veith and Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed*, 78.

grounded in Scripture, can bring us into contact with a spiritual reality.”³⁷ The church should find the same value in redeemed imagination as A. W. Tozer, who said, “I long to see the imagination released from its prison and given its proper place among the Sons of the new creation.”³⁸

The Need to Return to a Christian Aesthetic

The awakening of the Christian imagination begins with the return of a Christian aesthetic, a sense of that which is beautiful, that which takes a person into the realm of emotion and sensation rather than pure reason. Scripture does not provide an explicit definition or philosophy of aesthetic, but neither is Scripture altogether silent. Appealing to the opening passage of Genesis, Terence Groth writes, “The record of God’s aesthetic evaluations at progressive junctures in the Genesis creation accounts, as well as the final evaluation of ‘very good,’ affirm that God invites, at least, his human creatures to recognize and take delight in the elements that go together to make his creation beautiful, and by mimicry their own creations, as well.”³⁹ Furthermore, Scripture assumes the presence of beauty as characteristic not only of creation but also of its Creator, the first artist. God, therefore, reveals something of himself through the beauty found in this world, whether of things especially majestic or things relatively ordinary. As people created in the image of the Divine Artist, Manuel Luz suggests, “We are moved by art

³⁷ Boyd, *Seeing Is Believing*, 130.

³⁸ Richard J. Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul: Journey into Meditative Prayer* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2011), 37.

³⁹ Terence R. Groth, “Toward a Biblical Theory of Aesthetics,” *Concordia Journal* 38, no. 4 (Fall 2012): 346.

because the beauty of art reflects a divine aesthetic placed deep within all of us.”

⁴⁰Consequently, any human act of creation that is beautiful and any appreciation of that beauty is participation with the beauty of God. Veith concludes, “When God is understood as the primal artist, depictions of his works can be a means of honoring him, of recognizing and imitating those forms that he chose to create.”⁴¹

The authors of Scripture demonstrated a divine aesthetic when they used various forms of written expression such as poetry and metaphor. One sees a similar aesthetic in the design and production that played out within the Old Testament tabernacle and temple, places of beauty that appealed to the worshippers’ senses as much as, if not more than, their minds. Art, then, is far more than mere decoration or entertainment. Ivancic describes the arts as a diverse field of symbolic languages—visual art, music, dance, drama, or film. “Like words,” she explains, “artistic symbols give rise to thought, beckoning the viewer or listener to discover ‘real life’ within the fictive world of the artwork.”⁴² David Taylor similarly asserts, “Our sight is broken and therefore requires training to see God’s world rightly. As an act of the imagination, the visual arts can enable us to see the world, for example, not as open to God’s presence but as charged with it.”⁴³ When approached in this way, the return to a Christian aesthetic, the creation

⁴⁰ Manuel Luz, *Imagine That: Discovering Your Unique Role as a Christian Artist* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2009), 35.

⁴¹ Gene Edward Veith, *The Gift of Art: The Place of the Arts in Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 48.

⁴² Ivancic, “Imagining Faith,” 133.

⁴³ W. David O. Taylor, “Discipling the Eyes: The Visual Arts Can Play a Powerful Role in Worship—If We Look Closely Enough,” *Christianity Today* 56, no. 4 (2012): 42.

and appreciation of beauty, becomes a means for discipleship. As Jensen notes, beauty and the arts help to shape people when “we come to know that the thing we see is not the truth itself but a means for our encounter with the truth.”⁴⁴

Within the Evangelical Protestant world, Pentecostals seem uniquely positioned to return to an aesthetic that significantly influences Christian spirituality. A perceived division between secular and sacred, a separating of body and mind from spirit and soul, has strained the relationship between the Church and the world of art, and Pentecostals have at times participated in perpetuating this dichotomy. In fact, their focus on the supernatural and sensational can lead them to easily overlook created beauty. As Rybarczyk observes, “Amid their quest for dramatic and extraordinary acts of God, Pentecostals commonly overlooked the miraculous beauty of diurnal life.”⁴⁵ Tae Young So, however, believes a fully Pentecostal spirituality can aid in overcoming this dichotomy “because Pentecostals think of the Holy Spirit as God who offers vitality to the human life.”⁴⁶ A conviction that the Holy Spirit desires to permeate the entirety of this human existence is the very thing that could move Pentecostals toward a spirituality that considers emotional and sensory dynamics, as opposed to the purely intellectual. Because the Spirit indwells the individual, Pentecostal spirituality is a thoroughly embodied one. For example, the clapping of hands, the lifting of arms, or the shouting of praise to God often accompanies Pentecostal worship. Speaking in tongues is a physical,

⁴⁴ Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 19.

⁴⁵ Rybarczyk, “Pentecostalism, Human Nature, and Aesthetics,” 253.

⁴⁶ Tae Young So, “Pentecostal Spirituality as Nurturing Vitality for Human Lives,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18, no. 2 (2009): 254.

and therefore embodied, evidence of Spirit baptism. Pentecostals seek the empowerment and guidance of the Holy Spirit not only for the proclamation of the gospel but also for the demonstration of the gospel, embodying the presence of Jesus through compassionate service. A consistent Pentecostal spirituality, therefore, recognizes “the truth that life is about physicality, not just spirituality. Indeed if we are living beings, if we are humus into which God breathes his holy *ruach*, then physicality is spirituality.”⁴⁷ To come to this realization naturally encourages the return to a Christian aesthetic and a spirituality that engages the mind as well as the emotion, the senses, and the imagination.

The Need for a Holistic Spirituality

Arguing for a holistic spirituality, Avis writes, “We have to respond to [divine revelation] not primarily cognitively, by intellectual analysis, but aesthetically, by indwelling its beauty ... The aesthetic response is not our whole response, but it is an important—and neglected—part of it.”⁴⁸ Christians need ways to respond to God that incorporate every faculty of the mind, every facet of what it means to be human. Tawa Anderson maintains, “Human beings are not merely minds, but are fully-embodied creatures; hence, our Christian formation requires not just intellectual training, but also formation of desire and imagination.”⁴⁹ Awakening the imagination may begin with the return to a Christian aesthetic, but it does not end there. According to Susan Burt, “The human imagination is awakened, nurtured, and nourished in many ways: when we play

⁴⁷ Rybarczyk, “Pentecostalism, Human Nature, and Aesthetics,” 243.

⁴⁸ Avis, *God and the Creative Imagination*, 67.

⁴⁹ Tawa J. Anderson, “Apologetics, Imagination, and Imaginative Apologetics,” *Trinity Journal* 34, no. 2 (2013): 237.

and explore; when we practice hospitality, stillness and silence, care and compassion; when we observe or participate in the arts; and when we enter the world of the story and the worldview of the storyteller.”⁵⁰ The remainder of this chapter will focus on specific ways in which a Christian can engage the imagination within the practice of spiritual disciplines in pursuit of a more holistic spirituality.

Imagination within the Disciplines of Spiritual Formation

Human imagination is a powerful faculty of the mind given by the Creator that, in many ways, serves as a bridge between emotion and reason. Matthew Ristuccia underscores its significance within the context of spiritual formation: “The human imagination is where meaning is made, where a vision for life is set, where mind and heart and will converge. It is simultaneously the most strategic and the most forgotten part of the human soul when it comes to Christian discipleship.”⁵¹ Awakening the imagination rescues the Christian from a purely intellectual or scientific faith and can significantly contribute to the way one relates both to God and to Scripture. Additionally, a more imaginative approach to the spiritual disciplines could potentially help the church reach and disciple the artists in local communities (who may not easily identify with the typical scientific approach to spirituality) or members of the Millennial generation (who often value image over word).

⁵⁰ Susan Burt, “Nurturing an Imaginative, Inquiring Spirit,” *Family and Community Ministries* 26 (2013): 129.

⁵¹ Veith and Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed*, 360.

Criteria for Judging Spiritual Disciplines as Acceptable Christian Practice

Without criteria by which to judge between acceptable and unacceptable disciplines, the church risks leading people into a spirituality that may readily engage the imagination but may also stray far from any semblance of Christianity. To avoid such dangers, spiritual disciplines must be thoroughly Christian, grounded in a relational encounter with God, approached with openness to the present work of the Holy Spirit, built upon Scripture, and must lead to transformed Christian living in the world.

Spiritual Disciplines Must Be Thoroughly Christian

Many in the Evangelical world have criticized the modern spiritual formation movement for advocating for a more mystic or contemplative spirituality, claiming that the movement has its roots in Eastern mysticism. The first criteria for judging the disciplines of a holistic spirituality is that they must be thoroughly Christian, not Hindu or Buddhist, in nature.

In “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” John Coe articulates well the distinction between these two approaches to spirituality. Eastern or New Age spirituality ontologically divides the world between the realm of the spirit and the realm of the material. Coe explains, “Through contemplation, the human soul sheds its connection with the body, striving to know God as he knows himself through his own efforts of meditation.”⁵² Alternatively, Christian spirituality divides the world between Creator and created. God makes knowledge of himself possible by breaking into the

⁵² John Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 142.

created realm of His own accord and revealing himself. Christian contemplation and biblical meditation “is not an ascent into the mind of God; it is a relational journey and experience of love as a response to the self-revelation of God by the incarnate Christ and indwelling Holy Spirit.”⁵³ The believer does not bring about some new reality through contemplative efforts; instead, he or she “puts the human will in a position to experience or discern the reality of what the Spirit has already made available to the inner person on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.”⁵⁴

Additionally, the Eastern mystic seeks to transcend thought or rationality, thereby escaping this present reality. The Christian mystic, however, centers thought upon God. In fact, if God is fundamentally rational and relational, He cannot be beyond thought. If the one who meditates transcends thought, God cannot be the object of the meditation. Douglas Groothius explains that in Christian contemplation, “there is always a clear object of the meditation that requires reason to apprehend. There is a *directedness* to these meditations; the person ruminates *on*, mulls *over*, thinks *about* something true. One’s mind is not ignored in this activity, but is embraced and engaged.”⁵⁵

Both the worldview motivating the spiritual disciplines and the object of those disciplines distinguishes Christian spirituality from Eastern or New Age spirituality. In

⁵³ Ibid., 146.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 152.

⁵⁵ Douglas R. Groothius, “Examining Contemplative Prayer,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172, no. 685 (March 2015): 21.

sum, “Christian mysticism is relational in orientation and rejects pagan mysticism that is ontological in nature.”⁵⁶ This relational orientation leads directly to the second criteria.

*Spiritual Disciplines Must Be Grounded
in a Relational Encounter with God*

The disciplines of any Christian spirituality must take place within the context of a dynamic and growing relationship with God. To the mystics’ credit, when they spoke of the Christian life they spoke of “an encounter and experience of the Trinity that transforms life.”⁵⁷ Transformation through relational encounter with God is the goal. Unfortunately, believers have too often reduced the Christian life to an ethical or theological equation that actually places themselves at the center. Scot McKnight offers a necessary correction, saying, “We need to learn to do our spiritual disciplines from the angle of direction (direct encounter with God) instead of indirection (what benefits we will receive).”⁵⁸

Though some Christians may suffer from an impersonal spirituality, Lee Roy Martin believes the Pentecostal church faces a danger of another kind. Pentecostals value divine encounter, but they “face the danger of seeking experiences rather than seeking God for God’s sake.”⁵⁹ When grounded in relationship with God, Pentecostals make a significant contribution to the overall conversation of Christian spirituality by

⁵⁶ Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 152.

⁵⁷ Graham Standish, “A Congregation of Mystics: Re-Igniting Our Passion for Encountering and Experiencing God,” *Congregations* 31, no. 2 (2005): 24.

⁵⁸ Scot McKnight, “Spirituality in a Postmodern Age,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 13, no. 2 (2010): 215.

⁵⁹ Lee Roy Martin, “Longing for God: Psalm 63 and Pentecostal Spirituality,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22, no. 1 (2013): 75.

maintaining that God wants to be known by those who will seek him. Rybarczyk expands on this idea, suggesting that “in a way surpassing many other Christian groups ... Pentecostals resolutely assert that this knowledge of God is not limited to the intellectual domain of human existence, but that the believer can sense and hear God in visceral and profound ways.”⁶⁰ If spiritual disciplines neither proceed from a dynamic relationship with the living God nor cultivate a deepening of that relationship at a visceral level, they are not worth pursuing.

Openness to the Work of the Holy Spirit

The cultivation of a relationship with God and the consequent transformation comes to the believer by way of the Holy Spirit. As Richard Langer notes, the spiritual formation movement, in general, and the Pentecostal church, more specifically, has served traditional Evangelicalism well by “fostering a deeper awareness of the ongoing and active work of the Spirit. There is a strong desire to hear from the Spirit and learn to recognize his voice.”⁶¹ Transformation through the spiritual disciplines necessitates this kind of openness to the Spirit because the Spirit provides the power for Christian living. Surprisingly parallel to Pentecostal spirituality, the Orthodox teaching of *theosis* emphasizes the idea that transformation into Christlikeness “involves synergy: the working together of the Holy Spirit’s energy (grace as pardon and enablement) and the believer’s energy (will, affections, and obedience). The believer is supposed to cooperate

⁶⁰ Edmund J Rybarczyk, “Spiritualities Old and New: Similarities between Eastern Orthodoxy and Classical Pentecostalism,” *Pneuma* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 10.

⁶¹ Richard Langer, “Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 185.

with the Holy Spirit amid the process of transformation.”⁶² Patrick Oden affirms that within the context of spiritual disciplines “the Spirit does not simply keep people busy with religious chores. Rather the Spirit empowers participation that is profoundly creative.”⁶³

As a case in point, Leslie Hardin applies this criterion to the discipline of Bible study when he asserts, “Any method of interpreting Scripture that has transformation as its goal must include the involvement of the Spirit.”⁶⁴ The reader must begin with openness to what the Spirit wants to do in him or her through those Scriptures in the present. Andrew Village observes how this emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the life of the believer through Scripture “gives high importance to contemporary religious experience” because that experience “is understood as being closely linked to the experience of people in the biblical narrative.”⁶⁵ Openness to the Spirit invites an understanding that the Spirit desires to accomplish in the contemporary reader a similar work to that of which one reads in the Bible. Hardin maintains that the Spirit’s role of reproducing within the church the character of Christ “suggests that our interpretations of Scripture must go beyond mere historical investigation and consider how the Spirit is using the very words of life to affix his signature upon the interpreter’s heart and mind.”⁶⁶

⁶² Rybarczyk, “Spiritualities Old and New,” 14.

⁶³ Patrick Oden, “An Emerging Pneumatology: Jürgen Moltmann and the Emerging Church in Conversation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18, no. 2 (2009): 277.

⁶⁴ Leslie T. Hardin, “Searching for a Transformative Hermeneutic,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 152.

⁶⁵ Andrew Village, “The Charismatic Imagination,” *PentecoStudies* 11, no. 2 (2012): 216.

⁶⁶ Hardin, “Searching for a Transformative Hermeneutic,” 152.

This is not to say, however, that Christian spirituality somehow escapes the bounds of Scripture, a point that leads to the next criterion.

Spiritual Disciplines Must Be Built Upon Scripture

Openness to the Spirit neither lessens the authority of Scripture nor erodes the foundational role Scripture plays in the practice of spiritual disciplines. As Hardin suggests, “Openness run amok can lead to heresy. Opening ourselves to the leading of the Spirit also opens us to the possibility of being led by the spirits.”⁶⁷ The Apostle John calls believers to test the spirits (1 John 4:1), a task in which the Word of God provides the standard by which to judge. The desire for personal transformation in the present does not negate the need for historical investigation, developing an informed understanding of the historical context and original intent of the author. Sandra Schneiders adds, “No one who is serious about biblical spirituality should be excused from the study requisite for a well-grounded understanding of biblical texts in their own historical-cultural contexts and according to their literary genres and theological categories.”⁶⁸

A move toward a more holistic spirituality or a more contemplative one, in which an individual may engage the imagination, could imply a move away from Scripture. A move away from Scripture, however, is a move into extremely dangerous territory. The follower of Christ must inescapably tether all spiritual disciplines to the truth of the Word. Kenneth Boa suggests that a Christian avoids dangerous territory “by commitment to sound doctrine, by being comfortable with a high view of Scripture, and by

⁶⁷ Ibid., 151.

⁶⁸ Sandra M Schneiders, “Biblical Spirituality,” *Interpretation* 56, no. 2 (April 2002): 142.

approaching the Word with a willingness to study it and put it in practice.”⁶⁹ Not only does the Bible hold contemporary relevance, it also forms the basis for determining appropriate expressions of faith and spiritual practice. Adam McClendon writes, “The Bible is the basis for shaping one’s understanding of and experience with God. It is the basis for evaluating what is and is not of the Spirit of God. Additionally, the Bible grounds spirituality in an objective standard.”⁷⁰

In reality, the church should never consider all spiritual disciplines as equal. New believers should not necessarily begin by exploring the practices of biblical meditation or contemplative prayer. Boa maintains, “The disciplines of extensive Bible study and grounding in good theology should be regarded as prerequisites to the [contemplative] practices.”⁷¹ A thorough understanding of the background and context of Scripture should precede the pursuit of more imaginative engagement with Scripture.

*Spiritual Disciplines Must Lead to Transformed
Christian Living in the World*

The final criterion to consider here consists of the need for spiritual disciplines to lead one to a life of Christian transformation, a life on mission within both the church and the world. Inquiring of the mystics or considering more contemplative practices should not, as Eugene Peterson notes, mean “quiet, withdrawn, serene or benign.”⁷² He goes on

⁶⁹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical and Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 166.

⁷⁰ Adam McClendon, “Defining the Role of the Bible in Spirituality: ‘Three Degrees of Spirituality’ in American Culture,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 2 (Fall 2012): 225.

⁷¹ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 166.

⁷² Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 112.

to define contemplation as “living what we read, not wasting any of it or hoarding any of it, but using it up in living.”⁷³ The disciplines of any spirituality must work within the context of a person’s life. Most people cannot take a three-month sabbatical to pursue a deeper walk with God. Consequently, Langer insists, “We must find tools that allow one to go deeper without going elsewhere. We must find practices for an *embedded* spirituality not an *extracted* spirituality.”⁷⁴

Many within the church today fear that “contemplation and mysticism will reduce a person’s involvement in service to the kingdom of God and the world.”⁷⁵ The isolation from each other of the inward and the outward dimensions of spirituality, however, tends to distort both. Ken Wilson suggests that Jesus combined these dimensions in his own person: “He was an activist, a man with a message and a mission, working to make the world a better place. But he was also a contemplative with an inner life marked by a deep awareness of God that connected him with others and all living things.”⁷⁶ When Susan Muto suggests that “any split in ministry between the contemplative and the active life, between prayer and participation, between an in depth spiritual formation and the pursuit of Christian excellence in the working places of family, church, and society is simply an illusion,” she is suggesting that Christian spirituality and Christian mission are two sides

⁷³ Ibid., 113.

⁷⁴ Langer, “Points of Unease with the Spiritual Formation Movement,” 201.

⁷⁵ Tom Schwanda, “‘To Gaze on the Beauty of the Lord’: The Evangelical Resistance and Retrieval of Contemplation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 66.

⁷⁶ Ken Wilson, *Jesus Brand Spirituality: He Wants His Religion Back* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2008), 89.

of the same coin.⁷⁷ Only as one grows inwardly in relationship with Christ can one serve outwardly those within his or her sphere of influence. Anyone willing to take seriously a more robust spirituality, one that engages even the imagination in relationship with God, must take as seriously the fact that the disciplines of that spirituality must lead to a transformed life of love and service to others.

In summary, the disciplines of a holistic spirituality, one that is contemplative in nature and that seeks to engage the imagination, must be thoroughly Christian, grounded in a relational encounter with God, open to the work of the Holy Spirit, built upon Scripture, and oriented toward practical life change.

Engaging the Imagination through *Lectio Divina* and Ignatian Contemplation

With the preceding criteria serving as a framework in which one can safely explore spiritual disciplines that engage the imagination, this section offers two examples of disciplines that pre-date the Enlightenment and seem to fit well within said framework: *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation.

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is a Latin phrase meaning “divine reading.” As a method of Christian prayer, it has roots in the desert monastic tradition of the third through fifth centuries. Saint Benedict of Nursia, who lived at the turn of the sixth century, refined the use of *lectio* and included the method in the practices of his monastic order. Practiced communally, the Benedictine monks would hear the Scripture read during the Liturgy of

⁷⁷ Susan Muto, “Living Contemplatively and Serving God in the World: Two Sides of the Coin of Christian Ministry,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 6, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 82.

Hours, and each would hold whatever word or phrase stood out in his or her heart throughout the day. “This process was described as ‘rumination,’” which would eventually lead to later insight and contemplation.⁷⁸ Practiced individually, a monk would slowly read over Scripture, line by line, pausing after each line to ponder and allow the words and phrases to sink into the heart. Paintner notes, “When a particular word or phrase kindled the heart and the imagination, they would rest there and allow the prayer experience to unfold.”⁷⁹ Paintner describes an organic process, an experience in which the Holy Spirit leads the person in prayer. These men and women regarded Scripture as living, “animated in an ongoing way by the Spirit. It was not written once to remain fossilized in its historical form, but the inspired words continue to reveal the wisdom of God’s desires for us and our world at each moment in time.”⁸⁰

In *lectio divina*, “the scriptural texts were prayerfully meditated on, slowly and thoroughly chewed, digested and then regurgitated from the ‘stomach of memory’ to be ruminated and re-digested.”⁸¹ Evan Howard describes this as a spiritual discipline of Scripture reading “which includes elements of prayer and meditation and which aims to bear fruit in the spiritual growth of the reader.”⁸² This practice formed the core of

⁷⁸ Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina: The Sacred Art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths, 2011), 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸¹ Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin, eds., *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 178.

⁸² Evan Howard, “Lectio Divina in the Evangelical Tradition,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 58.

monastic spirituality. As James Fodor states, “Reading and meditation are the systole and the diastole—the heartbeat dash of the monastic scriptural practice.”⁸³

Most contemporary approaches to Scripture have more in common with scholastics than with monastics, more concern with information than with transformation. The church, however, needs both approaches. As Boa states, “An over emphasis on one or the other can lead to the extremes of cold intellectualism or mindless enthusiasm.”⁸⁴ He then suggests that the practice of *lectio divina* may help the church find balance in a modern world, “because it stresses reading scripture for spiritual formation through receptive openness to God’s loving call of grace.”⁸⁵ As Susan Muto asserts, “*Lectio divina* goes beyond exegetical-critical methods to a more personal-reflective approach. Two elements intersect: our desire to grow in spiritual self-knowledge and our intention to let these communications change our lives.”⁸⁶

Lectio

Lectio divina follows four movements: *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). The first movement involves the reading of Scripture. More than simply divine reading, one could describe the heart of *lectio divina* as sacred listening, reading with ears attuned to hear the voice of God. This discipline assumes that God is already calling to His people through the text and that He

⁸³ Treier, Husbands, and Lundin, *The Beauty of God*, 178.

⁸⁴ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 175.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Susan Muto, “The Art and Discipline of Formative Reading: Revisiting Holy Scripture with Humble Receptivity,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 5, no. 1 (2012): 100.

has something to offer every time the believer makes room to receive His presence.

Paintner instructs, “As you read the words of your selected passage aloud and really hear them, practice reverential listening for a word or phrase that chooses you. Notice if one of the words or phrases creates an energetic response within you.”⁸⁷ Paintner calls the reader to notice whether the passage inclines his or her heart to draw near to God or to perhaps resist. Either response could hint at the work the Spirit desires to accomplish in the given moment.

As it regards this movement of *lectio*, Robert Webber urges, “As you read those Scriptures that lead you into a walk with the Spirit, open your heart and mind to the voice of God met in the words and images of Scripture.”⁸⁸ In the words of Richard Foster, *lectio* is “seeing the text of Scripture, engaging the sanctified imagination in the full drama of God’s Word.”⁸⁹

Meditatio

In the *meditatio* movement of *lectio divina*, one allows the words of Scripture to move from the head to the heart. Again, Paintner offers assistance: “Once you have allowed the word or phrase to choose you, sink into the experience of allowing it to unfold in your imagination. Of what images are you aware? Savoring the sacred text means tending to the sights, smells, sounds, tastes, and touch.”⁹⁰ Within this movement,

⁸⁷ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 95.

⁸⁸ Robert Webber, *The Divine Embrace: Recovering the Passionate Spiritual Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2006), 210.

⁸⁹ Foster, *Sanctuary of the Soul*, 41.

⁹⁰ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 122.

the participant reflects on those segments of the reading that the Holy Spirit uses to trigger a response. Here, one ruminates upon the text, welcoming the images and feelings it brings, listening for God's call to his or her life right now.

Oratio

The movement of *oratio*, or prayer, relates to the two prior movements of reading and meditation. In this movement, the reader is “applying the passage to [his or her] own life, leading to personal conviction, resolution, and prayer.”⁹¹ More specifically, Boa says, “*Oratio* is the fruit of *meditatio*, and it is the way in which we interiorize what God has spoken to us through the passage. It is a movement from truth to implication, from hearing to acknowledgment, from understanding to obedience.”⁹² Depending on the reading and meditation, prayer could take any number of forms, including confession, adoration, intercession, or thanksgiving.

Of course, prayer may occur at any time during the practice of *lectio divina*. A person may find him- or herself alternating freely between all four movements. This discipline has “a fluid and responsive quality to it.”⁹³ To maintain that fluidity, one must realize that, as Boa suggests, “*Lectio divina* is not a lockstep 1—2—3—4 movement.”⁹⁴

⁹¹ Veith and Ristuccia, *Imagination Redeemed*, 54.

⁹² Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 180.

⁹³ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 5.

⁹⁴ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 181.

Contemplatio

The fourth and final movement of *lectio divina* is contemplation. The goal is to slow down, to “release all the words, thoughts, images, memories, and invitations that have emerged in our prayer, and [to] rest even more deeply into the presence of God.”⁹⁵ Here, one creates quiet space, making room for the Spirit’s work. Rybarczyk suggests that the “divine-human cooperation is best realized amid silence.”⁹⁶ Paintner clarifies that the silence “to which we are called in contemplative prayer is not a void or an absence of sound, but a rich and vibrant presence.”⁹⁷ To that, Peter Haas adds, “In the space of *lectio divina*, we are listening for something more than just information; we are listening for transformation. In this way, it’s as if the silence helps us surrender our need to be in control of the reading and to consent to the Scripture and the Holy Spirit ‘reading’ us.”⁹⁸

Lectio Divina as an Acceptable Spiritual Discipline

Lectio divina fits within the framework of a spirituality that seeks engagement with the Christian imagination, particularly in the movement of meditation. Rather than simply reading the words of the twenty-third Psalm, for example, one can enter into the scene as a sheep being led and cared for by the Good Shepherd. Ivancic says, “Resonating with the images conveyed by the inspired words, we not only see our own lives reflected in the pages of Scripture but also discover new ways to imagine God and

⁹⁵ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 159.

⁹⁶ Rybarczyk, “Spiritualities Old and New,” 14.

⁹⁷ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 159.

⁹⁸ Peter Traben Haas, “Contemplative Congregation: An Invitation to Silence,” *The Christian Century* 131, no. 5 (March 2014): 23.

our relationship with God.”⁹⁹ Additionally, the practice of *lectio divina* fits within the criteria for acceptable disciplines. It is anchored in Christian history and practice, grounded in divine encounter, open to the Holy Spirit, and guided by the very text of Scripture. Through the movements of prayer and contemplation, the individual internalizes the passage so that he or she can then live out of the transformation into Christlikeness that it brings.

Ignatian Contemplation

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, lived several centuries after Christians began practicing *lectio divina* as a method of prayerful engagement with Scripture. Ignatius went further in developing a form of praying with the imagination by offering what Paintner describes as “a deeply expanded version of *meditation*.”¹⁰⁰ Boyd notes, “Throughout his Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius called for practitioners to use their imaginations to further their spiritual growth.”¹⁰¹ O’Brien expands this thought, saying, “Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories. In the Ignatian tradition, praying with the imagination is called contemplation. In the Exercises, contemplation is a very active way of praying that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions.”¹⁰² This method of imaginative reading “serves to allow the text to reveal the divine presence to

⁹⁹ Ivancic, “Imagining Faith,” 138.

¹⁰⁰ Paintner, *Lectio Divina*, 105.

¹⁰¹ Boyd, *Seeing Is Believing*, 92.

¹⁰² Kevin F. O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure: Experiencing the Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius in Daily Life* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2011), location 1131 of 2229, Kindle.

particular readers” with the goal of helping participants “discern God’s will for their lives.”¹⁰³

Ignatius specifically called participants to engage imaginatively with Scripture with the five senses. As Gloria Hutchinson explains, “The spirituality of Ignatius, as codified in his Exercises, reflects his belief that our senses can provide us with passage into the mysteries of Christ’s life. They can enable us to experience the history of salvation in the present tense.”¹⁰⁴ In essence, “[Ignatius] wants us to en flesh prayer by bringing our bodily senses to bear on the Scriptures.”¹⁰⁵ This process of entering imaginatively into the biblical narrative “makes the scene more present and real to us and it helps us transition from the cognitive, analytical level to the affective, feeling level of our being.”¹⁰⁶

The Practice of Ignatian Contemplation

The process begins with a study of the selected passage. Ignatius took the Scripture much more seriously than those today who view devotional reading of the Bible as intellectual assent or emotional reaction. Gary Hansen describes this process of contemplation as one that “requires intellectual work and emotional presence—and every other form of engagement a human person can bring. Ignatius’ prayer of the senses allows the Word of God to be the forum for prayer as real conversation, asking God

¹⁰³ Village, “The Charismatic Imagination,” 213.

¹⁰⁴ Gloria Hutchinson, *Six Ways to Pray from Six Great Saints* (Cincinnati, OH: Franciscan Media, 2015), 56.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁰⁶ Boa, *Conformed to His Image*, 179.

questions, knowing we are heard and actually hearing answers.”¹⁰⁷ More pointedly, Izaak de Hulster stipulates that imaginative engagement with Scripture “should be controlled by proper knowledge, [which] requires study.”¹⁰⁸ Laying the intellectual groundwork of understanding the context and the background of a passage prepares the way for divine encounter in contemplation and can only enrich the experience. Ideally, the participant should lay the intellectual groundwork the day (or days) immediately preceding the time of contemplation. When selecting a passage for contemplation, Ignatius recommended using selections from the Gospels. More specifically, he chose scenes of Jesus acting rather than Jesus teaching or telling parables. David Fleming explains, “[Ignatius] wants us to see Jesus interacting with others. Jesus making decisions. Jesus moving about. Jesus ministering. He doesn’t want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience him. He wants Jesus to fill our senses. He wants us to meet him.”¹⁰⁹

Once a person makes room for contemplation, Timothy Gallagher observes how Ignatius would begin the time of prayer with a focus upon God’s love: “We begin our prayer by considering how God our Lord looks at us: the love in the divine gaze upon us. This moment is brief, but it is of the greatest importance for through it our prayer immediately becomes what it most profoundly is—relationship: the human person in

¹⁰⁷ Gary Neal Hansen, *Kneeling with Giants: Learning to Pray with History’s Best Teachers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2012), 107, Kindle.

¹⁰⁸ Izaak J de Hulster, “Imagination: A Hermeneutical Tool for the Study of the Hebrew Bible,” *Biblical Interpretation* 18, no. 2 (2010): 117.

¹⁰⁹ David L. Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), location 394 of 725, Kindle.

relationship with God.”¹¹⁰ Ignatius tethers contemplation to both the Scripture and a relational encounter with God.

With the content of the selected passage present and the heart attune to God’s love, Ignatius invites the participant to engage imaginatively in the text: “He invites us to compose ourselves imaginatively within the event described in the text. This composition, Ignatius says, ‘will be to see with the site of the imagination the material place where the thing I wish to contemplate is found.’”¹¹¹ In Hutchinson’s words, “[Ignatius’] method of meditating requires that we step out of ourselves and into a Gospel scene where we become part of the action.”¹¹² The participant makes the events of Jesus’ life present in the moment. O’Brien instructs the individual to “visualize the event as if you were making a movie. Pay attention to the details: sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event. Lose yourself in the story ... At some point, place yourself in the scene.”¹¹³ This process by which one sees the people, hears the words, and observes the actions—personally participating in the event—is Ignatian contemplation.

In entering the Gospel scene, one should give particular attention to Jesus. Fleming suggests, “We watch his face. We listen to the way he speaks. We notice how people respond to him. These imaginative details bring us to know Jesus as more than a

¹¹⁰ Timothy M Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation: An Ignatian Guide to Praying with Scripture* (New York: Crossroad, 2008), location 676 of 1417, Kindle.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, location 724 of 1417.

¹¹² Hutchinson, *Six Ways to Pray from Six Great Saints*, 60.

¹¹³ O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, location 1134 of 2229.

name or historical figure in a book. He is a living person.”¹¹⁴ Margaret Silf asserts that the whole purpose of Ignatian contemplation is for the participant to become an apprentice to Jesus, learning from the Master in the attitudes and values He displays. She writes, “He invites us to learn alongside him in this very earthed and relevant way. Not to get a set of notes to file away. Not to pass an exam. But to become more and more infused and enthused by the values and attitudes of this man who lived in such true and close alignment with the core of all being, that people called him the Son of God.”¹¹⁵

Amid all of this imaginative engagement, Ignatius would have the participant come to a point in the scene where he or she enters into dialogue with Jesus. It could be that the individual brings particular questions into the time of contemplation. On the other hand, it may be that Jesus simply pauses, looks lovingly upon the participant, and asks, “What may I do for you?” The individual might make his or her request, listening for Jesus’ answer, or he or she might ask in return, “What may *I* do for you?” again listening for Jesus’ answer. The goal of all prayer is colloquy, that is, dialogue. As Gallagher notes, “Colloquies may arise at any time in our prayer. When they do, our prayer has reached its deepest center. Then all anxiety to move forward, all further reflecting or imagining may be simply relinquished. This heart-to-heart communication has primacy over all else in prayer.”¹¹⁶ When the dialogue with Jesus has ended, the participant may resume the time of contemplation or bring the time to a close.

¹¹⁴ Fleming, *What Is Ignatian Spirituality?* location 399 of 725.

¹¹⁵ Margaret Silf, *Companions of Christ: Ignatian Spirituality for Everyday Living* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2005), 40.

¹¹⁶ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, location 823 of 1417.

Ignatian Contemplation as an Acceptable Spiritual Discipline

Those unfamiliar with Ignatian contemplation as prayer through imaginative engagement with Scripture may worry about going beyond the bounds of Christian practice or about selfish or ungodly influences. Significantly, Ignatius himself shared a similar concern. Hansen states, “[Ignatius] especially wanted to make sure we were not deceiving ourselves by what he called ‘disordered affections.’”¹¹⁷ When practiced correctly, however, this discipline fits well within the criteria of that which is acceptable in Christian practice. Ignatius did, for example, purposefully anchor the practice in Scripture. Gallagher explains, “The scriptural text itself guides the work of the imagination and so ensures the essential authenticity of such imaginative prayer.”¹¹⁸ Moreover, Hansen concludes that if God speaks through the prayer of imagination, “the message will not be something out of the blue. If it is God speaking, it will be true to what God already said in Scripture.”¹¹⁹

Additionally, Ignatian contemplation is grounded in a relational encounter with God and an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. John Coe broadly defines contemplative prayer as “the act and experience whereby our human spirit opens to and attends to the indwelling Spirit of Christ, who is continually revealing himself to us and bearing witness to our spirits that we are children of God, loved by God in Christ.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Hansen, *Kneeling with Giants*, 97.

¹¹⁸ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, location 390 of 1417.

¹¹⁹ Hansen, *Kneeling with Giants*, 113.

¹²⁰ Coe, “The Controversy over Contemplation and Contemplative Prayer,” 150.

Therefore, Gallagher concludes, “We trust that the Spirit, who ‘comes to the aid of our weakness’ (Romans 8:26) when we pray, will guide not only the activity of our minds, but also the work of our imaginations.”¹²¹ If the participant worries that his or her imagination is going too far, O’Brien advises, “Do some discernment with how you are praying. Where did your imagination lead you: closer to God or farther away? Is your imagination bringing you consolation or desolation?”¹²² Ignatius also advocated for the importance of having a spiritual director under which one could explore the practice of contemplation. A spiritual director would provide guidance to the participant, especially as questions arise during imaginative prayer.

Finally, Ignatian contemplation fits the criterion of leading one to a life of transformation into Christlikeness. Contemplation should lead to colloquy, and colloquy should lead to practical life-change. In fact, Andrew Village explains, “These engagements with Scripture were part of a wider process intended to help the exercitants discern God’s will for their lives, rather than simply help them to understand the text better.”¹²³ Insofar as Ignatian contemplation meets the criteria submitted here, one could certainly conclude that it is an acceptable spiritual discipline to explore.

Though not the only disciplines that may apply, *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation serve as two examples of spiritual disciplines through which an individual can explore the process of engaging the imagination. A person practices these disciplines

¹²¹ Gallagher, *Meditation and Contemplation*, location 390 of 1417.

¹²² O’Brien, *The Ignatian Adventure*, location 1139 of 2229.

¹²³ Village, “The Charismatic Imagination,” 213.

inwardly, in a contemplative fashion. The church should also make room, however, for spiritual disciplines that allow for an outward expression.

Engaging the Imagination through the Outwardly Expressed Disciplines of the Creative Arts

Increasingly, the church's understanding regarding the range of practices that count as spiritual disciplines has broadened to include the creative arts. Oden notes the recent attempt by some to participate with the creative God in bringing together physical expression and spiritual experience. He writes, "When each person is empowered to express and develop his or her [artistic] gifts, increasing diversity can be expressed, resulting in both creativity and ownership."¹²⁴ Such expression becomes a means of attending to the work of God in one's life. Though human imagination is limited by narrow ideas and contexts of living, God's imagination is limitless and able to consider all possibilities, and He calls people to become actively aware of all that is possible in their lives and in this world by His power. Paintner and Wyatt assert, "A dynamic contemporary Christian spirituality must include practices that nurture creativity by freeing the imagination."¹²⁵

Those advocating for creative arts as spiritual discipline ground their argument in the Genesis account of creation. Dorothy Sayers asserts, "Looking at man, [God] sees in him something essentially divine, but when we turn back to see what he says about the original upon which the 'image' of God was modeled, we find only the single assertion, 'God created.' The characteristic common to God and man is apparently that: the desire

¹²⁴ Oden, "An Emerging Pneumatology," 277.

¹²⁵ Paintner and Wyatt, "Creativity as a Christian Spiritual Practice," 79.

and ability to make things.”¹²⁶ Similarly, Oden writes, “This identity as creative beings is an expression of the image of God and the key indication of the Spirit’s presence.

Creativity is participation with the Spirit who is creative from beginning to end.”¹²⁷ To create, then, is to lean into the image in which humankind was created, to identify with and experience the Creator. Moreover, the Genesis account implies that God takes pleasure in the creative expression of individuals. Steve Turner points out, “During the naming of the animals we are told that God was interested ‘to see what he would name them’ (Genesis 2:19) indicating that God derived pleasure from Adam’s creative acts.”¹²⁸

Spiritual formation is more than a list of responsibilities or commands; it is the embodiment of the presence, character, and beauty of the Creator. Peter speaks of believers becoming “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4). Evan Howard observes how other New Testament authors “speak of ‘perfection,’ ‘maturity,’ ‘righteousness,’ ‘the kingdom of God,’ or ‘holiness,’” and states, “These are not to be seen as rigid prescriptions of thought and behavior, but rather as the beautiful integration of every aspect of life in union with the Spirit of the Living God.”¹²⁹ For the artistic individual, this union with the Spirit includes creative expression. Paintner and Wyatt note, “By making [creativity] an intentional part of our spiritual practice, we may grow to see the

¹²⁶ Dorothy L. Sayers, *The Mind of the Maker*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, OH: World, 1956), 34.

¹²⁷ Oden, “An Emerging Pneumatology,” 278.

¹²⁸ Turner, *Imagine*, 66.

¹²⁹ Evan Howard, “Formed into the Beauty of God: Reflections on Aesthetics and Christian Spiritual Formation,” *Ogbomoso Journal of Theology* 16, no. 1 (2011): 47.

ways in which God is active with and through our everyday lives.”¹³⁰ Elsewhere, she contrasts artistic knowing with intellectual knowing, suggesting that the arts have the potential of stretching a person beyond the limits of rational or linear thinking: “The arts afford us insights into life and the movements of the Spirit within us, presenting alternative possibilities that are not available through cognitive ways of knowing.”¹³¹

One should note, here, that not everything men and women create is good art or Christian practice. In his seminal work, *Art and the Bible*, Francis Schaeffer declares, “While creativity is a good thing in itself, it does not mean that everything that comes out of man’s creativity is good. For while man was made in the image of God, he is fallen.”¹³² This fallen nature of humanity, in general, and of artists, specifically, has often led the Church to nurture a negative view of the arts. Ryken observes, “Art is always tempted to glory in itself, and nearly every form of art has been used to communicate values that are contrary to Scripture. This fallenness perverts the arts against fulfilling their original purpose and prevents us from embracing them uncritically.”¹³³ Therefore, one must consider what makes art particularly Christian before he or she can explore the ways in which creative expression can serve as a spiritual discipline.

¹³⁰ Paintner and Wyatt, “Creativity as a Christian Spiritual Practice,” 87.

¹³¹ Paintner and Beckman, *Awakening the Creative Spirit*, 17.

¹³² Francis A. Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2006), 52.

¹³³ Philip Graham Ryken, *Art for God’s Sake: A Call to Recover the Arts* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2006), location 40 of 374, Kindle.

Art as Particularly Christian

Art, when reduced to its simplest form, is an expression of how an artist sees the world or has experienced life. Rather than viewing art as Christian or non-Christian, it is better to recognize that there are Christian and non-Christian artists. As Philip Ryken states, “A creation always reveals something about its creator. What artists make tells us something about how they view the world.”¹³⁴ The artist creates a body of work, and that work displays the artist’s worldview. Put differently, Erwin McManus argues, “The truth of the matter is that all art has an underlying narrative for which it advocates; all art is a declaration of meaning or the lack of it; all art is created both for self-expression and for the extension of self.”¹³⁵ The art of a Christian, therefore, should express a Christian worldview and be consistent with a life of faith in Christ. Madeleine L’Engle conveys this truth in a dialogue with an aspiring author:

Not long ago a college senior asked if she could talk to me about being a Christian writer. If she wanted to write Christian fiction, how was she to go about it? I told her that if she is truly and deeply a Christian, what she writes is going to be Christian, whether she mentions Jesus or not. And if she is not, in the most profound sense, Christian, then what she writes is not going to be Christian, no matter how many times she invokes the name of the Lord.¹³⁶

This is not to say that an unbeliever could never accurately portray God’s world or that a believer always would. Turner reminds his readers, “Truth is not exclusive to believers. We accept this in areas such as medicine, cartography and space but

¹³⁴ Ibid., location 293 of 374.

¹³⁵ McManus, *The Artisan Soul*, 106.

¹³⁶ Madeleine L’Engle, *Walking on Water: Reflections on Faith and Art* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 130.

begrudgingly in philosophy, psychology and the arts.”¹³⁷ This means it is quite possible for a non-Christian to create something inconsistent with his or her godless worldview, something that accurately captures the beauty and wonder of God or God’s creation. Conversely, it is possible for a Christian to be equally inconsistent and create a piece of work that opposes his or her worldview of faith in God.

The Church, however, should hesitate judging an artist based upon an individual piece of art. Rather, the Church should evaluate a body of work and, from the worldview expressed, recognize and affirm that which distinguishes an artist as particularly Christian. Luz observes that art often comes from humanity’s universal brokenness. One can distinguish a Christian artist, however, in that “we not only express our brokenness but our redemptive road toward wholeness.”¹³⁸ Additionally, Ryken observes, “Rather than giving into meaninglessness and despair, Christian artists know that there is a way out. Thus they create images of grace, awakening a desire for the new heavens and the new earth by anticipating the possibilities of redemption in Christ.”¹³⁹

Particularly Christian art expresses the Christian worldview of the artist. Taylor suggests that in drawing attention to concrete objects—canvases, sculptures, musical scores, dance, etc.—artists and their art “invite us to look at the world as it is or maybe as it shouldn’t be. At times, they urge us to see it as it might be.”¹⁴⁰ Christian art, however,

¹³⁷ Turner, *Imagine*, 41.

¹³⁸ Luz, *Imagine That*, 181.

¹³⁹ Ryken, *Art for God’s Sake*, location 226 of 374.

¹⁴⁰ Taylor, “Discipling the Eyes: The Visual Arts Can Play a Powerful Role in Worship—If We Look Closely Enough,” 42.

does not always express an explicit gospel message. Some Christians insist that certain forms of art are more godly than others, making a sharp distinction between sacred and secular. Ryken provides a needed correction saying, “As Christians, we are not limited to crosses and flannelgraphs, or to praise choruses and evangelistic skits. These simple forms may have their place in the life of the church, but God wants all the arts to flourish in all the fullness of their artistic potential, so that we may discover the inherent possibilities of creation and thereby come to a deeper knowledge of our Creator.”¹⁴¹

To understand the range of possibilities within the realm of Christian art, Turner offers a model illustrated by five concentric circles.¹⁴² The outer circle contains art that does not suggest an obvious worldview. This could include, for example, someone playing the violin, a family portrait, or an abstract sculpture made of driftwood. The next circle contains art that expresses a Christian worldview in that it dignifies human life or introduces a sense of awe. This would include any artistic medium that causes the observer to “well up inside because it is awakening our senses.”¹⁴³ The third circle contains art that conveys a clear biblical teaching that is not uniquely Christian, such as peace, love, forgiveness, or reconciliation. Turner indicates, “We may be compelled to these things because of our faith, but these values are not exclusive to Christianity.”¹⁴⁴ In the fourth circle, some of the Bible’s primary theological themes like creation, sin, redemption, or the spiritual realm inspire the art, yet artists belonging to other religions or

¹⁴¹ Ryken, *Art for God’s Sake*, location 187 of 374.

¹⁴² Turner, *Imagine*, 81-87.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

no religion at all have tackled some of these themes. The inner circle involves art that makes an explicit reference to the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus. In regards to this fifth circle, Turner argues that “some artists may never be called to go that far in their art,” but these artists are still Christians producing Christian art.¹⁴⁵ An artist glorifies God by making good art that expresses a Christian worldview; this is true even when the art contains no explicit gospel message.

Art as Spiritual Discipline

In an exploration of art as Christian spiritual discipline, one must continue to apply the criteria for judging spiritual disciplines as previously outlined. Based upon what has already been said about art expressing a particular worldview, the Christian artist’s creative process is intrinsically Christian and built upon a scriptural understanding of the world. The artist’s relational encounter with God and openness to the present work of the Holy Spirit also guide the creative process. When complete, both the process and the work of art itself should ideally lead to transformation that results in distinctively Christian service and living.

Luz claims that the ultimate discipline of the artist is “to practice the presence of God and to live in constant dialogue with the Father in our art. To love God with our art as He loves us.”¹⁴⁶ Paintner and Wyatt, likewise, views the creative process as dialogue in which artists “reach out to communicate with God and open ourselves to God’s communication with us through image and symbol, gesture and sound. We can develop

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 81.

¹⁴⁶ Luz, *Imagine That*, 141.

an awareness of God's presence in everything we do, see, and feel, so that prayer generates in all of our activities."¹⁴⁷ To use creativity as a spiritual discipline, however, the artist must shift his or her intention, entering the process with a commitment to seek God and invite him to inspire, guide, and speak. The artist must engage the imagination to see the world as charged with God's presence and must cultivate an awareness of that presence. Consequently, "the creative process and art making, with intention and awareness of God's invitation and movement with us, become the process of prayer itself."¹⁴⁸ Elsewhere, Paintner and Beckman develop this connection between art and prayer by identifying how "they are both rooted in an intense encounter involving a surrender of willfulness, openness to inspiration, and lead to a deep engagement with Mystery."¹⁴⁹

If the goal of the creative process is to receive inspiration through dialogue, the artist must learn to hear before he or she speaks and creates. Luz notes, "Creativity is contrary to busyness. Creativity often takes time and space, where the soul can breathe and the hand can doodle and the Spirit of God can inspire."¹⁵⁰ The artist, therefore, must learn the discipline of slowing. He or she must practice a modern form of peregrination, a self-imposed exile and wandering for the love of God practiced at the beginning of the fifth century. The artist must learn to wait but not in a passive way. Luci Shaw asserts, "In this waiting time, I must be sure that my antennas are out, combing the air, ready to

¹⁴⁷ Paintner and Wyatt, "Creativity as a Christian Spiritual Practice," 87.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Paintner and Beckman, *Awakening the Creative Spirit*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Luz, *Imagine That*, 133.

pull in the messages. Receptivity, yes. Awareness, yes. Active readiness, yes. For passivity has no place in the life of art or of Christian spirituality.”¹⁵¹

The creative process should include this contemplative or meditative aspect, but it must not end there. Paintner and Beckman describe the artist as “one who sees and listens deeply to what is happening below the surface, attends to the particulars, and then gives outward form and expression.”¹⁵² Whether this time stands alone or becomes the natural outflow of more inwardly practiced disciplines, like *lectio divina* or Ignatian contemplation, the artist eventually must put pen to paper, brush to canvas, or fingers to keys. There comes a time to give outward expression to the inward movements of the soul. For a musician like Luz, meditation takes on creative expression at the keys, where music becomes his voice. He writes, “The piano seems to speak for me in ways that my mouth cannot express.”¹⁵³ For Shaw, outward expression begins with her journal, the place “where art and spirituality form a single river.”¹⁵⁴ Eventually, phrases become poems, sketches become sculptures, or scribbles become musical scores—all possible as the artist pursues creativity as a spiritual discipline.

Through the process, the Holy Spirit brings about transformation in the life of the artist. Robin Jensen declares, “Each act of creation is a spiritual exercise, strengthening or honing us in particular ways, making us more and more into who we shall become and

¹⁵¹ Shaw, “Art and Christian Spirituality,” 119.

¹⁵² Paintner and Beckman, *Awakening the Creative Spirit*, 25.

¹⁵³ Luz, *Imagine That*, 134.

¹⁵⁴ Shaw, “Art and Christian Spirituality,” 120.

how we understand ourselves in relation to the rest of the created world.”¹⁵⁵ Spiritual formation through artistic expression most clearly happens as the artist takes time to detach from the process or transcend the experience so that he or she can evaluate the content of the art to ensure it conveys the proper message, model, or worldview. Jensen challenges artists to ask, “How are we changed or moved to change by this? Have we been helped or harmed? What is the good we seek?”¹⁵⁶ Reflection on the creative process makes way for greater transformation and keeps one from the real dangers of spiritual malformation.

Conclusion

For decades, many philosophers and theologians have warned of the dangers or heralded the wonders of both modernism and postmodernism. Social science professor Andrew Greeley, however, claims, “I don’t believe in either modernity or post-modernity. I find no persuasive evidence that either modern or post-modern humankind exists outside of faculty office buildings. Everyone tends to be pre-modern.”¹⁵⁷ Greeley argues that most people, those who find themselves outside of the ivory tower, see little inconsistency between science and faith in their ordinary lives; they see little evidence to support the dichotomy between imagination and reason, between image and word. Experience tells them that they are complex beings and that they cannot reduce the mind to one lone faculty. Man cannot live by reason alone.

¹⁵⁵ Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen*, 10.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁵⁷ Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 2.

To truly make disciples in this world, the church must offer a spirituality that consists of more than an intellectual relationship with God and a scientific approach to Bible study. The church's hope is in pursuing a more holistic spirituality that takes into account every facet of what it means to be human—the sensory, the emotional, and the imaginative as well as the academic. The engineer *and* the artist should have the tools that each needs to meaningfully interact with their Creator.

Perhaps Greeley would suggest that pre-modern people pursue a pre-modern spirituality. While remaining within the bounds of acceptable Christian practice, the church would benefit from exploring the spiritual disciplines that mattered in a time when the church had a deep appreciation for mystery, metaphor, beauty, symbolism, and image—a time when Christians engaged the imagination as an important instrument for spiritual formation. These disciplines would include methods of prayer like *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation. Additionally, a return to a pre-modern Christian aesthetic would not only help to awaken the Christian imagination but would equip believers to consider a more spiritually transformative approach to creativity and the arts. If the church would work toward releasing the Christian imagination, emerging generations have the potential of breaking free from a mere clinical Christianity and pursuing a deeper relationship with God that would have the potential of greatly affecting a spiritually starving world.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

The research of the previous two chapters laid a biblical-theological foundation for building a holistic imaginative spirituality and provided insights into creating a framework of spiritual practices through which a person may pursue such spirituality. Applying the research through a practical ministry intervention, I implemented a discipleship process particularly for the young adults of Taylor Christian Center that began with a seminar followed by four weeks of practice. This chapter describes the preparation and execution of this project and shares its results. It culminates with describing the project's contribution to ministry.

Preparation of the Project

Preparation for the project intervention involved the recruitment and assessment of participants, the development of curriculum, and the preparation of project logistics.

Recruitment and Assessment of Participants

As a quantitative means of assessing project participants, I created a group account with Discipleship Dynamics.¹ Through an assessment of 175 questions, Discipleship Dynamics helps people discover their strengths and weaknesses in thirty-five areas of life. For the purposes of this project, I had an interest in four specific

¹ Further information regarding Discipleship Dynamics may be found at <https://discipleshipdynamics.com>.

outcomes within the overall dimension of spiritual formation. (1) love the Word of God (i.e. disciples are absorbed with the Bible and have a working knowledge of its contents), (2) pray without ceasing (i.e., mature disciples have developed the capacity to communicate with God continually, regardless of the contexts in which they find themselves), (3) listen to the voice of God (i.e., disciples are able to discern the voice of God and differentiate it from all the other voices that demand their attention), and (4) cultivate solitude (i.e., disciples develop the ability to sit quietly and consider the character and works of God).

Through the month of June 2016, I recruited volunteers through Sunday announcements and weekly emails. The announcement read as follows:

Calling all creatives ... poets, authors, wordsmiths, artists, songwriters ... those who find a left-brained, graphs-and-bulletin-points approach to spirituality a little bland and would be interested in exploring a more imaginative or creative approach. Pastor Josh is hosting a seminar with you in mind.

Participation requirements:

- Complete an online assessment prior to the seminar.
- Attend the seminar. There is a weeknight option (July 19, 2016, 6-10 p.m.) and a weekend option (July 23, 2016, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.). Here, we will explore spiritual practices that tend toward imaginative engagement and consider how creative arts themselves can serve as a spiritual practice.
- Practice what you learn in the seminar at least three times a week for four weeks, keeping a journal of your experiences.
- Complete the online assessment again after those four weeks and submit your journal and any art produced out of the process.

Space is limited. Respond by email to PastorJosh@TaylorChristian.org for further instructions.

I emailed this announcement for the final time on July 5, 2016. Overall, twelve individuals conveyed a desire to join, which equaled the participation limit I had

previously imposed upon the project. These twelve consisted of three men and nine women. Four of these individuals were women over the age of thirty-five. Although I had aimed at providing this for the eighteen- to thirty-five-year-old demographic within the congregation, I did not prohibit these four from participating. I emailed all respondents a link by which to take the assessment prior to the seminar.

Participants answered each question of the assessment on a seven-point Likert Scale. The averages for the group were reported separately for each outcome on the website's administrator dashboard. For each outcome, Discipleship Dynamics assigned a percentage regarding overall group health. Scores from one to twenty-five percent indicate an outcome in which the group appears to struggle. Scores from twenty-six to fifty percent indicate the group has moved from struggling and is developing progress in an outcome. Scores from fifty-one to seventy-five percent indicate the group is growing in an outcome, gaining strength. Scores over seventy-five percent indicate the group appears strong and shows potential for leadership in an outcome. Table 1 shows the percentages for each outcome of the assessment's spiritual formation dimension.

Table 1: Percentages for the Initial Discipleship Dynamics Assessment

| <i>Outcomes of Spiritual Formation</i> | <i>Percentages</i> |
|--|--------------------|
| 1. Love the Word of God | 74.8% |
| 2. Pray without Ceasing | 53.5% |
| 3. Listen to the Voice of God | 55.2% |
| 4. Pursue Biblical Principles for Living | 68.4% |
| 5. Worship in Spirit and Truth | 66.3% |
| 6. Share the Gospel Wisely with Others | 62.2% |
| 7. Enjoy Fellowship in the Local Church | 79.8% |
| 8. Cultivate Solitude | 57.8% |

Regarding those four outcomes that apply most directly to this project (i.e., outcomes 1, 2, 3, and 8), the group demonstrated a significantly strong love of Scripture but appeared

to need improvement in the areas of praying without ceasing, listening to the voice of God, and cultivating solitude.

Development of Curriculum

Development of the seminar curriculum and follow-up materials focused on introducing participants to the ideas uncovered in the biblical-theological review and on providing them with a working knowledge of practices revealed in the contemporary literature review. I chose to title the seminar “Re-imagining Spirituality” and divided it into five segments. The first was a simple introduction into the traditional understanding of spiritual practices and a teaser introducing other possibilities.

Segment two explored the practice of *lectio divina*. I began the lesson with a brief history of St. Benedict and his rules for communal Christian living. The remainder of the segment focused on the purposes and practices of the four movements, giving particular attention to the role of the Holy Spirit in causing Scripture to come alive in the hearts of attentive believers. I included space within the teaching notes for discussion at the close of the segment and a time to practice *lectio divina* together. Likewise, segment three introduced Ignatius and his *Spiritual Exercises*. The lesson then focused on the purpose and practice of Ignatian contemplation. As before, I included space in the lesson for discussion and practice.

Segment four reflected on the relationship between the church and the artistic community throughout history and considered some ways in which the creative process can become a spiritual practice. I also hoped to place some emphasis on the characteristics of particularly Christian art and on the range of art to be found within that

spectrum in such a way as to validate the artists within our own community of faith.

Again, I included space within the lesson for discussion on these topics.

The curriculum concluded with a brief closing segment, providing instructions for the follow-up process over the next four weeks. Specifically, the teaching notes instructed participants to (1) explore the practices at least three times each week, (2) journal about the overall experiences of the week, (3) create art should the practices lead to such expression, (4) take the Discipleship Dynamics assessment again after the fourth week, and (5) celebrate the outcomes. I developed presentation slides for each segment, and these can be found in Appendix A.²

As a part of the process, I also developed a prayer journal that provided a weekly passage of Scripture to guide prayer times.³ For each passage, I offered a guided meditation from Timothy Gallagher's *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer* to aid in the practice of what I anticipated to be new approaches to prayer for everyone.⁴ The Scripture passages, by week, included Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10, Jesus's conversation with the Samaritan woman in John 4:1-42, Jesus's washing of the disciples feet in John 13:1-17, and the woman who washed Jesus's feet in Luke 7:36-50. The journal offered the following three questions for contemplation after prayer: (1) what word in this Scripture most spoke to my heart, (2) what did my heart feel as I prayed, and

² See also Appendix B, "Teaching Notes."

³ See Appendix C, "Four-Week Prayer Guide."

⁴ Timothy M. Gallagher, *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer: Spiritual Reflections According to the Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Crossroad, 2007).

(3) what did I sense the Lord saying to me. The back of each page provided space for the participants to record an overview of their experiences.

Preparation of Project Logistics

Preparation involved the scheduling of the seminar. To make it accessible to more people, I scheduled a weeknight option and a weekend option, both held in Taylor Christian Center commons. Participants could choose Tuesday evening, July 19, 2016, or Saturday morning, July 23, 2016. I purchased light refreshments to have available during breaks and prepared copies of the teaching handouts and journals for each participant. I also had to prepare the meeting space prior to the seminar, setting up tables and chairs as well as audio-visual equipment.

Execution of the Project

The ministry intervention began as scheduled with two identical seminars taking place the week of July 17, 2016. The Tuesday evening seminar had three in attendance, and the Saturday seminar had seven. Of the twelve who originally expressed a desire to participate, one young lady and a young man backed out at the last minute, leaving me with ten participants in all.

The introduction focused on a general overview of the day's material and on discussion regarding spirituality. I asked, "What spiritual practices have you been taught are most important to the Christian life?" I anticipated some version of "pray and read your Bible." I was not disappointed. Answers included pray, have a daily devotional time, read the Bible, memorize Scripture, attend church, and join a community group. I shared my childhood experience in which I perceived successful Christianity as reading through the entire Bible once each year and praying for one hour a day, ideally in the

early morning hours. I closed the opening segment by asking participants what they hoped to take away from our time together. Most had no specific hopes; the announcement of the seminar simply piqued their curiosity. One lady expressed her desire to become more in tune with God; most wanted a broader perspective.

Immediately following this introduction, I taught the segment on *lectio divina*, using the teaching notes described in the previous section. Before attempting to apply the material, I opened the floor for discussion. A few shared that while they had never heard of this particular approach to prayer, they had been practicing a form of it on their own, meditating on the words of Scripture. This segment ended with ten minutes of practicing this approach together using Psalm 46 as our text. The psalm reads:

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way,
though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble at its swelling. *Selah*

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
The nations rage, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Come, behold the works of the LORD,
how he has brought desolations on the earth.
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the chariots with fire.
“Be still, and know that I am God.
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth!”
The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress. *Selah*

Following a minute of preparation through attentiveness to God's presence, I read the passage aloud slowly three times while the others followed along in their Bibles or closed their eyes to listen. After the first reading, I asked them to spend two minutes quietly considering the word, phrase, or image that seemed to choose them from the psalm. Following the second reading, I asked them to spend two minutes contemplating their emotional response to the word, phrase, or image that chose them, that is, how it made them feel. After the third reading, I asked them to consider how their hearts were moved to respond to the psalm, that is, how the Spirit directed them toward action of any kind. The segment ended with a ten-minute break.

Following the break, I delivered the material regarding Ignatian contemplation from the teaching notes previously referenced. As before, this segment ended with a time for discussion. Participants offered little by way of questions or comments, likely because the practice seemed so foreign to them. I invited them to join together in practicing contemplation. After a minute of preparatory silence, I slowly read the account of Jesus healing Bartimaeus in Mark 10:46-52, asking participants to allow the passage to play like a movie on the screen of their imaginations. I then read aloud a guided meditation by Timothy Gallagher, in which each participant took the place of Bartimaeus and imagined what it must have been like to experience the healing touch of Christ. The meditation read as follows:

I see the crowds, the road as it leaves the city, the blind beggar seated by the road ... I am there with him ... perhaps I take his place, and, now, I am seated there, like him, waiting ...

He seeks to come to Jesus out of his great need, and his hope that in Jesus he will find healing. But he is helpless to approach the Lord ... I sense my own need, my own hope, my own helplessness.

I watch as he pours out his need and his hope in the repeated cry: “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” His cry becomes the cry too of my heart: “Jesus ... have mercy on me!” I make this prayer to the Lord ...

Jesus hears this cry. He stops. He says to the crowd: “Call him.” I hear them say to me: “Take heart; rise, he is calling you.” I feel my heart begin to lift with new hope ...

I stand before Jesus. Our eyes meet ... I see his face, I hear his words, his question to my heart: “What do you want me to do for you?” Now Jesus and I are alone in the midst of the crowd. And I speak to him from my heart, unhurriedly. I dare to tell him all that I hope he will do for me ... all that I hope for from this time of prayer ...

I say to him: “Master, let me receive my sight.” Help me to see! Help me to see my way clearly in the doubts and fears that my heart feels; help me to overcome the obstacle that keeps me from the closeness I desire with you ...

And, with Bartimaeus, I experience Jesus’ word of healing ... I sense the love that pours out from him and brings healing, brings new hope into my life ...

I follow him along the way ...⁵

Following this time of contemplation, I offered participants another ten-minute break before moving to the next topic.

Segment three explored the creative process as spiritual practice. The time for discussion at the end of the segment proved livelier than the previous times. One young woman, a Christian for just over a year, voiced her surprise that the church was ever at odds with the artistic community. Others expressed agreement with the material shared and said that it helped them articulate many of the things they were already feeling. Unfortunately, at this point the seminar was reaching the end of its allotted time, so we did not explore this topic as deeply as we may have otherwise.

⁵ Ibid., 10-11.

In the closing segment, I provided participants with instructions for the following four weeks. I asked them to explore these practices by engaging with them at least three times each week, using the accompanying prayer journal as a guide. I also asked them to create art, as they felt inspired to do so, and to journal about their experiences in such a way that the final product could be returned to me at the end as a means of qualitative assessment. I let them know that after the four weeks they would each take the online assessment again as a means of quantitative assessment. In all, the first seminar concluded in three hours while the second, with twice the people, took over three and a half hours.

For the next four weeks, I sent an email at the start of the week to encourage engagement with that week's text and guided meditation. Each email had a similar message: "This week Luke 19:1-10 serves as our center for prayer and contemplation. Please try to engage with the passage at least three times this week, journaling your experience. Thanks again for your help in this. I couldn't finish this project without you!"

Knowing that life often brings unexpected circumstances and that with the summer months come vacations and weekends at the lake, I offered a fifth week for practice and reflection. The week of July 28, I asked participants to take the follow-up assessment and turn in any written journal entries or creative expressions. Nine people took the second assessment while four people actually submitted written reflections. One young man conveyed his overview in a conversation following a worship service.

Results of the Project

Quantitative Results

As for quantitative measurements, the results of the follow-up assessment from Discipleship Dynamics can be found below in Table 2. Of the four outcomes particularly relevant to this project, two scores were higher than the first assessment, and two were lower. “Love the Word of God” saw a decrease of nearly twenty-five percentage points, which seems odd since the practices taught in the seminar were anchored in passages of Scripture. “Cultivate Solitude” also declined by just over eight percentage points. “Listen to the Voice of God,” however, saw an increase of almost three percentage points, while “Pray without Ceasing” went up by ten.

The table also shows that the percentage for the fifth outcome, worship in spirit and truth, increased by seven percentage points, second only to praying without ceasing. This outcome focuses on the disciple’s call to worship God under all circumstances, cultivating a joyful sensitivity to God’s presence and inviting Him to bless every aspect of life. Though the project did not originally consider the applicability of the discipleship process to the outcome of worshipping in spirit and truth, it appears that a strengthening of this outcome was an unexpected result.

Table 2: Comparison of Percentages for Initial and Follow-Up Assessments

| <i>Outcomes of Spiritual Formation</i> | <i>Initial Percentages</i> | <i>Follow-Up Percentages</i> | <i>+/- %</i> |
|--|----------------------------|------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Love the Word of God | 74.8% | 50.0% | -24.8% |
| 2. Pray Without Ceasing | 53.5% | 63.9% | +10.4% |
| 3. Listen to the Voice of God | 55.2% | 57.8% | +2.6% |
| 4. Pursue Biblical Principles for Living | 68.4% | 66.6% | -1.8% |
| 5. Worship in Spirit and Truth | 66.3% | 73.4% | +8.9% |
| 6. Share the Gospel Wisely with Others | 62.2% | 63.8% | +1.6% |
| 7. Enjoy Fellowship in the Local Church | 79.8% | 65.2% | -14.6% |
| 8. Cultivate Solitude | 57.8% | 49.4% | -8.4% |

This comparison was sent to Dr. Jeff Fulks, professor of organizational research and evaluation at Evangel University, for help with statistical analysis. To draw significant conclusions, however, required a larger data set that would include individual identifiers and labels for each cell of the assessment. This information was necessary because of the small sample size included in this project. Additionally, two individuals who took the initial assessment did not take the follow-up. Without the individual identifiers, it is impossible to know how that difference skewed the results. Upon contacting the creators of the online assessment, it was discovered that the program is currently unable to extract the identifiers and labels from the larger data set. Therefore, the assessment did not provide sufficient data to definitively evaluate the project, information that may have led to the use of a different means of quantitative measurement had this been realized at the outset.⁶

Qualitative Results

Qualitative measurements were garnered through written reflections and individual conversations. In all, seven participants offered some kind of written or spoken reflection. For example, one young lady wrote in her prayer journal, “I found the breaking down of Scripture, using all of our senses, so beneficial. It made the presence of the Lord tangible, His Word transferable to today.” Another wrote,

I really thought the practice of Ignatian contemplation would be uncomfortable and one I wouldn't lean in to, but I found it really the opposite. Putting myself in the words, looking at the surroundings, asking all my senses to join the reading has been very impactful. I feel like it makes the words much more what they are, real bits of history that become tangible.

⁶ As of the writing of this chapter, the creators of Discipleship Dynamics are working on making more data available to future group administrators.

The practice of sacred reading has also been a great practice. I think that pulling out a single word to focus on becomes an incredible building block for the remaining words, like building a foundation by which all the others are supported. To keep that word on my mind throughout the week helped me to stay connected and focused.

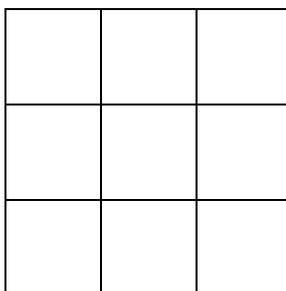
Elsewhere, this same person said, “I don’t know if I really found one practice more helpful than the other. I think they both have a use, and I found them more helpful than any study guide I’ve picked up to date. (And believe me, I’ve picked up a lot. I even have *A Guide to the Bible for Dummies.*)”

Another young lady, a recent graduate from an arts and design college, reflected on her experience as follows:

These past five weeks had me thinking about spirituality and how I, as a creative person, might practice and perceive spirituality differently. For a long time, I thought I was doing it wrong because when I practiced my spirituality the same way everyone else did I never felt right. I felt stiff and insincere. Honestly, I still do at times. I particularly felt this way when it came to prayer.

I was taught to pray the same way every child in a Christian household was taught. I learned “the prayer formula.” “Dear God ... please ... I need ... I want ... thank you ... Amen.” I was never taught that there might be other ways to pray, so I grew up as a prayer robot. I never really felt any truth in my prayers or hope that they were being heard. For some people the prayer formula might be right, but it’s never been right for me.

This made me think a lot about art and what it’s like to be a beginner in any art form. When you’re first starting out, there’s always guidelines to follow and rules that shouldn’t be broken. These basic guidelines help to keep whatever you’re creating pleasing until you’re mature enough in the art to know how to break the rules. There is a rule in painting/drawing/film (anything with a visual canvas) called The Rule of Thirds. The canvas is split up with imaginary lines like this ...



The rule is that the focal point should be placed along the lines or their intersections. This creates tension, energy, and interest in the composition. The focal point should never be placed in the center of the canvas. As one matures in their art, however, they learn when it's okay to break this rule and how to do it properly and effectively.

Wes Anderson is a film director who often places his subject in the center of the screen. It's odd, noticeable, sometimes uncomfortable, but still appealing. He breaks The Rule of Thirds, but he does it with maturity and intent. By doing this, he has created a recognizable style that is unique to him.

As a child learning to pray, the prayer formula was important. It gave me a foundation on which to grow, and I needed to know the basics before I could advance. The basics are important to every part of spirituality. As we mature and grow in our spirituality we learn how to break away from the basics and have a spiritual experience that is unique to us as individuals. This is what I am learning through these past five weeks of Re-imagining Spirituality.

In conversation with one participant, he expressed how Ignatian contemplation had been especially beneficial for him. At twenty-four years old and having grown up in the church, he indicated that this “new” practice has given him a sense of real communion with Jesus. He said, “I’ve really enjoyed Ignatian spirituality. It’s the thing I’ve been telling my friends about and encouraging them to try.” Another participant, a mother of seven children, expressed regret over not finding more time to practice these newly discovered methods of prayer and contemplation but said that what time she did find gave a fresh voice to familiar passages of Scripture.

The qualitative measures proved much more telling than the quantitative one. All participants who offered a reflection of the process found value in both *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation. The practice of sacred reading may have been slightly favored over contemplation, likely because it seems to come more naturally to the Western mind. All expressed the ways in which these methods of prayer opened their hearts to hear more clearly what the Spirit wanted to say.

Creative Arts Result

One of my hopes was that there would be some kind of creative expression that would result from the process. One young lady joined in this process simply because she enjoys writing; some might call her a poet. In the end, she was the only participant to submit any form of art from each week of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation. For example, she joined the group in focusing the first week on praying with the narrative of Jesus's encounter with Zacchaeus. Through sacred reading, the phrase "came to seek" resonated within her: "For the Son of Man *came to seek* and to save the lost" (Luke 19:10, emphasis mine). Her weeklong prayer and contemplation with this passage resulted in the following poem:

We are all seeking,
 at times never finding,
 a journey without end, only a beginning.
 Playing hide-n-seek with our faith as though it were a game.
 Breaking branches for a better view of our Seeker,
 instead of first searching for our solid ground.
 We boast our strengths as we hide away our weakness.
 All the while forgetting that our Seeker makes strong what is weak.
 Count to ten,
 close your eyes,
 and allow yourself to be found.

The second week, she prayed with the narrative of Jesus and the woman at the well. Regarding sacred reading, she wrote in her journal, "Focusing on 'living water' reminded me of my own journey, my own thirst, my own weariness and questions. It also reminded me of the water washing over me, living water." From there, she wrote the following:

As the steps shifted toward the warmth of the water,
 the crowded room washed away.
 In that moment it was about me and my journey,
 not the onlooking faces.
 As the words were spoken,

a peace began to settle in,
 a calm I've never known,
 silencing the angst.
 There are no words to describe the feeling as the water swirled
 around me
 through me
 within me.
 I emerged dripping in grace.
 Somehow changed yet the same.
 I was reminded of all my broken places,
 of all the self inventory I still needed to do,
 of all the questions that still danced through my mind.
 I was reminded to stop being so distracted,
 to turn in to the people in my life.
 It took away the taken for granted
 and reminded me of life's frailty.
 And while it often gives me misunderstanding,
 I was given the ability to seek
 and the freedom to be sought.

The third offering resulted from time spent with Jesus as he washed the feet of
 His disciples in John 13. She wrote in her journal of holding verse 15 in her heart
 throughout the week: "For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I
 have done to you." She reflected on how "the example wasn't just in that room. It was in
 all He did. It was all around, and we should be doing what is in our power to be an
 example."

The final week of prayer centered upon the sinful woman who washed Jesus's
 feet with her tears in Luke 7:36-50. Through *lectio divina*, the young lady felt particularly
 drawn to the phrase "you have judged" in verse 43. She considered the words with which
 those at the table had judged the woman contrasted with Jesus's words to her. This led
 her to reflect on her own use of words to either judge or extend grace to the people
 around her. The poems from weeks three and four may be found in Appendix C.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

The times of research and application for this project have certainly offered a new path for those who participated in the seminar, but more than that, the project has had a significant impact upon my own life. I hope that it makes an ongoing contribution specifically to the ministry of Taylor Christian Center and more generally to the church at large.

First, I believe this project acknowledges the need for the church to pursue a broader range of spiritual practice, and it offers avenues to make this possible. I once heard a rabbi give an interview in which he explained the metaphorical nature of Egypt in Jewish thought. In Hebrew, Egypt is called *Mitzrayim*, derived from a root that means “narrow places.” Egypt names a geographical location or empire, but it also describes a state of being that exists apart from divine extradition, a state in which a person’s heart is trapped in a place of restricted opportunity and tight control. By way of the Red Sea, God freed His people from Egypt, both the location and the state of being. The psalmist, then, can describe God’s work in his own life with the words, “He brought me out into a *broad place*; he rescued me, because he delighted in me” (Ps. 18:19, emphasis mine). God always works to lead people out of the narrow places of Egypt and into the broad places called the Promised Land.

In the church, it seems that people often go from one narrow place (i.e., enslaved by sin) to another narrow place (i.e., an anemic Christian spirituality). All the while, God desires to bring them into the broad spaces of relationship with himself, a place of liberation where a person is given ears to hear what the Spirit of the Lord is saying and given a heart enthusiastic to respond. The move from death to life, from the body of sin to the body of Christ, should be like the difference between burlap and silk or between

grayscale and high-definition color. Why, then, do so many Christians feel disconnected or restricted in their faith? Perhaps the church needs a broader path.

The path has widened for the congregation of Taylor Christian Center as I have introduced historic Christian practices like *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation. This has provided a means of engagement with both the Spirit and the Word that some have never known. It has forced church leadership to reconsider the acceptable practices of a particularly Pentecostal spirituality and the ways in which they teach those practices to novice and veteran Christians alike. The practices themselves have led many into a more fulfilling walk with God. My hope is that this project will spur similar conversations in other church contexts.

Second, this project helps broaden the space of Christian spirituality by pursuing a more holistic approach. A primacy upon the Scriptures keeps the intellect engaged, but a literary approach welcomes the awakening of imagination. We are learning to dwell in the place where reason and emotion coexist and bring us closer to God. Through consideration of the arts and the contributions of the creative process to one's spirituality, the congregation has begun to broach the subject of an embodied (i.e., physical) spirituality. We have also begun to consider how spirituality works itself out both individually and corporately, involving the relational dimension of humanity. In broadening the space of spirituality, the congregation has begun to explore what it means to worship with every aspect of our humanity. I hope this project contributes to the ongoing discussion of a spirituality that engages the entire being in relationship with God and the community of faith.

Third, this project has given a greater voice to the creatives of Taylor Christian Center, particularly among the young adult demographic. The research of the project shed some light on the rather rocky relationship between the Church and the artistic community throughout history, a trend that, thankfully, appears to be changing. For too long, the Church has viewed as troublemakers those who thought outside the box of standard church practice, the imaginative and fearless risk-takers and change agents. Now is the time to give voice to the creativity latent within the body of Christ and to validate the contributions to ministry of those who typically feel on the periphery.

The conversation of art as a spiritual practice has led to many more conversations within the Taylor Christian Center community. One young lady volunteered her time and skills as a graphic designer for a certain project and, likely for the first time, saw the creative process as a spiritual act of worship. The staff has had conversations regarding church aesthetics that went deeper than trends, considering the significance of art to worship. Someone else has asked about the possibility of further seminars on topics like theology in film or literature. Over all, some of those who once felt as though their skills and temperament did not fit within the larger community now feel that they have a seat at the table. As before, my desire is that this project will open similar doors in other contexts.

CHAPTER 5: PROJECT SUMMARY

This chapter provides an overall assessment of the *Re-imagining Spirituality* seminar and its related elements of research and follow-up. It suggests keys to project effectiveness, keys to project improvement, implications of the project, recommendations for Taylor Christian Center, and recommendations for future study. The quantitative and qualitative assessment of project participants and my own personal reflections serve as the basis for this evaluation.

Evaluation of the Project

The project sought to provide a path of Christian spirituality that would appeal and contribute to the spiritual development of a group of young adults at Taylor Christian Center. The project particularly targeted the individuals within that demographic who possess a creative or artistic bent, with a goal of bringing together the aspects of intellect and emotion through awakening the imagination within the practice of spiritual disciplines. Based upon the responses of the individuals who followed the discipleship process through to the end, the project succeeded. Some of the keys to the project's effectiveness include a church culture that nurtures Christian spirituality, a significant percentage of young, artistic adults within the larger congregation, and the seminar format of the ministry intervention itself.

A proper evaluation, however, must also consider ways in which the project could be improved upon. Keys to improvement include limiting the content taught at the

seminar, developing a better means by which to direct participants in the follow-up phase, and planning an art exhibition to more greatly encourage the practice of creative expression.

Keys to Project Effectiveness

First, Taylor Christian Center began 2016 by naming spirituality as one of three core foci guiding the direction of the church, the other two being community and mission. Consequently, the congregation has explored spiritual disciplines through sermon series and small groups. The pastoral staff has sought to create a church culture in which people speak naturally about the need for pursuing a growing relationship with Christ through the practice of various disciplines. I believe this contributed to the success of the project in that participants came with an existing foundation of Christian spirituality. They had, for example, explored other disciplines such as praying the Divine Office and setting aside time to practice the Daily Examen. Though unfamiliar with the specific disciplines of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation, they were no strangers to the broader stream of Christian practice. They came to this project, then, eager to learn new methods that could naturally fit within their more creative or imaginative approach to faith and life.

Second, this project would not have worked if Taylor Christian Center did not have a significant number of creative young adults. I have served a church where the average age of the congregation was easily sixty-five or higher. I believe that those congregants, having come to faith within a church culture shaped wholly by modernism, would be less likely to participate in this kind of project. I am not suggesting that these older believers lacked a desire to grow in Christ but that the left-brained approach they inherited worked well for them. They would be less inclined to perceive a need for

anything different or additional. This may be illustrated by the fact that one of the project participants was a woman in her late fifties. She contributed wisely to the overall conversation regarding spirituality and prayer, but there is no evidence to suggest that she followed through with actually practicing the disciplines introduced. She did not offer any feedback by way of journaling or take the follow-up assessment. I do not believe that she wanted to interfere with the process with an antagonistic attitude; I think she simply did not find the practices useful to her long-established approach to pursuing God.

Unlike the former church I served, a full one-third of my current ministry context consists of congregants between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five. The pushback of postmodernism against its more rational and industrial predecessor has greatly influenced these individuals, and the worlds in which they live appeal constantly to their imaginations. Additionally, these young people seem eager to learn new things and deeply desire the guidance provided by mentors and teachers. Aside from those who actually participated in the project, another handful of young adults expressed a desire to join the process but was unavailable to attend the required seminar. Having a large percentage of young people to whom the topic of this project seemed applicable and interesting contributed greatly to the success of this project.

The third key contributing to effectiveness, particularly to the success of the ministry intervention itself, was the seminar format. I had considered other combinations of teaching and practice, but people seemed far less receptive to these alternatives. I pitched the idea of doing a four-week small group study, which would have been in addition to the worship services and community groups in which people are already involved, and the idea of an overnight retreat. Each of these options offered particular

benefits that appealed to me. For example, the small group study would regularly bring participants together to discuss their individual times of practice in such a way that would allow for greater direction, while the retreat option would have created more space for significant spiritual impact within the context of the ministry intervention itself. In suggesting these options, however, I found people were leery of making the time commitment to either. The three-hour seminar format followed by the four-week process of individual exploration and practice garnered the most participation and, therefore, contributed to the effectiveness of the project.

Keys to Project Improvement

If I had it to do over again, the first improvement I would suggest is to include less teaching material in the seminar. When it came to the practices of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation, I was satisfied with the teaching content and with the moments of practicing these disciplines together. I believe, however, that participants could have benefited greatly by having space within our time together to find a solitary place, practice the discipline individually, and return to the group to discuss how the time alone had gone. Space for individual practice would have most likely resulted in an opportunity to address practical, rather than theoretical, questions as well as the opportunity for the Holy Spirit to do some teaching of His own.

Additionally, the teaching segment on art as a spiritual practice sparked great conversation. It was as if the energy in the room changed as participants resonated with the topic, and I believe more could have come from that had we not been pressed for time. This project would improve by covering fewer topics, thereby allowing time to explore more deeply.

Second, the project would improve by providing a further means of guidance throughout the follow-up process. Aside from providing a prayer guide for the four-week follow up, I sent weekly emails encouraging people to engage with that week's Scripture and offering assistance if needed. I think participants would have benefited more had I scheduled one-on-one meetings at least once within those four weeks. That time together would have given me the opportunity to play the role of spiritual director, personally assessing the individual's progress and helping him or her discern both those things the Spirit seemed to have done to that point in the process and those things He may yet desire to do. This approach would also have allowed for a better analysis of the project as a whole. While the responses I received through both written and spoken means seemed to indicate an effective project, this face-to-face meeting with each participant would have provided greater qualitative data from which to draw.

The third area for project improvement involves the aesthetic aspect. My hope had been that as people practiced the disciplines of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation, they would give creative expression to the inward work of the Spirit by producing various kinds of art. In the end, only one participant submitted any such work. Perhaps the creative process cannot be forced by or confined to a four-week process, or perhaps the church's culture is such that artists are not yet comfortable taking the risk of going public with their art. Whatever the case, it may have proven beneficial to plan some kind of exhibition for the end of the discipleship process, a time and place where resultant art could be displayed and appreciated. This kind of display may have provided more incentive for artistic participation than inclusion into a doctoral project alone seemed to provide.

Implications of the Project

The research and outcomes of this project offered several implications for the Church, the American evangelical church in particular, regarding Christian spirituality. First, this project brought to light the need for a broader approach to spirituality. For too long, the Church has limited the scope of acceptable Christian practice to a few spiritual disciplines that most greatly appeal to those whose minds incline toward the objective or rational. Meanwhile, those whose minds lean more toward the subjective or experiential often spend their Christian lives feeling inadequate, unable to perfect the methodical grid of spiritual maturity designed by their left-brained counterparts. This project suggested that the list of acceptable Christian disciplines is long and varied enough to open a much broader path of spirituality to a new generation of believers.

Second, this project implies the need for a more holistic spirituality. God desires to engage people at every level of their being. This project does not suggest that the Church should abandon the intellect. A holistic approach *must*, in fact, engage the intellect. It must also occupy the emotion, the will, and even the body. One of the primary conclusions of the project showed how awakening the Christian imagination is key for the very reason that it serves as a bridge between many of these facets of humanity.

Third, carried out within a Pentecostal context, this project demonstrates how the Pentecostal church can draw from the larger stream of Christianity. The centuries-old practices of *lectio divina* and Ignatian contemplation both originated within the context of Catholic monasticism, yet they easily find a home within a Pentecostal spirituality because of the space they create for the Holy Spirit to guide the heart and mind of the practitioner. While remaining discerning and applying the criteria for acceptable spiritual disciplines set forth in chapter 3, Pentecostal believers should readily explore practices

outside the rather young Pentecostal tradition, which could enrich the Pentecostal experience.

Fourth, this project also shows that Pentecostal spirituality itself has much to contribute to the larger stream of Christianity. A Pentecostal influence could save the Church from an overly intellectual approach and lead the Church in a path of divine encounter or experience. Furthermore, Pentecostalism already possesses an embodied and somewhat imaginative spirituality, though it may not always be articulated in that manner. Pentecostals value an embodiment of praise through clapping hands, raising arms, singing. They value embodied prayer through being attentive to the position of the body (standing, kneeling, lying prostrate, etc.) and through the practice of praying in the Spirit. In addition, the most recently released worship music seems to increasingly make use of metaphor to help capture the heart, and much of this music comes out of the more Pentecostal or charismatic streams of the Church (e.g. Hillsong). In these ways, Pentecostals have historically, even if unknowingly, pursued a more holistic approach to spirituality, and their contributions should be taken seriously.

Fifth, this project addresses the need for a revival of Christian aesthetics. Historically speaking, the evangelical church has seemed apprehensive about art. For the sake of reaching a postmodern world, however, they must bridge the divide. This revival should begin with a validation and honoring of artists and craftsmen within the Christian community. The church should pray that the creative gifts latent within the body of Christ would be awakened and should give space for God to use the creative process of the artist to bring transformation to the church and to the world. This aesthetic revival should also give consideration to the place of art within the local church and the ways in which the

worship experience could appeal to the senses, drawing people into an encounter with God.

Recommendations for Taylor Christian Center

Based upon the outcomes of the project, I have three recommendations for Taylor Christian Center. First, the church should offer similar types of seminars as a part of the overall discipleship strategy. Over the years, several avenues of discipleship have fallen by the wayside but were never replaced, such as Sunday school classes and Sunday evening services. Understandably, methods change with time and the congregation's waning commitment to these particular methods justified those changes. New methods become necessary, however, and the success of the seminar format for this project suggests that people are willing to commit to a one-time elective class or discussion that equips them to pursue a healthy spirituality through all of life.

As of the writing of this chapter, for example, I have scheduled a seminar in which I will share some of the material from chapter 2 regarding the metaphors of Scripture and the ways in which Christians best approach Scripture as a means of encountering God. As with this project, the seminar will take place for three hours on a Saturday morning. Within the first two Sundays of announcing this, fifteen people have registered to attend. I recommend that Taylor Christian Center consider offering at least quarterly seminars that offer times of learning as well as practice. I believe this approach will bolster the culture of healthy spirituality within the church.

Second, I recommend that Taylor Christian Center give thought to the place of art and the role of the artist within the context of worship and ministry. Three years ago, the church remodeled the sanctuary and foyer, finishing with an updated color palette with a

minimalist feel. At the time, no one was thinking about the role of aesthetics in creating sensate worship, only about how to escape the décor choices of the early 1990s.

However, the sanctuary is now a blank canvas and the time seems right to consider aesthetics as a means of leading people into the presence of God.

I recommend that Taylor Christian Center give the artists within the congregation charge over this transition, in consultation with the pastors and board. The church should become a place where artists feel like an integral part of the body of Christ. They should not only assist in formulating a Pentecostal aesthetic but, if possible, be commissioned to do the work. I was pleased to see that since the *Re-imagining Spirituality* seminar, a graphic artist was commissioned to work on a visual representation of the church's mission and values. Continued steps in these directions will begin to validate the artists within the church and create space for others like them.

Finally, I recommend that Taylor Christian Center remain faithful to the task of creating a broader path of Pentecostal spirituality, a path that seeks to draw the whole person into relationship with God through Christ. To those who have always felt on the margins, may this church become an alternative Christian community that empowers people to pursue God with every aspect of their beings. May they allow their imaginations to be captured by the Holy Spirit, and as He leads, may they go after the imaginations of others. In doing this, they may risk losing appeal to some established Christians, but they also risk opening the door of the gospel to many who never saw the church as a place where they belonged. In re-imagining spirituality, all while taking the life and words of Jesus seriously, may they see the Spirit work in them and through them to produce more Christians and better Christians to the glory of God.

Recommendations for Future Study

Due to the limited scope of this project, further and future study should take place in the following areas. First, this project only surveys the need to return to a Christian aesthetic, a topic that deserves significantly more attention. Future study should focus on the changing relationships between Church and art throughout history and how a Christian aesthetic might inform contemporary thought, both theologically as well as experientially. This project addressed the ways in which creativity and art can serve the area of spiritual formation, but churches should also consider the ways in which a revival of the arts could impact the evangelistic efforts as well as the worship of the church.

Second, the array of spiritual disciplines throughout church history provides a seemingly endless source for future study. This project sought to revive only two ancient practices in an attempt to engage the imagination for deepening one's relationship with God. Further research would certainly uncover other forgotten practices that fit within the framework of acceptable and healthy Christian spiritual disciplines. In addition, future study should give consideration to engaging the imagination not only in individual disciplines but also in corporate disciplines (e.g., corporate worship and prayer, the public preaching and teaching of Scripture, etc.). Churches should consider all the ways and times in which people's hearts open to the work of God in their lives and then consider how the various aspects of corporate gatherings are either opening or closing the door to closer relationship with Him.

Last, this project did not address the topic of spiritual direction, but I believe this is extremely important for future study. Spiritual direction is another ancient Christian practice by which a believer seeks guidance in discerning the work of God in his or her life. As with other historic practices, this topic has gained popularity in recent years, but I

do not see the church implementing spiritual direction as a significant part of the overall discipleship process. If the church seeks to broaden the path of Christian spirituality, it becomes increasingly important that people receive guidance along the way. Future study could help dispel the myths and crack the enigma of spiritual direction within evangelicalism, whereby genuine soul care could receive the level of attention it deserves.

Conclusion

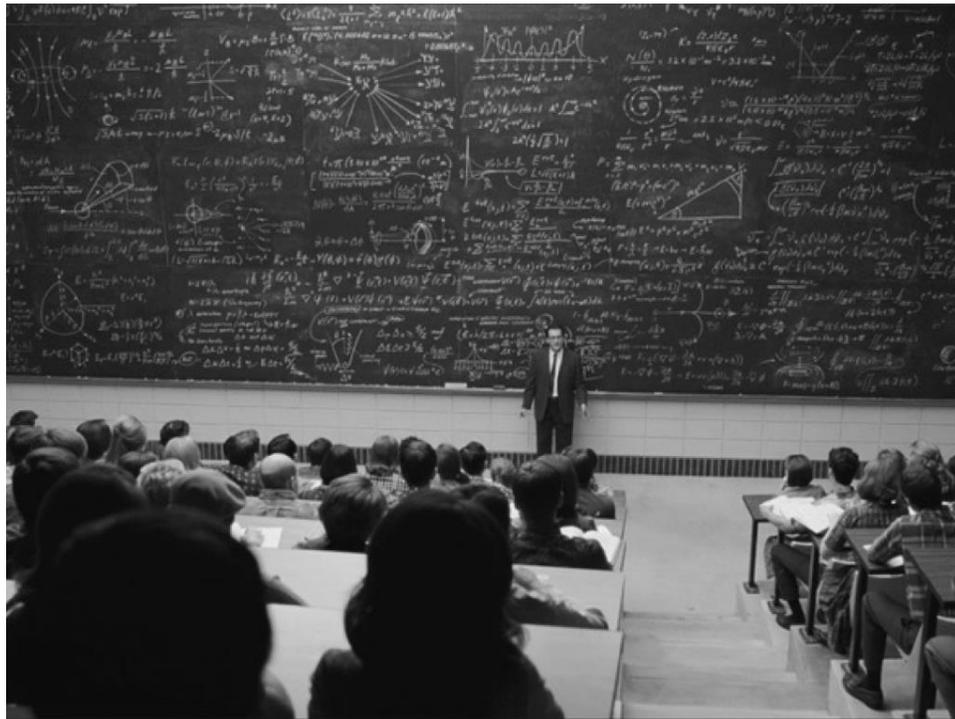
After seeing this project renew an enthusiasm for a pursuit of faith in the lives of those who, at times, have felt on the outskirts of Christian spirituality, I am optimistic that the Church can find ways to equip more people for the integration of life and faith. The Holy Spirit undoubtedly seeks to engage with people on every level, including both the intellect and the emotion, and this project has demonstrated how the awakening of the Christian imagination within the practice of spiritual disciplines holds at least one key to unlocking a deeper work of the Spirit within the hearts of believers. I hope that, in some small way, this project forges a path of Pentecostal spirituality that will lead to deeper relationships with Jesus, thereby creating a community empowered for ministry and mission in an ever-changing world. I also hope that this project might serve as a model, encouraging other pastors and ministry leaders to explore paths of spiritual formation that could provide hope and transformation to the artists and the young creatives within their own churches and communities.

APPENDIX A: PRESENTATION SLIDES FOR THE
“RE-IMAGINING SPIRITUALITY” SEMINAR

INTRODUCTION

RE-IMAGINING SPIRITUALITY

WHAT PRACTICES ARE IMPORTANT TO A LIFE LIVED IN CHRIST?





TEXT

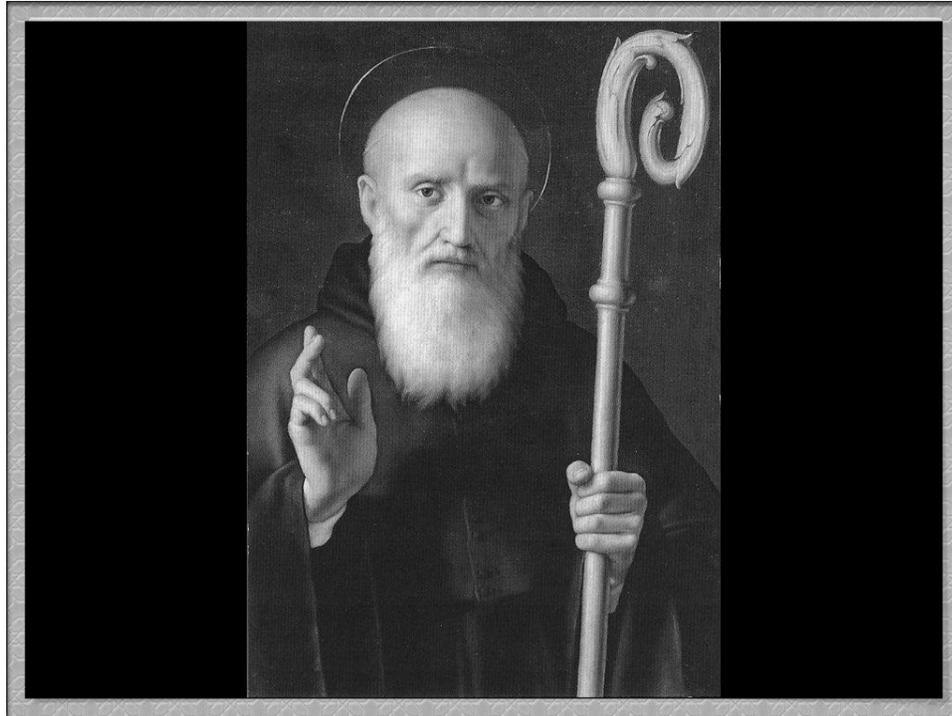
WHAT'S IN STORE?

- ▶ Sacred Reading
- ▶ Ignatian Contemplation
- ▶ The Arts as Spiritual Practice

**WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO
TAKE AWAY FROM TODAY?**

Sacred Reading





Rule of Saint Benedict

- ❖ *Sought a moderate path between individualism and communalism*
- ❖ *Formalized the practice of Sacred Reading as a part of monastic spirituality*



*“As I begin, I become aware of the Lord
present to me, looking upon me with love,
desirous of speaking to my heart.”*

—Timothy Gallagber

Reading

- *Read aloud slowly, pausing after each sentence or line*
- *Listen for those words or phrases that kindle your imagination*

Meditation

- *Allow the word or phrase to unfold in your imagination. What do you see, hear, smell, taste, touch?*
- *What feelings does this evoke? How does God call you to respond?*



Prayer

- *Acknowledge what God is speaking through the passage and begin to apply it to your life.*
- *Prayer could take many forms: confession, adoration, intercession, thanksgiving, etc.*

Contemplation

- ✿ *In silence, release everything that has emerged in prayer and rest deeply into the presence of God.*
- ✿ *It is no longer about you reading the Scripture but about the Holy Spirit 'reading' you.*



Sacred Reading Q&A



Reading 1: What word/phrase/image chooses you?
Reading 2: How does the word/phrase/image make you feel?
Reading 3: How does your heart respond?

IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION



THE SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

- Mentoring of a spiritual director
- Discerning the will of God
- Deepening relationship with God through prayer, meditation, and contemplation



LAY THE GROUNDWORK

- First take time to study the passage. Knowing the setting and background of a passage prepares the way for divine encounter in contemplation.
- Ignatius chose Gospel passages because his goal was for you to become an apprentice to Jesus.

"As I begin, I become aware of the Lord present to me, looking upon me with love, desirous of speaking to my heart."

-Timothy Gallagher

ENTER INTO THE SCENE

- Visualize the scene and let the event begin to unfold in your imagination. See the people, hear the words, and observe the actions.
- What do you see, hear, taste, smell, feel?
- Personally participate either as a bystander or as a character in the story.

FOCUS ON JESUS

- Watch his face. Listen to the way He speaks. Notice how people respond to him.
- At some point, enter into dialogue with Jesus.
- When you reach the place of dialogue, your prayer has reached its deepest center.

WHAT IF I'M WRONG?

- Lean into the Scriptures
- Lean into the Holy Spirit
- Practice discernment
- Live in community

IGNATIAN CONTEMPLATION Q&A

**MARK 10:46-52**

WHAT TOUCHED MY HEART IN THIS TIME OF PRAYER? WHAT DID MY HEART FEEL AS I PRAYED? WHAT DID I SENSE THE LORD SAYING TO ME?



Art as Spiritual Practice

Created as Creatives

- ◆ **"In the beginning, God created....Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image.'" (Genesis 1:1, 26)**



What Makes Art Christian

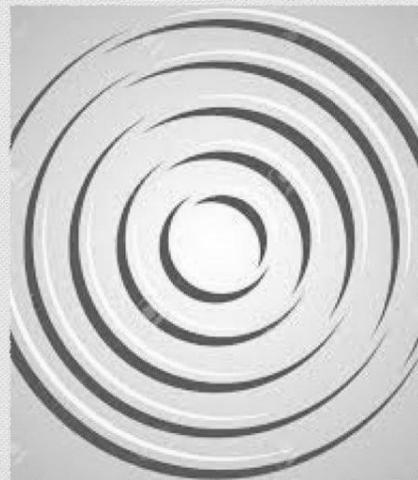
- ◆ **Art is an expression of how the artist sees the world or has experienced life. So, it is the artist, not the art, that is Christian or not.**

“Not long ago, a college senior asked if she could talk to me about being a Christian writer. If she wanted to write Christian fiction, how was she to go about it? I told her that if she is truly and deeply a Christian, what she writes is going to be Christian, whether she mentions Jesus or not. And if she is not, in the most profound sense, Christian, then what she writes is not going to be Christian, no matter how many times she invokes the name of the Lord.”

–Madeleine L'Engle

The Range of “Christian” Art

- ♦ No obvious worldview
- ♦ Dignifies human life or creates awe
- ♦ Conveys biblical principles that are not uniquely Christian
- ♦ Primary theological themes
- ♦ Explicit references to the gospel



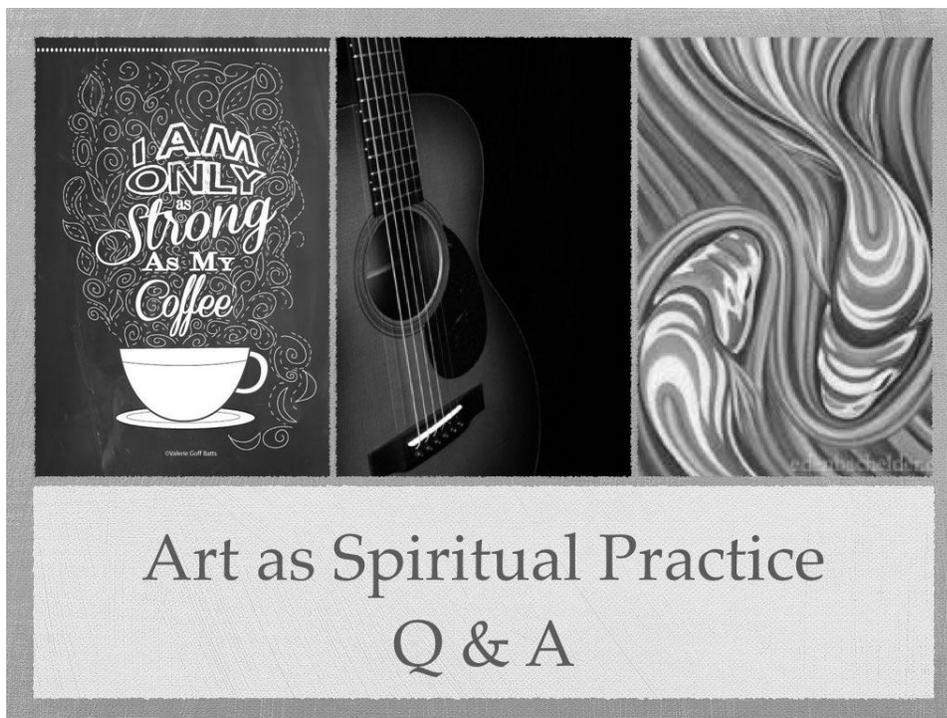
The artist's ultimate discipline is to practice the presence of God and to live in constant dialogue with the Father in our art.

Contemplation must precede creative action.

**"The artist is one who sees and
listens deeply to what is
happening below the surface,
attends to the particulars, and then
gives outward form and
expression."**

-Christine Paintner & Betsey Beckman

**Reflection is a key ingredient as the
Holy Spirit uses the creative process to
bring about transformation in our lives.**



Art as Spiritual Practice
Q & A

APPENDIX B: TEACHING NOTES

Session 1: Re-Imagining Spirituality Introduction

Slide 1

In our context, “spirituality” speaks of relationship with God. It’s about the ways in which we surrender ourselves to God’s relentless pursuit of us and live out our identity in Jesus. The goal of this seminar is to help us imagine a spirituality that engages every part of our being.

Slide 2

Essential to our surrender is participating in what are commonly called spiritual disciplines. We use the word “practices.” With what practices are you most familiar? What practices does the church typically emphasize? What are those practices supposed to look like?

Slide 3

In my own experience, I understood good prayer as usually an hour ... early in the morning. To help me fill the time, I was taught the prayer wheel, which broke that hour down into more manageable five to ten-minute segments ... five minutes of praise, five minutes of confession, five minutes of petition, five minutes of thanksgiving, five minutes of singing, etc.

The church also gave out Bible reading plans, where you would at least read the Bible through in one year ... sometimes the Old Testament once, New Testament twice,

and Proverbs twelve times. At the end of the year, those who complete the reading plan are rewarded with a free steak dinner.

An hour of talking to God, Bible reading plans, Scripture memorization, Bible study classes ... it was a very academic approach to spirituality, which really connects with people who loved school. But what about those who couldn't fill a full hour of prayer ... or could never get past the first month of the reading plan ... or didn't connect with God through charts and graphs? What about those more right-brained people ... the creative ... the free-spirits ... the feelers? Those people can often feel like outsiders in Christian spirituality, not quite good enough to complete the practices that really matter.

Slide 4

But what if Christian spirituality had space for all kinds of people ... the thinkers and the feelers? What if God's intention is to engage your head *and* your heart? What if your imagination was freed to draw you into a deeper relationship with God? What if the creative you didn't have to feel disconnected from the spiritual you?

This seminar is about introducing you to a few practices that engage the imagination in relationship with God, charting a path to spirituality that embraces your whole being.

Slide 5

Our time together will come in three waves. Each wave will explore a practice that seeks to engage the imagination.

The first two, sacred reading and Ignatian contemplation, are about encountering God through Scripture. The third explores how you can incorporate creativity and art into your life of faith.

Slide 6

Throughout our time together, feel free to interject thoughts or ask questions. We will also have a space for Q&A toward the end of each session. But I would like to begin with this question:

Based upon what you knew coming in to today and what I have just shared, what would you like to take away from our time? What are you hoping to learn? What questions are already in your mind?

Let's pray before we dive in. Let's acknowledge God's presence with us in this moment. Let's position ourselves in surrender to His pursuit of us.

Session 2: Lectio Divina

Slide 1

(No additional notes)

Slide 2

Benedict was born ca. 480 to Roman nobles. At around twenty years old and disenchanted with the indulgent life of his peers, he left home and settled in Enfide. There he met a monk with whom he discussed the meaning of life. At the monk's advice, Benedict became a hermit and lived three years in a cave. He would go on to found twelve monasteries and write "The Rule of St. Benedict."

Slide 3

Practiced communally, the Benedictine monks would hear the Scripture read during the Liturgy of Hours, and each would hold whatever word or phrase stood out in his or her heart throughout the day. "This process was described as 'rumination,'" which would eventually lead to later insight and contemplation.

We will explore how Sacred Reading is practiced individually. The lesson we must first learn from these men and women is that the Scripture is living, animated in an ongoing way by the Spirit. It was not written once to remain fossilized in its historical form, but the inspired words continue to reveal the wisdom of God's desires for us and our world at each moment in time.

Slide 4

Preparation is an important part of any prayer time. Quiet your mind by breathing in and out several times, settling into your time with God. Offer your distracting thoughts to Him (e.g., Richard Foster's practice of "palms down, palms up"). Become deeply aware of God's presence with you in that moment and recognize that He wants to speak with you. Then, explore the passage through the four movements of sacred reading.

Slide 5

It may help to read the passage through twice (which may require limiting the number of verses you read). Additionally, reading aloud engages both the eyes and the ears. The more senses we engage the better.

Slide 6

Ask, "How is my life touched by this passage today? What is the passage inviting me to do? How do I feel about what is being said ... and why? How do I respond deep within ... and why?"

Don't be concerned if there are times when no flashes of insight come. You can always return to the passage the next day for further meditation. Francis de Sales (Bishop of Geneva at the turn of the seventeenth century) said, "Imitate the bees, who do not leave a flower as long as they can extract any honey out of it."

Slide 7

God speaks ... we respond. Prayer could be as simple as “Show me how ...”
“Thank you for ...” or “Help me ...” You could also pray back the words of the passage.

As we discuss these movements of sacred reading, realize that this is not a rigid series of steps, moving in order from one to four. You should feel free to flow in and out of movements as the Holy Spirit leads.

Slide 8

Sometimes the dots do not immediately connect between the Scripture we read and the events of our lives. They often do begin to connect as we are quiet before God.

In this time of silence, you are open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit which may come by way of new insights, new perceptions, or a new infusion of peace, joy, and love.

John of the Cross, a sixteenth-century monk, said, “Contemplation is nothing else than a secret and peaceful and loving inflow of God, which, if not hampered, fires the soul in the spirit of love.”

It is good to end with a time of contemplation, but remember that the movements are fluid. You are able to move back and forth as the Holy Spirit leads.

Slide 9

For how many of you is sacred reading a new practice? What benefits do you see? What concerns might you have? Does anyone have questions to ask or thoughts to share?

Slide 10

Let's practice some sacred reading by looking at Psalm 46. We will take two minutes for preparation. I will then read the passage aloud three times. (You may follow along in your Bible or simply listen to the words being read.) After each reading, we will take a few minutes to consider the question on the screen before moving on.

Session 3: Ignatian Contemplation

Slide 1

(No additional notes)

Slide 2

Born to nobility in northern Spain (ca. 1491), Ignatius dreamed of being a national hero, a true knight in shining armor. He was seriously wounded in the Battle of Pamplona in 1521 and during recovery had a conversion experience (which included a vision of Jesus). Afterward, he abandoned military life and devoted himself to the church, founding the order of the Jesuits and writing his *magnum opus*, "The Spiritual Exercises."

Slide 3

Several centuries after St. Benedict formalized the practice of sacred reading, Ignatius invited people to use their imaginations in a deeply expanded version of meditation upon Scripture. He believed that God could speak to us just as clearly through the imagination as through the thoughts and reason. This method of engaging the imagination within Scripture came to be called "prayer of the senses" or "Ignatian contemplation."

Slide 4

The best path begins in the head and moves to the heart. A study Bible or reference books and websites may help. You're not looking for interpretation as much as context.

David Fleming explains, “[Ignatius] wants us to see Jesus interacting with others. Jesus making decisions. Jesus moving about. Jesus ministering. He doesn't want us to think about Jesus. He wants us to experience him. He wants Jesus to fill our senses. He wants us to meet him.”

Slide 5

This moment of preparation may be brief, but it is of the greatest importance. Through preparation, prayer immediately becomes what it most profoundly is—relationship: the human person in relationship with God.

Slide 6

Visualizing the passage requires that we become directors of the movie in our imaginations with the Bible passage as our script. A director has to figure out what everyone is doing.

Ignatius was adamant that we experience the passage with every possible sense, making the event as real as possible in our minds.

Slide 7

These details bring us to know Jesus as more than a historical figure in a book. He is a living person, and you are His apprentice.

You may have a particular question. You may simply see Him pause and ask, “What may I do for you?” You may be the one to ask, “What may I do for you?”

This heart-to-heart communication takes primacy over all else. When the dialogue has ended, you may resume your contemplation or bring the time to a close.

Slide 8

The anchor of Scripture helps ensure the authenticity of our experience. If Jesus is speaking to you in prayer it will be true to what we read in the Bible.

We trust that the Spirit, who ‘comes to the aid of our weakness’ (Rom. 8:26) when we pray, will guide not only the activity of our minds but also the work of our imaginations.

Is your imagination leading you closer to God or further away? Is it bringing you consolation or desolation? Ignatius advocated for a spiritual director who could provide guidance to the participant.

Slide 9

For how many of you is Ignatian contemplation a new practice? What benefits do you see? What concerns might you have? Does anyone have any questions to ask or thoughts to share?

Slide 10

Let’s practice some Ignatian contemplation together. I will read Mark 10:46-52, Jesus’s healing of the blind Bartimaeus. I will then guide you through an imaginative meditation, in which we will seek to enter into an experience of the passage (*An Ignatian*

Introduction to Prayer, 10-11). Following our meditation, I would ask you to consider the questions on the screen.

Session 4: Art as Spiritual Practice

Slide 1

(No additional notes)

Slide 2

When God looks at mankind, He sees something of himself (Gen. 1:26). But when we look back at the original, in whose image we were created, we find only one assertion ... “God created” (v. 1). To create is to lean into the image in which humankind was created, to identify with and experience the Creator (See also Exod. 35).

Slide 3

(No additional notes)

Slide 4

(No additional notes)

Slide 5

In his book *Imagine*, Steve Turner offers five concentric circles that express the range of art possible within Christianity. The outer circle includes art with no obvious worldview (e.g., a song played on the cello or an abstract sculpture made from driftwood).

The next circle contains art that expresses a Christian worldview in that it dignifies human life or introduces a sense of awe. This would include any artistic medium that causes the observer to “well up inside because it is awakening our senses.”

The third circle contains art that conveys a clear biblical teaching that is not uniquely Christian, such as peace, love, forgiveness, or reconciliation. Turner indicates, “We may be compelled to these things because of our faith, but these values are not exclusive to Christianity.”

In the fourth circle, some of the Bible’s primary theological themes like creation, sin, redemption, or the spiritual realm inspire the art, yet artists belonging to other religions or no religion at all have tackled some of these themes.

The inner circle involves art that makes an explicit reference to the gospel and the death and resurrection of Jesus. In regards to this fifth circle, Turner argues that “some artists may never be called to go that far in their art,” but these artists are still Christians producing Christian art.

Slide 6

The artist’s ultimate discipline is to practice the presence of God and to live in constant dialogue with the Father in our art. Through the creative process, we can reach out to communicate with God and open ourselves to God’s communication with us through image and symbol, gesture and sound. We can develop an awareness of God’s presence in everything we do, see, and feel so that prayer generates in all of our activities.

To use creativity as a spiritual discipline, however, the artist must shift his or her intention, entering the process with a commitment to seek God and invite Him to inspire, guide, and speak. The artist must engage the imagination to see the world as charged with

God's presence and must cultivate an awareness of that presence. Consequently, the creative process and art making, with intention and awareness of God's invitation and movement with us, become the process of prayer itself.

Art and prayer are both rooted in an intense encounter involving a surrender of willfulness and an openness to inspiration, and they can lead to a deep engagement with Mystery.

Slide 7

If the goal of the creative process is to receive inspiration through dialogue, the artist must learn to hear before he or she speaks and creates. Manuel Luz notes, "Creativity is contrary to busyness. Creativity often takes time and space, where the soul can breathe and the hand can doodle and the Spirit of God can inspire." The artist, therefore, must learn the discipline of slowing. He or she must practice a modern form of peregrination, a self-imposed exile and wandering for the love of God practiced at the beginning of the fifth century. The artist must learn to wait but not in a passive way. Luci Shaw asserts, "In this waiting time, I must be sure that my antennas are out, combing the air, ready to pull in the messages. Receptivity, yes. Awareness, yes. Active readiness, yes. For passivity has no place in the life of art or of Christian spirituality."

Slide 8

The creative process should include this contemplative or meditative aspect, but it must not end there. Christine Paintner and Betsey Beckman describe the artist as "one who sees and listens deeply to what is happening below the surface, attends to the particulars, and then gives outward form and expression."

Outward expression may flow immediately out of practices like sacred reading or Ignatian contemplation. Outward expression may come later as the fruit of those practices. Either way, the artist eventually must put pen to paper, brush to canvas, or fingers to keys. There comes a time to give outward expression to the inward movements of the soul.

For musician Manuel Luz, meditation takes on creative expression at the keys, where music becomes his voice. He writes, “The piano seems to speak for me in ways that my mouth cannot express.” For poet Luci Shaw, outward expression begins with her journal, the place where she says “art and spirituality form a single river.” Eventually, phrases become poems, sketches become sculptures, or scribbles become musical scores—all possible as the artist pursues creativity as a spiritual practice.

Slide 9

Through the creative process, the Holy Spirit brings about transformation in the life of the artist. Robin Jensen declares, “Each act of creation is a spiritual exercise, strengthening or honing us in particular ways, making us more and more into who we shall become and how we understand ourselves in relation to the rest of the created world.”

Spiritual formation through artistic expression most clearly happens as the artist takes time to detach from the process or transcend the experience so that he or she can evaluate the content of the art to ensure it conveys the proper message, model, or worldview. Jensen challenges artists to ask, “How are we changed or moved to change by this? Have we been helped or harmed? What is the good we seek?” Reflection on the

creative process makes way for greater transformation and keeps one from the real dangers of spiritual malformation.

Slide 10

In what ways have you already incorporated creativity into your Christian spirituality? In what new ways might you explore this idea? Does anyone have any questions to ask or thoughts to share?

Session 5: Re-Imagining Spirituality Closing

Slide 1

(No additional notes)

Slide 2

Explore these practices at least three to four times per week for the next four weeks. Don't worry about getting it right or wrong. Not every time of prayer is mind-blowingly transformative (though some are). You are like an acorn in the process of becoming a mighty oak. Be faithful to the process and lean in to God's pursuit of you.

I am giving you a packet that provides a Scripture passage for each week (and some supplemental material that may be helpful to you, especially in the beginning). Use that passage as your source for sacred reading and contemplation for the week. Journal something about your experience at least once each week. (Keep in mind that I will be asking for this journal at the end of four weeks, so record your most personal thoughts elsewhere.)

Practice giving outward expression to the inward work of the Spirit—poetry, story, music, painting, sketching, photography, decoupage, etc.

You will take the online assessment again the week of August 21. (I will send you a reminder.) I will be comparing our ending percentages in the area of spiritual formation with the beginning percentages.

We will end with a party where we can eat together, talk about our experiences, and share any artwork that came from the process.

APPENDIX C: FOUR-WEEK PRAYER GUIDE

WEEK ONE: ZACCHAEUS (LUKE 19:1-10)

Scripture Reading

As I begin, I become aware of the Lord present to me, looking upon me with love, desirous of speaking to my heart...

Prayerfully, I read Luke 19:1-10

Optional Meditation

(From Timothy Gallagher's *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer*, p. 36-37)

I see the crowd, filling the narrow streets of Jericho. I see Jesus in the midst of them, passing through, on his way...

And I become aware of this figure, Zacchaeus, hoping for so little simply to see the Lord ... and unable to do so because of his small stature. He senses all that is wrong with his life, how he is rejected by his own people ... and in his own eyes.

I see him move ahead of the crowd, climb the tree ... and wait. I am near him, perhaps I take his place ... I, too, long to see the Lord: "My heart says to you, 'Your face, Lord, do I seek.'/Hide not your face from me" (Ps. 27:8-9). I wait ...

And then, like Zacchaeus, I find that it is the Lord who sees me. He stops. He sets aside his journey, he seems almost to forget it entirely in his desire to see Zacchaeus, to see me ...

He looks at me ... “Zacchaeus, make haste and come down ... I must stay at your house today.”

I sense the wonder and the joy in Zacchaeus as he realizes the desire of the Lord to be with him. He makes haste to respond ... My own heart begins to grasp the desire of the Lord to be with me. I too respond ...

Now they—we—are together in the house. What takes place between them? A meal? A conversation? I see Jesus and Zacchaeus together. I am there, with them.

What does Jesus say to him? To me? What does Zacchaeus say to Jesus? What do I share with Jesus about my life, my hopes, my fears, my desire to change?

Zacchaeus is made new ... his whole life is filled with a new freshness and a new hope. With courage, the courage of the Lord’s presence, the Lord’s love, the Lord’s words to him, he will make the changes ... A new sense of hope fills my heart too ...

“Today salvation has come to this house ...” *Today* ... I hear Jesus’ words, I sense the gift offered to me, even today as I pray. My heart responds.

After the Prayer

- *What word in this Scripture most spoke to my heart?*
- *What touched my heart in this time of prayer? What did my heart feel as I prayed?*
- *What did I sense the Lord saying to me?*

WEEK TWO: THE SAMARITAN WOMAN (JOHN 4:1-42)

Scripture Reading

As I begin, I become aware of the Lord present to me, looking upon me with love, desirous of speaking to my heart ...

Prayerfully, I read John 4:1-42

Optional Meditation

(From Timothy Gallagher's *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer*, p. 48-49)

I am there by the well ... I see the dry countryside surrounding the well, the earthen road ... I feel the heat of the midday hours ...

I see Jesus seated by the well, alone, his weariness revealed in his face as he rests ... I become aware that he is waiting for me, that he has a "gift of God" that he longs to give me today ...

I see the woman approach. I see—perhaps I share—her weariness, her burden of repeated failure: five husbands, over and over the same pattern of failure. I feel her sense of helplessness, of inability to change ... With my own sense of helplessness, of inability to grow as I so desire, I stand there, with her, in her place, before Jesus ...

He speaks: "Give me a drink." She does not flee from the conversation that opens so simply ... and her life begins to change.

"If you knew the gift of God ..." I ask Jesus to help me know the gift that he is offering me even now, as I pray. I ask for eyes that are spiritually open *to see this gift* ... and to embrace it in my life.

I watch, I am in her place, as Jesus, gently, and with great respect for the burdens of her heart, unfolds for her the meaning of her own life, and leads her to grasp the gift he wishes to give her: “living water,” a new freshness in the power of the Spirit.

Desire for this newness wells up in her, in me: “Give me this water, that I may not thirst ...”

Now she becomes a witness to Jesus: “Come, see a man who told me all that I ever did.” She has found a Heart before which she need keep *nothing* hidden, before which openness does not wound, but heals ...

“Many ... from that city believed in him because of the woman’s testimony.” I ask the Lord that his healing touch in my life make of me too a witness, a channel of his light for others ...

I read this passage slowly, I live this passage ...

After the Prayer

- *What word in this Scripture most spoke to my heart?*
- *What touched my heart in this time of prayer? What did my heart feel as I prayed?*
- *What did I sense the Lord saying to me?*

WEEK THREE: HE LOVED THEM TO THE END (JOHN 13:1-17)

Scripture Reading

As I begin, I become aware of the Lord present to me, looking upon me with love, desirous of speaking to my heart ...

Prayerfully, I read John 13:1-17

Optional Meditation

(From Timothy Gallagher's *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer*, p. 74-75)

Jesus' hour has come ... It is the Passover. I see him at supper with the twelve: the upper room, the food for the meal, the wine ...

My gaze centers now on Jesus, in this moment of his self-giving ...” Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.” “His own.” I thank him that he has called me to be “his own.” And I ponder this love, given *to the end*: to the utmost degree, to the last moment of his life ... given for “his own,” for me ...

Now, as I watch, Jesus expresses the whole meaning of his life of service, a life lived in “the form of a slave” (Phil. 2:7), with a symbolic gesture, filled with meaning ...

I see him rise from the table, gird himself with a towel, take a basin with water, kneel at the feet of one disciple, then another, then another ... and wash their feet ... Can I allow him to wash my feet ...?

I see Peter resist—he struggles to allow the Lord to kneel before him, to serve him so humbly, to love him in this way ... I, too, know this struggle ...

“Lord, do you wash my feet?” “What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.” How often I, too, do not “know now” what the Lord is doing in my life ... but later I understand ...

“You shall never wash my feet.” “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.”
 “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head.” Peter allows the Lord to love
 and serve him ... I open my own heart to that love ... and no longer resist ...

Now I see Jesus take his place again at table ... I hear him ask me: “Do you know
 what I have done to you?” Do I know? I answer him ...

“If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash
 one another’s feet. For I have given you an example ...”

I ask the Lord to understand, deep in my heart, his example of service, his love for
 his own to the end. I share the gratitude for that love which rises in my heart ... I speak to
 him now, at length, with profound attention, unhurriedly, from my heart ...

I ask his grace to love those he has given me to be “my own” with the same love
 of service ... to the end ...

After the Prayer

- *What word in this Scripture most spoke to my heart?*
- *What touched my heart in this time of prayer? What did my heart feel as I
 prayed?*
- *What did I sense the Lord saying to me?*

WEEK FOUR: THE WOMAN AT JESUS' FEET (LUKE 7:36-50)

Scripture Reading

As I begin, I become aware of the Lord present to me, looking upon me with love, desirous of speaking to my heart ...

Prayerfully, I read Luke 7:36-50

Optional Meditation

(From Timothy Gallagher's *An Ignatian Introduction to Prayer*, p. 58-59)

The Pharisee's house, comfortable, well-arranged ... the room where the dinner takes place, the table in the center, the many guests, and Jesus there ... I read the text slowly, I am there, living each moment of this event.

"A woman of the city, who was a sinner ..." I see her, alone, scorned, shunned ... known to be "a sinner." I feel the shame and pain in her heart, her sense of failure. I see how each harsh word, each scornful look cuts deeply ...

With great respect, I contemplate the stirrings of her heart ... I sense her overpowering need to find a heart that will not condemn, that will not reject, that will understand the pain and confusion, will perceive the desire to change ... My heart too knows that great need ...

She hears of a new rabbi, one who eats with sinners, who chooses to be with the poor and infirm ... A new hope awakens in her ... and in me.

She knows that to enter the Pharisee's house uninvited, unwanted, will draw upon her the scorn and rejection of all in the house: "If this man were a prophet he would have known ... what sort of woman this is who is touching him ..." Yet, she draws near ...

because of her great hope that one heart in that house will not reject ... the same hope that stirs in my heart ...

She braves all this ... and comes to the feet of Jesus as he, like the other guests, reclines at the table.

She says nothing. All is said with her actions. Her tears fall ... Here I stop, and, with great reverence, I ponder those tears, their meaning ... I look upon her face, as her tears fall. I look upon Jesus' face, as he sees her tears. What does she read in his eyes? What do I read in those eyes?

She dries his feet with her hair ... she kisses his feet ... she anoints them with ointment ... I am there ...

And now I hear the words. "Simon, I have something to say to you ... One owed five hundred ... the other fifty ..." "The one ... to whom he forgave more." "Do you see this woman?" "For she loved much ..." "Your sins are forgiven." "Go in peace ..."

I open my heart to hear the Lord speak these words now to me ... I speak to him from my heart ...

After the Prayer

- *What word in this Scripture most spoke to my heart?*
- *What touched my heart in this time of prayer? What did my heart feel as I prayed?*
- *What did I sense the Lord saying to me?*

APPENDIX D: POEMS FROM A PROJECT PARTICIPANT

Poem from Week Three (reflecting on John 13)

Giving starts as a slow transformation,
One that begins from the inside
spreading through us, around us,
reaching out to all who come in contact with us.
It's easy to give in times of abundance, when our lives are overflowing.
We sometimes forget though how thirsty others can be
when our own wells face drought.
But when we've been given, it's harder to forget,
for the taste of humility still lingers upon our lips.
You give sheets and blankets to a shelter
because you can still feel the cold sting of the air as night sets in.
You know the bench is no place for rest,
yet tonight there you lay.
You sit down with strangers, not because you are hungry
but to share a meal, to learn a name and hear their story.
Because you yourself were once looked upon
with a bitter mix of disdain and pity,
just a person in line, a meal tray to be washed.
Sometimes we forget that holding on to those trays are tired hands,
that long to be shaken, not just a number in a sign-in book.
"Who cares what you serve. It's a free meal.
They should just be thankful," some are quick to say.
But you know otherwise.
That a meal cooked in love and good intention serves you longer
than one simmering in pride.
That when we give to feed our egos
it's a meal that will satisfy nobody.
Instead of throwing change at a man's feet,
you buy an extra sandwich, reach out a hand and say hello.
You help furnish houses you will never be invited to.
You buy socks because you remember the wetness of your own feet.
You wrap presents for children whose faces you will never see light up.
You buy a few extra groceries for a meal you will never eat.
You give an umbrella in the rain.
You give what you can
because you have been given so much,

because people need so little yet have even less,
 because you can re-spark a dismal heart,
 because every ounce of our giving,
 every gesture done in love, will never go unappreciated.
 No person is ever undeserving.
 Our giving can never be wasted.
 Because in a turn, we can be there,
 coming humbly and filled with humility,
 waiting our turn in line for a hot meal,
 hoping somebody will see past our circumstances, our choices,
 past our dirty clothes and unwashed hair,
 past our past.
 That somebody will be a light for us in our dark spot
 as we should be in theirs.
 To be a hug,
 a smile,
 a hand.
 To be the living example,
 not because we have to
 but because it simply does not exist in us to not.

Poem from Week Four (reflecting on Luke 7:36-50)

Words.
 Single letters strung together.
 Some are long, some short.
 Some roll off the tongue,
 while we choke on others.
 Words.
 We think they are all the same,
 just simple letters strung together,
 but how wrong we are.
 As the letters begin to arrange,
 they don't all sound the same.
 They don't all feel the same.
 Some words have the ability to lift us,
 while others can be what breaks us.
 Some words can fill our life with love,
 and others can take a life.
 Some words can usher in peace,
 while others fuel a raging fire of hate.
 Some words when left unspoken can become deafening,
 while others scream to be heard.
 Some words get spoken when they should be silenced,
 while others never find their voice.
 Some words never know their true meaning,
 forever used to manipulate and distort.

Some words burrow within,
ticking time bombs waiting to explode.
Some words can carry us away,
as others leave us wanting more.
Some words we keep with us for all our days,
while others fade into our memories.
A single word can change our entire view of a person.
It can define us,
change us,
consume us,
free us,
redeem us.
We forget sometimes while arranging these letters
the power we give our words.
So it lies within us
to gently pour them into others or
flood them out altogether.

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