

ASSEMBLIES OF GOD THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

HELPING AIRMEN BUILD SPIRITUAL FITNESS:
TRAINING MILITARY MEMBERS IN NICEVILLE,
FLORIDA ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH RETREAT

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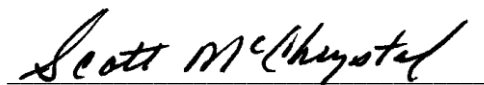
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TRAINING MILITARY MEMBERS IN NICEVILLE,
FLORIDA ON SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH RETREAT

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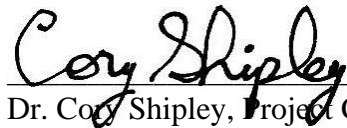
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CONTENTS

CONTENTS.....	IV
ABSTRACT.....	X
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	XI
LIST OF TABLES	XII
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
The Context.....	1
The Problem.....	2
The Purpose	4
Definition of Key Terms	4
Description of Proposed Project	5
Phases of the Project	6
Research	6
Planning	7
Implementation	8
Evaluation	9
Writing	9
Conclusion	10
CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW	11
Introduction.....	11
Sabbath, the First Retreat.....	11
Creation Sabbath.....	12

Covenant Sabbath	13
Redemptive Sabbath	14
Jacob's Encounters in the Wilderness.....	16
Jacob at Bethel	16
Jacob at Jabbok	18
Moses's Personal and Corporate Retreat	21
Moses's Personal Encounters	21
Corporate Encounters with the Sacred.....	25
Sacred Space and Sacred Time	26
Sinai as a Corporate Sacred Encounter	27
Zion as a Corporate Sacred Encounter.....	28
Elijah	30
Elijah Afraid.....	30
Elijah Depressed	31
Elijah Retreats to the Wilderness	32
Elijah Encounters God	33
Jesus	34
Jesus's Call to Preparation in the Wilderness	35
Jesus Overcoming Temptation in the Wilderness.....	38
Jesus Withdraws to Pray	39
Withdrawing to the Mountains to Pray for a Decision	39
Withdrawing from Ministry to Rest.....	41
Withdrawing to the Wilderness to Discern	42
Jesus's Habit of Withdrawing.....	43
Jesus at Gethsemane	44

Jesus Desire to Be with His Disciples.....	45
The Disciples’ Failure.....	45
Not My Will but Yours Be Done.....	46
Uniqueness of Jesus’s Prayer.....	47
The Reality of Jesus’s Suffering.....	48
Acts	49
The Disciples Wait on God.....	50
Disciples Empowered	51
Purpose of Empowerment.....	52
Purpose of Clarity	53
Conclusion	54
CHAPTER 3: GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW	56
Introduction.....	56
Spiritual Fitness	56
Spiritual Fitness Defined.....	57
History of Spiritual Fitness in the Military Context	59
Importance of Spiritual Fitness Today.....	62
Spiritual Fitness Assessments.....	64
The Role of the Chaplain in Spiritual Fitness.....	67
Spiritual Fitness and Human Flourishing	69
Spiritual Formation	71
The Role of Habits in Christian Spiritual Formation.....	74
The Role of Culture in Christian Spiritual Formation	78
The Role of Spiritual Disciplines on Christian Spiritual Formation.....	79
The Role of Retreats on Christian Spiritual Formation	83

The Role of Spiritual Modalities on Christian Spiritual Formation	85
Transformative Learning	88
Definitions of Transformative Learning	89
Transformative Learning Models	90
Transformative Learning Applied to a Religious Context.....	93
Transformative Learning Theory Applied to Retreat Settings	95
Conclusion	97
CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT.....	98
Introduction.....	98
Preparation of the Project.....	98
Development of Leader’s Guide/Participant Handouts	98
Seeking Permission to Conduct the Retreat.....	99
Venue and Date Selection	100
Selecting Participants, Advertising the Retreat, and Registering Participants	100
Preparation of Venue	101
Preparation of the Assessment and Retreat Evaluation	101
Execution of the Project.....	102
Session 1	102
Session 2	103
Session 3	104
Session 4	105
Session 5	106
Results of the Project	107
Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS) Results	107
Pursue Meaning, Purpose, and Value	108

Service and Sacrifice for the Greater Good	110
Personal Connection to a Higher Power	113
Retreat Evaluation.....	115
The Project’s Contribution to Ministry.....	116
CHAPTER 5: PROJECT SUMMARY.....	118
Introduction.....	118
Evaluation of the Project.....	118
Keys to Project Effectiveness	118
Developing a Biblical Basis for Retreating	118
Retreating in a Beautiful Location.....	119
Providing Outstanding Hospitality	120
Befitting from Existing Relationships	120
Keys to Project Improvement	121
Seeking the Early Support of Leaders	121
Increasing Participant Diversity.....	122
Retreating during Milder Weather	122
Increasing Time for Gender-Specific Breakout Sessions	123
Including Enlisted Participants	123
Implications of the Project.....	124
Recommendations for the Air Force Chaplain Corps.....	126
More Faith-Based Spiritual Retreats.....	126
Faith-Based Options for Open-to-All Retreats	126
Post-Retreat, Faith-Based Small Group.....	127
Experiential Learning Training for Chaplains	127
Recommendations for Future Study	127

Conclusion	128
APPENDIX A: JESUS’S TRANSFIGURATION	129
APPENDIX B: LEADER’S GUIDE	135
APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT’S GUIDE	157
APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL	177
APPENDIX E: EMAIL ADVERTISEMENT	178
APPENDIX F: CHAMP SOCOM SPIRITUAL FITNESS SCALE	179
APPENDIX G: RETREAT EVALUATION.....	186
APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT	187
APPENDIX I: RETREAT SCHEDULE	189
APPENDIX J: PROJECT DATA	190
APPENDIX K: RETREAT EVALUATION RESULTS	196
SOURCES CONSULTED.....	202
Chapter 1: Introduction	202
Chapter 2: Biblical-Theological Literature Review.....	202
Chapter 3: General Literature Review	210
Appendices.....	217

ABSTRACT

The possibility of another major world war in the near future remains quite high. Ensuring military members are spiritually resilient and ready for war is essential. The lack of spiritual resilience has led to a force that does not understand how to develop spiritually. This lack contributes to hopelessness and a higher suicide rate.

The following project develops and implements a five-part curriculum to train military personnel stationed near Eglin Air Force Base on spiritual fitness through a faith-based spiritual retreat. This project is grounded in a biblical-theological framework and informed by contemporary literature on spiritual fitness and resilience and emphasizes experiential and transformative learning. The retreat includes structured sessions on Sabbath practices, solitude, devotion, and reflection, with the aim of fostering spiritual growth and resilience. The Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS) was used for pre- and post-retreat assessments, including a 30-day follow-up, to measure the effectiveness of the retreat interventions. The findings indicate a positive shift in participants' spiritual fitness, demonstrating the retreat's potential as a model for future applications in military and civilian contexts.

The project contributes to the broader discourse on spiritual resilience, offering practical resources for chaplains and religious leaders seeking to enhance spiritual fitness within their communities. Chaplains and clergy members can use the included curriculum as a guide for engaging military members needing to develop their spiritual fitness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First, and foremost I want to thank God. I could not have done this project without His loving grace surrounding my life. I pray that this project is a reflection of the life-transforming power that I have experienced through spiritual retreats when I met with God.

Next, I could not have done this without my amazing partner and the love of my life, Lindsey. Thank you for the many mornings and nights that you spent with me, waking up early and staying up late as I read or typed away. Your encouragement kept me going and I don't think I could ever thank you enough for all that you did for me. To Emelyn, Lucas, and Caleb, you all kept my love and energy bucket full throughout my time working on this project. When I was feeling done, you came and filled me up with your hugs, snuggles, and encouragement. I love you guys so much.

I would be remiss if I also did not thank my editor Erica Huinda, biblical advisor Rev. Dr. Vince Medina, and project advisor Rev. Dr. Scott McChrystal (Chaplain, Colonel, U.S. Army, retired). Their great wisdom, encouragement and guidance helped me take this project from idea to completion.

I wish to also acknowledge the support and great love of my friends, family, pastors, and professors, along with a huge shout out to AGTS. This project would never have come into being without the life-transforming teaching from Rev. Dr. Carolyn Tennant. I am grateful for all you have taught in the past four years.

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Pursue Meaning, Purpose, and Value	108
Table 2: Self-Sacrifice for the Greater Good	111
Table 3: Personal Connection to a Higher Power	113

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Context

I am a protestant chaplain at Eglin Air Force Base, Florida. I have had this assignment since September 2021. Eglin Air Force Base is unique due to its primary purpose within the Department of Defense to develop and test munitions for use within the military. As a result of the test mission, Eglin has a lot of highly educated engineers assigned to the base. Eglin also sits in the panhandle of Florida, next to Fort Walton Beach, making it a desirable location for airmen. The area's growth has recently exploded in the past decade, with Hurlburt Air Force Base doubling in size and Eglin adding another 50 percent. The immovable land test range has led many airmen to move forty-five minutes from the base to find suitable housing for their families.

The base is also unique for having nine wings or wing equivalents. A typical Air Force base will have one or two wings. Each wing within the Air Force comprises roughly two to three thousand people, split between airmen, civilians, and contractors. Having nine wings has led to disconnection at the base level. This, coupled with how far people drive for work, leads to the base lacking a hometown feel. This has contributed to nine suicides on Eglin Air Force Base in the past year—nine calls where a chaplain walks up to a family in crisis and provides care.

The chapel at Eglin is responsible for the free exercise of religion on the base for all personnel and remains ready for immediate deployment. We are responsible for the spiritual pillar of comprehensive airmen fitness. My job as a chaplain consists of three

primary duties. First, I provide for religion's free exercise by conducting worship services consistent with my faith group. Second, I provide spiritual care through counseling, workplace visitation, and programs. Finally, I advise leaders on ethics, morality, morale, and the spiritual needs of their personnel.

Eglin Chapel currently has two Protestant services and two Catholic masses that meet weekly. We recently launched a contemporary service in early January 2023. To date, the average weekly attendance is 40 to 50 people. The gospel service recently celebrated its 46-year anniversary and averages 110 people. The two Catholic masses have been around since the base's inception and average 70 and 110 people in attendance.

The Problem

Resiliency is the buzzword of the day in the military. Every top leader, from Congress to generals, wants to improve our force's resiliency. Leaders give airmen whole days off work to focus on their physical, social, mental, or spiritual resiliency. Most of the time, however, the spiritual component of resiliency is often overlooked. This lack of attention and focus as it relates to spiritual resilience has led to a force that remains clueless about how to develop spiritually. This, coupled with the fact that most Generation Z airmen no longer attend church and identify as nonreligious, has made it challenging to engage them in spiritual practices..

The suicide epidemic at Eglin Air Force Base represents only the tip of the iceberg as it relates to the base's lack of spiritual resiliency. Airmen have to wait a month for an appointment at the base's mental health clinic. Doctors tell airmen to go to the emergency room if they want to see a psychologist. Many on base struggle in profound

ways, yet the Air Force and society have so separated spirituality from religion that it is hard to be honest with people as it relates to the profound benefits of religion. The best way I know how to spiritually build up airmen is through religious activity. The airmen devout in their religious practices have far lower rates of depression and do not need as much outside help.

Sadly, most chapels throughout the Air Force do not utilize the religious expertise of their chaplains to tackle the spiritual resiliency crisis. In 2016, Dondi Costin, former chief of chaplains for the Air Force, launched an initiative called Faith Works, highlighting the positive aspects of practicing one's faith. If airmen learn to practice their faith in a retreat setting and then actually put into practice what they know while on the retreat, they will feel comfortable doing it in everyday life.

In the Air Force, we train people by practicing the crawl, walk, and run model. The airmen learn their jobs by watching their teacher do the job. They then do the job with the teacher, and then the teacher watches them do the job. Only after they have completed the previous steps do they begin doing the work on their own. We need to do the same with spiritual practices.

With the overall lack of spiritual resiliency on base, as a chaplain, I need to teach others how to live out their faith in such a way that it increases their resiliency. This must be done by teaching, showing, allowing others to shadow, and finally, watching and providing feedback on how others are doing. Normally, this is done over an extended time through a discipleship model; however, it can also be done in an intensive retreat model. The problem of a lack of spiritual resiliency must be addressed in airmen and the best means to do that is through faith based retreats within the chapel context.

The Purpose

This project will develop a two-day retreat using experiential and transformative learning to improve spiritual resiliency for local military members within the Fort Walton Beach, Florida area.

Definition of Key Terms

Airman. An individual who serves in the United States Air Force. This refers to officers, enlisted members, and civilians working within the Department of the Air Force.

Appropriated Fund. Directly funded appropriations from the government to fund the Chapel Corps mission and its programming.

Chapel. A religiously neutral building used for spiritual/religious practice owned by the United States Air Force Base.

Chapel Tithes and Offerings Fund. A non-appropriated fund that allows individual donors to contribute to the chapel to teach stewardship. This fund supplements Chaplain Corps programming.

Combat Stress. Physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual response to intense, life-threatening stressors of combat or military operations.¹

Comprehensive Airmen Fitness. It encompasses many cross-functional education and training efforts, activities, programs, and other aspects that contribute to sustaining a fit, resilient, and ready force.²

¹ US Department of Veterans Affairs, “Combat Exposure - PTSD: National Center for PTSD,” 2014, https://www.ptsd.va.gov/understand/types/combat_exposure.asp.

² Secretary of the Air Force, “Integrated Resilience,” September 17, 2018, https://static.e-publishing.af.mil/production/1/af_a1/publication/afpd90-50/afpd90-50.pdf.

Deployment. The movement of military personnel from their home station to a combat zone.

Moral Injury. An invisible wound of war that may occur after exposure to an event in which a person engages in or witnesses an act that violates sincerely held moral beliefs.³

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. A potentially debilitating psychological condition that may develop in individuals who have experienced or witnessed an exceptionally terrifying event.⁴

Redeployment. When military members return to their home duty stations from the battlefield.

Spiritual Fitness. The ability to adhere to beliefs, principles, or values needed to persevere and prevail in accomplishing missions.⁵

Spiritual Resiliency. The ability to withstand, adapt, recover and/or grow in the face of challenges and demands.⁶

Description of Proposed Project

I will conduct a spiritual retreat based on research conducted for the biblical-theological literature review and the general literature review of this project. This retreat

³ Harold G. Koenig, Nagy A. Youssef, and Michelle Pearce, "Assessment of Moral Injury in Veterans and Active Duty Military Personnel With PTSD: A Review," *Frontiers in Psychiatry* 10 (June 28, 2019): 443, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyt.2019.00443>.

⁴ American Psychiatric Association, *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-5 (R)* (Arlington, TX: American Psychiatric Association Publishing, 2013), 271.

⁵ Secretary of the Air Force, "Integrated Resilience."

⁶ Ibid.

will consist of five 90-minute sessions for military personnel within the Fort Walton Beach area. This retreat will be conducted in July 2024. Sessions will include eating a sabbath dinner, performing examen, engaging in a daily devotion, goal setting, and practicing solitude and silence.

This retreat is not designed to be a mental health retreat nor a new believer retreat. In the event a question comes up that is mental health related, I will refer them to one of our eight military and family life counselors (MFLC) on base who are licensed therapists. I will also make them aware of our mental health clinic; however, they have a 45-day wait to get seen. Providing them with the MFLC information guarantees they can be seen within 48 hours. This retreat will exclusively focus on equipping believers to learn experiential practices that build spiritual resiliency. The goal will be to help airmen learn new skills and put them into practice through experiential and transformative learning.

Phases of the Project

This project will consist of five phases: research, planning, implementation, evaluation, and writing.

Research

The biblical-theological review (chapter 2) will provide the biblical basis for the project and an understanding of retreat and its benefits. I will do this by focusing on the Old Testament narratives, from creation to the story of the Prophet Elijah, to shed light on the spiritual motif of retreat for divine communion and revelation. I will then focus on Jesus's experiential retreat, as well as the retreats conducted by the Apostle Paul.

Attention will focus on how retreats have fundamentally changed the lives of individuals in the Old and New Testaments. It is imperative to understand the nature of the retreat,

how it was practiced, and how it impacted people throughout the biblical narrative before trying to conduct a retreat for members of the military. A biblical model of retreat will be the basis for the retreat conducted.

Following the research and writing for the biblical-theological literature review, the general literature review (Chapter 3) will combine contemporary resources to examine resiliency and spiritual fitness in the military. This chapter will focus on the research behind strategies to enhance spiritual support and resilience among airmen and their families. It will explore integrating spiritual readiness and resilience into military life, emphasizing the power of transformative learning. The research will demonstrate how military personnel can overcome historical and ongoing challenges by providing airmen with the tools to develop lasting spiritual resilience and thus help foster a more resilient and spiritually prepared force. This will provide the framework for my project and ensure the retreat's design provides maximum impact for airmen.

Planning

After I complete the general literature review, I will develop the material for the retreat, including instructor notes, student handouts, and media to use during the retreat. I will prepare five 90-minute sessions of teaching material. I will create a retreat checklist for planning purposes. Before the start of the retreat, I will get final approval to pay for the retreat center and buy the materials needed for the participants.

Because retreat participants will consist of active-duty military members and potentially their spouses, I will obtain IRB approval from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary's Institutional Review Board. After securing approval, I will choose an evidence based pre-and posttest assessment to analyze spiritual resiliency

developed through the retreat. As a part of the general literature review, I will study multiple assessments and choose the best one for measuring spiritual resiliency.

I will promote the retreat through the local churches that we are affiliated with. In addition, I will create a flyer and personally invite airmen who display a need for spiritual resiliency. These personal invites will happen as I do my walkabouts through the units. Since I primarily serve as the protestant chaplain, participants are likely to fall within this group. The announcements and invitations should net the twelve participants desired for the retreat. The venue chosen for the retreat has a limited capacity of twelve participants. The first twelve to sign up will be guaranteed a spot and then a waitlist will be created if there are any additional sign-ups.

Implementation

The retreat will take place at the Space to Sojourn retreat center, June 28 and June 29, 2024. Because this will occur during peak tourist season, participants will sleep in their beds at home due to the cost of overnight accommodations in Destin, Florida. I will budget for the rental of the beachside retreat venue for two days, three catered meals, professional printing, and the book *Resilient* by John Eldredge. The first night of the retreat will be a three-hour event focusing on the sabbath as a weekly retreat and examen as a nightly retreat. The evening will conclude with an experiential activity involving a bonfire to anecdotally “burn” the reasons that hold participants back from God.

The second day of the retreat will consist of three distinct 90-minute sections, beginning with a section on daily devotions, in which participants will learn how to do a daily devotion and then practice doing a daily devotion followed by reflection and confession. The second section will focus on the disciplines of silence and solitude,

followed by an extended practice of silence followed by confession. The final section will explore the nature of reflection and goal setting, with time spent reflecting on where God has called them and some goal setting. The retreat will end with a final teaching on staying the course.

Evaluation

Prior to the first session, I will administer the Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale to establish a baseline of spiritual fitness among retreat participants. Immediately after the five 90-minute sessions, I will then administer an additional Spiritual Fitness Scale to compare those results to the pre-session results. After 30 days have passed, I will administer an additional final Spiritual Fitness Scale and compare those results to the others.

In addition, after the final session, participants will complete an evaluation to provide feedback that will help improve future iterations of this retreat. They will identify the program's strengths and weaknesses and offer ideas for strengthening future retreat sessions.

After receiving all the Spiritual Fitness Scale assessments, I will compare and contrast the retreat results. The expectation is that the assessments will show an increase in positive thoughts and feelings about the participants' spiritual fitness levels from before to after the retreat and then also at the 30-day mark.

Writing

After concluding my research on the biblical themes during the fall of 2023, I will begin writing. I will complete the biblical-theological review (Chapter 2) in February 2024. I will complete research and writing for my general literature chapter (Chapter 3)

by May 2024. In the summer of 2024, I will conduct the retreat and write the description of the project's implementation (Chapter 4). After receiving all of the 30-day posttest evaluations, I will submit the data to Jeffrey Fulks in August 2024, who will help analyze the assessment results. I will complete the project summary (chapter 5), introduction (chapter 1), frontmatter, and appendices by October 1, 2024.

Conclusion

The possibility of another major world war in the near future remains quite high. Estimates predict hundreds of thousands of casualties. Ensuring our Air Force is spiritually resilient and ready for war remains essential. Today, airmen are the least religious in history, yet they are open to spirituality. Many challenges exist for spiritually forming airmen who did not grow up in a faith-based household; however, inviting them to attend a retreat environment to break away from the stress of the military and assess their lives shows promise for building spiritual resiliency. The Lord has given me favor with many of the airmen and soldiers, and with their trust, I plan to help them grow into more robust, resilient military members. I want to leverage that influence to help the airmen develop spiritual resiliency by guiding them through a faith-based spiritual retreat.

CHAPTER 2: BIBLICAL-THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Although the word *retreat* never appears in the Bible, the concept of the spiritual retreat appears repeatedly throughout Scripture. As God unveils His metanarrative, He reveals a structured framework for engaging with people. From the rest that comes after His creative work, to the silent whispers of the wilderness and the solitude of mountain top experiences, each instance of retreat in Scripture, whether experienced by God, Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, the disciples, or Paul, is a door of transformation, revelation, or preparation. This chapter will explore the purposes of sacred pauses in Scripture. As these spiritual retreats are mapped out, it will also be shown how these pauses or retreats provide a source for the contemporary believer to find God through solitude, reflection, and engagement with the Divine.

Sabbath, the First Retreat

The Sabbath, the divine injunction that includes rest, reflection, and renewal, is expressed in Scripture through creation, covenant, and redemption. It serves as one of the foundational elements of divine rest. As this section will demonstrate, sabbaths in Scripture represent not only cessation from work, but they also provide opportunities for sacred space, illustrating how the Sabbath and rest fit into God's design for humanity and remain relevant for today's world.

Creation Sabbath

The seventh day of the creation narrative describes how God celebrates the completion of His creative work and enters into joyful rest with His people (Gen 2:2-3). Kenneth Mathews posits that God rested on the seventh day as an example for humanity: “Embracing God’s sabbath rest meant experiencing the sense of completeness and well-being God had accomplished at creation on behalf of all human life.”¹ Francois Möller, however, offers a different perspective and explains that God had completed all that He had set out to complete and that, once it was complete, He ceased creating and rested. Möller asserts that the concept of rest refers to “the state of God being an eternal God of perfect love, peace, goodness, and holiness.”² Richard Lowery, however, rightly posits that the seventh day of rest constitutes the first Sabbath, a holy or sacred time. He argues that the Sabbath is a blessed time around which all other times cohere, just as a tent pole holds up a tent:³ “By observing the blessed sabbath, the world expresses gratitude to the God who calls us into the flourishing life.”⁴ Lowery observes that the chapter break inserted by translators, dividing Genesis 1 and 2, causes many to not only miss the significance of God’s institution of a divine and blessed rest but also to make the mistake of over emphasizing the work of the creation account, which he states, has had

¹ Kenneth Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, vol. 1A of *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 176.

² Francois P. Möller, “Three Perspectives on the Sabbath,” *In Die Skriflig/In Luce Verbi* 53, no. 1 (January 24, 2019): 2, <https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v53i1.2394>.

³ Richard H. Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, Understanding Biblical Themes (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2000), 90.

⁴ Ibid.

“destructive consequences in the modern age.”⁵ The institution of rest in the creation account is modelled by God and develops further when God calls Moses into a covenant with Him.

Covenant Sabbath

The establishment of the Mosaic Covenant offered rest to the people of God. Prior to the covenant, the Hebrew people were enslaved and worked every day of the week to serve an Egyptian ruler who served the gods of the world, but after their delivery from slavery, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, which includes the command to keep the Sabbath day holy (Exod 20:8). In his writings on the covenant sabbath and Exodus, Walter Brueggemann rightly argues that the covenant sabbath cannot be separated from its context during the Mosaic period, in which God’s people were enslaved and overworked: “The sabbath command of Exodus 20:11 recalls that God rested on the seventh day, an allusion to Genesis 2:1-4. That divine rest made clear that YHWH is not a workaholic, (b) that YHWH is not anxious about the full functioning of creation, and (c) that the wellbeing of creation does not depend on endless work.”⁶ God established the Sabbath and called Israel to obey (Exod 20:8). He set a choice before them: be rested or restless; trust God or abandon Him for the gods of the world.

⁵ Lowery, *Sabbath and Jubilee*, 90.

⁶ Walter Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now*, New Edition, with Study Guide (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 3.

Patrick Miller agrees with Brueggemann, adding that “Pharaoh’s exploitation of human life and human work triggered God’s gift of the sabbath.”⁷ Luisa Gallagher concurs and points out the stark contrast between the sabbath and the “enslaved lives and hectic work of the Israelites while in Egypt.”⁸ It remains clear that the establishment of the Sabbath indicates God’s care for His people and His desire to draw them back into the rhythm and balance that He had demonstrated at creation. The institution of the Sabbath was further codified by Jewish religious leaders until God revealed His plan through Christ’s redemptive work.

Redemptive Sabbath

As time progressed, God revealed that His plans for the Sabbath would shift with the arrival of His Son, Jesus Christ, who, as Möller asserts, has established an “atonement sabbath.” This redemptive sabbath provides believers with a “new life and rest in God” and a lifestyle “that will climax in the fullness of eternity as initially expressed by the creation.”⁹ Brueggemann likewise argues that Jesus embodies “sabbath rest for those no longer defined by and committed to the system of productiveness.”¹⁰ Jesus remains the ultimate fulfillment of the Sabbath, as demonstrated by His Sermon on the Mount, when Jesus explains that “no one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and

⁷ Patrick D. Miller, *The Ten Commandments*, Interpretation, Resources for the Use of Scripture in the Church (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 130.

⁸ Luisa J. Gallagher, “A Theology of Rest: Sabbath Principles for Ministry,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 16, no. 1 (April 2019): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0739891318821124>.

⁹ Möller, “Three Perspectives on the Sabbath,” 6.

¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 12.

love the other or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24). Brueggemann explains that money symbolizes “endless desire, endless productivity, and endless restlessness without any sabbath.”¹¹ In contrast to this endless pursuit, Jesus beckons all to come to Him, those who are “weary and heavy burdened,” so He can give them rest, rest from the world and the endless drive to attain more (Matt 11:28). Like the covenant sabbath, the redemptive sabbath offers a rest from the bondage of the world’s ways.

Jesus also reformed the practice of the Sabbath. No longer is the Sabbath tied to the legalistic ways of the past. Instead, as Carl Bridges and Stephen Cook note, Jesus provided freedom in God. Jesus ignored the legalism of the Sabbath in exchange for protecting others: “As the Deuteronomy version of the Ten Commandments affirms sabbath keeping for humanitarian reasons, Jesus affirms sabbath breaking for the same reasons.”¹² God revealed a new sabbath, a redemptive one, where rest can be found in Him by following Him and keeping His commands. Raoul Dederen explains that sabbath keeping goes far beyond simply taking a day: “Christians will never understand what it means to keep the sabbath until they try it—and not merely as a day of rest but on the level of its full God potential for divine-human fellowship.”¹³ God calls people to himself, which remains the ultimate goal of the Sabbath. Christian Vaiday agrees, adding

¹¹ Brueggemann, *Sabbath as Resistance*, 11.

¹² Carl B. Bridges and L. Stephen Cook Jr., “Tribal Sabbaths: Rest Days in the Bible and in African Traditional Religions,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 19, no. 2 (2016): 244.

¹³ Raoul Dederen, “Reflections on a Theology of the Sabbath,” in *The Sabbath in Scripture and History* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing, 1982), 302.

that the practice of sabbath provides “rest in God” and resists the “deep crisis of modernity with its consumerism and ecological despotism.”¹⁴

Jacob’s Encounters in the Wilderness

Not only did God institute the Sabbath to demonstrate His care for His people and provide opportunities for them to draw back to Him, but Scripture also describes how God has used the wilderness to meet with and transform individuals, such as He did with Jacob. The life of Jacob, which is broken by moments of solitude and divine encounter, provides a strong case study for withdrawing for the purposes of personal transformation and divine promises. This section will examine Jacob’s two strategic retreats at Bethel and Jabbok, where he experiences isolation, confrontation, and communion with God, which changed his destiny and reveals the transforming power of seeking God in solitude.

Jacob at Bethel

The first significant theophany in Jacob’s life occurs when he leaves his brother Esau and engages in a military-like retreat, strategically withdrawing from the perceived threat. As he leaves, Jacob encounters God at “a place” (Gen 28:11). Some scholars, such as Claus Westermann, believe this could have been where Abram met with God;¹⁵ however, most commentators believe that this was a random place in the wilderness that

¹⁴ Cristian Vaida, “Sabbath and Sunday: The Meaning of the Day of Rest in the Ancient Church – A Hope for the Future?” *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (February 28, 2023): 6, <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.8263>.

¹⁵ Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36, A Continental Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 239.

God transformed into something more.¹⁶ Jacob was not expecting to meet God in his solitude under the stars, but he encountered Him in a mighty way, similar to that of his grandfather Abram.¹⁷ During this encounter, God calls him out and shows him the vision of a stairwell (v. 12). Commentators do not precisely know what the stairwell looked like or if it was a ladder;¹⁸ however, Jacob has a profound experience with God, who gives him a promise amid the chaos in his life.

God then reassures and promises to be with Jacob. As God reveals himself, He makes three promises: He will sustain Jacob's faith, provide protection, and give him a homecoming back to the land he was promised (Gen 28:15). As Bruce Waltke observes, wherever Jacob went, God was going to be with him.¹⁹ Jacob then wakes from his dream, remembers all God did, sets up a pillar, and makes a vow (v. 18). Building a pillar was a common religious practice in the ancient Near East, and since Jacob's story occurs early in redemptive history, one cannot compare how he worships God with others who come

¹⁶ Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 238; Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 225; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, vol. 1B of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 454.

¹⁷ Kenneth Gangel and Stephen Bramer, *Genesis*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 1 of *Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2002), 235; Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 242.

¹⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 221. Wenham posits that it is a Babylonian Ziggurat; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 450. Mathews believes it was an Akkadian parallel to stairs; John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, and Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 60. Walton describes it in the sense of the ANE belief that gods ascended and descended based on stairwells at their temples.

¹⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 391-392.

later.²⁰ It is important to note that Jacob sets up an altar and then anoints it as an act of religious observance and ultimately makes a vow to God.²¹ Victor Hamilton summarizes that the vow acknowledges Jacob's complete dependence on God and his need for God's grace to sustain him.²² God meets Jacob in the wilderness during this state of retreat, and God promises to be his God. Jacob then serves his uncle Laban for twenty-one years, where he starts with nothing and acquires wealth due to God's provision for him.

Jacob at Jabbok

The second significant theophany in Jacob's life occurs when he retreats from Laban and returns home. When he first left his home, Jacob was in his seventies, so after having spent the previous two decades under Laban, he was approximately ninety years old upon his return. Though he appeared blessed and had achieved massive success with servants, flocks, and wives, he was still afraid of Esau. Wenham describes Jacob as being "paralyzed with anxiety."²³ When Jacob reaches Jabbok, he intends to cross but realizes there is no easy way around it (Gen 32:13-21).

Jacob decides to split his family and appease his brother, relying on his human tricks once again. He crosses the river at night, an extremely reckless action and spends time alone.²⁴ In the solitude and silence of the night, God meets him; however, it is not clear whether this encounter occurs in a dream, vision, or in person (Gen 32:24). Most

²⁰ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 224; Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 243.

²¹ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 224.

²² Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 248.

²³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 302.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 303.

commentators believe this event was an angel of the lord wrestling with him; however, some argue this event constitutes either a Christophany or a fight with a river spirit. Scholars, however, generally agree that Jacob encountered the Divine at the river, and when he did, he struggled with the being.²⁵

Hamilton rightly asserts that Jacob thought he was wrestling a man and then realized he was wrestling with God.²⁶ Time alone with God often brings struggle, just as it did for Jacob. During times of struggle and distress, when one becomes quiet enough and enters solitude, they often meet God. As Kenneth Gangel and Stephen Bramer explain, their struggle might begin in the human realm, like Jacob experienced, but then will culminate in a struggle with God.²⁷ Jacob, knowing he had to face his brother, whom he feared, starts fighting with God and realizes he wants a blessing to help him face his brother.²⁸

God sees his plight and strikes his hip (Gen 32:25). Jacob realizes that he cannot face his brother alone and needs God's assistance.²⁹ W. H. Griffith Thomas describes Jacob's cry for God to not leave him as a desperate prayer years in the making: "Much like a stream that emerges into the day after running for a long distance underground, Jacob's spiritual life comes out now after those years at Haran, and though there is still much to seek, we can see the clear marks of the work of God directing, deepening, and

²⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 337.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Gangel and Bramer, *Genesis*, 278.

²⁸ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 332.

²⁹ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 297.

purifying his soul.”³⁰ As the morning comes, Wenham notes that the man must leave to ensure Jacob does not see his face, lest he risk a death sentence for witnessing the face of God.³¹

Jacob, having been transformed through the struggle, receives a new name from God. Before Jacob leaves, God asks him, “What is your name?” Wenham states, “At that moment of anxiety, solitude, struggle, and now humility and pain, Jacob acknowledges his past as a deceiver.”³² However, God does not leave him in his shame; God covers him and changes his name from Jacob to Israel, “signifying the transformation from Deceiver to God Fighter.”³³

Scholars make the interesting observation that when a king places a vassal in charge of an area, they often change their name to demonstrate their power over the vassal.³⁴ Jacob’s name change, then, indicates that God is now his master.³⁵ Israel now felt at peace to limp to his brother, not as a schemer but as one whom God had transformed. According to Brian Howell, Israel marches out, goes to the front of the pack, and trusts God to lead the way.³⁶ Rachel Nabulsi rightly points out that this story of

³⁰ W. H. Griffith Thomas, *Genesis: A Devotional Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979), 296.

³¹ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 332.

³² Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 296; Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 18–50*, 333.

³³ Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 304; Gangel and Bramer, *Holman Bible Commentary*, 279.

³⁴ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 65.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Brian M Howell, “God’s White Flag: Interpreting an Anthropomorphic Metaphor in Genesis 32,” *Southeastern Theological Review* 1, no. 1 (2010): 45.

God's grace meeting Jacob in the wilderness brings all who read it into connection with God and His transforming power.³⁷ God shows that in the wilderness and in the dark of night, He can transform those who struggle with Him.

Moses's Personal and Corporate Retreat

God's use of the wilderness to transform individuals is also seen in the story of Moses. Moses's transformation from being a solitary shepherd in Midian to a leader who experiences life-transforming encounters with God at Sinai emphasizes the importance of seeking God in solitude and meeting Him in sacred spaces. The story of Moses's life reveals the importance of retreats for the reception of revelation, preparation for leadership, and making covenants with God. Further, Moses's withdrawals illustrate how quiet communing moments remain crucial for those called to undertake God's great tasks.

Moses's Personal Encounters

The wilderness provides the setting for Moses encountering God, a motif that appears repeatedly in the totality of Scripture. Exodus 3 introduces Moses as a shepherd keeping a flock on the far edge of the wilderness.³⁸ Douglas Stuart points out that Moses

³⁷ Rachel Nabulsi, "Rudolf Otto and the Fearful Numinous: Jacob and Moses Wrestle with the Dangerous Divine; An Investigation of Genesis 32:22-33 and Exodus 4:24-26," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 53, no. 2 (May 2023): 91.

³⁸ Glen S. Martin, *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 2 of *Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2002), 19; R. Alan Cole, *Exodus: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 2 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 68.

was alone with his sheep in the wilderness for weeks.³⁹ Being in the wilderness for that long leads Narelle Coetzee to believe that he was attuned to his senses, creating an opportunity for an encounter with God.⁴⁰

With Moses's senses attuned to his surroundings, he encounters something strange. The Angel of the Lord meets him through a fiery bush (Exod 3:4). This famous depiction has a lot to teach about God encountering humans. First, Moses was prepared for this moment by being present in nature. God chooses to reveal himself to Moses through the ordinary, a bush. This ordinary bush turns into something extraordinary as Moses sees that the bush does not burn as "God holds it in abeyance," thus revealing that God is over creation.⁴¹

Commentators have hotly debated what type of bush this could be. Some deem it a blackberry bush with bright berries, while others argue that it was a small thorny shrub.⁴² Some authors have referenced this tree or bush as an echo of the creation of the Tree of Life. The type of bush, however, does not matter. What remains important is that God chose the ordinary to do something extraordinary. God knew that Moses would be intrigued by the bush, since as Douglas Stuart points out, Moses was a shepherd who made fires every night and knew how to create one for warmth.⁴³ James Orr argues that

³⁹ Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, vol. 2 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2006), 108.

⁴⁰ Narelle Jane Coetzee, "Moses' Embodied Encounter: Bare Feet Grounded in the Wilderness (Exodus 3.1–4.17)," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31, no. 1 (February 21, 2022): 2.

⁴¹ Peter Enns, *Exodus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 97.

⁴² Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 79.

⁴³ Stuart, *Exodus*, 110.

the burning bush was God's indwelling spirit.⁴⁴ It was not the flame of judgment or destruction but a flame of His holy presence. Alan Cole agrees, adding that he believes this holy presence of fire relates back to the Genesis story of the flaming sword.⁴⁵ D. A. Carson, meanwhile, associates the fire of the bush to God's sustaining power, such that even in the midst of trials, Israel will not burn up.⁴⁶

God then calls out from the bush, "Moses, Moses" (Exod 3:4). Stuart explains that the repetition of his name was used as a term of endearment in the ancient Near East.⁴⁷ Standing before God, Moses was told to take off his shoes. This simple act of taking off shoes could mean a number of things, according to scholars. He may have done this because he was stepping into a holy area like that of a temple,⁴⁸ showing a sign of reverence,⁴⁹ removing any semblance of sacrifice,⁵⁰ making himself subservient like a slave or servant since they do not wear shoes,⁵¹ or performing a ceremonial de-possession ceremony to say, "I relinquish my rights to the ground to you God."⁵² Wyatt strikes a

⁴⁴ James Orr, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, rev. ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 152.

⁴⁵ Cole, *Exodus*, 71.

⁴⁶ D. A. Carson, ed., *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 152.

⁴⁷ Stuart, *Exodus*, 110.

⁴⁸ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 80.

⁴⁹ Enns, *Exodus*, 98.

⁵⁰ Coetzee, "Moses' Embodied Encounter," 13.

⁵¹ Cole, *Exodus*, 72.

⁵² Peter J. Gentry, "The Meaning of 'holy' in the Old Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 170, no. 680 (October 2013): 405.

good balance as he connects the shoes back to the Eden narrative, as Moses is grounded before God with his whole body.⁵³ Coetzee agrees, adding that Moses was being connected “back to his earthly origins,” being asked to stand “without barrier” before the Lord.⁵⁴ God then calls the place where Moses stands “holy ground” (Exod 3:5). The word “holy” means “consecrated” or “set apart,” and, as Gentry notes, this was one of the first times that holy ground was brought forth in the Old Testament.⁵⁵

Coetzee correctly argues that God called Moses to wholly experience Him with all of his senses.⁵⁶ As Moses draws near to investigate his curiosity, he then hears God’s voice. He hides his face as he sees it is God (Exod 3:6). He can still hear God’s voice, feel the warmth of fire, smell the smoke and scent of the sheep, and feel all that is going on. Moses experiences God with his whole self because, as Amos Yong rightly asserts, “God reveals himself to us through multiple sensory modalities.”⁵⁷

God reveals himself, and Moses hides his face (Exod 3:6) to protect himself because he knows that looking at God is a death sentence.⁵⁸ God reveals that He is the God of his fathers. Cole argues that this is one of the first depictions of God revealing himself to Moses in which He shows Moses that he is not to bring a new god to the

⁵³ N. Wyatt, “The Significance of the Burning Bush,” *Vetus Testamentum* 36, no. 3 (1986): 362.

⁵⁴ Coetzee, “Moses’ Embodied Encounter,” 13.

⁵⁵ Gentry, “The Meaning of ‘holy’ in the Old Testament,” 403.

⁵⁶ Coetzee, “Moses’ Embodied Encounter,” 8.

⁵⁷ Amos Yong, “Many Tongues, Many Senses: Pentecost, the Body Politic, and the Redemption of Dis/Ability,” *Pneuma* 31, no. 2 (2009): 182.

⁵⁸ Stuart, *Exodus*, 116.

people of Israel but, rather, a fuller revelation of who God is, and this is redemptive history at work.⁵⁹

God asks Moses to be His emissary to Pharaoh, and Moses does not think he can do it. Glen Martin points out that Moses was no deliverer because when he tried to deliver someone earlier in his life, he ended up a murderer (Exod 2:12).⁶⁰ However, God reveals that He would be with Moses and sustain him. Moses reluctantly complies with God, and God leads him back into his past to stand up to Pharaoh (Exod: 5:1) As Martin points out, God does not promise Moses a pain-free pass through the Egyptian journey, but He promises to be with him.⁶¹ Finally, Moses asks for God's name (Exod 3:13). Walton explains that names were essential to gods in the ancient Near East, and they rarely released personal names.⁶² However, God chose to reveal His personal name, which Cole describes as a further revelation in the story of God and Israel.⁶³

Corporate Encounters with the Sacred

Moses also led the people of God to encounter the sacred as a community. This concept of "corporate encounters with the sacred" focuses on the communal aspects of religious experiences, where people engage with the Divine within designated sacred spaces and times. These corporate experiences are peppered throughout Scripture, but for the sake of organization, only Moses's encounters will be assessed. These encounters

⁵⁹ Cole, *Exodus*, 72.

⁶⁰ Martin, *Exodus*, 20.

⁶¹ Ibid., 19.

⁶² Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 79.

⁶³ Cole, *Exodus*, 76-77.

served to bind the Israelites through shared rituals and collective memories. The events at Mount Sinai and Mount Zion functioned as epicenters of communal religious life, influencing the identity and practices of the Israelites.⁶⁴ By examining these mountains through the lenses of sacred space and time, insights can be gleaned concerning their significance in shaping communal worship and spiritual retreats.

Sacred Space and Sacred Time

The concepts of sacred space and sacred time are foundational in structuring religious communities. They serve as the settings where divine manifestations are corporately experienced. Eliade argues that sacred spaces are not merely physical locales but are spaces that are transformed through religious experiences that designate them as “realms of the sacred.”⁶⁵ He further articulates that sacred times interrupt the “profaneness of one’s routine and mundane existence, introducing moments in time that reflect eternal realities.”⁶⁶ Both of these experiences involving space and time shape the individuals experiencing them and create a shared bond between them. These experiences are not unique to the Judeo-Christian tradition but are true of many religions, and thus, exploring how they impacted the Jewish people is essential.

Jon Levenson explores these dimensions within the Jewish tradition, focusing on how Mount Sinai and Mount Zion are revered not just as geographical mountains

⁶⁴ John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3 of *Word Biblical Commentary*, Accordance ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 261.

⁶⁵ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (San Diego, CA: Harcourt, Brace, 1987), 26.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

(spaces) but for their role in the formation of the covenantal community of Israel. Mount Sinai symbolizes the creation of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant with Yahweh, making it a foundational sacred space and, ultimately, time for the Jewish people.⁶⁷ Levenson further argues that Zion, or Jerusalem, represents the ongoing relationship between the Divine and the Israelites, represented through the Temple and the Davidic line.⁶⁸ These interpretations show how repeated exposures to sacred times and sacred spaces form the Judeo-Christian understanding of their communal religious identity.

Sinai as a Corporate Sacred Encounter

Mount Sinai serves as one of the most important sacred spaces in the biblical narrative. It is where Moses and, subsequently, the Israelites corporately encountered God and received the Torah, forming them into a religious community set after keeping the covenant with YHWH (Exodus 19-20). According to Eliade, these sacred moments are characterized by religious revelations that transform the normal temporal sequences of time into sacred time, where the community collectively steps into a “liminal, timeless space.”⁶⁹ Levenson also writes about Sinai’s role in shaping Israel’s legal and ethical norms through the receiving of the Law amid a dramatic theophany. He argues for the mountain’s status as a consecrated space where God’s presence was manifest and His laws given, which bound the community in a sacred covenant with God.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Jon Douglas Levenson, *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*, New Voices in Biblical Studies (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987), 90.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 112.

⁶⁹ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 42.

⁷⁰ Levenson, *Sinai & Zion*, 95.

The biblical narratives of Mount Sinai show how sacred laws and Israel's obligations were communicated directly in a context and space that underscored God's transcendence and immanence. Smith argues that this dual presence of God at Sinai—transcendent in the giving of the Law and immanent in His guidance, reinforced the Israelites' collective identity and understanding of the sacredness of their communal life and mission.⁷¹ Sinai is not the only place where the community of Israel had a sacred encounter with God, however; they also experienced Him in a similar way at Zion.

Zion as a Corporate Sacred Encounter

Zion, or Jerusalem, represents another pivotal corporate sacred space central to the spiritual and national life of the Israelite community. Unlike Sinai, which was primarily about lawgiving, Zion encompassed the ongoing religious life of Israel through the Temple, serving as the focal point for national festivals and rituals. As Levenson articulates, Zion became synonymous with God's enduring presence among His people, mainly through the Temple, because it housed the Ark of the Covenant.⁷² This permanent sacred space in the Israel community helped facilitate a continuous corporate encounter with the Divine. Each time they came to the temple for a sacrifice or a festival, it helped Israelites remember back to the birth of the covenant and the ever-present God who is outside of time, bringing them into sacred time. This allowed them to engage in regular communal worship and celebration, helping maintain and renew their covenantal relationship with God.

⁷¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map Is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1993), 130.

⁷² Levenson, *Sinai & Zion*, 117.

Likewise, Eliade's concept of sacred space is exemplified in Zion's role as the center of the world, a concept found in many religious traditions where the sacred center establishes the "prime axis mundi" of the community's world.⁷³ The Israelite's annual pilgrimages and festivals, such as Passover and Yom Kippur, all were held at Zion, which helped to transform regular chronological time into sacred time. Zevit posits that this transformation happened when the historical events of salvation history were re-lived and re-experienced by the community.⁷⁴ These festivals reinforced the communal bonds among each other and connected them with the sacredness of God. This helped to ensure that each generation reaffirmed its communal identity as God's chosen people and their commitment to His laws and decrees.

These principles observed at Sinai and Zion are profoundly relevant for designing modern spiritual retreats and communal worship practices. Christian communities today can foster a similar sense of a shared and sacred experience by creating spaces and times that mirror these biblical models. Retreat settings can be designed to reflect the sanctity and separation from everyday life to facilitate communal encounters with the Divine. In addition to the setting, certain religious practices draw participants closer to their spiritual heritage and build community through shared rituals and transformative experiences.⁷⁵ By incorporating both sacred time and sacred spaces into a retreat, the retreatants walk away transformed.

⁷³ Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, 30.

⁷⁴ Ziony Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel: A Synthesis of Parallactic Approaches* (London: Continuum, 2001), 154.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Map Is Not Territory*, 140.

Elijah

Just as Moses experienced God in the wilderness, so too does Elijah, a prophet who communes with God in solitude and sheds light on the spiritual motif of retreat for divine communion and revelation. Similar to Moses's solitude on Sinai, where he grows in his leadership and receives the Law from God, Elijah's retreats, especially in the cave at Horeb Mount, testify to the value of seeking God in secluded places. Elijah retreats not only to renew himself but also to receive guidance and comfort. Elijah's experiences illustrate how solitude should be a place of refuge for encountering God's presence and voice, undergirding the role of retreat in sustaining the faith and mission of God's servants.

Elijah Afraid

Elijah's story begins after an amazing display of power on Mount Carmel, where he calls forth the power of God and destroys Baal's prophets (1 Kgs 18:16-46). Jezebel hears this from Ahab and immediately dispatches a messenger to Elijah and declares to him that he will die tomorrow. Elijah was afraid when he received this message and flees. Thomas Constable believes that Elijah's fear stemmed from focusing on Jezebel's power rather than on God.⁷⁶ He knew Jezebel had killed before (1 Kgs 18:4, 13).⁷⁷ She was

⁷⁶ Thomas Constable, *1 Kings*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck. The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 528.

⁷⁷ Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Kenneth A. Mathews, vol. 8 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995), 222.

ultimately committed to her gods, as he was to Yahweh, and nothing was going to sway her.⁷⁸

Elijah Depressed

Elijah spirals quickly into depression (1 Kgs 19:3). Much has been made about the nature of his mindset shift, but some commentators believe he suffered from a maladaptive depressive episode that impacted his thought processes.⁷⁹ He also displays all-or-nothing thinking, a key characteristic of someone who has experienced an episode.⁸⁰ J. Dwayne and Susan Howell, using a cognitive behavior therapy model, argue that Elijah is depressed, noting that as an introvert, Elijah isolates himself and believes a false narrative, becoming depressed to the point of suicidal ideation.⁸¹

Neil Dougal, however, argues that Elijah became depressed because he took an unhealthy amount of ownership. He focused on the weight of the role, even though he knew Obadiah had hidden one hundred prophets.⁸² Chuck Degroat attributes Elijah's depression to narcissism and "refusing to live with God-ordained limitations of creative existence."⁸³ Gary Inrig, meanwhile, views this episode as combat exhaustion that

⁷⁸ Gary Inrig, *I & II Kings*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 7 of *Holman Old Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2003), 158.

⁷⁹ J. Dwayne Howell and Susan H. Howell, "Journey to Mount Horeb: Cognitive Theory and 1 Kings 19:1–181," *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 11, no. 7 (November 2008): 658, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13674670801930445>.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 659.

⁸² Neil Dougal, "Taking Responsibility: Reframing Christian Leadership," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 22, no. 1 (2023): 29.

⁸³ Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional and Spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 24.

stemmed from the extreme nature of what occurred.⁸⁴ Regardless of the exact nature of Elijah's depression, what all scholars agree upon is that Elijah suffered a mental breakdown and sought relief by retreating from the situation.

Elijah Retreats to the Wilderness

Elijah ventures out of Jezreel and makes his way to Beersheba, which was the southernmost part of Judah, where he left his servant and traveled another fifteen miles toward Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:4).⁸⁵ While Simon Vries believes Elijah has abandoned the covenant land and people, others such as Paul House believe he is setting out for Horeb to meet with God.⁸⁶ Before Elijah can get there, he stops at the broom tree and admits that he wants to die. Micha Roi believes that he did not want to die but rather did not want to live in his present circumstances, similar to the mindset Moses had in Numbers 11:15.⁸⁷

Despite Elijah trying to abandon his responsibilities, God meets him in his desperation (1 Kgs 19:5). As Elijah falls asleep, he begins to dream, which helps him process and gain a new perspective of all that has happened. When he awakes, an angel is present to provide for his needs and remind him that God is with him (vv. 5-6).⁸⁸ He eats

⁸⁴ Inrig, *I & II Kings*, 159.

⁸⁵ Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 380.

⁸⁶ Simon John de Vries, *1 Kings*, vol. 12 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 237; House, *1, 2 Kings*, 223.

⁸⁷ Micha Roi, "1 Kings 19: A 'Departure on a Journey' Story," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 37, no. 1 (September 2012): 25, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309089212455569>.

⁸⁸ Inrig, *I & II Kings*, 159.

and is miraculously sustained for forty days and nights, much like the Israelites with manna.⁸⁹

Elijah Encounters God

When Elijah arrives at Mount Horeb, he goes to a cave, possibly the same cave where Moses met God, according to Mordechai Cogan.⁹⁰ Elijah waits for God in the cave, having known how Moses experienced the theophany,⁹¹ but God did not show himself the same way to Elijah. God shows him that He is not just a warrior god like that of the ancient Near East but the God who shows up gently.⁹² God questions him over why he is there and forces Elijah to “consider his current position and his future destiny carefully.”⁹³ As Elijah is questioned, however, he loses “sight of the nature of God” and becomes self-absorbed, according to Inrig.⁹⁴ Despite this, God still shows him grace through a magnificent theophany of wind, earthquake, and fire (1 Kgs 19:11-12). He then speaks to Elijah in a still, small voice (v. 12). It is not in the extravagant theophany that God is found but in the afterward, in the “sound of sheer silence,” that God reveals

⁸⁹ Donald J. Wiseman, *1 and 2 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9 of *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 184.

⁹⁰ Mordechai Cogan, ed., *1 Kings: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10 of *The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 452.

⁹¹ Constable, *1 Kings*, 528.

⁹² Walton, Matthews, and Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, 380.

⁹³ House, *1, 2 Kings*, 223.

⁹⁴ Inrig, *I & II Kings*, 159.

himself to Elijah.⁹⁵ Terence Fretheim describes the scene as a “pregnant moment of calm.”⁹⁶

God follows this revelation with the same questions, and unfortunately, Elijah gives the same answers (1 Kgs 19:13-14). This leads God to take Elijah’s mantle of empowerment and announce his replacement (vv. 15-16). Christina Fetherolf notes that Elijah does not change as Moses did after his theophany, nor does Elijah do as God tells him.⁹⁷ He is depressed and egotistical, so God asks him to anoint his successor.⁹⁸ God reveals His plans for Elijah and commissions him to do the work He had asked for. He gave him the dangerous task of “reversing his retreat” and anointing Hazael and Jehu, both of whom would be considered treasonous and punishable by the death penalty.⁹⁹

Jesus

Where Elijah’s retreat in the cleft reflects a place of reassurance and direction for his personal life, Jesus’s moments of retreat reflect His engagement with solitude for prayer, preparation, and personal confrontation with temptation. Jesus’s intentional moments of solitude, from the wilderness to Gethsemane, where He models prayer for

⁹⁵ E.D. Reymond, “The Hebrew Word *Damma* and the Root *D-m-m* I (‘To Be Silent’),” *Biblica* 90 (2009): 378.

⁹⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings*, Westminster Bible Companion (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 110.

⁹⁷ Christina Marie Fetherolf, “Elijah’s Mantle: A Sign of Prophecy Gone Awry,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 42, no. 2 (December 2017): 202.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 203.

⁹⁹ Vries, *1 Kings*, 237.

communion, resilience, and alignment to God's will, speaks to the importance of retreat for developing one's spiritual life.

Jesus's Call to Preparation in the Wilderness

The narratives of the temptation of Jesus shortly after His baptism, as recorded by the gospel writers, illustrate several elements of retreat. As Matthew and Luke note, Jesus was led (ἀνάγω, Matt 4:1, and ἄγω, Luke 4:1) into the wilderness.¹⁰⁰ Muhammad Schmidt in his lexical work describes these words as indicating that Jesus “was led properly”¹⁰¹ Mark would say, “driven” (ἐκβάλλω) by the Spirit into the wilderness desert (1:12).¹⁰² The term “driven” or “sent” (ἐκβάλλω) means to “drive out, expel, or send away.”¹⁰³ According to scholars, first century people avoided the wilderness or desert because they considered such places as being full of demons.¹⁰⁴ R. T. France highlights

¹⁰⁰ Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 219.

¹⁰¹ Muhammad Wolfgang G. A. Schmidt, *A Greek-English Reference Manual to the Vocabulary of the Greek New Testament: Based on Tischendorf's Greek New Testament Text and on Strong's Greek Lexicon with Some Additions and Amendments* (Hamburg, Germany: Disserta Verlag, 2017), 9.

¹⁰² William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 59.

¹⁰³ Joseph Henry Thayer and Christian Gottlob Wilke, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Being Grimm's Wilke's Clavis Novi Testamenti* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., 1999), 9; John D. Grassmick, *Mark*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 106..

¹⁰⁴ Trent C. Butler, *Luke*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 3 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 60; Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 130.

the parallels between the wilderness motif developed here and the one that Israel experienced, noting that in both accounts, preparation is taking place.¹⁰⁵

Rodney Cooper concurs with France, explaining that Jesus's forty days of temptation recall the forty-day motif of Moses and Elijah waiting to receive from the Lord (Exod 24:18; 1 Kgs 19:8).¹⁰⁶ France adds that these forty days also denote a limited but significant timeframe.¹⁰⁷ Though Jesus wandered in the desert for forty days being tempted by the devil, He did not succumb to temptation. In contrast, as Israel wandered for forty years, they were also tempted but failed. Thus, Jesus becomes a new Israel, not succumbing to the temptations as His predecessors had.¹⁰⁸

Numerous scholars such as France describe Christ in the temptation narratives as the faithful Israel: "The conception of Jesus as the true Israel, already affirmed in Matthew 2:15, here [in the temptation narratives] comes to fuller expression."¹⁰⁹ Craig Keener, meanwhile, notes how the Jewish people of that day and age were waiting for a Messiah who would come and lead a new exodus of people and that the Messiah would be a "new Moses."¹¹⁰ Robert Guelich, however, believes that Jesus in the wilderness is

¹⁰⁵ R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 129; John Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, vol. 35A, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 178.

¹⁰⁶ Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 2 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 10; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 60; France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 130.

¹⁰⁷ France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 129.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁰⁹ R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 102.

¹¹⁰ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 53.

not that of a new Moses but that of a new Adam. He suggests that, according to Mark's version, with the animals and angels present, the pericope is a counterpoint to the failings of the original Adam.¹¹¹ In a similar argument to Guelich, Louis Barbieri points out how Adam and Eve likewise face each temptation Jesus faces, namely the appeal to physical appetite, the appeal to personal gain, and the appeal to power or glory.¹¹² John Nolland concurs, noting that there are echoes of Adam in the account but asserts that the main thrust of the temptation narrative is Jesus being tempted as God's Son and the reader's question of whether He will "use the power at his disposal for his means."¹¹³ Jesus, of course, succeeds in thwarting the devil's temptations.

Unlike Keener, France, and others, Philip Thompson argues that the way to read the temptation accounts in the Gospels is to focus on them through the lens of humility.¹¹⁴ Jesus humbles himself to the Spirit's will and goes into the wilderness to be tempted. Likewise, He humbles himself and goes to the cross, saying, "Not my will but yours be done" (Mark 14:36). Thompson is correct in asserting that those seeking to grow in their faith must also humble themselves to the Lord and Scripture.

¹¹¹ Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, vol. 34A, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1989), 39.

¹¹² Louis A. Barbieri Jr., *Matthew*, ed. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, The Bible Knowledge Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1983), 27.

¹¹³ Nolland, *Luke 1–9:20*, 182.

¹¹⁴ Philip E. Thompson, "Matthew 4:1–11," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 60, no. 1 (January 2006): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430606000108>.

Jesus Overcoming Temptation in the Wilderness

As Jesus is tempted, He uses Deuteronomic texts to combat temptation (Matt 4:4-10; Deut 8:3; Deut 6:16; Deut 6:13). Michael Morris describes how the discovery of the Damascus Document in the Dead Sea Scrolls reveals significant insights into how Qumranic communities dealt with demons. He describes their use of apotropaism to fight against demons.¹¹⁵ France points out that, in a similar manner, Jesus uses the texts of Deuteronomy to challenge the temptations because the texts refer to the faithfulness of God, as Moses points the Israelites back to God being first.¹¹⁶ Jesus uses the Word of God to combat the devil and his schemes, teaching the disciples who read His words to do the same. However, not all scholars believe the temptation narratives are original to the Gospels but were added to help disciples navigate temptation.

Nicholas Taylor, for example, incorrectly argues that the temptation narrative in the Synoptics is an addition created by the authors to help Christians undergoing immense persecution under the reign of King Agrippa.¹¹⁷ He explains that King Agrippa forms an antitype image of the Lord, and whereas the Lord resisted temptation in the desert, King Agrippa bowed to Caligula, who was the personification of Satan. Whereas God exalted Jesus, the Jewish people revered Agrippa, who was crowned by the Romans and would be destroyed by God.¹¹⁸ France, however, counters that Jesus most likely

¹¹⁵ Michael Morris, "Deuteronomy in the Matthean and Lucan Temptation in Light of Early Jewish Antidemonic Tradition," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 78, no. 2 (April 2016): 298.

¹¹⁶ France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 127.

¹¹⁷ Nicholas H. Taylor, "The Temptation of Jesus on the Mountain: A Palestinian Christian Polemic against Agrippa I," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 24, no. 1 (September 2001): 41.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

revealed the temptation narrative to His disciples as the primary source.¹¹⁹ Thus, it is not a narrative addition.

In the narrative, Jesus faces temptation in the wilderness and is overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:1). He is empowered to do all He can because He remains close to the Father and follows the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Through trusting the Father and relying on the Spirit, He can overcome and minister to all who come His way.

Jesus Withdraws to Pray

In addition to Jesus's retreat in the wilderness to prepare for His ministry, Jesus continues to periodically withdraw to encounter God during pivotal moments throughout His life. These include prior to His calling of the twelve disciples, His withdrawal with the disciples to rest, and His withdrawal to pray and seek direction after the death of His cousin John.

Withdrawing to the Mountains to Pray for a Decision

As Butler and Stein both observe, prayer in retreat informs all of the most significant decisions that Jesus makes (Luke 4:42, 5:16; 6:12; 9:18; 9:28-29; 11:2; 18:1).¹²⁰ Luke 6:12-17 shows Jesus making a decision that will affect His ministry for years to come, and when He makes this decision, He does so by going up the mountain, showing parallels to Moses's theophanic revelations (Exod 3:1-2) and Elijah as well (1

¹¹⁹ France, *Matthew*, TNTC, 120.

¹²⁰ Butler, *Luke*, 91; Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 24 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 60.

Kgs 19:8).¹²¹ Joel Green notes that Jesus's selection of a mountain for retreat remains significant due to the Jewish literature of that time, which connected mountains with divine revelation.¹²² Keener adds that Jesus may have followed Moses's pattern for receiving instruction about helpers (Exod 19:24; 24:1-2).¹²³ Jesus often climbed the mountain for more than just theophanic revelations; He often went there to have silence and solitude so He could hear from God, according to Alan Cole.¹²⁴ Stein contends that Jesus spending the night praying in darkness heightens the importance of the decision (Luke 6:12).¹²⁵ Nolland concurs, noting that nowhere else in the New Testament is a decision as emphasized as this one concerning how long Jesus prayed, thus emphasizing its importance.¹²⁶

Jesus, having withdrawn up the mountain to pray, is now able to discern who He is to call for His disciples and how many (Luke 6:12-17). He chooses Twelve as His followers. As Green points out, nowhere in Luke is it established that Jesus needs an election of disciples, which “underscores its origination in divine will discerned in prayer.”¹²⁷ This discernment could only take place when Jesus withdrew, allowing Jesus

¹²¹ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 136.

¹²² Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 258.

¹²³ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 195.

¹²⁴ Alan Cole, *Mark*, ed. D. A. Carson et al., New Bible Commentary, 21st Century ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 954.

¹²⁵ Stein, *Luke*, 145.

¹²⁶ John Nolland, *Luke 9:21–18:34*, vol. 35B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 269.

¹²⁷ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 258.

to act as God's agent in His work. Morris explains the significance of this action, stating that Jesus was "establishing the true Israel, the people of God."¹²⁸

Withdrawing from Ministry to Rest

Jesus also retreats to the wilderness for the purpose of rest. The wilderness provides an environment for rest in numerous Old Testament narratives (Deut 3:20, 12:9, 25:19; Josh 1:13, 15, 21:44; Ps 95:7-11; Isa 63:14; Jer 31:2). In keeping with this tradition, the twelve disciples go into the wilderness to hear His teaching and find rest (Mark 6:31). There they find His rest and sustenance, much like the manna in the Exodus narratives, leading William L. Lane to posit that Jesus created a new exodus of people.¹²⁹ Lane further argues that the wilderness motif provokes the renewal of temptation for Jesus, which He continually fights off by resting in the presence of the Father¹³⁰

Jesus invites His disciples into this rest because He cares deeply for them and does not want them to burn out, according to Guelich.¹³¹ Jesus did this because He knew how it felt to be under the constraints of ministry. Beverly Zink-Sawyer agrees, stating that He knew His disciples needed "refreshing solitude."¹³² He wanted to bless His disciples with rest by escaping the crowds.¹³³ He also saw that they were so busy doing

¹²⁸ Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 145.

¹²⁹ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 225.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹³¹ Guelich, *Mark 1–8:26*, 339.

¹³² Beverly Zink-Sawyer, "Mark 6:30–34," *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 51, no. 3 (July 1997): 291, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002096439605100308>.

¹³³ Cooper, *Mark*, 104.

the gospel ministry that they neglected themselves and their personal needs. Retreating with Jesus led them to care for their personal needs. Cole equates this weariness and the need for rest with the Sabbath and how Jesus is atonement on the Sabbath. In Him, they found rest for their weary souls.¹³⁴ This rest is essential for continued service in the ministry.

Withdrawing to the Wilderness to Discern

In Matthew 14:13, Jesus retreats to the mountains by himself to process John's death and to find solace in the Father. As Stuart Weber explains, Jesus was fully God but also fully human, and He had deep emotions that He needed to process.¹³⁵ John Calvin notes that, while on the mountain, Jesus also needed to discern what God would have Him do regarding how the people were reacting to His message and John's message.¹³⁶ France agrees with Calvin, asserting that John's death and His retreat to the mountain and the ensuing discernment that occurred led to a pivotal change in Jesus's ministry.¹³⁷ Jesus refused to be the warrior messiah the public deemed Him to be, and in response to John's death, "Jesus sent his disciples away to keep them from getting caught up in the middle

¹³⁴ R. Alan Cole, *Mark: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 214.

¹³⁵ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 1 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 219.

¹³⁶ John Calvin and John King, *Calvin's Commentaries (Complete)* (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), paragraph 69865, Accordance Bible Software.

¹³⁷ France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 469; France, *Matthew*, TNTC, 105.

of the nationalistic spirit.”¹³⁸ As Craig Blomberg points out, Jesus, for a period of time, retreats from the people trying to set Him up as the nationalistic messiah.¹³⁹

Jesus's Habit of Withdrawing

Jesus made a habit of retreating from people, whether from others as a result of conflict, to make a decision, or to pray. Luke 5:16 states that Jesus “often withdrew to lonely places” (εἰμί ὑποχωρέω ἐν ἔρημος καί προσεύχομαι) in order to pray. Joseph Thayer defines προσεύχομαι as prayer and describes it as involving addressing prayers to God, expressing one's desires, requests, or worship. He argues that the term is derived from the preposition προς (meaning "towards") and εὐχομαι (meaning "to wish" or "to pray"). Thus, he states that προσεύχομαι emphasizes a direction or approach towards God in prayer, highlighting the relational aspect of prayer as a communication with God.¹⁴⁰ Stein notes, the tense of the verbs is imperfect, meaning that this was a regular practice for Jesus.¹⁴¹ Scholars hold differing opinions as to why Jesus would regularly withdraw to pray. Green mentions that Jesus would make these withdrawals to the wilderness and the mountains when He needed to be “strengthened for Divine service.”¹⁴² Morris, however, suggests that Jesus withdrew often to reject Satan's temptation of being a wonder worker, just as Satan had tempted Him to jump off the pinnacle of the temple

¹³⁸ Cooper, *Mark*, 106.

¹³⁹ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 231.

¹⁴⁰ Thayer and Wilke, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 544.

¹⁴¹ Stein, *Luke*, 191.

¹⁴² Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 238.

(Luke 4:9-12).¹⁴³ Butler counters that Jesus withdrew often because of His popularity and the crowds that would continue to grow until He physically left the area.¹⁴⁴ Regardless of the primary reason for withdrawal, the important point is that Jesus retreated as a matter of practice. He made it a habit to get alone with God and find solitude where He could hear God speak to Him. This can also be seen in the transfiguration account but more closely in the garden of Getheseme.¹⁴⁵

Jesus at Gethsemane

The context of the next significant withdrawal of Jesus occurs on the Mount of Olives, where Jesus and His disciples often visit to get away and pray (Matt 26:36).¹⁴⁶ This setting of an olive grove with an olive press overflows with symbolism, portraying Jesus being squeezed like an olive, yet Jesus often came here to pray with His disciples.¹⁴⁷ As Keener notes, it was around 10:00 or 11:00 p.m., and customarily, people would have stayed awake well into the night, talking about the redemption story as part of the Feast of Passover.¹⁴⁸ The fact that the disciples fell asleep during this time shows how much their grief had impacted them.

¹⁴³ Morris, *Luke*, 136.

¹⁴⁴ Butler, *Luke*, 78.

¹⁴⁵ For a discussion on how the Transfiguration of Jesus illustrates the value of solitude and voluntary withdrawal for the purposes of revelation and affirmation, see Appendix A, “Jesus’s Transfiguration.”

¹⁴⁶ Cooper, *Mark*, 239.

¹⁴⁷ Morris, *Luke*, 329.

¹⁴⁸ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 167.

Jesus Desire to Be with His Disciples

Jesus retreats to Gethsemane because of the real struggle that He is about to undergo. Donald Hagner describes how He craved His disciples' support and chose those closest to Him to journey further into the grove as He cried out to His Father.¹⁴⁹ Cooper agrees, noting that when Jesus was undergoing the most challenging moment in His life up to this point, He wanted the moral support of His disciples, much like humans do today.¹⁵⁰ Not all theologians believe Jesus sought the moral support of Peter, James, and John, however. Lane, for example, argues that Jesus brought His disciples to see His struggle with God, yet He could only share His true struggle with His Father as He was the only one who understood what was going on in the hour of His testing.¹⁵¹

The Disciples' Failure

Jesus brings His disciples with Him and asks that they pray for the trials that He is undergoing. Brooks asserts that He asks them to watch so they would not be "spiritually indifferent."¹⁵² Jesus does this because He knows spiritual alertness is necessary for their crisis. Jesus prepares for His crisis through prayer, showing them, according to Lane, that they, too, should prepare through prayer.¹⁵³ Jesus's life was characterized by prayer throughout its entirety—beginning, middle, and end. Jesus modeled the importance of

¹⁴⁹ Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, vol. 33B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 782.

¹⁵⁰ Cooper, *Mark*, 240.

¹⁵¹ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 516.

¹⁵² Brooks, *Mark*, 234.

¹⁵³ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 517; Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 779; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, vol. 34B, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 409.

prayer for His disciples, but they did not heed His instruction and ended up failing Him (Matt 26:40). Hagner asserts that, though each disciple is eager to watch, they are overcome by human flesh, either from the Passover activities and wine or, as Butler asserts, from the grief that each had as they realized Jesus was going to die.¹⁵⁴ To conquer temptation, they needed to stay alert and pray.

Not My Will but Yours Be Done

As Jesus ventures further into the grove, He comes to His Father and prays real emotive prayers. Nolland points out the gap that exists between His will and His Father's and that Jesus's prayers in Gethsemane close that gap.¹⁵⁵ Jesus overcomes this gap when He says to His Father, "Not my will but yours be done" (Mark 14:36). Like Nolland, Cooper argues that Jesus's prayer here is not to get the Father to change His mind but to help Jesus align himself with the Father.¹⁵⁶ James Neumann, however, argues that His words "not my will but yours be done" are tied to the words from the Lord's Prayer. He explains that Matthew takes Mark's version of the Gethsemane account and uses it as a source to develop the Lord's Prayer to teach the disciples.¹⁵⁷

The withdrawal to the Mount of Olives also reveals that God is in control. Bloomberg argues that "Matthew's theme underlines this when he states that Jesus is the

¹⁵⁴ Hagner, *Matthew 14–28*, 783; Butler, *Luke*, 372.

¹⁵⁵ John Nolland, *Luke 18:35–24:53*, vol. 35C, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 1083.

¹⁵⁶ Cooper, *Mark*, 240.

¹⁵⁷ James N. Neumann, "Thy Will Be Done: Jesus's Passion in the Lord's Prayer," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 1 (2019): 161, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1381.2019.524397>.

Son of God who is suffering and dying, an act of obedience fulfilling God's will."¹⁵⁸ Paul Moser, likewise, contends that the primary purpose of Jesus going to the garden was to obey the will of the Father.¹⁵⁹ Jesus demonstrates a deep relationship with the Father, subjecting His will to His Father's no matter the cost, and expects His disciples to do the same.¹⁶⁰

Uniqueness of Jesus's Prayer

The prayer during this withdrawal on the Mount of Olives remains unique, giving readers insight into how intense this moment was for Him. France describes how Jesus prostrated before the Father in prayer, indicating extreme spiritual anguish.¹⁶¹ Angela Harkins, however, argues that Jesus's display of grief was ritualistic in that it reenacted a scene from Moses at the desecration of the covenant and a remaking of a new covenant.¹⁶² This argument is strengthened by looking at Ezra's covenant-making in the second temple period as recorded in 1 Esdras. Jesus's displays of emotion and prayers usually brought a response from God, but in this case, as Harkins notes, there was nothing.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 264.

¹⁵⁹ Paul K. Moser, "Having 'Ears to Hear': Jesus, Gethsemane, and Epistemology," *The Evangelical Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (April 2020): 155.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹⁶¹ France, *Matthew*, NICNT, 1007.

¹⁶² Angela Kim Harkins, "Ritualizing Jesus' Grief at Gethsemane," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 41, no. 2 (December 2018): 177, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X18804433>

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 183.

The second unique thing about Jesus's prayer is how He talked with God. First, his physiological response to what was transpiring was that His sweat was so great it resembled blood droplets.¹⁶⁴ Herschel Hobbs goes further, stating, "With a physician's touch, Luke says that his 'sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground.' He broke out into a bloody sweat, which became clotted blood."¹⁶⁵ This description of Jesus and how His body reacted remains vital for understanding the extreme nature of what He was experiencing.

The third unique aspect of Jesus's prayer is how He addresses God the Father. As Lane observes, Jesus addresses God as Abba (Mark 14:36), which is an unusual way to address God.¹⁶⁶ Cooper concurs, describing Jesus as seeking comfort from His Father.¹⁶⁷ This picture of a familial relationship is essential to this narrative as it sets Jesus apart and readies Him for the crucifixion.

The Reality of Jesus's Suffering

In the garden, Jesus pleads with God to remove the cup from Him, as if there might be an alternative to bringing about God's will. Lane asserts that Jesus knows that the suffering will come from Him being completely separated from the Father and having the whole weight of wrath on Him.¹⁶⁸ He knew this would be a time of testing, and as

¹⁶⁴ Butler, *Luke*, 373.

¹⁶⁵ Herschel Hobbs, *Life and Times of Jesus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1966), 180.

¹⁶⁶ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 774.

¹⁶⁷ Cooper, *Mark*, 239.

¹⁶⁸ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 774.

Green points out, this testing carries with it a “notion of diabolic Assault.”¹⁶⁹ This is why an angel is spoken of that comes to minister to Jesus.¹⁷⁰ Jesus knows that He needs to submit to the will of the Father even if it means immense suffering.

Moser posits that when one looks at the Synoptic accounts of Jesus in Gethsemane and the greater whole of Jesus’s life, one can observe that the proper revealing of God can only happen when one fully obeys God and His will for one’s life.¹⁷¹ God can hide from those who no longer submit to His will as an act of helping them be aware that they need God in their life.¹⁷² When one withdraws and commits to do the will of God like Jesus, however, they experience reconciliation and the fullness of life that He promises.

Acts

Acts is a new kind of chapter in the story of faith, which has contributed to the development of the retreat motif through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and apostolic mission. Acts underscores the continuation of retreat as an essential practice for spiritual empowerment, guidance, and communal discernment. It shows how early Christians followed the example of Jesus, who employed times of retreat to practice communion, prayer, and preparation for the great work of evangelization. It also provides

¹⁶⁹ Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 780.

¹⁷⁰ Morris, *Luke*, 330.

¹⁷¹ Paul K. Moser, “Jesus and *Abba* in Gethsemane: A Center in Filial Cooperation,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 15, no. 1 (May 6, 2021): 63, <https://doi.org/10.5325/jtheointe.15.1.0063>.

¹⁷² Moser, “Jesus and *Abba* in Gethsemane,” 78.

a sacred echo of the festivals of the Old Testament where God meets with the people in a sacred place.

The Disciples Wait on God

In the Book of Acts, Jesus commands the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until Jesus sends His promised Helper (Acts 1:4-5), whom Jesus spoke of in John 14:16 at the Last Supper.¹⁷³ He would send His Spirit to help the disciples with their ministry and be with them in power. Jesus began His ministry with the Spirit, and here He asks the disciples to do the same.

The disciples begin their Jerusalem stay by gathering in the Upper Room, waiting for the Spirit (Acts 2:1). The phrase “were all together” (εἰμί πᾶς ὁμοῦ) literally means “take salt together,” which is an idiom for “gathering, eating, and being one.”¹⁷⁴ In waiting for the Spirit to come, the disciples were preparing themselves. The Greek construction of the terms *χωρίζω* and *περιμένω*, “to stop and to wait,” in Jerusalem means “to stop departing from Jerusalem,” indicating that the disciples, prior to this point, were coming and going as they pleased.¹⁷⁵ Jesus knew that the only way they could fulfill His command was to withdraw, wait on Him, and wait for the Holy Spirit, which is similar to what God called Moses and the people of Israel to do.

¹⁷³ F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 34.

¹⁷⁴ Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, 319.

¹⁷⁵ Kenneth O. Gangel, *Acts*, vol. 5 of *Holman New Testament Commentary*, ed. Max Anders (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1998), 9.

Disciples Empowered

The Spirit eventually came and empowered the disciples to do the work of the ministry by His power. As the Spirit was poured out, it fulfilled what was prophesied in the Book of Joel (2:28-32), and the disciples prophesied and spoke in unknown tongues.¹⁷⁶ This pouring out of the Spirit with fire reflects other stories in Scripture as well. Theresa Haynes believes that Luke was aware of the Jewish tradition that God's voice appeared as fire on Mount Sinai and wrote Acts with similar imagery to convey that God was speaking through the prophecies of the apostles.¹⁷⁷ Haynes further argues that the Jewish people gathered on the Festival of Pentecost were not celebrating a harvest festival but celebrating in remembrance of Sinai. James VanderKam agrees with Haynes, noting that this was how Jewish people celebrated Pentecost by the first century.¹⁷⁸ Luke used this connection with Sinai to show the importance of the Holy Spirit coming to the disciples. Just as Moses delivered God's living, fiery Torah, so did Jesus the Messiah send the fiery Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁹

John Griffith, however, disagrees with this assessment, arguing that the Day of Pentecost represents the temple imagery in the Old Testament. Specifically, Griffith believes that the fire of God that descended and fell on the apostles is the Spirit of God,

¹⁷⁶ Bruce, *The Book of the Acts*, 35.

¹⁷⁷ Theresa Abell Haynes, "Voices of Fire: Sinai Imagery in Acts 2 and Rabbinic Midrash," *Nordisk Judaistik/Scandinavian Jewish Studies* 32, no. 1 (May 31, 2021): 30, <https://doi.org/10.30752/nj.102389>.

¹⁷⁸ James C VanderKam, "Covenant and Pentecost," *Calvin Theological Journal* 37, no. 2 (November 2002): 239.

¹⁷⁹ Haynes, "Voices of Fire," 14.

who previously resided in the Temple but now resides in the new temple, the Church.¹⁸⁰ Gregory Beale agrees, citing similarities in language referring to the house in Acts 2 and Solomon's temple, while Griffith notes the crowds that would have gathered on the temple grounds that day.¹⁸¹ Brian Lidbeck also points out that the language of the house being filled is similar to how the tabernacle is described as being filled (Exod 40:34 and 1 Kgs 8:11).¹⁸² God's presence poured out in fire means that the new Jesus community is the new temple of God, bringing hope to the world through its mission.¹⁸³

Purpose of Empowerment

Keener believes that the key to understanding the disciple's retreat and time of waiting for the Holy Spirit was intended for them to understand the purpose of the Spirit's outpouring, which was for the mission. Keener shows that the believers need the Holy Spirit much like Jesus, the son of God, needed it and depended on Him.¹⁸⁴ As followers of Christ, they were in a posture of prayer and remained in that posture until the Spirit came upon them.¹⁸⁵ Keener notes multiple occasions throughout Luke-Acts in

¹⁸⁰ John D. Griffiths, "Tongues as of Fire: Pentecost as a Temple Inauguration Theophany," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 32, no. 2 (April 24, 2023): 213, <https://doi.org/10.1163/17455251-32010003>.

¹⁸¹ Gregory K. Beale, "The Descent of the Eschatological Temple in the Form of the Spirit at Pentecost Part 2 Corroborating Evidence," *Tyndale Bulletin* 56, no. 2 (2005): 63; Griffiths, "Tongues as of Fire," 9.

¹⁸² Brian W. Lidbeck, *Resurrection and Spirit: From the Pentateuch to Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2020), 193.

¹⁸³ Griffiths, "Tongues as of Fire," 19.

¹⁸⁴ Craig S Keener, "The Spirit and the Mission of the Church in Acts 1-2," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 62, no. 1 (March 2019): 45.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

which the disciples have corporate experiences with the Spirit following times of prayer, a pattern that today's church would do well to emulate.¹⁸⁶

Purpose of Clarity

The final biblical character who illustrates the theme of retreating in Scripture is the Apostle Paul, who retreated to Arabia for three years (Gal 1:17-18), soon after Paul's encounter on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:4). As he writes to the Galatians, he challenges the Judaizers present in the region, who claimed that Paul sat under the apostles in Jerusalem after he was saved and was not as independent as he preached.¹⁸⁷ Paul bore witness to the risen Christ much like the apostles in Jerusalem did; however, as Alan Cole points out, he did not spend three years with them.¹⁸⁸ Instead, as Max Anders notes, he left for Arabia to spend three years training under the Spirit and developing his Christian theology.¹⁸⁹ His time in Arabia proved vital for his growth and development.

Most scholars hold one of four common viewpoints as to why Paul retreated to Arabia. Timothy George and Alan Cole, for example, argue that Paul needed silence and solitude to reorient his life due to this newfound message that Christ is indeed the

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 39.

¹⁸⁷ Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1990), 35; David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 157.

¹⁸⁸ R. Alan Cole, *Galatians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 9 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989), 92.

¹⁸⁹ Max Anders, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians & Colossians*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 8 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1999), 8-9.

Messiah.¹⁹⁰ Others, such as N. T. Wright, believe that Paul retreated not to a populated city but to Mount Sinai and wanted to meet with God, just like Elijah did.¹⁹¹ The third viewpoint, held by F. F. Bruce, Hans Dieter Betz, and Murphy-O'Connor was that Paul was evangelizing the Gentiles.¹⁹² However, evidence points to the most common viewpoint as being correct, which is that Paul went to Arabia to reorient himself and begin his preaching message as he was also studying and tent-making.¹⁹³ Paul, a devout Jew whose world had been turned upside down, needed to study and develop his theology before he embarked on his ministry of evangelization and church planting.

Conclusion

This study of spiritual retreats, which spans from the inception of the Sabbath to the solitude and wilderness experiences of biblical figures and to the communal retreat of the Early Church, underscores a continuous thread of seeking the presence of the Divine in quiet places. These stories show the multi-dimensional purposes of retreat: preparation, revelation, renewal, and communion with God. The examples given by Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Jesus, and the early disciples show that these moments of withdrawal are precisely those turning points that beget personal transformation and spiritual empowerment. The

¹⁹⁰ deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 158; Timothy George, *Galatians*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 30 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 124; Cole, *Galatians*, 124.

¹⁹¹ N. T. Wright, "Paul, Arabia, and Elijah (Galatians 1:17)," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 115, no. 4 (1996): 683, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3266349>.

¹⁹² F. F. Bruce, *Paul, Apostle of the Free Spirit* (U.K.: Paternoster Digital Library, 2005), 81; Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 74; Murphy-O'Connor, "Paul in Arabia," 736.

¹⁹³ deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, 157; Longenecker, *Galatians*, 34.

stories convey to contemporary believers that they should seek to retreat not only as a spiritual discipline but as an integral part of their spiritual journeys in which they seek God in the silence, attune their hearts to His voice, and emerge from the silence renewed and ready for further mission.

CHAPTER 3: GENERAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

As the military transitions from a culture of war on insurgency to a culture of great power competition and future near-peer conflict, it remains imperative to ensure that the force is spiritually ready in order to maintain resiliency. The nature of military life demands its members have strong spiritual resiliency and fitness, yet the military as a whole continues to struggle to effectively address these spiritual needs. Spirituality and faith are central to military personnel's wellbeing and operational effectiveness. Despite various initiatives, an opportunity exists to provide more comprehensive spiritual support that fosters true resilience among airmen and their families.

This chapter will focus on the research behind strategies to enhance spiritual support and resilience among airmen and their families. It will explore integrating spiritual readiness and resilience into military life, emphasizing the power of transformative learning. The research presented aims to demonstrate how military personnel can overcome historical and ongoing challenges by providing airmen with the tools to develop lasting spiritual resilience and thus help foster a more resilient and spiritually prepared force.

Spiritual Fitness

The military differs from the civilian population in terms of the stressors they face, how they process them, and the resources available to them. The most common age

for enlistment in the United States military is the early twenties.¹ Military leaders have institutionalized chaplains at every level to provide spiritual and religious support by recognizing the uniqueness of the profession of arms and the existential questions that are often faced. In this section, spiritual fitness and spiritual readiness will be defined as they are crucial to understanding how airmen can maintain resilience. In addition, examining the historical context and ongoing challenges related to spiritual fitness will highlight the importance of spirituality in the Air Force and the role of the chaplain in helping develop airmen.

Spiritual Fitness Defined

Spiritual fitness have been integral to the military from the Revolutionary War through the Civil War, the World Wars, and to the present day. Over different historical periods, the emphasis on the role of spirituality and religion in soldiers' lives has varied. However, one constant remains: the soldiers that fared the best where there has been grief, trauma, and death were those with strong spiritual fitness. The US Army defines *spiritual fitness* as “the ability to endure and overcome difficulties through finding meaning in our life experiences.”² The RAND Corporation defines *spiritual fitness* as “the capacity for adherence to core personal values that reflect beliefs and transcendent or

¹ Department of Defense, Office of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Military Community and Faith Policy, “2020 Demographics Profile of the Military Community,” 2020, 35, <https://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2020-demographics-report.pdf>.

² Nina Borgeson, “Holistic Health and Fitness: Building Spiritual and Mental Resilience,” www.army.mil, accessed July 24, 2024, https://www.army.mil/article/243612/holistic_health_and_fitness_building_spiritual_and_mental_resilience.

ultimate meaning and purpose.”³ Based on these two definitions, a working definition of spiritual fitness is the ability to adhere to personal transcendent beliefs, principles, or values needed to overcome hardship and prevail in accomplishing the mission.

Religion and spirituality play an important role in spiritual fitness. It remains important to distinguish the difference between religion and spirituality as it pertains to spiritual fitness. Harold Koenig, a leading researcher in the area of resiliency and spirituality/religion within the military context, defines *religion* as “Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals, and symbols designed to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality), and to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others living together in a community.”⁴ while *spirituality* refers to “any way of relating to that which is perceived to be sacred—inherently it contains themes of religion—which refers to institutionalized or culturally bound ways of relating to that which is perceived to be sacred.”⁵ Though spirituality and religion differ, the two overlap in discussions of spiritual fitness. *Spirituality* refers to a life with metaphysical qualities, and *religion* is a term used to describe someone with a shared culture with a group of people who all

³ Douglas Yeung and Margret T. Martin, *Spiritual Fitness and Resilience: A Review of Relevant Constructs, Measures, and Links to Well-Being*, RAND Project Air Force Series on Resiliency, RR-100-AF (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 2013), 5.

⁴ Harold G. Koenig, Dana E. King, and Verna Benner Carson, *Handbook of Religion and Health*, 2nd ed (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 18.

⁵ David H. Rosmarin and Harold G. Koenig, eds., *Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health*, 2nd edition (San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2020), xix.

believe the same thing.⁶ Within the military setting, they focus on spirituality rather than religion.

History of Spiritual Fitness in the Military Context

Understanding the historical context of how the military got to where it is today with regard to spiritual fitness is vital to be able to develop a solution to meet the needs today. In a speech right before the United States entered World War II, the secretary of defense under President Truman, George C. Marshall, stated, “I have said it is the spirit which endures to the end; the determining factor in war is something invisible and intangible, something wholly spiritual. ... The men ... will fight, if they have to fight, with more than their bodies and with their hands and their material weapons. They will fight with their souls.”⁷ War, fighting, and the taking of a human life that results from military conflict is a profoundly spiritual event for most people.

Soldiers with a strong spiritual sense often fare better in life when faced with the complexities of war. Dave Grossman describes that, in an effort to protect their spiritual and moral centers, most Revolutionary War soldiers fired above the heads of those who were standing across from them because they did not want to take a life.⁸ The act of taking a life or seeing a life taken is a traumatic experience that can break a soldier’s

⁶ Rosmarin and Koenig, eds., *Handbook of Spirituality, Religion, and Mental Health*, xx.

⁷ George Catlett Marshall, Larry I. Bland, and Sharon Ritenour Stevens, *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 534.

⁸ Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society* (Boston, MA: Back Bay Books, 1996), 11.

spirit, a phenomenon that the military eventually began referring to as “shell shock” during World War I.⁹

The military and its earliest efforts to track and test its members for shell shock began in World War I, and during World War II, the military found that soldiers who prayed consistently dealt with combat stress much better than those who did not pray.¹⁰ As a result of those findings, the Army tried to instill character into the soldiers and increase their religious faith during the Cold War as a way to counteract communist mind control techniques.¹¹ Throughout the wars of the twentieth century, commanders routinely saw the positive effects of practicing religion for developing resiliency in soldiers.

After the Cold War, however, religiosity became less emphasized in the military. Not surprisingly, during the 1990s and 2000s, this was directly correlated to the epidemic of suicides in the military.¹² Between 2004 and 2008, at the height of the Iraq War and the global war on terrorism, suicides in the Army increased by 80 percent, outpacing combat-related deaths.¹³ The military's answer to this was to engage in positive psychology, which encourages the development of “spiritual fitness,” an inherently vague

⁹ Edgar Jones, Nicola T. Fear, and Simon Wessely, “Shell Shock and Mild Traumatic Brain Injury: A Historical Review,” *American Journal of Psychiatry* 164, no. 11 (November 2007): 1641.

¹⁰ Shenandoah Nieuwsma, “Broken Spirits: A History of Spiritual Fitness Training in the United States Army since World War II” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2016), 65, <https://cdr.lib.unc.edu/concern/dissertations/cn69m5159>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Timothy W. Lineberry and Stephen S. O’Connor, “Suicide in the US Army,” *Mayo Clinic Proceedings* 87, no. 9 (September 2012): 871, <https://www.mayoclinicproceedings.org/action/showPdf?pii=S0025-6196%2812%2900687-8>.

¹³ Ibid.

and ambiguous concept, as Steven Weitzman argues.¹⁴ Weitzman notes that the military has purposely left the term *spiritual fitness* undefined to allow it to mean multiple things in the hope that it will be powerful to different people at various times.¹⁵

In 2008, the military developed the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness and the Air Force's Comprehensive Airmen Fitness to help protect soldiers and airmen against combat-related stress and trauma by improving their resilience and ability to cope with adversity and recover from setbacks.¹⁶ In 2012, the military issued the Comprehensive Soldier and Family Fitness to include military families and civilian Army personnel. However, some scholars like Roy Eidelson, Marc Pilisuk, and Stephen Soldz argue that these resources have methodological and ethical problems, leaving them inadequate for assessing one's fitness and spirituality.¹⁷

In recent years, one command within the Air Force, the Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC), has seen combat more than any other, resulting in increased attention on this command's spiritual resiliency. Throughout the global war on terror, commanders recognized the need for spiritual fitness and began embedding chaplains within their units, developing the Preservation of the Force and Family Initiative (POTFF). POTFF allows chaplains to host retreats and marriage seminars focused on keeping their human assets fully resilient and ready to fight at any moment.

¹⁴ Steven Weitzman, "Strategic Spirituality: Positive Psychology, the Army, and the Ambiguities of 'Spirituality Fitness,'" *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 89, no. 1 (April 23, 2021): 253.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 256.

¹⁷ Roy Eidelson, Marc Pilisuk, and Stephen Soldz, "The Dark Side of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness," *American Psychologist* 66, no. 7 (2011): 643–44.

POTFF team members include a psychologist and a physical therapist as a holistic team to meet the needs of special operators. Danielle Worthington and Patricia Deuster found that the POTFF's efforts to teach horizontal and vertical spirituality to their operators increased their overall performance. They taught their operators meditation, mindfulness, and prayer to help them in their spirituality.¹⁸

Similarly, the Navy has started teaching Stoicism to its members in an effort to help with overall spiritual fitness. David Daigle, Daniel Goff, and Harold Koenig argue that Stoicism and spirituality, including religious practices, are complementary and can strengthen military personnel's mental and spiritual capabilities, helping them become more operationally effective. Their research underscores the need for a more intentional and systemic approach to spiritual and philosophical education within the military to optimize readiness in the face of great power competition.¹⁹

Importance of Spiritual Fitness Today

Harold Koenig, Lindsay Carey, and Faten Al Zaben argue that spiritual fitness within the military remains as important as physical and mental preparedness. These authors highlight how spirituality and faith are not just additional components but are central to military personnel's wellbeing and operational effectiveness.²⁰ They describe the unique challenges that service members face, such as mental health struggles,

¹⁸ Danielle Worthington and Patricia A. Deuster, "Spiritual Fitness: An Essential Component of Human Performance Optimization," *Journal of Special Operations Medicine* 18, no. 1 (2018): 100.

¹⁹ David A. Daigle, Daniel V. Goff, and Harold G. Koenig, "Holistic Health as a Twenty-First-Century Military Strategy: Stoic Philosophy and Spiritual Fitness for Optimizing Warfighter Readiness," *Expeditions with MCUP* 2023, 44, accessed March 31, 2023, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/887023>.

²⁰ Harold G. Koenig, Lindsay Carey, and Faten Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness: Essentials for Military Leaders and Chaplains* (New York: Amazon Books, 2022), 5.

substance abuse, PTSD, and moral injury, emphasizing the role of spirituality and spiritual care in providing support. The authors make a compelling case for including spiritual care within the holistic framework for soldiers, airmen, and sailors, arguing that a person's sense of meaning, purpose, and connection to a higher entity is crucial for resilience and readiness in the face of great power competition.²¹

Koenig, Carrie, and Al Zaben also emphasize the important role of faith-based chaplains in offering moral and ethical guidance, helping soldiers contend with moral quandaries, and providing comfort and support to those grappling with unforeseen combat issues. They offer insights for religious and non-religious service members and how various religious practices can be imparted to build them up.²² This is important because everyone needs something to hold onto, whether spiritual or religious.

Spiritual readiness impacts everyone's overall mental and social readiness, as illustrated by the findings of Megan L. Willison et al., who studied just under one hundred ROTC cadets. They found a measurable difference in the spiritual readiness of those who identified as believing in God and were religious compared to those who did not or were not religious.²³ Their study also showed that ROTC cadets were less spiritually fit than they ought to be, and they concluded that the ROTC program should encourage religious and spiritual involvement to help strengthen the next group of

²¹ Ibid., 12.

²² Ibid., 79.

²³ Megan L. Willison et al., "Spiritual Fitness, Spiritual Readiness, and Depressive Symptoms in ROTC Cadets," *Journal of Athletic Training* 59, no. 4 (2024): 5.

officers coming into the force.²⁴ The study also revealed how chaplains impact the development of spiritual readiness in the undergraduate training of commissioned officers.²⁵ At the U.S. military academies, cadets have access to a plurality of chaplains and their services; however, in university settings, they do not. Willison et al.'s research demonstrates the value of chaplains in fostering religious activity in developing spiritual readiness and resilience.

Spiritual Fitness Assessments

Because the military is so pluralistic, with a mix of those who do and do not believe in God, it is often difficult to determine and measure one's spiritual fitness and spiritual readiness. Over the past few decades, numerous spiritual fitness assessments have been developed and researched. Three assessments will be examined below.

There were not many spiritual fitness assessments at the start of the Global War on Terror and the Iraqi Freedom Campaign. In 2010, David Hufford and colleagues noted that the military had not yet determined standards for spiritual fitness, leaving it without a "comprehensive and valid" tool for assessing it among members of the armed forces.²⁶ While conducting a three-day residential retreat emphasizing spiritual fitness for twenty-five military veterans, Kate Thomas expressed concerns that the military did not have

²⁴ Willison et al., "Spiritual Fitness, Spiritual Readiness," 6.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ David J. Hufford, Matthew J. Fritts, and Jeffrey E. Rhodes, "Spiritual Fitness," *Military Medicine* 175, no. 8S (August 2010): 78-79.

tools to quantitatively measure spiritual fitness.²⁷ She found that she could teach the members new spiritual fitness skills and train the veterans but had difficulty assessing the participants due to the lack of available tools. This led Koenig, Carey, and Al Zaben to begin groundbreaking work on developing spiritual assessments for the military context.

In 2006, U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventative Medicine began researching and developing the Spiritual Attitudes Inventory (SAI).²⁸ They developed one of the most comprehensive measures of spiritual fitness or readiness, predating the predominant Special Operations Command spiritual fitness scale by almost fifteen years.²⁹ The SAI has twenty-eight items and an additional eleven items on demographic and military characteristics. What is unique about the SAI is that it was psychometrically validated in a study of 909 active-duty soldiers and family members at Army garrisons worldwide. Its participants, who averaged thirty-three years of age, comprised 62 percent active duty, 20 percent Army Reserve, 10 percent family members, and 3 percent Department of Defense civilians.³⁰ Though the SAI is the only psychometrically validated spiritual readiness or spiritual fitness assessment, it is not the most popular tool and is rarely used in today's setting.

²⁷ Kate H. Thomas et al., "Spiritual Fitness for Military Veterans: A Curriculum Review and Impact Evaluation Using the Duke Religion Index (DUREL)," *Journal of Religion and Health* 57, no. 3 (June 2018): 1169.

²⁸ Koenig, Carey, and Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness*, 73.

²⁹ Yumpu.com, "Spiritual Attitude Inventory (SAI) - U.S. Army Public Health Command," yumpu.com, accessed April 5, 2024, <https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/4080242/spiritual-attitude-inventory-sai-us-army-public-health-command>.

³⁰ Koenig, Carey, and Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness*, 76.

In 2012, the U.S. Army Public Health Command published the Spiritual Fitness Inventory (SFI).³¹ This ten-item inventory was developed to address a broad audience of military personnel and focuses on non-religious service members. As a result, it remains more of a psychological measure as it does not distinctively assess the religious element of spiritual fitness and readiness. As Koenig et al. argue, however, the SFI needs to be more specific in providing information to commanders, chaplains, or healthcare professionals for determining and building spiritual readiness because most service members have religious backgrounds.³²

The most recent tool that has gained the most traction within units is the Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS), published in 2020. The SSFS is a useful tool for assessing spiritual readiness and fitness. It may be used clinically to assess the initial level of spiritual readiness and then track changes over time. The seventeen-item measure comprises three subscales: 1) personal connection to a higher power, 2) pursuit of meaning and purpose and value, and 3) service and sacrifice for the greater good.³³ Using the SSFS as its foundation, the Chaplain Corps has since developed the Spiritual Readiness Initiative. Nina Borgeson created a Spiritual Readiness Matrix based on the responses to the SSFS. This coaching matrix provides service members with a

³¹ Harold G. Koenig, “‘Spiritual Readiness’ in the U.S. Military: A Neglected Component of Warrior Readiness,” *Journal of Religion and Health* 62, no. 3 (June 2023): 1562.

³² Koenig, Carey, and Zaben, *Spiritual Readiness*, 77.

³³ David William Alexander, Zainah Abulhawa, and Joshua Kazman, “The SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale: Measuring ‘Vertical’ and ‘Horizontal’ Spirituality in the Human Performance Domain,” *Journal of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Advancing Theory and Professional Practice through Scholarly and Reflective Publications* 74, no. 4 (December 2020): 274.

tangible way to grow and develop their spiritual fitness.³⁴ The SSFS is the assessment chosen for this project because of its broad applicability and ability to coach members based on their results.

The Role of the Chaplain in Spiritual Fitness

Since their establishment in the eighteenth century, chaplains have trained, embedded with, and deployed with military units, which helps build trust between the chaplain and their troops. Not surprisingly, units trust chaplains with their problems, and this relationship builds resiliency, according to Bryan Cafferky, who surveyed 3777 service members and found that those who sought the support of a chaplain showed elevated levels of resilience.³⁵ On average, 23 percent of service members seek the support of chaplains.³⁶ Regardless of whether members lived on base or off base or were officer or enlisted, those who sought a chaplain had a strong correlation to better overall resilience.³⁷

The reasons vary for why service members see chaplains; however, research shows that behavioral health needs are a primary driver for seeking chaplaincy care. One study of 14,327 service members reveals that 36.5 percent need some form of behavioral health services. Twenty-six percent of those members saw someone or a combination of

³⁴ Borgeson, "Holistic Health and Fitness."

³⁵ Bryan Cafferky, Aaron Norton, and Wendy J. Travis, "Air Force Chaplains' Perceived Effectiveness on Service Member's Resilience and Satisfaction," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 23, no. 2 (April 3, 2017): 65.

³⁶ Lisa A. Gorman et al., "National Guard Families After Combat: Mental Health, Use of Mental Health Services, and Perceived Treatment Barriers," *Psychiatric Services* 62, no. 1 (January 2011): 29.

³⁷ Cafferky, Norton, and Travis, "Air Force Chaplains' Perceived Effectiveness," 56.

providers, such as chaplains and mental health professionals, for their behavioral health needs. Of those individuals seeking care, 70 percent sought the care of a mental health professional, 37 percent sought medical care, and 30 percent sought the care of a chaplain for behavioral health needs.³⁸ This means that, in total, 8 percent of survey respondents see chaplains for behavioral health needs. When extrapolated over the force, a chaplain sees many people while conducting their normal religious duties. Many service members trust the chaplain because they offer 100 percent confidentiality and can be approached without risk to the member.

In their article on the overlapping roles of military chaplains and mental health clinicians, Denise Cooper et al. dive into the similarities and differences between chaplains and clinicians. The Department of Defense has 6,600 clinicians and 2,800 chaplains.³⁹ While chaplains are largely in non-clinical roles and are embedded in units, clinicians typically remain in a medical treatment facility (MTF). Cooper et al.'s research shows that people often present to the chaplain with underlying mental issues that ought to be seen by a clinician. At the same time, mental health clinicians frequently see people with underlying spiritual issues.⁴⁰ This has led to the military embedding a mental health professional and a chaplain in high-risk units.⁴¹ Cooper et al. rightly conclude that more collaboration needs to occur between chaplains and clinicians.

³⁸ Josh B. Kazman et al., "Who Sees the Chaplain? Characteristics and Correlates of Behavioral Health Care-Seeking in the Military," *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy* 28, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 5.

³⁹ Denise C. Cooper et al., "Military Chaplains and Mental Health Clinicians: Overlapping Roles and Collaborative Opportunities.," *Psychological Services* 20, no. 1 (February 2023): 57.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

When clinicians and chaplains have a synergistic relationship, the force does better overall. Larkin Kao, John Peteet, and Christopher Cook agree, pointing out that spirituality is often seen as a component of mental wellbeing, with lower rates of several mental health conditions observed among individuals who regularly engage in spiritual and religious practices.⁴² Additionally, some mental health concerns can be directly tied to many spiritual struggles, such as anxiety or depression stemming from a perceived inability to live up to certain standards or feeling abandoned by one's higher power.⁴³ Working together with mental health providers is one of the keys to effective spiritual care, as mental health providers, who are the experts of psychological health, contribute to comprehensive airman fitness, just as chaplains provide expert care for the individual's spiritual and religious life.

Spiritual Fitness and Human Flourishing

Spiritual fitness and human flourishing remain integrally tied to each other. Tyler VanderWeele's research on human flourishing shows how people in religious communities who practice their faith weekly are far better off in their quest for human flourishing than those who do not practice their faith.⁴⁴ However, VanderWeel notes that a significant difference in flourishing exists between those who practice their faith

⁴² Larkin Elderon Kao, John R. Peteet, and Christopher C. H. Cook, "Spirituality and Mental Health," *Journal for the Study of Spirituality* 10, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 44.

⁴³ Kenneth I. Pargament and Julie J. Exline, "Religious and Spiritual Struggles and Mental Health: Implications for Clinical Practice," in *Spirituality and Mental Health Across Cultures*, ed. Alexander Moreira-Almeida, Bruno Paz Mosqueiro, and Dinesh Bhugra (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2021), 396.

⁴⁴ Tyler J. VanderWeele, "Religious Communities and Human Flourishing," *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 26, no. 5 (October 2017): 479.

privately and those who practice their faith within a communal religious environment.⁴⁵

VanderWeele's research concludes that the key to a long, flourishing life is being involved in a religious community and practicing one's faith in that community.⁴⁶

Religiosity also significantly impacts various dimensions of health and wellbeing. Chen, Kim, and VanderWeele conducted a rigorous study exploring how religious service attendance relates to physical health, healthy behaviors, psychological distress, and psychological wellbeing among adults. The results showed that participants who attended religious service at least once in one week had a 26 percent lower chance of all-cause mortality, were 34 percent less likely to engage in heavy drinking, and were 29 percent less likely to be current smokers compared to those who never attended.⁴⁷ Further, they found that service attendance was inversely related to different indices of psychological distress—depression, anxiety, hopelessness, loneliness—and positively correlated with psychosocial wellbeing.⁴⁸ These findings show that the practice of faith can strengthen the force in multiple ways.

Likewise, in VanderWeele's address to the Air Force Chaplain Corps, he argued that consistent religious attendance is more of a predictor of better health overall than spiritual practices practiced in isolation. Regularly practicing faith in a community

⁴⁵ VanderWeele, "Religious Communities and Human Flourishing," 478.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ying Chen, Eric S. Kim, and Tyler J. VanderWeele, "Religious-Service Attendance and Subsequent Health and Well-Being throughout Adulthood: Evidence from Three Prospective Cohorts," *International Journal of Epidemiology* 49, no. 6 (January 23, 2021): 2035.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2036.

provides numerous health benefits.⁴⁹ VanderWeele further argues that encouraging communal religious attendance is equally or more important than privately practiced faith for long-term resiliency.⁵⁰ Marino Bruce et al.'s research concurs. They studied the relationship between religious service attendance and all-cause mortality among older Black men and found that those attending religious services one or more times per week had a significantly reduced risk of all-cause mortality compared to those who did not attend.⁵¹ This shows that private spiritual practices pale in comparison to communal religious practices. For the Chaplain Corps, this should underscore the importance of conducting communal religious rites, sacraments, and services for their members; however, it remains important to realize that spiritual growth and formation in service members requires more than simply practicing one's faith in community.

Spiritual Formation

Incorporating communal religious practices in life has already been shown to bring about a flourishing life, but one must do more than just attend; one needs to engage. The Christian chaplain's role is to guide and lead the members in their care, forming those entrusted to them to become disciples of Jesus Christ. This requires both Christian education and spiritual formation. One cannot be formed without being educated; however, one can be educated without being formed.

⁴⁹ Tyler J VanderWeele, "Religious Communities, Health, and Well-Being – Address to the US Air Force Chaplain," *Military Medicine* 183, no. 5–6 (May 1, 2018): 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁵¹ Marino A. Bruce et al., "Religious Service Attendance and Mortality among Older Black Men," *PLOS ONE* 17, no. 9 (September 2, 2022): 9.

Ashlee Crawford argues that spiritual formation in the Christian's life requires finding peace in God through spiritual community and practicing the presence of God through spiritual disciplines, focusing on God as the center of their being.⁵² However, many Christians, even those who have been in church for decades, often do not know what spiritual formation is, according to Tania van Dongen.⁵³

As part of her research, Van Dongen took a group of church members who had been in her church for over ten years through a spiritual formation journey and found that most members did not understand what spiritual formation was.⁵⁴ They attended church regularly but had not taken the next step for spiritual development. Van Dongen found a statistically significant discrepancy between how participants valued Scripture and how much they interacted with it.⁵⁵ Additionally, she found, like Koenig has found, that long-term regular involvement in a community builds up their spiritual formation.⁵⁶ The main conclusion from her work was that the solution to spiritual formation is to “teach Scripture, teach and practice the spiritual disciplines, and disciple new believers in the application of the Word by setting an example of what living a transformed life looks

⁵² Ashlee Alley Crawford, “Clergy Spiritual Transformation: From Depletion to Pastoral Presence,” (DMin proj., Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, 2023), 145, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

⁵³ Tania van Dongen, “Knowing and Loving God: A Spiritual Formation Journey,” (DMin proj., Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, 2023), 102, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 109; Koenig, “‘Spiritual Readiness’ in the U.S. Military,” 1561–77.

like.”⁵⁷ Training people to find God through spiritual formation is essential to their development as Christians.

In his article on the future of Christian spiritual formation, Steve Porter describes the difference between spirituality and Christian spiritual formation, giving definitions to both. He posits that spirituality is how spiritual formation occurs, but Christian spiritual formation focuses on becoming more Christ-like.⁵⁸ He argues that for real formation to occur, one must know what formation is while simultaneously experiencing that knowledge. He describes knowledge without experience as “ceasing to be anything.”⁵⁹ Teaching spiritual formation remains crucial for developing Christians. Porter argues that destroying barriers to that knowledge is important for pastors and teachers to do for their students, but that seeking the Kingdom first is not a matter of the mind but of the heart.⁶⁰ David Setran and Jim Wilhoit agree that spiritual formation and Christian education go hand in hand: one needs to be educated and then put that education into practice.⁶¹

Chuck Miller discusses the practice of spiritual formation by describing the necessity of spending time in what he calls the “inner room.” He uses a pitcher, cup, saucer, and plate metaphor to describe the spiritual formation process.⁶² One must learn

⁵⁷ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁸ Steve L. Porter, “The Future of Christian Spiritual Formation,” *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 16, no. 1 (May 2023): 5.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 8.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 11.

⁶¹ David Setran and Jim Wilhoit, “Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: Recent History and Future Prospects,” *Christian Education Journal: Research on Educational Ministry* 17, no. 3 (December 2020): 536.

⁶² Chuck Miller, *The Spiritual Transformation of Leaders* (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2007), 22.

to trust and live in the presence of God as one relies on His pitcher to pour out the Spirit, which will overflow out of the cup and pour into the saucer and the plate. The key, though, is not relying on one's strength but on the strength of God to guide and lead. This book shows that formation needs to happen continuously, both for service members and chaplains.⁶³

The Role of Habits in Christian Spiritual Formation

Formation unfolds over a significant period of time. Establishing routines and habits remain essential to spiritual formation. Learning about eating a good diet and exercising, for example, is often the first step to getting into shape. The challenging part, however, is eating healthily and maintaining a consistent workout routine. Setting up habits and routines helps transform individuals.

Charles Duhigg's research on habit formation and its ripple effect on personal growth, community development, and organizational transformation suggests that habits are the key to a good life. He introduces the concept of the “habit loop,” a simple framework involving a cue, a routine, and a reward.⁶⁴ This loop is a process by which someone is triggered by a cue that initiates a routine that leads to a reward. Most often, this happens in the subconscious, and most are not aware of it happening. This cycle is foundational in crafting and reshaping one's habits. He argues that people can swap detrimental habits for positive ones by identifying the root of these loops and making

⁶³ Miller, *The Spiritual Transformation of Leaders*, 313.

⁶⁴ Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), 19.

minor modifications to them.⁶⁵ Duhigg demonstrates how habits dictate every aspect of one's existence and shows that, by mastering this knowledge, people can transform their lives.⁶⁶

James Clear concurs with Duhigg. In *Atomic Habits*, Clear notes how small, consistent changes in one's daily routines can significantly impact spiritual growth, which provides a practical framework for understanding this transformative process. Clear argues that one's habits shape one's identity and goes so far as asserting that one's habits are the foundation of one's identity.⁶⁷ Clear's concept closely aligns with spiritual formation principles, which advocate for the daily practice of biblical meditation, prayer, and expressions of gratitude to foster spiritual growth and redefine one's essence.

Clear's approach builds on Duhigg's in that it adds to the cue, routine, and reward cycle by identifying it as a cue, craving, response, and reward cycle. This underscores the importance of the craving after the cue by giving it its own step. Individuals can cultivate spiritual disciplines by understanding the triggers for deeper spiritual engagement. This shows that the journey of spiritual formation is marked by gradual, intentional steps that lead to significant personal transformation and a deeper spiritual identity.

Michael Hyatt takes a slightly different approach than that championed by Duhigg and Clear. Hyatt focuses not on individual habits but on routines. He describes the morning routine before work, the workday startup, the workday close-down, and the

⁶⁵ Duhigg, *The Power of Habit*, 64.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 273.

⁶⁷ James Clear, *Atomic Habits: Tiny Changes, Remarkable Results: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2018), 40.

wind-down routine.⁶⁸ He describes how making a systematized approach to one's routines will shape a person far better than trying to start a habit by itself.⁶⁹ Similarly, Robin Sharma argues that a routine of waking up early, such as at 5:00 a.m., leads to many other healthy routines. His 20, 20, 20 methods of exercise, working on oneself, and reflection tie directly into Christian spiritual development.⁷⁰ Waking up early and working out right away for 20 minutes helps wake up the body and mind,⁷¹ which then enables one to study Scripture for 20 minutes, followed by 20 minutes of reflection and journaling, leading to life change over time. Routines are a group of habits that make each habit easier to complete. Following them helps one get into a rhythm that some authors, such as Cal Newport, call “flow.”

Newport argues that, to get into a state of “flow,” one must follow a routine, which will assist in getting oneself into the right mindset.⁷² He also argues that setting up mental or physical barriers, like putting one’s phone in another room or separating oneself from distractions, will help an individual get into a state of flow.⁷³ The same holds true for getting into a state of religious flow; one must follow a liturgy. When a

⁶⁸ Michael Hyatt, *No-Fail Habits: Design the Daily Rituals That Help You Win at Work and Succeed at Life* (Franklin, TN: Michael Hyatt & Co., 2020), 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Robin S. Sharma, *The 5 AM Club: Own Your Morning, Elevate Your Life* (Toronto, Ontario, Canada: HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2018), 109.

⁷¹ Ibid., 50.

⁷² Cal Newport, *Deep Work: Rules for Focused Success in a Distracted World* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2016), 84.

⁷³ Ibid., 86.

person endeavors to become transformed, it remains important to get into this state of flow to find God.

Justin Early borrows concepts from Newport, Clear, and Duhigg in his book *Habits of the Household*, where he describes how spiritually based habits and routines can impact generations of families.⁷⁴ Early argues that families can leverage their daily habits or routines for spiritual development, leading to radical transformation. He outlines ten habits that families can integrate spiritual disciplines into, including waking, mealtimes, screen time, work, play, conversation, and bedtime.⁷⁵ He rightly observes how incorporating spiritual practices into existing routines is easier than establishing entirely new ones.

Ruth Haley Barton delves into the world of spiritual formation through routines and habits by focusing on key spiritual disciplines, which she refers to as “rhythms.” She discusses several vital spiritual disciplines, including solitude, silence, prayer, Sabbath, self-examination, and discernment.⁷⁶ For each discipline, she provides a biblical basis and then offers practical tools for implementation. Barton articulates that these rhythms help create a new heart. She argues that one of her primary rhythms is the discipline of silence for seeking a deeper knowledge of God.⁷⁷ In her writing, she invites people to come and

⁷⁴ Justin Whitmel Earley, *Habits of the Household: Practicing the Story of God in Everyday Family Rhythms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021), 24.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁷⁶ R. Ruth Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 192.

⁷⁷ R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Solitude and Silence: Experiencing God’s Transforming Presence*, Expanded ed (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 31.

know God through the silence where He meets them. Like Newport, she suggests that deep work can occur by following a routine and entering a state of silence. She encourages people to remove distractions and be open to letting God guide them on a spiritual journey.

The Role of Culture in Christian Spiritual Formation

Another crucial aspect to consider in developing habits and routines is the role of culture. The central thesis of Roger Connors and Tom Smith's *Change the Culture, Change the Game*, is that every organization has a culture, and to achieve different results, one must first shift the organization's beliefs from their current state to a new set of beliefs.⁷⁸ The author describes this through what he calls the "results pyramid," where beliefs form the base and actions change as one ascends the pyramid, leading to different results.⁷⁹ Every Christian brings their cultural background to the table, which shapes them. It remains imperative to consider how one's background culture impacts long-term shaping.

Patrick Lencioni discusses how four disciplines form the basis of a healthy culture within organizations. The first is building a cohesive leadership team; the second is creating clarity, then over-communicating that clarity, and finally, reinforcing transparency.⁸⁰ Lencioni believes that implementing these four simple disciplines can

⁷⁸ Roger Connors and Tom Smith, *Change the Culture, Change the Game: The Breakthrough Strategy for Energizing Your Organization and Creating Accountability for Results* (New York: Portfolio Penguin, 2011), 85.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 86.

⁸⁰ Patrick Lencioni, *The Advantage: Why Organizational Health Trumps Everything Else in Business* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 94.

transform an organization, setting it apart. This principle also applies within the Christian context. A church or chapel with a healthy culture will encourage and support the spiritual formation of its members. Conversely, an unhealthy culture can hinder this development, potentially leading to stagnation among individuals or causing them to leave the church altogether, much like businesses that lose their top talent.

Culture is the most influential aspect of someone's life, and understanding how to create and change culture is crucial for retreat leaders. C. Douglas McConnell argues that one must view culture through a missional lens. He examines various missionaries within cultural contexts who make mistakes due to their lack of cultural understanding.⁸¹ He then guides readers on how to avoid these mistakes. When conducting a retreat, people from diverse backgrounds will be present, and ensuring that the correct environment is safely created is key to success. Understanding the cultural context of the retreat participants is imperative for achieving any type of change that one aims to accomplish. Once someone understands how to shift culture, they need to comprehend what to shift it to. This is where the role of spiritual disciplines comes into play.

The Role of Spiritual Disciplines on Christian Spiritual Formation

In the Christian tradition, spiritual formation refers to the process by which the innermost part of a human being, namely the heart or the spirit, is transformed so that its instinctive expressions reflect Christ's teachings.⁸² John Ortberg's book *Soul Keeping*

⁸¹ C. Douglas McConnell, *Cultural Insights for Christian Leaders: New Directions for Organizations Serving God's Mission* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 23.

⁸² Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco, CA: Harper One, 2006), 69.

emphasizes the importance of nurturing one's soul by exploring the intricate relationships between the will, mind, and body.⁸³ This book is dedicated to Dallas Willard, Ortberg's mentor, who advocated for Christians to rid their lives of the incessant rush that impedes their spiritual journey. Ortberg introduces the concept of "the ruthless elimination of hurry."⁸⁴ He argues that to develop spiritually, one must eliminate hurry from one's life and learn to live in the present moment to see God at work. A critical aspect of spiritual development involves shedding the constant need to hurry, as this prevents deep work and precludes the soul from drawing on the well of God's grace.⁸⁵

This incessant desire to eliminate hurry from life stems from Willard's work as a theologian. Willard believed that as the radical grace of Jesus Christ transforms individuals, they enter a new way of living, and a vast ocean of experience awaits them.⁸⁶ In his work, he does not delve into the deeply practical side of the disciplines but recommends reading Richard Foster for that aspect. Instead, Willard explores the deep theological truths of the disciplines, which he describes in the following way: "The necessity for such disciplines comes from the very nature of the self in the image of God."⁸⁷ Once the individual, through divine initiative, becomes alive to God and His Kingdom, the extent of integration of his or her total being into that Kingdom order

⁸³ John Ortberg, *Soul Keeping: Caring for the Most Important Part of You* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 34.

⁸⁴ Ortberg, *Soul Keeping*, 134.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 2.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 68.

significantly depends on the individual's initiative.⁸⁸ Willard places the onus on the individual to grow deeper with the Lord as the Lord calls. One is not saved through works but grows deeper in the world by focusing on the disciplines. Willard goes on to examine the disciplines of abstinence and engagement. As he writes, he provides deep insight into each discipline from his standing as a theologian, making his contributions to the literature on spiritual disciplines invaluable.

Where Willard focuses on the theology of spiritual disciplines as a theologian, Kenneth Boa emphasizes their practical application. Boa offers an in-depth exploration of Christian spiritual growth. He examines the process of being shaped into the likeness of Christ by breaking down spiritual formation into twelve facets of spirituality. He defines spiritual formation as the grace-driven development process in which the soul grows in conformity to the image of Christ.⁸⁹ In each chapter, he unpacks what that facet means for the believer and how they can embody it daily to become more Christlike. Boa reinforces that everyone is different and encourages readers to explore and embrace practices that resonate with their unique journey with God.

Richard Foster is one of the foremost experts in Christian spiritual formation. His *Celebration of Discipline* is considered the premier book in the field and remains widely used for spiritual formation. Foster categorizes the disciplines into three groups—inward, outward, and corporate—and describes how each discipline impacts the believer and

⁸⁸ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 68.

⁸⁹ Kenneth Boa, *Conformed to His Image: Biblical, Practical Approaches to Spiritual Formation*, Revised edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 515.

those around them.⁹⁰ He delves into the details of each discipline and provides guidance for their practice. His discussions on disciplines such as meditation, prayer, fasting, and simplicity draw people into a deeper relationship with God in a holistic style of spirituality. Foster integrates older Christian practices with newer applications, offering practical tools for believers seeking to live disciplined lives. What is remarkable about his book is its wide acceptance across denominational divides.

Donald Whitney takes a more academic approach. He introduces ten different disciplines, providing background and practices for each one. He defines spiritual disciplines as “those personal and corporate disciplines that promote spiritual growth.”⁹¹ His focus on the spiritual disciplines is to bring one closer to God and foster closer relationships with one another. In his concluding chapter, he emphasizes the concept of *koinonia*, which centers on the Christian community.

He asserts that, as people draw closer to God, they will grow in their godliness, and as they grow in godliness, they begin to view the disciplines as a source of delight.⁹² Jesus calls people into a holy communion together, which is on a much deeper level than anything the world can provide. Whitney emphasizes the necessity for spiritual disciplines to lead to godliness, which, when practiced in the community, fosters *koinonia*—a deep sense of belonging and love found only within Christian relationships

⁹⁰ Richard J. Foster and Kathryn A. Helmers, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, Study guide ed (London: Hodder, 2008), 3.

⁹¹ Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, Revised and Updated (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2014), 5.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 300.

with a mutual longing to become more Christlike.⁹³ This mutual longing to be Christlike is the culture that leads to life transformation.

One way for churches to measure this culture and transformation process is to assess the discipleship taking place within the church. When people are given an assessment, discipleship can be studied and analyzed in the congregation. Charlie Self developed an assessment that does just that. *Discipleship Dynamics* outlines five dimensions and thirty-five outcomes to guide believers in their development of becoming Christlike.⁹⁴ His work challenges churches and leaders to take discipleship seriously and make it a priority. When Christianity is practiced in a community on a consistent basis, transformation occurs.

The Role of Retreats on Christian Spiritual Formation

Theologians have also explored how to cultivate the koinonia community in a retreat setting. Barton argues that spiritual retreats are indispensable for spiritual and personal growth. She contends that retreats are not merely optional but essential practices for anyone seeking deeper communion with God.⁹⁵ Barton includes “Practicing Retreat” sections at the end of each chapter to help retreatants practically engage in transformative experiences. Her approach, which integrates physical exercise, engagement with poetry, and fixed-hour prayers, ensures participants have a holistic retreat experience.⁹⁶

⁹³ Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines*, 302.

⁹⁴ Charlie Self, Johan Mostert, and Jame Bolds, *Life in 5-D: A New Vision of Wholeness* (N.p.: 5D Press, 2022), 87.

⁹⁵ R. Ruth Barton, *Invitation to Retreat: The Gift and Necessity of Time Away with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2018), 7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

Building successful spiritual disciplines remains integral to spiritual formation, and retreats offer a powerful setting to accomplish this. Regina Proctor discovered this when she conducted a retreat and three-month discipleship course for her church.⁹⁷ While she organized a one-day retreat and introduced various new spiritual formation techniques and modalities, she did not allocate enough time to teach and allow for sufficient reflection and application. She acknowledged that, if given another opportunity, she would double the retreat time and provide instruction on the essence and objectives of spiritual formation.⁹⁸ While new experiences for participants benefit learning, most individuals will revert to their neural pathways unless habits are formed and they feel comfortable with the new practices.⁹⁹ While knowledge of spiritual disciplines is one component of a multi-legged stool, reflection and practice are equally essential. Otherwise, neural pathways will not develop, and transformation will not occur.¹⁰⁰

Teaching and practicing spiritual disciplines have a transformative effect on people's lives. In his dissertation on teaching spiritual disciplines to his church, Steven Hill focuses on instructing members on five spiritual disciplines and providing a

⁹⁷ Regina B. Proctor, "Knowing God through Spiritual Practices and Spiritual Direction" (DMin proj., Garrett Evangelical Theological Seminary, Evanston, IL, 2020), 105, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 110.

practicum for each.¹⁰¹ He discovered that out of his eighty-one participants, each experienced learning as evidenced by pre- and post-class assessments. However, he also found that knowledge alone of the spiritual disciplines was insufficient—the disciplines needed to be translated into practice. He found that after teaching about the disciplines and hosting a reunion later, over half of the participants (53 percent) began participating in small groups, where they could continue practicing what they had learned.¹⁰² The emphasis on spiritual disciplines profoundly impacted his church so they purchased a campground for spiritual retreats.¹⁰³ Hill concludes that to sustain learning, there needs to be a relational and liturgical aspect to education. Joining a small group afterward was crucial for the transformation to take root.

The Role of Spiritual Modalities on Christian Spiritual Formation

Practicing spiritual modalities is key to one's experience on a spiritual retreat. These experiences include breathing, worship, awe, mind-body, and experiential learning. In their review of 2,461 articles on slow breathing, Andrea Zaccaro et al. found that slow breathing, or six breaths per minute, can have substantial psychophysiological outcomes.¹⁰⁴ They discovered that slowing one's breathing causes the heart rate to decline and calms the central nervous system. The brain waves in the cortical and subcortical

¹⁰¹ Steven Chad Hill, “A Discipleship Program That Introduces Five Spiritual Disciplines to the Laity of Trinity Church in Warm Springs, Georgia” (DMin proj., Regent University, Virginia, 2023), 174, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

¹⁰² Ibid., 176.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 182.

¹⁰⁴ Andrea Zaccaro et al., “How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life: A Systematic Review on Psycho-Physiological Correlates of Slow Breathing,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience* 12, no. 353 (September 7, 2018): 1.

structures are increased, leading to “increased comfort, relaxation, vigor, and alertness, and reduces the negative symptoms of arousal, anxiety, depression, anger, and confusion.”¹⁰⁵ The military has been using these techniques for decades, teaching divers, snipers, and special operators the box technique of breathing to remain focused on the task when in a high stress environment.¹⁰⁶ However, practicing slow breathing in conjunction with meditation on God's Word or during a transformative worship gathering can be a powerful experience in a retreat setting.

Rory Noland argues about the importance of the transformative power of weekly church gatherings. Worship is a routine part of church life and a fundamental catalyst for change, particularly in the fight against nominal Christianity. Noland argues that when worship is designed as a purposeful, formative encounter with God, it can radically shape and mold participants, guiding them to live out their faith as committed followers of Christ.¹⁰⁷ Integrating classical spiritual practices like communion, prayer calls to worship, and benedictions within the structure of gathered worship helps deepen the spiritual substance of worship services. The service should lead to spiritual transformation and equip believers with the tools, insights, and experiences necessary to navigate the complexities of modern life while staying true to their faith.¹⁰⁸ These experiences during worship help evoke a sense of awe connected to spiritual resiliency.

¹⁰⁵ Zaccaro et al., “How Breath-Control Can Change Your Life,” 1.

¹⁰⁶ Stefan Röttger et al., “The Effectiveness of Combat Tactical Breathing as Compared with Prolonged Exhalation,” *Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback* 46, no. 1 (March 2021): 19.

¹⁰⁷ Rory Noland, *Transforming Worship: Planning and Leading Sunday Services as If Spiritual Formation Mattered* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2021), 11.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 14.

In their study of awe and spirituality, Jesse Preston and Faith Shin found that awe is directly connected with spirituality. They conducted five consecutive studies that analyzed the effect of awe on both religious and non-religious persons. Preston and Shin identified eight types of experiences that induce awe:

- 1) Religious experiences, where experience had a direct connection to an explicit religious activity or belief (e.g., attending church)
- 2) Life and death experiences (e.g., birth of a child, death of a loved one)
- 3) Experiences in nature (e.g., hiking, stargazing)
- 4) Connection with others (e.g., meeting a spouse, coordinated group dancing)
- 5) Peak experiences (e.g., riding a motorcycle, psychedelic drugs)
- 6) Meditation/yoga
- 7) Science (e.g., watching “Cosmos”) and
- 8) Other (not categorizable).¹⁰⁹

They also found that while religious and non-religious persons had experiences of awe, religious people were more likely to experience awe than non-religious persons.¹¹⁰ This study shows that developing a retreat setting with multiple diverse ways to experience God remains important. Whether through a religious experience or something else, it is important to develop a retreat setting that allows for experiencing and remembering awe.

Ken Nelson, David Ronka, and Lesli Lang Nelson offer immense research behind what makes a retreat transformational. They argue that life transformation is possible through mind-body experiences.¹¹¹ Mind-body experiences are defined as “holistic practices that integrate physical and mental activities to foster deep personal growth and

¹⁰⁹ Jesse L. Preston and Faith Shin, “Spiritual Experiences Evoke Awe through the Small Self in Both Religious and Non-Religious Individuals,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* 70 (May 2017): 215.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 216.

¹¹¹ Ken Nelson, David Ronka, and Lesli Lang, *Designing & Leading Life-Changing Workshops: Creating the Conditions for Transformation in Your Groups, Trainings, and Retreats* (Kittery Point, ME: Cliffhouse Press, 2020), 61.

transformation.”¹¹² Using modalities such as mindfulness, meditation, yoga, prayer, singing, and chanting, they are able to enhance the self-awareness, emotional regulation, and overall well-being of their retreatants. Their work also provides key details on how to set up a life-transforming workshop, providing practical illustrations at the beginning and end of every chapter.

Flavio Artigas also emphasizes the need for experiential learning in the discipleship context, which he asserts achieves compassion changes. The experiential activities in his research led participants to change how they see people in general. Artigas could see life change in his participants by focusing on the gospel's transformative power. If his findings were to be extrapolated for all discipleship activities, the church could build a practical discipleship pipeline by focusing on experiential and transformative learning and embodying the gospel of Jesus Christ.¹¹³

Transformative Learning

One of the most powerful transformative learning models developed for spiritual development in the past century is the Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) model. The CPE educational model focuses on action, reflection, and new action to train and develop spiritual care providers.¹¹⁴ In CPE, a resident is a fully trained seminary student or graduate who understands that they have much to learn within the clinical setting. Each

¹¹² Nelson, David Ronka, and Lesli Lang, *Designing & Leading Life-Changing Workshops*, 61.

¹¹³ Flavio Ricardo Hasten Reiter Artigas, “Experiential Discipleship: Compassion Changes Through Experiential Learning” (DMin proj., Asbury Theological Seminary, Kentucky, 2023), 144, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global.

¹¹⁴ Gordon J. Hilsman, *How to Get the Most out of Clinical Pastoral Education: A CPE Primer* (Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018), 23.

group comprises a small cohort of 6 to 7 students who journey through the hospital for three months together. They write a weekly theological reflection and submit it to the leader each week. They meet one-on-one with the leader for spiritual direction and to discuss group dynamics, pastoral care, or the stresses of life.

Additionally, each week, the group discusses 3 to 6 pastoral care visits, and each member presents a verbatim or case study from a pastoral care visit, requiring substantial reflection on their thoughts and feelings during the moment and their theological reflection after the visit. The group then reviews that case study with the individual and asks questions to help them see their blind spots in their practical ministry. This can be a very trying time for many pastors, who may feel attacked. However, it develops humility and trust among the cohort and allows for spiritual formation through personal reflection, practice of ministry, one-on-one direction, and group formation. By examining the transformative qualities of CPE, one can learn how to develop and lead an equally transformative retreat.

Definitions of Transformative Learning

A life-changing retreat depends on transformative learning. Patricia Cranton defines *transformative learning* as “a process by which previously uncritically assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned, thereby becoming more open, permeable, and better validated.”¹¹⁵ Similarly, Andrew Kitchenham defines it as an active process that encourages seeing new things, seeing old

¹¹⁵ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, 3rd edition (Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing, 2016), 39.

things differently, and re-conceptualizing mindsets.¹¹⁶ Jack Mezirow and Edward Taylor, however, emphasize that transformative learning turns negative frameworks into positive ones: “Transformative learning is defined as the process by which we transform problematic frames of reference (mindsets, habits of mind, meaning perspectives)—sets of assumption and expectation—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change.”¹¹⁷ They add that positive perspectives will impact choices and actions, as well as beliefs and opinions.¹¹⁸ In designing spiritual retreats, it remains important to consider participants’ frames of reference since many come with mindsets that need shifting.

Transformative Learning Models

In designing a transformative retreat, it remains helpful to consider various models of learning and pedagogy. One of the most influential scholars and educators in the twentieth century was Benjamin Bloom. Bloom developed Bloom's Taxonomy, a model that examines how humans learn and grow. His model, developed in the early 1950s, was created to “codify the learning objectives set for their students.”¹¹⁹ For over seventy years, Bloom's Taxonomy has been one of the most used tools for assessing the effectiveness of a class or curriculum. Bloom's six levels of learning, which stair-step and

¹¹⁶ Andrew Kitchenham, “The Evolution of John Mezirow’s Transformative Learning Theory,” *Journal of Transformative Education* 6, no. 2 (April 1, 2008): 104.

¹¹⁷ Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor, *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 79.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Niall McNulty, *Blooms Taxonomy Reimagined: Digital Strategies for Today's Teachers* (N.p.: Amazon, 2020), 4.

become more challenging as one delves deeper, include remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating.¹²⁰ Niall McNulty argues that the goal is to have students actively interact with the learning and apply it to the real world rather than just absorb the information.¹²¹ The same principle applies in a retreat setting where the aim is for retreatants to interact with the information and apply it to their lives, leading to transformation.

Jack Mezirow's model goes more in-depth than Bloom's Taxonomy in that it describes ten phases that people go through as they shift their perspective and experience transformation:

1. Experiencing a disorienting dilemma
2. Undergoing self-examination
3. Conducting a critical assessment of internalized assumptions and feeling alienated from traditional social expectations
4. Relating discontent to the similar experience of others—recognizing that the problem is shared
5. Exploring options for new ways of acting
6. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles
7. Planning a course of action
8. Acquiring the knowledge and skills for implementing a new course of action
9. Trying out new roles and assessing them
10. Reintegrating into society with a new perspective.¹²²

Mezirow emphasizes that reflection is crucial to get students into a transformative learning mindset and believes that one of the most important aspects of adult education is the ability to reflect critically on what is being learned. Having learners reflect, validate,

¹²⁰ McNulty, *Blooms Taxonomy Reimagined*, 8.

¹²¹ Ibid., 50.

¹²² Jack Mezirow and Edward W. Taylor, *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 19.

and then change their beliefs, values, or presuppositions is essential to adult learning.¹²³

Within the realm of spiritual development and learning, then, students must question and come to their understanding of their spiritual growth.

Gary Borich and Angelica Blanchette are educational researchers who specialize in teaching methods for children and adolescents; however, they offer insights that remain useful for transformational learning in adults as well. They assert that teaching is about the student applying the learning and walking away having learned something, which they call the “success rate,” and those who are actively engaged will have a much higher success rate.¹²⁴ They go into depth on how to encourage engagement by providing practical recommendations.¹²⁵ Their work remains important for retreats because it highlights the need for student engagement for true learning. By applying their findings, retreats can avoid the problem of being preaching-focused, where little time is given to applying the material in the retreatants' lives. Helping retreat participants apply the information they learn remains key to them truly learning.

James and Wendy Kirkpatrick are also modern educators focused primarily on training at corporations and other work-centered education. Over the years, the Kirkpatricks have developed a model called Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation to evaluate whether teaching has been effective. The first level, reaction,

¹²³ Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” in *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 89.

¹²⁴ Gary D. Borich and Angelica D. Blanchette, *Effective Teaching Methods: Research-Based Practice*, 10th edition (Hoboken, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc, 2022), 12.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

focuses on whether the students enjoyed the training. This is usually determined by a short exit survey people take at the end of a training session.¹²⁶ The second level, learning, focuses on whether the learning process began and if learning transfer occurred. This is done using Bloom's Taxonomy to see if learning transfer occurred. The third level, impact, looks at whether the training changed the individual's behavior or if the individual reverted to their previous state. This is assessed through practice and observation.¹²⁷ The final level, results, focuses on whether the corporation has noticed a difference in the performance of the individual and, ultimately, if this difference is leading to a more profitable venture. They emphasize that learning is about more than just obtaining knowledge; it requires applying that knowledge and seeing the result of the training. The same is true with spiritual formation training or resiliency training. It is not enough to train to knowledge; it must go from the head to the heart.

Transformative Learning Applied to a Religious Context

Having a facilitator trained in transformative learning theory remains essential for ensuring that retreat participants engage in reflection and meaning-making, as illustrated by the experience of Lufi Kartika Sari, who applied transformative learning theory to a group of pre-service teachers in Indonesia. After the teachers' disorienting experience of teaching in a part of Indonesia that differed from their upbringing, Sari interviewed them and asked about their experiences. This interview and time to reflect helped stimulate

¹²⁶ James D. Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, *Kirkpatrick's Four Levels of Training Evaluation* (Alexandria, VA: ATD Press, 2016), 16.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

some life changes in the teachers.¹²⁸ Applied to a retreat setting, asking each participant questions after an experiential modality will help them assimilate their experience.

Transformational learning researchers have been expanding their research into soul work, sustainability, discrimination training, teaching abroad, and others. The focus has been producing disorienting perspective shifts in students. For example, a teacher who has always taught in a high-income area may experience a perspective shift when teaching in a lower-income area for a semester. Or a student attending an Ivy League school may study abroad and realize the profound differences in educational experiences others have. Research has identified that these perspective shifts occur daily in different fields of study.¹²⁹ In applying this to a retreat setting, leaders may introduce participants to disorienting spiritual experiences or concepts and then allow participants to practice and reflect on them. The goal would be for the disorientation to produce learning.

Vicki Wiltse also argues for transformative learning theory in a religious context. She asserts that transformative learning can incorporate a holistic approach involving the whole person, including their mind, emotions, spirituality, and sociocultural context.¹³⁰ Teaching spiritual topics inherently involves transformative learning because spirituality is so enmeshed with other areas of one's life. Engaging spirituality is bound to touch on

¹²⁸ Lufi Kartika Sari et al., "Pre-Service Teachers' Changes in Perspective: A Transformative Learning Experience During Teaching Practice in Remote Areas," *Journal of Transformative Education* 21, no. 3 (July 2023): 373.

¹²⁹ Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton, eds., *The Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, Jossey-Bass Higher and Adult Education Series (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 3.

¹³⁰ Vicki Wiltse, "Transformative Learning in Religious Education Contexts" (paper, Claremont School of Theology, October 2, 2009), 45.

emotions and cultural issues.¹³¹ Since topics covered in faith-based retreats tend to be deeply spiritual, it makes sense to incorporate transformative learning theory when designing retreats.

Transformative Learning Theory Applied to Retreat Settings

Transformative learning needs to be applied for it to be effective. Niall McNulty provides a reference guide on incorporating transformative learning theory into the classroom. Taking his step-by-step approach, one can create a plan to apply it to a retreat setting.¹³² As it relates to spiritual disciplines and applying the learning, a student would be introduced to the concept (remembering and understanding) and then begin to practice the concept in concrete ways (applying), followed by introspection and journaling about the experience (analyzing and evaluating), and finally pair sharing and group sharing in which each member can confess and share their experience and how they plan to move forward with that experience.¹³³ Notice that when applied, minimal lecturing is involved.

In James Farley, Evan Risko, and Alan Kingstone's research on lecturing and memory retention, they study the effects of mind wandering during a lecture and examines the effect of fidgeting during the same time frame. They found that as lecture time increases, memory retention decreases.¹³⁴ They also discovered that as time increased, fidgeting also increased, which helps maintain attention when one becomes

¹³¹ Wiltse, "Transformative Learning," 45.

¹³² McNulty, *Blooms Taxonomy Reimagined*, 5.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ James Farley, Evan F. Risko, and Alan Kingstone, "Everyday Attention and Lecture Retention: The Effects of Time, Fidgeting, and Mind Wandering," *Frontiers in Psychology* 4, no. 619 (2013): 8.

disinterested.¹³⁵ The researchers conclude that looking for clues of fidgeting remains imperative as it allows the teacher to change pacing or take a break. In a retreat setting, the key is experiential activities where people are less likely to mind wander and fidget. This will increase retention for the group.

The single most important aspect of transformative learning theory is achieving results. The Bob Pike Group focuses on training toward results and believes that training is ineffective if there are no results. The same is true for spiritual formation training. If there are no results, the training is fruitless. They emphasize four concepts when teaching: closers, openers, revisitors, and energizers.¹³⁶ They believe that every time a topic is introduced, it is important to catch people's attention through an opener, which can be a game or an icebreaker. However, opening the topic in a way that catches attention remains crucial. As teaching progresses and people start to lose interest, it is important to revisit the material at least three times in a meaningful way to help them remember the material. It is also important to observe the audience's body language and notice when their attention is declining. During those times, it is vital to do an energizer to raise the energy level and get participants back into the game.¹³⁷ Finally, as the class ends, it is vital to close it with a closer wrap-up and provide a clear demarcation line for the students regarding what is ending. This simple approach developed by the Bob Pike Group offers an effective way to achieve results in a retreat setting.

¹³⁵ Farley, Risko, and Kingstone, "Everyday Attention and Lecture Retention," 8.

¹³⁶ Becky Pluth, *Creative Training: A Train-The-Trainer Field Guide* (Bloomington, MN: Creative Training Productions LLC, 2022), 64.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 113.

Conclusion

The military is shifting its mindset from an insurgency conflict to a near-peer conflict paradigm. Future wars will test military members more than at any time in history. Chaplains at all levels must assess the best way to develop their spiritual fitness. Contemporary research shows that for those members who have faith, it is the best avenue available to strengthen their spiritual fitness.

Understanding Christian spiritual formation assists in developing a plan and program to address the core needs of military members. Habits, routines, and culture all play a part in the formation process, and space was given to assess their role and how to utilize them to their best effectiveness. Spiritual disciplines and spiritual modalities that can be used in a retreat setting were also studied to help show that they are powerful tools in formation.

Finally, a great need exists to improve teaching practices in the contexts of church, school, and the military. Ministry leaders, educators, and chaplains would benefit from exploring transformative learning theory. Leaders cannot remain satisfied with the status quo in an era of declining church attendance, lower higher education enrollments, and decreasing numbers of military recruits. They must move beyond traditional lecture-based teaching methods and embrace other innovative approaches that reach today's airmen. By incorporating these practices into educational settings, chaplains can create memorable and effective learning experiences that help airmen grow. With war on the horizon, the stakes are too great to continue the current spiritual fitness trajectory of the force; transformation is the answer.

CHAPTER 4: DESCRIPTION OF FIELD PROJECT

Introduction

This chapter discusses the preparation, implementation, results, and implications of the project to cultivate spiritual resiliency for military members through a two-day, nine-hour experiential and transformative learning faith-based retreat in the greater Eglin AFB area. The project used the Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale to quantify spiritual fitness among participants at three different intervals to evaluate the retreat's immediate and sustained effects in three key areas: personal connection with a higher power (PCHP), pursuing meaning, purpose, and value (PMPV), and service and sacrifice for the greater good (SSGG). Qualitative feedback on the retreat was also gathered through a separate evaluation given at the conclusion of the retreat.

Preparation of the Project

In February 2024, I began to prepare for project implementation, which would happen in the summer. I focused a significant portion of my general literature review on experiential and transformative learning to acquire the skills necessary to conduct the retreat. Upon completing my rough draft of the general literature review in early May, I transitioned to developing the material to host the retreat.

Development of Leader's Guide/Participant Handouts

After researching transformative learning, I set out to create a retreat incorporating experiential and transformative learning elements to help the participants

experience life change leading to greater resiliency. I built a nine-hour retreat around five distinct sessions, each focused on a spiritual discipline that would help the participants enter into a deeper relationship with God. I developed a leader's guide that included teaching notes, which I would use during the retreat.¹ During this time, I also developed a separate participant's guide, which I then printed and placed in folders to give to participants at the start of the retreat.² I chose not to utilize technology with the retreat as I wanted the participants to unplug for the weekend.

Seeking Permission to Conduct the Retreat

For this retreat, I needed approval from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and, subsequently, the wing chaplain at Eglin Air Force Base. I submitted all documentation to the IRB in February 2024 and, after some required revisions, was subsequently given IRB approval in April.³ I then requested permission from the wing chaplain at Eglin to conduct this faith-based retreat under the umbrella of the Air Force Chaplain Corp since it would involve airmen who attend the Protestant chapel.

The wing chaplain felt uncomfortable with the retreat as it directly related to my doctoral education and thus could be perceived as using government resources for my gain. After obtaining a legal review from the judge advocate, my request to host the retreat with the chapel on May 31, 2024 was ultimately declined. I then worked with

¹ See Appendix B, "Leader's Guide."

² See Appendix C, "Participant's Guide."

³ See Appendix D, "IRB Approval."

AGTS and obtained approval to conduct my retreat under the umbrella of a retreat center in my capacity as an ordained minister and not as a chaplain in the Air Force.

Venue and Date Selection

One of the unique challenges of hosting a retreat is the high cost associated with securing a venue in the area during tourist season. As a result, I had to be creative to make the retreat affordable. I partnered with church friends Jill and Travis Hill, who had turned their gulf-front home into a retreat center and asked if they would be willing to host us for the retreat. They happily agreed and provided their retreat center, Space to Sojourn, in Niceville, Florida, on a donation basis. This allowed me to reduce the cost of the retreat to \$50 per person, which would cover the cost of food and materials.

Selecting Participants, Advertising the Retreat, and Registering Participants

My original plan for the retreat was to invite airmen who attend the Protestant chapel services; however, due to the lack of approval from the wing chaplain, I shifted my strategy to invite local members of churches in the greater area surrounding Eglin AFB. Because I could not use my position as a chaplain or service pastor to advertise or recruit people, I created an electronic advertisement that I sent to people I had met over the past three years while at Eglin.⁴ I first sent a text letting them know about the retreat, then sent the email advertisement, and followed up a few days later with another text.

The email advertisement contained the registration with a link for participants to pay the \$50 attendance fee. I explained that the fee would cover the cost of the three meals and the book each participant would receive. I invited fifty people to the retreat,

⁴ See Appendix E, "Email Advertisement."

and the Space to Sojourn retreat center sent another fifty invites to their contacts, all of whom had military ties. Ten individuals signed up for the retreat. Though this was less than I was initially hoping for, I was excited to see how God would move.

Preparation of Venue

Four weeks before the retreat, I worked with my wife, Jill, and Travis to discuss the retreat, the elements needed to conduct the retreat, and how the retreat would flow. We ensured the outside spaces for silence and solitude were ready, as well as placed two tables and twelve chairs for the indoor Friday night sabbath session. Travis prepped the materials for creating a bonfire, and we also prepared enough seating in the living room.

Preparation of the Assessment and Retreat Evaluation

To measure the effectiveness of the retreat for participants, I had to locate a measurement tool that would quantify spiritual fitness. Because most tools were developed for a hospital context, I decided on a tool developed by the military for the military in the Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS).⁵ This tool is designed to track the spiritual fitness of the military members in special forces while in and out of deployments. It uses a 5-point Likert scale validated by over 1,600 service members taking the assessment. It tracks three key areas that are deemed essential for the spiritual fitness of members: personal connection with a higher power (PCHP), pursuing meaning, purpose, and value (PMPV), and service and sacrifice for the greater good (SSGG). This instrument would serve as the basis for how the members were doing before the retreat, immediately after the retreat, and thirty days after the retreat.

⁵ See Appendix F, "CHAMP SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale."

In addition to the SSFS, I developed an evaluation that would allow me to collect data from the participants on how they enjoyed each session and their key takeaways.⁶ This information would be vital to determining the success of each session and would provide essential information for making the retreat better the next time it is conducted.

Execution of the Project

The retreat took place from June 28 to June 29, 2024. Ten participants attended the retreat, which consisted of five teaching sessions lasting approximately 90 minutes each. Friday night featured two sessions, and the remaining three sessions occurred on Saturday. Prior to the start of the first session, I reviewed the informed consent form and had participants sign and submit them.⁷ I also gave each participant a folder with handouts, notecards, and pens, along with the retreat schedule.⁸ I then asked participants to complete the initial SSFS.

Session 1

After the group gathered and filled out all the forms necessary for the retreat, I invited them to the table for a sabbath dinner. After praying and explaining the sabbath dinner, I began an experiential activity by asking each person to share what their high and low was from the week. As soon as we finished sharing, I explained to the group that this practice allows each person to gather to share where God is working in their lives, with

⁶ See Appendix G, “Retreat Evaluation.”

⁷ See Appendix H, “Informed Consent.”

⁸ See Appendix I, “Retreat Schedule.”

both the positive aspects of life and the negatives. I encouraged them to practice lighting a candle and sharing highs and lows each week.

I then shared from Paul's teaching on communion in 1 Corinthians. I explained that weekly communion as a family is one of the most powerful things that can be done. As we read the story, we reenacted the text around our table. We took bread together, prayed, and ate. Then we took the cup and drank. Some participants had never taken communion outside of church, so I encouraged them to take communion as a family weekly and implement this practice into their weekly rhythm. As we finished communion, I encouraged everyone to take some time to reflect and personalize this message with some reflection questions on their sheet of paper.

Session 2

Session two began like session one, with a prayer slowing down and asking God to be in our midst. I then asked the group about their nightly routine and how they slowed down, and their nightly routine. After they shared, I taught the importance of a nightly examination of the day. Like a daily devotion in the morning, a nightly examination helps us reorient ourselves to where God is moving in our lives and those around us.

I then invited each participant to practice what had just been taught, the nightly examen. We encouraged each participant to close their eyes and let God speak to them about the week and the day. Jill, the retreat director, slowly guided the group through reflective questions, and we spent about thirty minutes in silence and reflection. The group then shared their experiences with guided silence.

I then asked each person to take out a card from their folder and write down something that God revealed to them during the examen that they needed to entrust to

God. We then discussed the imagery of trusting God, focusing primarily on Moses but also aspects of Solomon and Daniel. I explained how God is typed as fire in the Old Testament and what this meant to Moses and the people of Israel. As we talked and reflected on this biblical imagery, I prepared them for our final two experiential elements.

We then went outside for a bonfire, where we would place our cards into the flames and practice benevolent detachment. We were going to give everyone and everything to God. After each person cast their card into the fire, we had a couple of minutes of silence, and then I said a short prayer. The final experiential element of the daily examen session was leaving in a covenant of silence. Leaving in silence after a solemn moment is a powerful testimony. Each member left the fire one by one, gathered their things, and left. No one talked on the way out, and it allowed the experience at the fire to be an exclamation point of the night.

Session 3

Session three began Saturday morning with breakfast. While eating, we discussed their experiences with the silence the night before. After a brief break, we met in the living room for the daily devotion session, where I began with an open-ended question: what works well for you when doing devotions? I was quiet, letting the awkward silence fall on the group and awaited an answer. Eventually, participants began to share.

One mentioned journaling, and another mentioned Bible study. Another explained how they loved to linger in prayer. I then started teaching about standard practices for daily devotion. I taught them about prayer and focusing on the ACTS model (adoration, confession, thanksgiving, and supplication). Next, we talked about how to have a devotion to Scripture, focusing on studying, meditation, and application. Finally, we

spoke about how to journal by asking God, “Where have I been?” and “Where do You want to take me?” After teaching each of these, we went around the room, and each shared what came most naturally to them and what was the hardest for them to practice.

Participants then went off on their own for thirty minutes to practice doing a daily devotion. For some participants, daily devotion is something they had yet to do consistently, although all agreed that it is vital to their spiritual fitness. I provided a sample devotion exercise for them to practice with. I also offered a list of resources they could use to assist in their daily devotion. Afterwards, everyone returned inside. I asked an open-ended question about their experiences. Most individuals said they practiced a new spiritual practice they hadn’t practiced before. This was their first extended time of silence alone in solitude on the retreat, and most loved the experience.

Session 4

We then transitioned into a time of spiritual reflection and reorientation. I explained that we would move into a time of group silence and reflection as we orient ourselves to where we are currently in our spiritual state. I taught the importance of a compass and how when one moves through uncertainty, one needs to constantly reorient to it. A spiritual GPS is one of the spiritual practices we can do as often as needed. I then invited everyone to steady themselves silently as we asked the Holy Spirit to guide us.

After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, I asked the group, “What have you been most thankful for lately?” Participants wrote their answers on cardstock. We then did this with the remaining eight questions. After the last participant finished writing, I invited the group back into solitude and asked them to reflect on where they were. We dispersed for twenty minutes to let them reflect on the exercise.

Participants then divided into two groups, one each men and women. Each group shared their experiences with each other, and this was a highlight for many participants. The women felt comfortable and at ease sharing with each other, as did the men. I had planned the share time to take at most 15 minutes, but it went significantly longer than that. Eventually, I had to stop the share time because time was running short.

Returning to the living room, I handed out compasses with a unique Scripture on the back of each and asked each person to commit to consistently checking in with God. As I handed out the compasses, some participants laughed aloud as they read their Bible verse and proclaimed that God has a sense of humor because that was the verse they were meditating on during the daily devotion time. We praised God for how He works and then prayed over lunch. As we moved into lunch, I wanted it to remain as unstructured as possible. There was no plan for deep conversation; we just let everyone talk as they rested between sessions.

Session 5

After lunch, we returned to the living room for the final teaching session, which was on prayer and reflection, emphasizing the future. I asked the group, “What has prayer looked like for you in the past?” Upon the conversation’s conclusion, I mentioned how this session culminated the previous four sessions. I wanted them to take what they had learned and ask God to reveal things to them in powerful ways. I also mentioned how this solitude and silence would be the longest at 45 minutes. I gave tips on how to implement prayer daily and how to pray for a hopeful future. The participants were then released to spend quality alone time with God, praying and seeking His guidance for the future.

Afterwards, I asked the group to share one thing God had spoken to them. Each shared how God was moving in their life and what God was calling them to do. Everyone wrote on a notecard how they would commit to a regular prayer practice in the future and put their cards into a basket. As everyone finished, I gave each person the book *Resilient*, by John Elderidge. At the conclusion of the session, I asked each participant to take the SSFS and to complete the retreat evaluation. Once they were done, I told them they were free to go. After they completed the SSFS and evaluation, participants remained at the retreat center for another hour to visit with each other.

Results of the Project

Special Operations Command Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS) Results

The primary objective of the project was to evaluate whether a faith-based retreat would increase the spiritual fitness of participants. I administered the SSFS to participants at three different times: immediately before the retreat, immediately after the retreat, and again thirty days after the retreat. Conducting the assessment three times allowed for evaluating the retreat's immediate and sustained effects on spiritual fitness in three key areas: pursuing meaning, purpose, and value (PMPV), service and sacrifice for the greater good (SSGG) and personal connection with a higher power (PCHP).⁹

The assessment results only partially confirmed my hypothesis of increased spiritual fitness after the retreat. There are multiple reasons for this, which will be discussed. There were few statistically relevant changes due to the Likert scale only being a 1 to 5 and an overall lack of participants. This may also be attributed to the fact that the

⁹ See Appendix J, "Project Data."

retreat was faith-based and focused on connecting to God, attracting already spiritually mature believers. The results of the project would likely significantly differ if there were a greater pool of participants and a more diverse set of individuals in their faith journey. The data below shows the distribution of responses to the pre- and post-retreat assessments, as well as the 30-day post-retreat assessment and mean scores.

Pursue Meaning, Purpose, and Value

The results of the five PMPV questions demonstrated the largest change among participants. When the overall mean scores were taken for each of the pre-, post-, and 30-day scores and compared to the statistically validated percentage means with the SSFS, a 10 percent change occurred in the data from pretest to posttest. At 30 days, this tapered off to a more modest 6 percent change. This observed decrease at 30 days may be attributed to resuming a normal life after experiencing a spiritual high during the retreat. The table below shows the results of the five PMPV questions:

Table 1: Pursue Meaning, Purpose, and Value

Pursuit of Meaning, Purpose and Values (PMPV)									
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I know what my life is about.	pre			1	5	4	4.30	0.675
		post			1	3	6	4.50	0.707
		30 days		1		3	6	4.40	0.966
3	I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.	pre			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
		post			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
		30 days			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
4	Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.	pre			3	3	4	4.10	0.876
		post			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
		30 days		1		5	4	4.20	0.919
6	I have a core set of beliefs, ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.	pre				3	7	4.70	0.483
		post				2	8	4.80	0.422
		30 days				4	6	4.60	0.516

10	I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.	pre		1		6	3	4.10	0.876
		post			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
		30 days			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
%	A percentile score of the assessment	pre						4.32	71%
		post						4.58	81%
		30 days						4.48	77%

For the first question on the assessment, “I know what my life is about,” the mean pre-retreat score was 4.3; after the retreat, it was 4.5, and then 30 days post-retreat, it was 4.4. Participants showed slight growth in this area after the retreat. The results show that two members increased from agree to strongly agree and held steady even after 30 days. The retreat only slightly impacted people’s understanding of their meaning in life.

The third question, “I’ve been able to find a sense of meaning in my life” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.4; after the retreat, it was 4.6, and then 30 days post-retreat, it was 4.6. Participants showed slight growth in this area after the retreat, with an increase in two members changing from agree to strongly agree and holding steady over 30 days. The standard deviation with such a small sample size is within the margin of error; however, the fact that two people were impacted on questions one and three indicate that these were likely the same two people impacted by the retreat.

The next question, “Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.1; after the retreat, it was 4.4, when 90 percent of participants answered in the affirmative compared to 70 percent at the beginning of the retreat. Thirty days post-retreat, the mean lowered to 4.2 primarily due to one individual’s disagreement. This indicates that the group was positively impacted by the times of silence and solitude, which allowed them to reflect on their life and God’s leading.

PMPV question 6, “I have a core set of beliefs, ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.7. Immediately after the

retreat, this rose to 4.8, but thirty days after the retreat, it fell to 4.6. All ten individuals, however, answered in the affirmative on this question each of the three times they took the assessment, with shifts only occurring between “strongly agree” and “agree.” These results indicate that because the group was made up of established Christians, they already have a good understanding of their core beliefs, so the retreat did little to change their sense of meaning and purpose.

The final PMPV question, “I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences,” had a 4.1 pre-retreat mean, which rose to 4.6 post-retreat and stayed the same 30 days later. Half of the participants moved up one point on the scale as a result of the retreat and held steady for thirty days. These results likely reflect that a significant portion of the retreat focused on living in the present moment and recognizing where God was meeting them in the here and now. We did this during the sabbath session, the examen session, and during devotions.

Service and Sacrifice for the Greater Good

Little change in scores was observed in the five SSGG questions. The mean scores for this section remained unchanged, with each coming in at 4.24, which puts their scores at the 65th percentile compared to the statistically validated group. This could be attributed to a lack of focus in the sessions on service and mission.

Table 2: Self-Sacrifice for the Greater Good

Self Sacrifice for the Greater Good									
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
2	Human values and respect should be the greatest social values.	pre				6	4	4.40	0.516
		post			2	4	4	4.20	0.789
		30 days			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
5	I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.	pre		2	1	3	4	3.90	1.197
		post		1	2	3	4	4.00	1.054
		30 days		1	2	3	4	3.90	1.101
7	I often think about a “grand plan” or process that human beings are a part of.	pre				6	4	4.40	0.516
		post				5	5	4.50	0.527
		30 days			2	2	6	4.40	0.843
8	The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.	pre			4	3	3	3.90	0.876
		post		1	2	5	2	3.80	0.919
		30 days		1	4	2	3	3.70	1.059
9	Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.	pre				4	6	4.60	0.516
		post				3	7	4.70	0.483
		30 days				2	8	4.80	0.422
%	A percentile score of the assessment	pre						4.24	65%
		post						4.24	65%
		30 days						4.24	65%

Question 2, “Human value and respect should be the greatest social values,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.4; after the retreat, it was 4.2; and 30 days post-retreat, it was 4.4. No significant movement occurred with this first question. If anything, teaching on the religious aspects of retreat may have led to the decline in the posttest results, as participants’ greatest values may have become more related to God.

The results to SSGG questions 5 and 7, “I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people” and “I often think about a ‘grand plan’ or process that human beings are a part of” both lacked any significant difference in scores. This indicates that the retreat

did little to change participants' perceptions about humanity and service to others, which is not surprising given that the retreat focused on the individual's relationship to God.

The next SSGG question, "The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings" had a pre-retreat mean of 3.9. After the retreat, it was 3.8, and 30 days post-retreat, it was 3.7. The means decreased as time passed, which likely reflects that this question is geared toward a more non-theistic crowd because Christians could potentially view the greatest moral decision as accepting Christ as their Lord and Savior.

The final question, "Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life," had a pre-retreat mean of 4.6. After the retreat, it was 4.7, and 30 days later it increased to 4.8. All participants agreed on this one and two changed their "agree" to "strongly agree" over the 30 days. This is not statistically significant.

The consistency of the mean score of 4.24 throughout the SSGG questions indicates that participants' views on service and sacrifice were already well-formed before the retreat and were not significantly altered by the experience. The retreat's focus on personal spiritual development, rather than service-based activities, may have contributed to this lack of change. While there was a slight increase in the importance placed on serving others, the overall impact was not substantial. These findings suggest that future retreats could benefit from incorporating more activities or discussions that explicitly address service and sacrifice to foster a deeper engagement with these concepts. Additionally, the similarities of participants in the group, all of whom shared similar spiritual and demographic backgrounds, may have limited the exposure to differing viewpoints during discussions.

Personal Connection to a Higher Power

The final section assessed one's PCHP. The seven PCHP questions revealed one's attitude toward a higher power. With this being a faith-based retreat, I expected the results to be high from the beginning and stay high throughout, with little significant change. The mean scores changed from 4.53 before the retreat to 4.66 directly after, to 4.57 at 30 days. This is a small increase in the overall rate, statistically relevant from pre- to posttest, but it became irrelevant as it hit thirty days.

Table 3: Personal Connection to a Higher Power

Personal Connection with a Higher Power									
			Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Dev
12	I feel God's love for me.	pre				4	6	4.60	0.516
		post				3	7	4.70	0.483
		30 days			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
13	I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.	pre				4	6	4.60	0.516
		post				4	6	4.60	0.516
		30 days				4	6	4.60	0.516
14	I feel God's presence.	pre			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
		post			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
		30 days			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
15	I am grateful for all God has done for me.	pre				3	7	4.70	0.483
		post				1	9	4.90	0.316
		30 days				1	9	4.90	0.316
16	God comforts and shelters me.	pre				4	6	4.60	0.516
		post				3	7	4.70	0.483
		30 days				4	6	4.60	0.516
17	I've decided to place my life under God's direction.	pre				5	5	4.50	0.527
		post				3	7	4.70	0.483
		30 days				3	7	4.70	0.483
18	Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.	pre			2	3	5	4.30	0.823
		post			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
		30 days		1		3	6	4.40	0.966
%	Percentile score of assessment	pre						4.53	73%
		post						4.66	78%
		30 days						4.57	74%

The first question, “I feel God’s love for me,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.6, which increased to 4.7 after the retreat and decreased to 4.4 thirty days later. This increase and subsequent decline suggest that while the retreat helped participants feel a deeper sense of God’s love in the short term as a result of the modalities, this effect diminished as participants returned to their daily routines. This could suggest that they did not put the modalities into practice.

The second question, “I look to God for strength, support, and guidance,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.6, which held steady after the retreat and 30 days post-retreat. This indicates that participants already had a strong reliance on God for support, and the retreat did not significantly alter this pre-existing connection. The question “I feel God’s presence” also had a steady 4.4 mean throughout testing. This also suggests that participants had a steady awareness of God’s presence both before and after the retreat, and the retreat did not significantly impact this aspect of their spiritual connection.

The next question, “I am grateful for all God has done for me,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.7. After the retreat, it was 4.9, and 30 days post-retreat, it was 4.9. This sustained improvement suggests that the retreat reinforced participants’ sense of gratitude toward God, and this effect stayed the same even a month after the retreat. Gratitude was emphasized during the breath prayers exercise.

The fifth question, “God comforts and shelters me,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.6. After the retreat, it was 4.7 but returned to 4.6 thirty days after the retreat. This minor fluctuation suggests that while the retreat temporarily deepened participants’ sense of God’s comfort, the effect was not sustained in the long term. The next question, “I’ve decided to place my life under God’s direction,” had a pre-retreat mean of 4.5. After the

retreat, it was 4.7, and it stayed the same 30 days post-retreat. This suggests that the retreat helped participants reaffirm or deepen their commitment to living under God's direction, and this renewed commitment held steady over time.

The final question, "Religious beliefs lie behind my whole approach to life," had a pre-retreat mean of 4.3, which rose to 4.6 after the retreat and fell slightly to 4.4 thirty days later. This slight rise could suggest that the retreat encouraged participants to reflect more deeply on how their religious beliefs shape their lives, but this reflection became slightly less prominent by the thirty-day mark.

The PCHP section revealed that the retreat moderately and immediately impacted participants' spiritual connections, particularly in their gratitude and commitment to following God's direction. However, some of these effects, particularly feelings of God's love and presence, diminished over time. The findings suggest that while the retreat provided some short-term spiritual enrichment, maintaining these gains over the long term may require continued engagement with spiritual practices beyond the retreat.

Retreat Evaluation

In addition to the quantitative data gathered from the SSFS, the retreat evaluation provided qualitative feedback from the participants' experiences during the retreat.¹⁰ Many participants appreciated the retreat's emphasis on silence and solitude, noting that these practices allowed them to profoundly connect with God. One participant commented, "The time spent in reflection and prayer was the most spiritually enriching experience I've had in years." Others noted challenges, such as difficulty maintaining

¹⁰ See Appendix K, "Retreat Evaluation Results."

focus during extended periods of silence. This feedback shows the importance of balancing guided instruction with personal reflection to cater to varying spiritual practices and needs.

Overall, the results of this study suggest that the retreat had a meaningful impact on participants' spiritual fitness, particularly in enhancing their connection with God and their sense of meaning and purpose. The retreat successfully fostered immediate and sustained spiritual growth in these areas. However, the findings also indicate the need for continued engagement and additional modalities to address the principles of service and sacrifice in participants' lives. These results from the retreat underscore the potential of faith-based retreats as a valuable tool for promoting spiritual resilience among military members and highlight areas for further refinement in future programs.

The Project's Contribution to Ministry

The possibility of another major world war occurring in the near future remains relatively high. Estimates predict hundreds of thousands of casualties. Ensuring our airmen are spiritually resilient and ready for war remains essential. Today, airmen are the least religious in history yet are open to spirituality. Many challenges exist for spiritually forming airmen who did not grow up in a faith-based household; however, inviting them to attend a faith-based retreat to break away from the stress of the military and assess their lives shows promise for building spiritual resiliency.

This project addressed the problem of a lack of spiritual resiliency in Air Force members by providing insights and opportunities for airmen to pursue God in a faith-based retreat environment. This retreat allowed the airmen to develop stronger connections to God and others and help them uncover the tools they need to continue

growing in their walk with Him. Additionally, this project developed the necessary training materials to help other chaplains lead similar retreats to impact the spiritual health of airmen worldwide. These guides can be shared with other members struggling with spiritual resiliency. Often, airmen find safety in doing things with others they know and love, and this material can work in a small group environment over five or six weeks.

Current chaplains are often task-saturated with things to do within the chapel context. This curriculum requires minimal effort for the chaplain to implement in the field. Its focus on silence and solitude in a retreat setting means that it can work well at a home station or deployment overseas. This initiative will likely increase the spiritual vitality of airmen, resulting in a greater need for chaplain-led services and events and a growth in attendance at the base chapels.

Local churches could also implement the retreat format for their members. From my research and implementation, I have found that not just airmen but almost everyone needs this type of resiliency and spiritual fitness. As generations go by, so does the military. The military lacks spiritual fitness because the generation does. Churches are wise to consider incorporating a retreat program into their church calendar to help their congregants realize the real benefit of spending quality alone time with the Lord in their lives.

CHAPTER 5: PROJECT SUMMARY

Introduction

The following chapter provides an evaluative overview of the faith-based retreat for the local military members in the greater Eglin area and the retreat curriculum. This summary will 1) evaluate the project and its effectiveness while identifying areas for improvement, 2) ascertain the implications of the project, 3) present recommendations for chaplains and pastors engaged in similar ministry and for the Chaplain Corps, and 4) propose further studies.

Evaluation of the Project

This project demonstrated that a faith-based retreat utilizing experiential and transformative learning improves one's spiritual fitness. The context of this project focused on a trinitarian approach to building spiritual fitness through a faith-based spiritual retreat. This project showed participants that one of the best ways to build spiritual fitness is to lean into their faith, fully experience God, and set a firm foundation they can build upon through conducting experiential modalities.

Keys to Project Effectiveness

Developing a Biblical Basis for Retreating

First, from the research conducted in both the biblical and general literature chapters, the project presented a clear biblical-theological case for the necessity of spiritual retreats for the Christ-follower. The eight months of in-depth research and

organization of the findings made the rest of the project phases flow smoothly. Everyone in the military knows the importance of spiritual fitness, as it is often preached in resiliency training. However, allowing members to develop their spiritual fitness is often ignored or postponed for the sake of the mission or other pressing items.

Presenting information on the value of retreats from the Old and New Testament Scriptures helped the participants understand the importance of retreating for their development. This helped each attendee realize that retreats are not a luxury but a critical step in their spiritual growth. This realization helped them internalize each spiritual modality that was practiced. They could see from this foundation how retreating and taking a tactical pause to reflect on where they are and where God is calling them to go is a vital part of their spiritual journey.

Retreating in a Beautiful Location

Secondly, the project benefited from the deeply inspiring natural beauty of the retreat center's location on the bank of the Choctawhatchee Bay. This location allowed participants to enter a state of awe as they prayed and overlooked the water. This state of awe was critical for facilitating spiritual openness and reflection. The natural beauty helped reduce distractions and allowed participants to focus more deeply on their spiritual practices. Their experience of awe, prompted by the natural beauty, helped each member dive deeper into contemplation and connection with God, highlighting the importance of the natural environment in spiritual formation.

While contemplation and connection can happen anywhere, being in a peaceful, beautiful location helps. Participants must find that awe state differently when retreats are held in non-serene environments. Conducting this retreat in such a beautiful location was

vital to the members entering the transformative learning modalities, leading to increased spiritual fitness.

Providing Outstanding Hospitality

Furthermore, the hosts of the retreat center, Travis and Jill Hill, were instrumental in the retreat's success. Their warm hospitality and willingness to meet before the start of this retreat to offer advice and counsel from lessons they have learned from hosting other retreats in their space were invaluable. Their generous hospitality created a welcoming atmosphere, creating psychological safety for all participants. This safety was essential for participants to feel secure enough to become spiritually transparent and vulnerable.

Their attention to detail in the small things like soft music in the background, candles burning, and adjusting the temperature when they noticed people were getting hot, provided a supportive environment. They also helped me feel comfortable and relaxed during the retreat. I liken them to a good funeral director who ensures all the details are on point so the officiant can lead the family through grief care. Travis and Jill were critical for providing the ideal retreat environment. They handled all the small details and helped everyone feel comfortable in their space, which freed me to focus on teaching and helping participants enter spiritual formative experiences.

Befitting from Existing Relationships

Finally, the participants also made this retreat what it was. This retreat was initially going to focus only on airmen within the chapel context, but I had to shift at the last minute and find retreat participants through other connections due to circumstances outside my control. Of the more than fifty invitations to the retreat that we sent, ten individuals responded and wanted to come. These ten were all spiritually open and came

from evangelical backgrounds. We had a preexisting relationship with each one, and they trusted us to lead them in spiritual modalities they had never tried before. As a result, they each felt safe to explore new spiritual modalities. Without this preexisting trust, I don't know that the retreat would have been as effective as it was. It shows that relationships remain vital to spiritual care, and building relationships and trust is crucial before diving into deep spiritual modalities.

Keys to Project Improvement

Seeking the Early Support of Leaders

The first and foremost need for project improvement is having a chapel's local leaders on board long before planning the retreat. While our chapel has had many spiritual retreats and resiliency events, none of them were tied to research for a chaplain's doctoral degree program. When I presented my plan ninety days in advance to host a retreat through the chapel at Eglin AFB, it was met with uncertainty due to the direct benefit the retreat would have in helping me accomplish my doctoral degree. Upon completing a full legal review of the project, leaders determined that it would be legally sufficient if the retreat were in the same vein as other retreats that had been done in the past; however, if it differed from those done in the past, it could be deemed as using government resources for personal gain.

The chapel leaders ultimately decided they did not feel comfortable hosting the retreat under the umbrella of the Eglin Chapel. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial to engage chapel leaders earlier in the planning process to better communicate the retreat's goals and explain how it could benefit the chapel as a whole. Building a

stronger case for how this retreat would align with the Test Wings mission might have also alleviated some concerns.

Increasing Participant Diversity

Not having a diverse pool of participants was a second-order effect of not having the retreat within the chapel context. Of the ten participants who attended, only one had children still in the house. We had four empty nesters and five who did not have any children. More diversity would have improved the retreat experience by bringing a more comprehensive range of perspectives and experiences into the group discussions. Participants with children could have shared how spiritual fitness is lived out in their family circumstances and with their children.

For future retreats, partnering with a childcare provider could alleviate this problem, as most of the individuals we invited said no due to childcare concerns. The costs of paying a babysitter for five hours on a Friday night and then eight hours more on a Saturday, in addition to the price of the retreat, was prohibitive for many of the invitees. This is a critical issue to address as most staff sergeants and those above in rank have children in their households.

Retreating during Milder Weather

Another area that could have made for a better retreat experience would be holding the retreat at a different time of year, when the weather is more temperate. In late June, the temperatures were hovering around 90 degrees, and some members felt uncomfortable being outside for extended periods. If I had conducted the retreat when temperatures were between 60 to 80 degrees, participants would have enjoyed a better

environment. The heat also impacted the bonfire experience. Though we had a smaller fire, the heat it produced was still uncomfortable.

Increasing Time for Gender-Specific Breakout Sessions

From the retreat evaluations, I realized I should have planned more time for men's and women's breakout sessions. I focused most of the attention on group share time, but the one session that involved splitting up the men and women produced much deeper conversations and vulnerability. Through my general literature review, I read that gender-specific breakout sessions can create a safe space for participants to explore issues they may not feel comfortable discussing in a mixed-gender setting. Having more gender-specific breakouts would have allowed for more tailored discussions that could have addressed gender-specific challenges and experiences. Expanding the time allotted for the group discussions in future retreats could help the transformative impact of the retreat.

Including Enlisted Participants

Finally, the project would have benefited from having enlisted members involved in the retreat. Another second-order effect of not having the retreat within the chapel context is that I, as a chaplain, could not use my title or means to get the word out about this retreat other than personal invitations. Due to fraternization concerns, I only have a few enlisted friends I felt comfortable inviting to this retreat. As a result, all the retreat participants were officers. While this led to them feeling comfortable in a group setting, we needed to include the largest segment of the force: those members who enlisted.

Implications of the Project

Multiple implications are evident throughout my research and development of the retreat curriculum in connection with this project. Most importantly, spiritual fitness remains a vastly misunderstood topic that is needed for military members. Operation Iraqi Freedom and the Global War on Terror were America's longest wars, and they revealed that PTSD and moral injury have impacted many military members. Commanders say the next war will not be an insurgency war but a near-peer conflict with the potential to see many more casualties, which could lead to even greater rates of PTSD and moral injury. This project underscores the chaplains' role in preparing service members for the psychological and spiritual toll of future conflicts. Spiritual fitness must be integrated into military health and resilience strategies, ensuring that service members are equipped to handle not only the physical and mental challenges of warfare but also the deep existential and spiritual questions that arise in times of intense conflict.

Through my research on the current spiritual fitness modalities in the military, I found few faith-based spiritual fitness retreat programs. This lack of opportunity was surprising, given that chaplains are religious professionals. This gap represents a significant missed opportunity to leverage the unique strengths of chaplains. As religious professionals, chaplains are uniquely qualified to offer faith-based retreats that can meet the spiritual needs of military personnel in a way that secular retreat programs cannot.

By incorporating more faith-based elements into existing spiritual fitness programs, the Chaplain Corps can better fulfill its mission and provide a more holistic approach to spiritual care. Getting back to our roots as a Chaplain Corps and leaning into the spiritual aspect of our jobs is a significant first step to take. Many programs within the Chaplain Corps address resiliency, but most do not approach it from a faith perspective;

they leave it open to all. While these programs have a place, incorporating a voluntary, faith-based component would be an excellent opportunity.

The reality is that if we go to war with China or another near-peer country, faith will be necessary. Through studying the Revolutionary War, when members stood 50 yards apart and held a musket up and fired, soldiers looked to the chaplain for religious services to help them cope with the existential questions of life. Knowing they could die the next day, many attended services and wanted communion. The same will be confirmed when the next great war starts. Members will wish for a faith that stands the tests and trials that war throws at them, and chaplains are uniquely positioned and trained to offer a hope that goes beyond anything members may face. Preparing airmen for that is what is needed at this time.

Finally, the last implication is that transformative and experiential learning works and dramatically affects people. Everyone learns differently. This retreat helped solidify the learning by allowing members to experience the learning, reflect on it, and share their experiences with others. Experiential learning engages participants on a deeper level and facilitates long-term retention of the concepts and practices introduced. Utilizing this method allowed participants to internalize the spiritual disciplines taught, making them more likely to continue these practices in their daily lives. The retreat demonstrated that when service members are given the space to engage hands-on with their faith, the impact on their spiritual fitness is profound and lasting. Many attendees had not practiced some of these modalities before, and being given the time and space to practice helped them learn and incorporate them into their lives.

Recommendations for the Air Force Chaplain Corps

More Faith-Based Spiritual Retreats

First and foremost, the Chaplain Corps should provide more faith-based spiritual retreats. I recommend that the Chaplain Corps use the Chapel Tithes and Offerings Fund (CTOF) and set aside money for faith-based spiritual retreats for both the local congregation on base and the units. The corps currently spends much of the CTOF money on unit visitation; diverting some of that money to host cost-effective retreats would be wise. Retreats would enhance the spiritual fitness of service members and reinforce the Chaplain Corps' role as the key provider of spiritual care within the military. These retreats could cater to different demographics, such as families, singles, and specific units, ensuring that the spiritual needs of all service members are addressed.

Faith-Based Options for Open-to-All Retreats

Secondly, I recommend that faith-based opportunities be made available to the attendees of retreats when chaplains conduct open-to-all retreats. Faith-based opportunities might include optional prayer and meditation time, bonfire examen time, communion as a family, service on a Sunday, or a blessing of a couple. All opportunities must be made optional, as open-to-all retreats are not faith-specific. However, offering faith-based modalities within one's faith endorsement leans into our strengths as a Chaplain Corps and helps the participants by connecting them to their own faith. Chaplains can offer a more personalized and meaningful retreat experience by providing these optional faith-based components. These opportunities allow participants to engage with their faith in a way that aligns with their personal beliefs and practices, fostering a deeper connection to their spiritual life.

Post-Retreat, Faith-Based Small Group

Furthermore, offering an optional post-retreat, faith-based small group would be beneficial. This could be offered in conjunction to both the open-to-all retreats and the faith-based retreats. Encouraging the modalities to become habits takes time and accountability, both of which can occur in small groups for service members after they have developed a relationship with the chaplain leading the retreat.

Experiential Learning Training for Chaplains

Finally, I recommend that the service branches send chaplains to experiential learning training with the Bob Pike Group or a similar organization to help them learn how to teach more effectively. Most individuals know how to lecture, but guiding people through experiential and transformative learning experiences is much more complicated. Experiential learning methodologies require a skill set different from traditional teaching methods. Training chaplains in these approaches would enable them to lead more effective and engaging retreats. This would help participants to internalize and apply what they learn in a more impactful way. Investing in chaplain education like this would ultimately lead to higher quality spiritual care and better outcomes for service members. Having taken the Bob Pike Group trainer class, I can attest to the methodology and how it helped me lead and guide groups more productively.

Recommendations for Future Study

This retreat project offered a start to investigating faith-based retreats. However, the complications of conducting the retreat within a chapel context prevented us from obtaining the desired number or diversity of participants. Future studies should consider greatly expanding the participant demographic and number of participants.

The current data considered only Air Force officers. I believe that results from other military branches and ranks would contribute significantly to understanding how the branches can incorporate faith-based modalities into a curriculum geared to them. In addition, the current program also occurred during the peak season of travel in Destin, Florida without an overnight option. An iteration with an overnight stay would be informative in determining if the retreat proves more effective or less effective.

Another recommendation would be to compare two identical studies of retreats, one faith-based and one non-faith-based, and see what differences, if any, occur in the data collected. I would keep all other factors as equal as possible, with the only difference being the faith component. Similarly, I would compare two retreat studies, one using experiential learning and one using lecture only, and compare the differences. These options could make the data from these retreats more beneficial for individuals.

Conclusion

This project has accomplished what it set out to do by presenting faith-based retreats as an option to increase spiritual fitness in airmen. While it will not change the Air Force at large, this single retreat presents one possible solution to the decline in spiritual fitness. Further research can help improve this retreat model and develop new modalities for assisting airmen to connect with their spirituality and lean into their faith. Chaplains and local churches should strive to offer more faith-based opportunities to the military members they serve to help disciple them. Preparing airmen spiritually today for the fight tomorrow helps them in innumerable ways.

APPENDIX A: JESUS'S TRANSFIGURATION

Transfiguration as an Initiation Vision

In the narrative of the Transfiguration, Jesus takes His three closest disciples up a high mountain to escape (Luke 9:28-36). He embarks on a physical journey that exhausts His disciples. Darkness falls and they find themselves alone in the wilderness on a mountain. Against this backdrop, God appears, changing before their eyes, and Moses and Elijah appear (Luke 9:30). Santiago Guijarro makes a novel argument that the disciples were introduced to and shown a new religious experience: experiencing a vision through an altered state of mind.¹ He describes how monophasic and polyphasic cultures have differing views on knowledge acquired during the waking phase versus the dream or vision phase.² Guijarro posits that their culture, at that time, came from a polyphasic background and that the disciples would have had the grammar to describe their experiences.³ He concludes that, since many other biblical characters had visions, it would not be inconceivable if this was also a vision. Guijarro concludes that this was necessary to help the disciples understand the future Easter visions when Christ would be

¹ Santiago Guijarro, "The Transfiguration of Jesus and the Easter Visions," *Biblical Theology Bulletin: Journal of Bible and Culture* 47, no. 2 (May 2017): 95, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146107917697905>.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 96.

resurrected.⁴ Guijarro's argument, of course, assumes that both instances were vision events and did not physically occur.

In contrast to Guijarro, Robert Stein argues that the Transfiguration is an actual event, not a vision or misplaced resurrection account, as believed by Bultmann.⁵ In his analysis, Stein critiques the main arguments of people who claim that Mark's account of the Transfiguration (9:2-8) is a resurrection account.⁶ He then builds on the argument that Mark's narrative of the Transfiguration is an actual event in Jesus's lifetime. Stein concludes that evidence favoring the traditional view carries more weight than the evidence arguing that the Transfiguration account is related to the Resurrection.⁷

Transfiguration as an Apocalyptic Revelation

Unlike other scholars, Delbert Burkett claims that the Transfiguration is not a vision or resurrection account but an apocalyptic revelation of Jesus Christ. He likens the ascent of the high mountain in the narrative to other apocalypses in which individuals travel to other worlds, the underworld, or a remote part of the earth.⁸ Furthermore, Burkett notes that Jesus encounters two angelic-like beings, which infer that He is in a heavenly world and also received revelation from an otherworldly being, which occurred

⁴ Ibid., 98.

⁵ Rudolf Bultmann and John Marsh, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, rev. ed (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 259; Robert H. Stein, "Is the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8) a Misplaced Resurrection-Account?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 1 (March 1976): 79, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3265474>.

⁶ Stein, "Is the Transfiguration (Mark 9:2-8)," 82.

⁷ Ibid., 99.

⁸ Delbert Burkett, "The Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2-8): Epiphany or Apotheosis?" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 138, no. 2 (2019): 413, <https://doi.org/10.15699/jbl.1382.2019.542353>.

when God spoke through the cloud.⁹ He concludes that the Greco-Roman world knew much about apocalypses, and that for Jesus to institute one here would be to show that Jesus is not a god who becomes a man but a man who becomes a god.¹⁰ This revelation of Jesus as God is essential to the coming passion narrative.

Dale Allison agrees and builds on this argument by claiming that Jesus is revealed to be YHWH, the angel of God. He describes this by noting how Moses and Elijah are the only scriptural characters who converse with God on a mountain.¹¹ When Moses and Elijah show up on the mountain, they converse with Jesus, and when God calls out to them to listen to Him, He draws a solid correlation to Jesus being the Angel of YHWH at Sinai.¹² In this narrative, God shows that Jesus is equal to God and is not the “new Moses but the re-manifestation of the divine figure who appeared at Mount Sinai and Horeb.”¹³ This high Christology prepares the disciples to fully believe in the resurrection account.

Preparation Before the Transfiguration

In examining differing perspectives about what happened on the mountain during the Transfiguration, it remains important to highlight a few key motifs that have taken place throughout Scripture that Jesus more fully reveals in this moment. First, Gospel authors describe how they took six days (Matthew and Mark) or eight days (Luke) to

⁹ Ibid., 435.

¹⁰ Ibid., 437.

¹¹ Dale C. Allison, *The New Moses: A Matthean Typology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2013), 24.

¹² Burkett, “The Transfiguration of Jesus (Mark 9:2–8),” 437.

¹³ Ibid., 438.

prepare for the journey up the mountain. Craig Blomberg believes that both accounts refer to about a week of preparation,¹⁴ whereas Brooks deems that the account of six days is the most precise indicator and, as a result, should be taken at face value.¹⁵ James Brooks explains that this figure directly correlates with the six days of preparation experienced by Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 24:16).¹⁶ What remains essential is that a time of preparation occurred before ascending the mountain, which was essential for experiencing God.

Jesus, Peter, James, and John ascend the mountain, either Mount Tabor in lower Galilee, which is the traditional location, or Mount Hermon, which rises much higher at 9,200 feet.¹⁷ As William Lane points out, Jesus recalls the theophanies on the mountain of God as described in Exodus 24 and 1 Kings 19 (Mark 9:4), where He does not simply seek solitude from people but wants to bring the disciples closer to the significance of the hour.¹⁸ Lane further claims that Jesus uses the mountain's evocative significance to heighten the moment's significance, as the disciples would have immediately recollected what happened at Horeb and Sinai.¹⁹

¹⁴ Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 22 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 262.

¹⁵ James A. Brooks, *Mark*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and David S. Dockery, vol. 23 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1991), 141.

¹⁶ William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1974), 317.

¹⁷ Stuart K. Weber, *Matthew*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 1 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 267.

¹⁸ Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 318.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Jesus Reveals His True Identity

As the disciples are on the mountain, the glory of God comes down and reveals that “Jesus is himself the new tabernacle of divine glory.”²⁰ The disciples realize that Jesus was not equal to Moses and Elijah but more significant than both. Rodney Cooper believes that Moses and Elijah were a part of the experience because they represented the Law and Prophets.²¹ R. T. France disagrees and posits that they represent the eschatological expectation of the Messiah’s role.²² He further shows they were represented because they both experienced rejection and suffering.²³ What remains important, however, is that Jesus was shown to be the Son of God in His glory, and the disciples were to see that God was not abandoning Jesus even though He was about to experience His crucifixion.

Brooks emphasizes that in the account of the Transfiguration, the important takeaway is that Jesus experiences a metamorphosis.²⁴ He is transformed, and His clothes and face become radiant (Matt 17:2). His change in appearance clued the disciples that something special was taking place; He was, in fact, the Son of Man, as referenced in Daniel 7:10.²⁵ God revealed to Peter, James, and John who Jesus was and that God the

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Rodney L. Cooper, *Mark*, ed. Max Anders, vol. 2 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2000), 147.

²² R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1 of *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 651.

²³ France, *Matthew*, *TNTC*, 266.

²⁴ Brooks, *Mark*, 142.

²⁵ Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, vol. 34B, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1988), 36.

Father would not abandon Him even in the trials and tribulations to come.²⁶ Jesus's mission, however, could only be fully understood after He was finished suffering.²⁷ The disciples see the metamorphosis and realize that Jesus is above Moses and Elijah.²⁸ Allowing the disciples to witness the metamorphosis prepares them for the metamorphosis that would come by way of the Holy Spirit.

Jesus's retreat to the mountain is not an escape but a voluntary withdrawal for revelation and affirmation. This divine manifestation, which took place away from the crowds, illustrates the value in solitude for experiencing God's glory and preparing oneself for forthcoming trials. As the account of the Transfiguration illustrates, retreats are not just for moments of desperation or loneliness but also provide opportunities for meeting God, without whom one would be rendered absolutely helpless.

²⁶ Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, 38; Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 316.

²⁷ Blomberg, *Matthew*, 263.

²⁸ Cooper, *Mark*, 147.

APPENDIX B: LEADER'S GUIDE

LEADERS – FRIDAY (0)

****TEACHING: STEVE****

Instructions and Assessments

Purpose: To give participants the SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Assessment and review the IRB overview.

Welcome and Opening Remarks (1800 - 1830)

Welcome to our weekend retreat! We are thrilled to have you join us and look forward to a meaningful time together, growing spiritually, and building connections.

As people arrive, welcome them at the door and give them a name tag. Talk about them and ask about their day. People will be showing up a little nervous about how this weekend will look, and our job is to quiet their souls and calm them. Please give them a packet of information for the weekend in the form of a folder. Let them know that this is their folder, which will have all the information they need for each session. Then, please encourage them to come in and get a drink or something to have in their hands. People with something in their hands feel more at ease. As soon as the last of the participants arrive, begin to shift focus and call everyone into the living room for the opening welcome session.

Have them open up their folders and explain to them the Consent Forms, starting with:

Institutional Review Board (IRB) Overview

First, we must address the Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocols. The IRB is a committee established to review and approve research involving human subjects, ensuring that all ethical standards are met. This retreat involves activities and assessments contributing to our ongoing research on spiritual fitness. We want to assure them that their privacy and well-being are our top priorities. Go through the form and ask if anyone has any questions.

Consent Forms

Next, ask everyone to fill out the consent forms provided. These forms are necessary for participation and ensure you have everyone's consent to include your feedback and experiences in our research data. There are three consent forms: one for the IRB understanding, one for the photo release, and one for privileged communication release.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (0)

SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Assessment

After completing the consent forms, we'll move on to the SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Assessment. This assessment is designed to help you reflect on your current spiritual state and identify areas for growth. It will also provide valuable insights guiding our activities and discussions throughout the weekend. I will read each question and ask that you mark the question that best answers where you are today.

Setting the Tone for the Weekend

This retreat is a unique opportunity to step away from the busyness of daily life and invest in your spiritual well-being. We have designed a series of sessions and activities that will encourage deep reflection, meaningful prayer, and personal growth. We aim to foster a supportive community where we can explore our faith, share our experiences, and grow closer to God. Through practicing your faith, you become more resilient.

As we embark on this journey together, let's commit to being fully present, open to new experiences, and supportive of one another. We hope this retreat will be a spiritual renewal and personal transformation for each of you.

Thank you for being here, and let's begin with our first steps in this meaningful journey.

Transition to Session 1 – Sabbath Dinner

LEADERS – FRIDAY (1) – SABBATH

****TEACHING: STEVE****

Sabbath Dinner – A Weekly Practice of Rest and Worship

Purpose: To show participants how to practice the Sabbath weekly, fostering a rhythm of rest, worship, and community.

Teaching element: This is such an essential part of our week. I want to begin with a story about how we came up with this dinner. It is from an organization called Family Teams. Family teams are all about putting into practice rhythms and routines that make us a stronger part of the body of Christ. They are concerned with the state of the family in the world—things that are happening or not happening that are taking our families out.

This weekend will be about establishing and creating spiritual rhythms, routines, and habits that can improve our lives. I believe your spiritual resiliency and, thus, your spiritual fitness, directly impact your spiritual practices. The better your spiritual practices are, the more you practice them, and the better you are overall.

The first practice that we are going to focus on is the sabbath. Sabbath is a vital part of Lindsey's and my week. In the beginning, God created everything in six days and rested. He completed all that he had done and made the sabbath day holy. Then, at the height of the Egyptian dominion over the Israelites, when Israelites were working seven days a week doing back-breaking work for others, God met them there. God always shows up right when he is needed. God shows up and creates a new style of work set apart from the world and instructs the Israelites to work not seven days a week but six days and rest on the seventh. He instituted a new way of life amid the brokenness of Egypt. This way of living became the backbone of the Israelites and persisted for millennia.

Around Constantine's time, the date shifted from Saturday to Sunday, and the practice slowly faded out of importance for Christians. However, there is a lot of wisdom in a sabbath practice or ritual. Throughout history, this time-honored and time-tested tradition has been used to bring rhythm and balance to life. So tonight, for our first practice, we want to introduce you all to the practice of the Sabbath.

Elements Needed

- Dinner setup
- Table with seating for 4-6 (multiple tables if needed)
- Candle with three wicks (representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

Every time one wants to practice a sabbath, a few things are essential. First, you have to decide that you are going to do it for a meal. The most common two meals that are chosen for the sabbath meal are Friday night dinner or Saturday night dinner. In the Jewish context, the most

common form of sabbath was from sunset to sunset, or what has been adapted in our lives is dinner to dinner.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (1) – SABBATH

The Sabbath is something to be celebrated as a family. The dinner table can be a place of great bonding and healing. Having a dinner table that can seat 4-6 is imperative. Making sure that people can be invited over is crucial. We want to share a meal with other Christians and hear their stories.

So, Lindsey and I practice the Sabbath together at our house.

Things to Do

1. **Light a Candle:** Place a candle with three wicks in the center of the table. The three wicks symbolize the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This act marks the beginning of your Sabbath dinner, inviting the presence of God into your meal and conversation.
2. **Pray Together:** Go around the table and invite each participant to pray, welcoming the Lord into your dinner and conversation. This sets a sacred tone for the meal.
3. **Share Highs and Lows:** As you eat, go around the table and share your highs and lows from the week. This practice fosters community, vulnerability, and support among participants.
4. **Practice Gratitude:** After sharing highs and lows, have each person say one thing they are grateful for this week. Gratitude shifts our focus to God's blessings and cultivates a cheerful, thankful heart.
5. **Bible Story Time:** Transition into a time of Bible study. Read a children's Bible story that aligns with the church calendar (e.g., Easter, Pentecost, Epiphany, Advent, or other major Christian holidays). This makes the stories relevant and timely.

6. **Reflect on the Story:** Ask, “How did God show up in that story?” Encourage everyone to share their thoughts and reflections. This deepens the understanding and application of the biblical narrative.
7. **Take Communion:** As a family, take communion together. Read the relevant passages from the Bible and reflect on the significance of Jesus’s sacrifice. This is a profound way to remember and honor Christ.
8. **Blow Out the Candle:** End the meal by blowing out the candle together. This signifies the closing of your sacred time and the transition back to everyday life, carrying the peace and presence of God with you.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (1) – SABBATH

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- **Not Legalistic:** Remember, we are free from the law. Approach this dinner with a relaxed attitude. Don't stress about perfection; the goal is to enjoy and rest in God's presence.
- **Enjoy the Time:** Savor the meal's flavors and the company of those around you. This is a time to delight in God's gifts.
- **Use Your Best:** Use your best china or dinnerware—not paper plates. This makes the meal feel unique and set apart.
- **Make a Special Meal:** Prepare the best meals on this day. Consider steak, seafood, or a charcuterie board. This highlights the importance of the Sabbath dinner.
- **Home Setting:** It's best to host the dinner in your home, creating a cozy, intimate environment.
- **Invite Others:** Sabbath dinner is a communal practice. Invite friends, neighbors, or church members to join you. It's an opportunity for fellowship and outreach.
- **Family Time:** Incorporate family activities after the meal, such as a walk, a bonfire, or a family game night. This extends the time spent together for rest and enjoyment.
- **Consistent Elements:** Keep certain elements the same each week: the candle, sharing highs and lows, communion, and prayer. Consistency helps establish a meaningful tradition.
- **Budget for Sabbath Dinner:** Feel free to splurge on this meal. Consider buying USDA Prime steak, freshly caught snapper, big scallops, etc. Investing in this meal underscores its significance.

REFLECT AND LISTEN

After the dinner, take 10 -20 minutes to listen and reflect on what God is showing you regarding Sabbath dinner. Consider these questions:

- How did you experience God's presence during the meal?
- What insights or revelations did you receive?
- What is your next step in incorporating Sabbath dinner into your weekly routine?

Encourage participants to jot down their reflections and actions they feel led to take. This helps internalize the practice and make it a regular part of their spiritual lives.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (2) – DAILY EXAMEN

One of the most powerful things that can be done for most people is to examine their lives every day at night. I recommend that we begin our day anew every day with some devotion time, which we will be looking at tomorrow, but I also recommend that we spend time in dedicated prayer every night to look over our day and give it to God. St. Ignatius developed a daily routine that did just this. Every night, he would practice what is called Examen and focus on the day that had just gone before him. He would analyze all that had happened, reflect, ask God to help him with gratitude and reveal anything that had taken place that day that needed to be confessed and asked for forgiveness.

For the next session, we are going to practice the Daily Examen. I have given each of you a handout in your folders with the steps of the Daily Examen, so let's go over them now.

I invite Jill to guide us through these questions as we examine our lives and minds from the past day.

Let's each take some time to practice this vital part of our daily routines.

We will gather around the fire downstairs at the end of this time. As you are practicing Examen, I want you to write down anything that you think is holding you back, whether that be a sin, situation, relationship, or anything you need to give to God for this weekend. Ask God to reveal it as you pray and examine your heart.

Now I will call us back together sometime. The whole property is yours for the taking.

DAILY EXAMEN

Steps to praying the Examen

Praying the Daily Examen is a great way to look for God's presence. St. Ignatius (c. 1522) developed this practice of prayerful reflection on the day's events to detect God's presence in our lives and discern direction. This is one version of the Examen.

Step 1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember the events of the day.

The day may seem like a blur, but ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

Step 2. Have gratitude.

Mentally walk through your day in the presence of God. Ask Him where He was at work. In what ways did you experience His goodness, or maybe heard His voice? Note what brought you joy.

Look at the work you did and the people you interacted with. What good did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you eat, the sights you see, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details. Thank God for all these good things.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (2) – DAILY EXAMEN

Step 3. Pay attention to your emotions.

St. Ignatius believed we can learn much about ourselves and what God is doing in us and our lives through our emotions. Turn your prayers to the feelings you experienced that day. What were some of the emotions you experienced? Ask God about a couple that stood out to you. This isn't about judging things as good or bad; it's about letting God reveal new things about you and about His love, care, and desire to help you grow and have life to the fullest.

Note: God may show you some ways that you fell into sin. If so, confess them, knowing He is merciful and forgives. But look deeply for other implications. That is where you might find God at work.

Step 4. Choose one feature and pray from it.

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to one event or emotion of the day, whether positive or negative or significant or insignificant. Look at it; pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart, whether intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Step 5. Trust God with tomorrow.

Mentally survey tomorrow. What's coming up? What emotions arise: anticipation, dread, cheerfulness, fear? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance and peace. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. Ask for God's wisdom about your questions and problems. Do all this in a spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

Take the Next Step.

Having examined the day, I want us to take another step and think about something holding us back, something that is preventing you from entering into this weekend. It could be a sin, a relationship, a habit, or a routine. What is God calling you to give to him? Please take what he calls you to give him and write it down on a card. We will take those cards in a minute and burn them in a fire. God is often referred to in the Bible as a flame or a refining fire. And we are going to experience that right now.

LEADERS – FRIDAY (2) – DAILY EXAMEN****TEACHING: STEVE****

As we enter this sacred moment, I invite you to reflect on the incredible story of Moses. He was a man called by God to do extraordinary things despite his flaws and past mistakes. From the moment of his miraculous birth and being raised in Pharaoh's court, Moses longed to belong, yet he was caught in the tension between his heritage and the world where he was raised.

At age 40, Moses made a grave mistake, taking matters into his own hands and committing a terrible act. Filled with guilt and shame, he fled to the wilderness, seeking solace and escape from his past. For 40 years, he lived as a lowly shepherd, a far cry from the grandeur of Pharaoh's court. However, God sought him out amid his exile through a burning bush. Through this encounter, God called Moses back to his past, back to Egypt, to fulfill his divine purpose of rescuing the people of God.

Despite his doubts and fears, Moses mustered up the courage, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to heed God's call. Returning to Egypt, he faced numerous trials and tribulations, but God was with him every step of the way. Through God's power, Moses confronted Pharaoh, and God's mighty hand prevailed. It was not Moses' strength or abilities that won the victory; it was the power of God working through him. This serves as a reminder that nothing and no one can stand against us when God is for us.

As Moses led the people of Israel through the wilderness, God manifested His presence as a pillar of fire by night. Wherever the pillar of fire led, the people followed. They sacrificed, ordered their lives around God's leading, and experienced His provision and guidance. For 40 years, they journeyed in the wilderness, learning to trust God's faithfulness and surrendering to His will.

Similarly, God calls us to follow Him wherever He leads. As a symbolic surrender, we will place these cards representing our sins, hurts, and hang-ups into the fire tonight. We entrust them to God's redeeming grace, believing He can heal us from the inside out. Just as Moses was a vessel chosen by God to save the Israelites, we recognize that we, as the people of God, carry the presence of Jesus within us through the Holy Spirit. We are called to follow the Holy Spirit's leading and allow His transformative power to work in our lives.

Let us approach the fire, one by one, with our cards in hand. As we release them into the flames, let us release the burdens and sins that have held us back. Let us trust in God's redemptive grace, knowing that through His Son Jesus, we are made new. May this act of surrender be a powerful reminder that our past no longer binds us, but we are now set free to walk in the fullness of God's purpose and peace.

As the flames consume these cards, let us declare our trust in God's leading, acknowledging that His presence goes before us, guiding our steps and transforming our lives. Together, let us embrace the freedom and healing that God offers us, knowing He is with us every step. As you place the card in the fire, release it by saying, "I give everyone and Everything to you, God." After

putting the cards in the chimney, let us leave in a covenant of silence. I would ask you not to speak again until you get to your car.

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (1) – DAILY DEVOTION

****TEACHING: STEVE****

This next session focuses on daily devotions. Routines play a significant role in our devotional lives. I hope to establish a new daily rhythm and routine to have daily devotion.

What is a daily devotion? It is simply starting the day on the right foot and beginning with the Lord. Each of our devotions can look vastly different, but what is essential is that it leads and guides you closer to the Lord, transforming you more into the image and likeness of Christ.

I wanted to have a session on daily devotions and then practice it because, like Sabbath and Examen, this practice is vital to your development as a Christ-follower and, honestly, is not practiced very often.

The primary purpose of daily devotions is to deepen our relationship with God, transform us into the likeness of Christ, and integrate His Word into every aspect of our daily lives.

Direct the group to take a few minutes to respond to the questions below, then share with the group.

Prayer for your devotion time: *God, I pray now that you will help me draw into your presence. Please help me make every day a day to meet with you. When I practice my daily devotion, allow me to feel your love for me. Help me to love you with all my heart, mind, soul, and strength and come away from these times changed from the inside out. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

What has your daily devotion time looked like in the past? What has worked well and what hasn't?

Take 3 minutes and reflect on this question. Take a few notes below.

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (1) – DAILY DEVOTION**THREE COMPONENTS OF DEVOTION****1. Prayer**

- Adoration (Worship)
- Confession
- Thanksgiving
- Supplication (asking God)

Prayer is the lifeline of a believer's relationship with God. Through prayer, we communicate with our Creator, express our needs, and align our hearts with His will.

2. Scripture

- Study
- Meditation
- Application

Studying the Scriptures is a cornerstone of our spiritual lives. It allows us to understand God's will, grow in wisdom, and apply His truths to our daily lives.

3. Journaling

- Reflection: Journaling helps you reflect on your experiences, thoughts, and feelings. It allows you to see patterns, understand your spiritual growth, and recognize areas where God works.
- Prayer and Gratitude: Writing down your prayers and moments of gratitude helps solidify your communication with God and reminds you of His faithfulness.
- Scripture Meditation: Journaling your reflections on Scripture helps you internalize God's Word and apply it to your life.

Which component comes most naturally to you? Which component is the hardest for you to practice?

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (1) – DAILY DEVOTION

Direct the group to disperse and spend about 30 minutes doing personal devotion time.

You will now break off and practice a daily devotion for 30 minutes. Please do not take your phone. Take your Bible, your journal, and a pen. Spend time with God, and then we will come back and see how we are doing.

On the back of this page is a sample devotion time.

SAMPLE DEVOTION – 30 MINUTES

Prayer: Pray for about five minutes. During that time, worship God—express your love and devotion to Him (adoration), talk to Him about any sins you’ve committed, and ask for forgiveness (confession).

Scripture: Pick a passage of Scripture to read for about 10 minutes. Read the chapter and consider what God is saying about himself, our world, and your heart.

Back to Prayer: Spend another five minutes praying. Practice gratitude and thank God for your time with Him, the good things in your life, what He reveals to you, etc. (thanksgiving). Then, take a few minutes to request or ask God for something (supplication).

Journal: Now, take about 10 minutes to take a few notes. What are your next steps? How is God speaking to you? What is He showing you, asking you, etc.?

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (2) – SPIRITUAL GPS

Spiritual GPS: Reflection and Reorientation

****TEACHING: STEVE****

Purpose: To help participants reflect on their current spiritual and personal state and to discern God's direction for their future. This session encourages honest self-assessment and seeking God's guidance for the journey ahead. This session builds on the daily devotion and Examen and provides clarity as to where someone is right now. This session is going to be done together in the living room.

Elements Needed:

- Comfortable seating
- Journal and pen for each participant
- Handouts with reflection questions and prompts
- Candles or soft lighting for a peaceful atmosphere
- Compasses for each participant

1. Create a Sacred Space:

- Set up a serene environment with candles or soft lighting.
- Ensure each participant has a comfortable space to sit quietly and reflect.

2. Introduction to Reflection:

- Start with a brief introduction about the importance of reflection in spiritual growth.
- Discuss how reflecting on our current state helps us align with God's will and deepen our faith.
- Tell about being lost in the woods without a compass and how everyone ends up walking in a big circle. Sometimes it is important to stop what we are doing and look inward and descend into the depths of our soul to see if we are on track to the right spot. Are we heading in the right direction? We can only know when we take time to pause and look at the God compass that He has given us.
- Scripture Reference: "Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." (Psalm 139:23-24)

3. Steps to Reflecting on Your Current State:

Begin with Prayer: Invite the Holy Spirit to guide their thoughts and reveal insights.

Prayer to Enter Reflection: "Holy Spirit, help me to reflect on my life with wisdom, grace, and faith. Give me the grace to see my life as You see it. When I see my failings, remind me that I am Your beloved child with a future and a hope. When I see my accomplishments, remind me that my true worth is found in being made in Your image. Help me to see what You see and to answer the call that You are placing on my life. Amen."

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (2) – SPIRITUAL GPS

Reflection Questions: Provide handouts with the following questions for participants to ponder and write about in their journals:

1. What have you been most thankful for lately?
Scripture Reference: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18
2. Is there something you have repeatedly been talking to God about in prayer?
Scripture Reference: "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." - Philippians 4:6
3. What concept or idea has been swirling around in your head lately?
Scripture Reference: "Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." - Colossians 3:2
4. What emotions have been surfacing lately? Can you name them?
Scripture Reference: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" - Jeremiah 17:9
5. When have you felt most distant from God or distracted?
Scripture Reference: "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." - Matthew 6:33
6. When lately have you felt most alive or drawn to God?
Scripture Reference: "Come near to God and he will come near to you." - James 4:8
7. What relationship(s) have you been investing in the most? Is it draining or life-giving (no judgment or condemnation)?
Scripture Reference: "A friend loves you all the time, but a brother was born to help in times of trouble." - Proverbs 17:17
8. Is there a relationship or project in which you would like to invest more in the months ahead?
Scripture Reference: "Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." - Proverbs 16:3
9. Go back over everything you wrote and, one by one, talk to God about each answer. Spend some time in quiet and ask Him for His perspective on each of these topics. Remember, He loves you.

Scripture Reference: "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." - 1 Peter 5:7

4. Group Reflection:

- After going through the reflection questions, encourage the participants to share with a group of 3 or 4 and share and their experience.
 - How did you experience God's presence during the reflection time?
 - What insights or revelations did you receive?
 - What is your next step in aligning your life with God's will?
- Scripture Reference: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." - Proverbs 27:17

5. Symbolic Act of Commitment:

- End the session with a symbolic act of commitment to their reflections
- Compass Distribution: Distribute a compass to each participant as a symbol of their journey and finding their true north in God.
- Scripture Reference: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight." - Proverbs 3:5-6

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (2) – SPIRITUAL GPS

6. End with Group Prayer:

- Close the session with a group prayer, asking God to bless their commitments and guide their steps.

LEADERS – SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1) – PRAYER

Purpose: To teach participants how to engage in meaningful and transformative prayer, foster a deeper relationship with God and understand His will, and then give them space to practice it.

****TEACHING: STEVE****

Elements Needed:

- Quiet space for individual prayer
- Candles or soft lighting to create a serene atmosphere
- Journals and pens for each participant
- Prayer prompts handout

Session Structure

1. Create a Sacred Space:

- Begin by setting up the environment with candles or soft lighting to create a peaceful, inviting atmosphere for prayer.
- Ensure each participant has a comfortable space to sit or kneel.

2. Introduction to Prayer:

- Start with a brief introduction on the importance of prayer. Discuss how prayer is a vital communication line with God and a means to deepen our relationship with Him.
- Say, "This next session is going to be all about getting alone with God for a time to look to the future. We have been building to this point where you can reflect and think about the future in silence."
- **Scripture Reference:** "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." - 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

3. Steps to Engaging in Meaningful Prayer

Begin with Silence:

- Encourage participants to start their prayer time with a few moments of silence. This helps to clear the mind, focus the heart, and invite God's presence.
- **Scripture Reference:** "Be still and know that I am God." - Psalm 46:10

Praise and Adoration:

- Guide participants to begin their prayers with adoration, praising God for His attributes and mighty works. Acknowledge His greatness, love, mercy, and sovereignty.

- **Example:** "Lord, You are holy and righteous. I praise You for Your unfailing love and mercy."
- **Scripture Reference:** "Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours." - 1 Chronicles 29:11

LEADERS – SATURDAY MORNING (2) – PRAYER

Confession:

- Lead participants to reflect on their lives and confess any sins or shortcomings. Emphasize the importance of being honest and transparent with God, seeking His forgiveness and cleansing.
- **Example:** "Father, I confess my impatience and pride. Forgive me and help me to grow in humility and love."
- **Scripture Reference:** "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." - 1 John 1:9

Thanksgiving:

- Encourage participants to spend time thanking God for His blessings. Gratitude helps shift our focus from our worries to God's goodness and faithfulness.
- **Example:** "Thank You, Lord, for the gift of today, for my family, and for Your constant provision."
- **Scripture Reference:** "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever." - Psalm 107:1

Supplication:

- Guide participants to present their requests to God. This can include personal needs, intercessions for others, and seeking God's guidance and help in various situations.
- **Example:** "Lord, I pray for Your guidance in my job search. Please provide wisdom and open doors according to Your will."
- **Scripture Reference:** "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." - Philippians 4:6

4. Practicing Different Prayer Methods

ACTS Model:

- **Adoration:** "Lord, You are worthy of all praise."
- **Confession:** "Forgive me for my anger and lack of patience."
- **Thanksgiving:** "Thank You for Your provision and grace."
- **Supplication:** "Please heal my friend who is sick."

Breath Prayer:

- Short, simple prayers that can be repeated as you breathe in and out.
- **Example:** “Jesus, have mercy on me.”

Lectio Divina:

- A meditative way of reading Scripture, involving reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.
- Read a passage slowly, meditate on its meaning, pray in response, and contemplate God’s message.

LEADERS – SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1) – PRAYER**Intercessory Prayer:**

- Praying on behalf of others.
- **Example:** “Lord, I lift up my friend to You. Please provide comfort and healing.”

5. Extended Time of Silence and Solitude:

- After teaching the methods of prayer, provide participants with an extended period of silence and solitude to practice prayer and reflect on their future direction with God.
- **Scripture Reference:** “But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” - Luke 5:16

6. Steps to Discerning Future Direction**Pray for Guidance:**

- Lead participants in a prayer asking for God’s guidance for their future.
- **Prayer into a Hopeful Future:** “Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see where You want me to go. I lay down my desires for my life and pick up only what You desire to bring forth through me. What would You want to create through me? Where do You want to transform me to be more Christ-like? I submit my will to Yours, Jesus. I humbly ask for You to speak as I sit in the quiet. Amen.”
- **Scripture Reference:** “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” - Psalm 119:105

Set Future Goals:

- Encourage participants to set specific goals for the upcoming weeks and months in various areas of their lives (emotional, spiritual, relational).
- **Prompt:** “What specific goals would you like to see in the areas of emotional, spiritual, and relational growth? Write a few bullet points for each.”

Identify Joys and Habits:

- Have participants reflect on activities and habits that bring them joy and consider incorporating new positive habits.
- **Prompt:** “In what do you find the most joy—activities, people, places, experiences, moments? Is there a new habit you want to incorporate into your life? What about creating margin—what should you say yes and no to? Reflect on these and write them down.”

Discern God’s Direction:

- Ask participants to consider what they sense God might want them to do in the near future.
- **Prompt:** “What are you sensing God might want you to do? Write down your thoughts and pray about them.”

LEADERS – SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1) – PRAYER**Identify Potential Distractions:**

- Guide participants to recognize any potential distractions that could hinder their progress.
- **Prompt:** “Is there anything that might distract you from your goals and God’s direction? Identify these distractions and pray for strength to overcome them.”

7. Group Reflection:

- After practicing prayer individually, gather as a group to reflect on the experience. Encourage participants to share their insights, challenges, and any specific ways they felt God’s presence.
- **Discussion Questions:**
 - How did you experience God’s presence during the prayer time?
 - What insights or revelations did you receive?
 - What is your next step in incorporating prayer into your daily routine?
- **Scripture Reference:** “Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.” - 1 Thessalonians 5:11

8. Symbolic Act of Commitment:

- End the session with a symbolic act of commitment to a regular prayer practice.
- **Writing a Prayer Goal:** Ask participants to write a prayer goal on a card and place it in a communal basket as a dedication.

9. Closing Prayer:

- End with a group prayer, asking God to bless their commitments and guide their steps.
- **Scripture Reference:** "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."
- Matthew 18:20

Additional Notes:

- **Not Legalistic:** Emphasize that prayer should not be a burden but a joy and a privilege. Approach it with a relaxed attitude, focusing on the relationship with God rather than the form.
- **Enjoy the Time:** Encourage participants to savor the moments of prayer, finding peace and comfort in God's presence.
- **Use Resources:** Suggest using prayer books, apps, or joining prayer groups for support and inspiration.
- **Be Open to the Holy Spirit:** Remind participants to be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit during prayer, allowing God to guide their thoughts and words.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT'S GUIDE

FRIDAY (1)

SABBATH DINNER & COMMUNION

A Weekly Practice of Rest and Worship

Purpose: To show participants how to practice Sabbath on a weekly basis, fostering a rhythm of rest, worship, and community.

Elements Needed

- Dinner setup
- Table with seating for 4-6 (multiple tables if needed)
- Candle with 3 wicks (representing the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit)

Things to Do

1. **Light a Candle:** Place a candle with three wicks in the center of the table. The three wicks symbolize the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This act marks the beginning of your Sabbath dinner, inviting the presence of God into your meal and conversation.
2. **Pray Together:** Go around the table and invite each participant to say a prayer, welcoming the Lord into your dinner and conversation. This sets a sacred tone for the meal.
3. **Share Highs and Lows:** As you eat, go around the table and share your highs and lows from the week. This practice fosters community, vulnerability, and support among participants.
4. **Practice Gratitude:** After sharing highs and lows, have each person say one thing they are grateful for this week. Gratitude shifts our focus to God's blessings and cultivates a positive, thankful heart.
5. **Bible Story Time:** Transition into a time of Bible study. Read a story from a children's Bible that aligns with the church calendar (e.g., Easter, Pentecost, Epiphany, Advent, or other

major Christian holidays). This makes the stories relevant and timely.

6. **Reflect on the Story:** Ask the question, “How did God show up in that story?” Encourage everyone to share their thoughts and reflections. This deepens the understanding and application of the biblical narrative.
7. **Take Communion:** As a family, take communion together. Read the relevant passages from the Bible and reflect on the significance of Jesus’s sacrifice. This is a profound way to remember and honor Christ.
8. **Blow Out the Candle:** End the meal by blowing out the candle together. This signifies the closing of your sacred time and the transition back to everyday life, carrying the peace and presence of God with you.

FRIDAY (1)

Reflect and Listen

After the dinner, take 5-10 minutes to listen and reflect on what God is showing you regarding Sabbath dinner. Consider these questions:

How did you experience God’s presence during the meal?

What insights or revelations did you receive?

What is your next step in incorporating Sabbath dinner into your weekly routine?

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE SABBATH (EXTRA HANDOUTS)

- **Not Legalistic:** Remember, we are free from the Law. Approach this dinner with a relaxed attitude. Don't stress about perfection; the goal is to enjoy and rest in God's presence.
- **Enjoy the Time:** Savor the flavors of the meal and the company of those around you. This is a time to delight in God's gifts.
- **Use Your Best:** Use your best china or dinnerware—not paper plates. This makes the meal feel special and set apart.
- **Make a Special Meal:** Prepare the best meals on this day. Consider steak, seafood, or a charcuterie board. This highlights the importance of the Sabbath dinner.
- **Home Setting:** It's best to host the dinner in your home, creating a cozy, intimate environment.
- **Invite Others:** Sabbath dinner is a communal practice. Invite friends, neighbors, or church members to join you. It's an opportunity for fellowship and outreach.
- **Family Time:** Incorporate family activities after the meal, such as a walk, a bonfire, or a family game night. This extends the time of rest and enjoyment together.
- **Consistent Elements:** Keep certain elements the same each week: the candle, sharing highs and lows, communion, and prayer. Consistency helps establish a meaningful tradition.
- **Budget for Sabbath Dinner:** Feel free to splurge on this meal. Consider buying USDA Prime steak, freshly caught snapper, big scallops, etc. Investing in this meal underscores its significance.

FRIDAY (2)**DAILY EXAMEN****Steps to praying the Examen**

A great way to look for God's presence in our lives is to pray the daily examen. St. Ignatius (c. 1522) developed this practice of prayerful reflection on the events of the day to detect God's presence in our lives and to discern direction. This is one version of the examen, downloadable at <https://www.jesusexpedition.com/resources>.

Step 1. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you remember the events of the day.

The day may seem like a blur, but ask God to bring clarity and understanding.

Step 2. Have gratitude.

Mentally walk through your day in the presence of God. Ask Him where He was at work. In what ways did you experience His goodness, or maybe you heard His voice. Note what brought you joy. Look at the work you did, the people you interacted with. What good did you receive from these people? What did you give them? Pay attention to small things—the food you ate, the sights you saw, and other seemingly small pleasures. God is in the details. Thank God for all these good things.

Step 3. Pay attention to your emotions.

St. Ignatius believed we can learn a lot about ourselves and what God is doing in us and in our lives through our emotions. Turn your prayers to the emotions you experienced that day. What were some of the emotions you experienced? Ask God about a couple that stood out to you. This isn't about judging things as good or bad, it's about letting God reveal new things about you and about His love, care and desire to help you grow and have life to the fullest.

Note: God may show you some ways that you fallen into sin. If so, simply confess them knowing He is merciful and forgives. But look deeply for other implications. That is where you might find God at work.

FRIDAY (2)**Step 4. Choose one feature and pray from it.**

Ask the Holy Spirit to direct you to one event or emotion of the day. It may be positive or negative, significant or insignificant. Look at it; pray about it. Allow the prayer to arise spontaneously from your heart. It might be intercession, praise, repentance, or gratitude.

Step 5. Trust God with tomorrow.

Mentally survey tomorrow. What's coming up? What emotions arise: anticipation, dread, cheerfulness, fear? Allow these feelings to turn into prayer. Seek God's guidance and peace. Ask him for help and understanding. Pray for hope.

St. Ignatius encouraged people to talk to Jesus like a friend. Ask for God's wisdom about the questions you have and the problems you face. Do all this in a spirit of gratitude. Your life is a gift, and it is adorned with gifts from God.

SATURDAY MORNING (1)**DAILY DEVOTION**

Prayer for your devotion time: God, I pray now that you would help me draw into your presence. Please help me make every day a day to meet with you. When I practice my daily devotion, allow me to feel your love for me. Help me to love you with all of my heart, mind, soul and strength and come away from these times changed from the inside out. In Jesus name Amen.

What has your daily devotion time looked like in the past? What has worked well and what hasn't?

Take 3 minutes and reflect on this question. Take a few notes below.

Three Components of Devotion

1. Prayer: Adoration (Worship) – Confession – Thanksgiving – Supplication (asking God)
2. Scripture: Study – Meditation – Application
3. Journaling: Where have you been? – Where is God taking you?

Which component comes most naturally to you? Which component is the hardest for you to practice?

SATURDAY MORNING

You will now break off and practice a daily devotion for 30 minutes. Please do not take your phone. Take your Bible, journal, and a pen. Spend time with God, and then we will come back together and discuss our time with Him. A sample devotion time is on the next page.

SAMPLE DEVOTION

Prayer: Pray for about five minutes. During that time worship God—express your love and devotion to Him (adoration) and talk to Him about any sins you’ve committed and ask for forgiveness (confession).

Scripture: Pick a passage of Scripture to read for about 10 minutes (possibly visit Psalm 62). Read the chapter, think about what God is saying about himself, our world, and your own heart.

Back to Prayer: Spend another five minutes praying. Practice gratitude and thank God for your time with Him, the good things in your life, what He is revealing to you, etc. (thanksgiving). Then, take a few minutes to make requests or ask God for something (supplication).

Journal: Now, take about 10 minutes to take a few notes. What are your next steps? How is God speaking to you? What is He showing you, asking you, etc.?

DAILY DEVOTION RESOURCES (EXTRA HANDOUTS)

1. The Daily Walk Bible: Bible set up with specific chapters to read per day, six days a week.
2. Phone apps
 - Pause App
 - Abide App
 - You Version App
3. The Bible Project: YouTube channel with detailed video explaining books of the Bible.
4. Walking: Walks with the intention of prayer and reflection
5. Deep breathing
6. Breath prayers: Example included in your folder
7. Journal prompts: Specific questions to think about and answer
 - Example: Immanuel Journaling Exercise
8. Accountability Partner: Set up a weekly walk or call with a friend to discuss your time with the Lord.
9. Mantras: Small Scripture memorization
10. Daily Devotion Books
 - My Utmost for His Highest
 - Jesus Calling

SATURDAY MORNING

SPIRITUAL GPS: Reflection and Reorientation

Purpose

To help you reflect on your current spiritual and personal state and to discern God's direction for your future. This session encourages honest self-assessment and seeking God's guidance for the journey ahead.

Elements Needed

- Quiet space for individual reflection
- Comfortable seating
- Journal and pen
- Candles or soft lighting for a peaceful atmosphere

STEPS TO REFLECTING ON YOUR CURRENT STATE

Begin with Prayer: Start your reflection time with a prayer, inviting the Holy Spirit to guide your thoughts and reveal insights.

Prayer to Enter Reflection

Holy Spirit, help me to reflect on my life with wisdom, grace, and faith. Give me the grace to see my life as You see it. When I see my failings, remind me that I am Your beloved child with a future and a hope. When I see my accomplishments, remind me that my true worth is found in being made in Your image. Amen.

Reflection Questions:

1. **What have you been most thankful for lately?**
 "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." - 1 Thessalonians 5:18

2. **Is there something you have repeatedly been talking to God about in prayer?**
 "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." - Philippians 4:6

SATURDAY MORNING

3. **What concept or idea has been swirling around in your head lately?**
"Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." - Colossians 3:2

4. **What emotions have been surfacing lately? Can you name them?**
"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" - Jeremiah 17:9

5. **When have you felt most distant from God or distracted?**
"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." - Matthew 6:33

6. **When lately have you felt most alive or drawn to God?**
"Come near to God and he will come near to you." - James 4:8

SATURDAY MORNING (2)

7. What relationship(s) have you been investing in the most? Is it draining or life-giving (no judgment or condemnation)?

"A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity." - Proverbs 17:17

8. Is there a relationship or project in which you would like to invest more in the months ahead?

"Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans." - Proverbs 16:3

9. Go back over everything you wrote and, one by one, talk to God about each answer. Spend some time in quiet and ask Him for His perspective on each of these topics. Remember, He loves you.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you." - 1 Peter 5:7

SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1)

PRAYER: Communing with God

Purpose:

To teach you how to engage in meaningful and transformative prayer, fostering a deeper relationship with God and understanding His will.

Elements Needed:

- Quiet space for individual prayer
- Comfortable seating
- Candles or soft lighting to create a serene atmosphere
- Journals and pens
- Prayer prompts handout

STEPS TO ENGAGING IN MEANINGFUL PRAYER

1. **Begin with Silence:** Start your prayer time with a few moments of silence. This helps to clear the mind, focus the heart, and invite God's presence.
2. **Praise and Adoration:** Begin your prayers with adoration, praising God for His attributes and mighty works. Acknowledge His greatness, love, mercy, and sovereignty.

Example: "Lord, You are holy and righteous. I praise You for Your unfailing love and mercy."

3. **Confession:** Reflect on your life and confess any sins or shortcomings. Be honest and transparent with God, seeking His forgiveness and cleansing.

Example: "Father, I confess my impatience and pride. Forgive me and help me to grow in humility and love."

SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1)

4. Thanksgiving: Spend time thanking God for His blessings. Gratitude helps shift our focus from our worries to God's goodness and faithfulness.

Example: "Thank You, Lord, for the gift of today, for my family, and for Your constant provision."

5. Supplication: Present your requests to God, including personal needs, intercessions for others, and seeking God's guidance and help in various situations.

Example: "Lord, I pray for Your guidance in my job search. Please provide wisdom and open doors according to Your will."

SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1)

STEPS TO DISCERNING FUTURE DIRECTION

1. **Pray for Guidance:** Ask for God's guidance for your future.

A Prayer into a Hopeful Future

Holy Spirit, open my eyes to see where You want me to go. I lay down my desires for my life and pick up only what You desire to bring forth through me. What would You want to create through me? Where do You want to transform me to be more Christ-like? I submit my will to Yours, Jesus. I humbly ask for You to speak as I sit in the quiet. Amen.

2. **Set Future Goals:** Set specific goals for the upcoming weeks and months in various areas of your life (emotional, spiritual, relational).

What specific goals would you like to see in the areas of emotional, spiritual, and relational growth? Write a few bullet points for each.

3. **Identify Joys and Habits:** Reflect on activities and habits that bring you joy and consider incorporating new positive habits.

In what do you find the most joy—activities, people, places, experiences, moments? Is there a new habit you want to incorporate into your life? What about creating margin—what should you say yes and no to? Reflect on these and write them down.

SATURDAY AFTERNOON (1)

4. **Discern God's Direction:** Consider what you sense God might want you to do in the near future.

What are you sensing God might want you to do? Write down your thoughts and pray about them.

5. **Identify Potential Distractions:** Recognize any potential distractions that could hinder your progress.

Is there anything that might distract you from your goals and God's direction? Identify these distractions and pray for strength to overcome them.

SYMBOLIC ACT OF COMMITMENT

Write a short statement to commit to a regular prayer practice. Place these in a communal basket as an act of dedication.

TIPS FOR EFFECTIVE PRAYER (EXTRA HANDOUTS)

- **Be Consistent:** Set a specific time each day for prayer to develop a consistent habit.
- **Be Honest:** Approach God with honesty and transparency, sharing your true feelings and thoughts.
- **Be Still:** Spend time in silence listening for God's voice. Prayer is a two-way conversation.
- **Use Scripture:** Incorporate Scripture into your prayers. Pray through the Psalms or other passages to align your prayers with God's Word.
- **Keep a Prayer Journal:** Record your prayers and how God answers them. A journal helps track spiritual growth and reminds you of God's faithfulness.

PRACTICING DIFFERENT PRAYER METHODS

ACTS Model:

- **Adoration:** "Lord, You are worthy of all praise."
- **Confession:** "Forgive me for my anger and lack of patience."
- **Thanksgiving:** "Thank You for Your provision and grace."
- **Supplication:** "Please heal my friend who is sick."

Breath Prayer:

Short, simple prayers that can be repeated as you breathe in and out.

Example:

"Jesus, have mercy on me."

Lectio Divina:

A meditative way of reading Scripture involving reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation.

- Read a passage slowly, meditate on its meaning, pray in response, and contemplate God's message.

Intercessory Prayer:

Praying on behalf of others.

Example:

"Lord, I lift up my friend to You. Please provide comfort and healing."

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- **Not Legalistic:** Prayer should not be a burden but a joy and a privilege. Approach it with a relaxed attitude, focusing on the relationship with God rather than the form.
- **Enjoy the Time:** Savor the moments of prayer, finding peace and comfort in God's presence.
- **Use Resources:** Consider using prayer books, apps, or joining prayer groups for support and inspiration.
- **Be Open to the Holy Spirit:** Be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit during prayer, allowing God to guide your thoughts and words.

BREATH PRAYERS (EXTRA HANDOUTS)

CONNECT US WITH GOD WITH EVERY BREATH

Every breath is a sacred gift. Without it, we die. That's what makes breath prayers so powerful. They connect us to God with every breath.

The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. (Job 33:4)

Considering its great size and power, an elephant must exercise self-control and restraint to effectively navigate and thrive. Likewise, breath prayers help us navigate and thrive through the elephant-sized gift of our breath (and the One who is with us in every breath).

Christ in. Self out. More of Him. Less of me.

What started when God breathed the breath of life into Adam continues in each of us every minute of every day that our hearts beat on this spinning, blue planet. At least a dozen times a minute, we repeat this ancient rhythm that began in the Garden of Eden.

Just as God breathed life into us: "The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and *breathed* into his nostrils the breath of life," He *breathed* it into His Word: "*All Scripture is God-breathed.*" (2 Timothy 3:16a)

Yet how often do we move through our days, months, and years, giving no thought to this automatic function of life? The Desert Mothers and Fathers chose this rhythm to teach them how to "pray without ceasing" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). Their most common prayer was an echo of Luke 18:13: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner."

With every breath, their hearts and minds were drawn toward Jesus.

PRAY SCRIPTURE WITH BREATH PRAYERS

As we consciously pray a short passage of Scripture with each breath, thoughts settle, breathing slows, pressure drops, expectations wane, stress falls away, tensions fade, heart rates ease, and we are drawn into the Presence of our Creator.

How fitting to pray the gift of God's Word to the ancient rhythm of His gift of our life.

Are you ready to step in?

HOW TO PRAY WITH EVERY BREATH

1. Find a comfortable spot.
2. Close your eyes.
3. **Quiet** your thoughts.

4. When you're ready, begin with the first few words of Scripture as you breathe in – **Let the word of Christ** (focus on each word).
5. Complete the verse as you exhale – **dwell in you richly**.
6. If you are anxious or your body is restless, try adding a simple movement as you breathe.

Look up and open your hands, surrendering your will, words, thoughts, anxiety, frustration, exhaustion, and sin to Jesus.

Pull your hands into your chest as you breathe in the first half of your prayer, embracing God and His Word.

Open and extend your hands as you breathe out the second half of your prayer, worshipping God.

7. Focus on each word.
8. Begin to feel the rhythm of the words with the rhythm of your breathing.
9. Listen for God to speak to you in this place of quiet surrender.

VERSES TO TRY FOR BREATH PRAYERS

My soul finds rest in God alone. (Psalm 62:1a)

When I am afraid, I will trust in you. (Psalm 56:3 CSB)

I cried to my God for help ... He heard my voice ... (Psalm 18:6)

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. (1 Samuel 3:9b)

...not my will, but yours be done. (Luke 22:42)

Be still, and know that I am God... (Psalm 46:10a)

May your unfailing love be my comfort... (Psalm 119:76a)

My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121:2)

He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)

...live by the Spirit...keep in step with the Spirit. (Galatians 5:25)

<https://chronic-joy.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Breath-Prayers.pdf>

APPENDIX D: IRB APPROVAL



April 23, 2024

Dear Steven Wichern:

On 4/23/2024, the Evangel University Institutional Review Board reviewed your submitted application addressing the proposal titled, "Helping Airmen Build Spiritual Resiliency: Training Eglin Protestant Chapel Members on Spiritual Formation Through Retreat." Your research protocol is hereby accepted as completed. The full committee reviewed your application and voted to approve. Your project IRB number is 2024-024. Use this number for all documentation regarding your study, including all consent forms.

Please note that you must be continually mindful and adhere to all standards that protect human subjects in your study. Additionally, where applicable, subjects must sign and be given a copy of a consent form before the subject's participation. You also included a photo release form in your application. You may only use photos of participants for whom you have a signed photo release on file.

All digital data must be password protected, and the password must be updated yearly until the file is deleted. Data must be saved in this fashion for 3 years post-study. All hard copy consent forms must be scanned and digitally saved in a secure location. Hard copy data must be shredded at the conclusion of the study.

Should you wish to make changes to the IRB-approved procedures, the following materials must be submitted for IRB review and approved by the IRB before being instituted:

- Description of proposed revisions
- If applicable, any new or revised materials, such as recruitment fliers, letters to subjects, or consent documents, and
- If applicable, updated letters of approval from cooperating institutions and IRBs.

In harmony with University policies, none of the investigators or research staff involved in the study took part in the final decision.

Sincerely,

Kristen Kansiewicz, PhD, LPC
Chair- EU IRB
417-865-2815 x. 8619
Kansiewicz@evangel.edu

APPENDIX E: EMAIL ADVERTISEMENT

Spiritual Retreat

...he leads me besides quiet waters, he refreshes my soul.
Psalm 23:2-3

JUNE 28 & 29

FRIDAY: 6PM TO 9PM

SATURDAY: 9AM TO 3PM

\$50 PER PERSON
Food and drinks provided

SPACE IS LIMITED TO 12 PARTICIPANTS

PLEASE RSVP BY JUNE 14

Hosted by Steven & Lindsey Wichern in partnership with Space to Sojourn Ministries

APPENDIX F: CHAMP SOCOM SPIRITUAL FITNESS SCALE



CHAMP/SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS)

Spiritual Fitness (SF) is a key component of the Department of Defense (DoD) Total Force Fitness framework for maintaining the total well-being and readiness of the force (CJCSI 3405.01, 2011). Spiritual Performance (SP) is a key component of the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) Preservation of the Force and Family (POTFF) program framework for total well-being and readiness (SOCOM Directive 10-12, 2021). Both frameworks seek to enfranchise nontheists as well as theists. Both also address the importance of maintaining and strengthening the connections Military Service Members hold with their highest beliefs and values, and the connections they hold with other people.

DoD mandates that SF stakeholders produce metrics that provide useful information on individual, unit, and organizational readiness related to SF. SOCOM mandates the same for stakeholders related to SP. However, tools to holistically measure SF/SP remain in

their infancy. The academic literature contains many validated and publicly available survey instruments that assess aspects of spirituality, but they don't adequately capture SF/SP. Available scales are often lengthy and burdensome to administer for baselining and tracking trends over time. They also frequently assume a theistic orientation, so for non-theists these scales risk being invalid or even offensive. Lastly, most are poorly aligned with fitness and readiness objectives. As a result, military leaders lack validated tools to track SF/SP and optimize supporting programs and services.

In response, Consortium for Health and Military Performance (CHAMP) researchers partnered with SOCOM to develop the CHAMP/SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS), a multi-year project that included input from more than 8,000 people in quantitative panels, responding to an initial 378 items.

During exploratory factor analysis completed within the 6 iterations of the project, 3 distinct spiritual traits emerged, which might be seen as Core Attributes of SF/SP. Each is represented by its own sub-scale.

The 3 Core Attributes/sub-scales are called: Personal Connection with a Higher Power (PCHP); Pursuing Meaning, Purpose, and Value (PMPV); and Service and Sacrifice for the Greater Good (SSGG).

To ensure survey validity for nontheists, a screener was included to allow nontheists to opt out from the PCHP subscale. The scales provide a good balance of the following properties: They are reliable and metrically sound, they're concise but not too narrow (17 items

in the final product), they're sensitive to many belief systems, and they correlate with many wider wellness traits such as gratitude, quality of life, forgiveness, familial commitment, coping, resilience, and adaptive reframing.

1

¹ Reproduced by permission from David William Alexander, Commander (O-5/OF-05), U.S. Navy Chaplain Corps, Assistant Professor of Military & Emergency Medicine, Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences Force (TYCOM) Chaplain, Naval Medical Forces Pacific.

Using the SSFS

The SSFS is capable of informing and supporting many activities related to SF/SP, including:

- Establishing multi-dimensional baseline profiles for groups and individuals
- Assessing trends over time
- Bridging trends to individual coaching and mentoring
- Providing an evidence base for SF/SP program alignment
- Evaluating the effectiveness of programs designed to impact SF/SP, and articulate the impact of this growth with total well-being and readiness

Administer the scale within two blocks:

- Block 1: PMPV and SSGG
- Block 2: PCHP

To avoid any priming effect, the scale designers recommend administering the horizontal sub-scales (PMPV and SSGG) before the vertical sub-scale (PCHP). When administering the SSFS using an electronic system, the order of the items within each item-block can be randomized. When using paper and pencil to administer the SSFS, consider using the provided version below (this item sequence will minimize likely order-effects).



SOCOM Spiritual Fitness Scale (SSFS)

Reflect on your attitudes, commitments, and beliefs and answer as accurately as possible.

1. I know what my life is about.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

2. Human value and respect should be the greatest social value.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

3. I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

4. Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

5. I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

6. I have a core set of beliefs, ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

7. I often think about a "grand plan" or process that human beings are a part of.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

8. The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

9. Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

10. I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree

The next set of statements reflects commitment to God or a higher power. Even if you don't think of yourself as religious, try to answer as accurately as possible. If you believe a statement doesn't align with your belief system, then choose the option "The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views."

11. I believe in God or a higher power.

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

12. I feel God's love for me.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

13. I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

14. I feel God's presence.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

15. I am grateful for all God has done for me.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

16. God comforts and shelters me.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

17. I've decided to place my life under God's direction.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

18. Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.

- ☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neutral ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree
☐ *The assumptions behind this question aren't consistent with my world views.*

Scoring

For profiling, sub-scales should be scored by first coding the response options, such that:

- Strongly disagree = 1
- Disagree = 2
- Neutral = 3
- Agree = 4
- Strongly agree = 5

Averaging

- Each sub-scale should be averaged separately; after this, the sub-scales may be averaged together.
- In the version above, PMPV items (1, 3, 4, 6, 10) and SSGG items (2, 5, 7, 8, 9) are mixed together, and must be unmixed to generate separate averages.

Classifying scores

Rigid cutoffs to classify individual scores can be seen as arbitrary for nonclinical traits that exist along a continuum. However, for the purposes of creating working categories that can be matched with suggested readiness interventions: An average score below 3.5 for any sub-scale can be considered a 'low/lower score,' indicating ample room for growth. Accordingly, an average score above 3.5 for any sub-scale can be considered a 'high/higher score,' indicating the need for a readiness focus on both maintenance and growth.

Other considerations

- PCHP items (12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18) *should* be scored if respondents indicate they *do* believe in God.
- PCHP items *should not* be scored if respondents indicate they *do not* believe in God.
- PCHP also *should not* be scored if respondents use the option "The assumptions behind this statement aren't consistent with my world views" on two or more items.
- When using sub-scales to evaluate program-related growth in one of the three Core Attributes of SF/SP, extending to a 10-point, Likert-type format is recommended, with descriptors placed only on points 1 (strongly disagree) and 10 (strongly agree). Change scores in the 10-point format can then be divided by 2 to compare with scores in the 5-point format.

SSFS Qualitative Companion Tool: Spirituality & Performance Coaching Grid (SPCG)

Scales	Notes on Commitment & Connection Related to the 3 Core Attributes			Goals to Maintain or Strengthen Spiritual Commitments
	How has my commitment to this attribute changed in the past 6-18 months?	Which factors might help me strengthen my commitment to this attribute?	Which factors might threaten my ability to maintain commitment to this attribute?	
PMVP				
SSGG				
PCHP				

Using the SPCG

You can use the SPCG in conjunction with SSFS to capture narrative feedback corresponding to SSFS item responses. It can also be used as a tool for bridging SSFS results into tailored coaching or mentoring for optimized performance and enhanced readiness.

Note: The SPCG isn't a static tool. Designed as a qualitative companion matrix to the SSFS, its top-column categories can be dynamically adjusted for use anytime an SF/SP stakeholder wishes to capture first-person comments related to SSFS scaling. The top-column categories in the version above are ideal for preparing an individual coaching encounter. However, if an SF/SP stakeholder wishes to use the SPCG as a component in program evaluation, it's expected that the top-column categories would be changed to pursue information on program-related processes and outcomes.

For more information, contact:

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Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences

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APPENDIX G: RETREAT EVALUATION

RETREAT EVALUATION

Please provide your feedback on the retreat. Your input is valuable to us as we strive to improve our future retreats.
Use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent.

Overall Experience: Rate your overall experience of the retreat.	1	2	3	4	5
Organization and Logistics: How would you rate the organization and logistics of the retreat?	1	2	3	4	5
Content and Topics: Please rate the content and topics covered during the retreat.	1	2	3	4	5
Facilitators: Rate the knowledge, communication, and engagement of the facilitators and speakers.	1	2	3	4	5
Experiences: Rate the experiential activities and their effectiveness in enhancing your spiritual journey.	1	2	3	4	5
Schedule: How would you rate the timing and schedule of the retreat in terms of balance and flow?	1	2	3	4	5

Please provide your feedback, thoughts, and suggestions on the following sessions:

FRIDAY

Purpose of Retreat: Reflect on the experiential activity during Friday evenings session on the Purpose of Retreat and Peace.

Bonfire Experience: Reflect on the experiential activity during the Fire of God session.

SATURDAY

Daily Devotion Experience: Reflect on the experiential activity during the devotional session.

Spiritual Location Exercise: Reflect on the experiential activity during the Spiritual Location Exercise.

Reflection, Hopeful Future and Prayer Experience: Reflect on the experiential activity during the final session.

Please provide your feedback, thoughts, and suggestions for the retreat in general.

Strengths: Please mention the aspects of the retreat that you found most valuable and impactful.

Areas for Improvement: Share any suggestions or areas where you feel the retreat could be enhanced in the future.

Additional Comments: Please provide any additional comments or feedback you would like to share.

Thank you for taking the time to complete this evaluation. Your input is greatly appreciated.
We hope the retreat was a meaningful and transformative experience for you.

APPENDIX H: INFORMED CONSENT

Doctor of Ministry
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary
Researcher: Steven Wichern

You are invited to participate in a study of Spiritual Formation. As the researcher, I hope to learn the effectiveness of the “Faith Based Spiritual Formation through Retreat” curriculum on the spiritual fitness of the nominal Christian. You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an active participant in Eglin Chapel. This curriculum is designed to fulfill part of Steven Wichern’s project and dissertation for the completion of his Doctor of Ministry degree with AGTS.

If you decide to participate, I, Steven Wichern, will provide a 5-session training series describing how to develop in your spiritual formation through retreat. The retreat will meet for two days and you will participate in a pre-test, post-test, activities, and discussions. The retreat will include activities that involve relational growth, prayer, and education on spiritual topics. Some discussions may bring up challenging emotions. As these individuals’ hurts are revealed, there may be significant issues that need personal counseling. Personal counseling is available by appointment through Eglin Chaplains, Military Family Life Counsellors, and Eglin Behavioral Health Clinic. Please contact Chaplain Steven Wichern for more information at Steven.wichern.1@us.af.mil or contact the chapel at 850-882-2111. Referrals can also be made to counseling services independent of the chapel and military through military one source.

Any information obtained in connection with this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only aggregate data will be presented.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with Eglin Chapel or Chaplain Wichern in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without affecting such relationships.

This research project has been approved by my research adviser in accordance with AGTS’ Levels of Review for Research with Humans. If you have any questions about the research and/or research participants’ rights or wish to report a research-related injury, please call Dr. Cory Shipley at 417-268-1084 or email him at shipleyc@evangel.edu.

By completing and returning the survey, you are granting consent to participate in this research. You will be offered a copy of this form to keep.

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read the information provided above and have decided to participate. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice after signing this form should you choose to discontinue participation in this study.

Signature

Date

Photo Release
Spiritual Formation through Retreat
Researcher: Steven Wichern

I, _____, am attending the retreat voluntarily and attest that I am at least 18 years of age and competent to give my consent. I grant permission for Chaplain Wichern and/or Eglin Chapel to use my image (photograph/s) taken at/during the event for use in his research presentations, publications, or as promotional material, even if it leads to others recognizing me as a participant in the event. I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising from or related to the use of the image. I understand I can participant even if I decline the use of my image/photo.

Signature

Date

APPENDIX I: RETREAT SCHEDULE

INVITATION TO RETREAT

• JULY 7 & 8, 2023 •

FRIDAY

- 6:00 PM Dinner
- 7:00 PM Purpose of Retreat
- 8:00 PM Outdoor Fire
- 9:00 PM Conclude

SATURDAY

- 9:00 AM Breakfast
- 9:30 AM Morning Devotion
- 10:30 AM Silence & Solitude
- 12:00 PM Lunch
- 1:00 PM Reflection & Prayer
- 2:45 PM Retreat Evaluation
- 3:00 PM Conclude

APPENDIX J: PROJECT DATA

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1	10	3	5	4.30	0.675
Q2	10	4	5	4.40	0.516
Q3	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q4	10	3	5	4.10	0.876
Q5	10	2	5	3.90	1.197
Q6	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q7	10	4	5	4.40	0.516
Q8	10	3	5	3.90	0.876
Q9	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q10	10	2	5	4.10	0.876
Q12	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q13	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q14	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q15	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q16	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q17	10	4	5	4.50	0.527
Q18	10	3	5	4.30	0.823
Valid N (listwise)	10				

Pre-test								
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I know what my life is about.			1	5	4	4.30	0.675
2	Human value and respect should be the greatest social values.				6	4	4.40	0.516
3	I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
4	Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.			3	3	4	4.10	0.876
5	I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.		2	1	3	4	3.90	1.197
6	I have a core set of beliefs, Ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.				3	7	4.70	0.483
7	I often think about a "grand plan" or Process that human beings are a part of.				6	4	4.40	0.516
8	The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.			4	3	3	3.90	0.876
9	Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.				4	6	4.60	0.516
10	I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.		1		6	3	4.10	0.876
11	I believe in God or a higher power.							
12	I feel God's love for me.				4	6	4.60	0.516
13	I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.				4	6	4.60	0.516
14	I feel God's presence.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
15	I am grateful for all God has done for me.				3	7	4.70	0.483
16	God comforts and shelters me.				4	6	4.60	0.516
17	I've decided to place my life under God's direction.				5	5	4.50	0.527
18	Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.			2	3	5	4.30	0.823

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q1Post	10	3	5	4.50	0.707
Q2Post	10	3	5	4.20	0.789
Q3Post	10	3	5	4.60	0.699
Q4Post	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q5Post	10	2	5	4.00	1.054
Q6Post	10	4	5	4.80	0.422
Q7Post	10	4	5	4.50	0.527
Q8Post	10	2	5	3.80	0.919
Q9Post	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q10Post	10	3	5	4.60	0.699
Q11Post	10	1	1	1.00	1.000
Q12Post	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q13Post	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q14Post	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q15Post	10	4	5	4.90	0.316
Q16Post	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q17Post	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q18Post	10	3	5	4.60	0.699
Valid N (listwise)	10				

Post Test								
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I know what my life is about.			1	3	6	4.50	0.707
2	Human value and respect should be the greatest social values.			2	4	4	4.20	0.789
3	I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
4	Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
5	I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.		1	2	3	4	4.00	1.054
6	I have a core set of beliefs, Ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.				2	8	4.80	0.422
7	I often think about a "grand plan" or Process that human beings are a part of.				5	5	4.50	0.527
8	The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.		1	2	5	2	3.80	0.919
9	Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.				3	7	4.70	0.483
10	I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
11	I believe in God or a higher power.						1.00	1.000
12	I feel God's love for me.				3	7	4.70	0.483
13	I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.				4	6	4.60	0.516
14	I feel God's presence.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
15	I am grateful for all God has done for me.				1	9	4.90	0.316
16	God comforts and shelters me.				3	7	4.70	0.483
17	direction.				3	7	4.70	0.483
18	Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.			1	2	7	4.60	0.699

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Q130days	10	2	5	4.40	0.966
Q230days	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q330days	10	3	5	4.60	0.699
Q430days	10	2	5	4.20	0.919
Q530days	10	2	5	3.90	1.101
Q630days	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q730days	10	3	5	4.40	0.843
Q830days	10	2	5	3.70	1.059
Q930days	10	4	5	4.80	0.422
Q1030days	10	3	5	4.60	0.699
Q1130days	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q1230days	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q1330days	10	3	5	4.40	0.699
Q1430days	10	4	5	4.90	0.316
Q1530days	10	4	5	4.60	0.516
Q1630days	10	4	5	4.70	0.483
Q1730days	10	2	5	4.40	0.966
Valid N (listwise)	10				

Post Test - 30 days								
		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean	Std. Deviation
1	I know what my life is about.		1		3	6	4.40	0.966
2	Human value and respect should be the greatest social values.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
3	I've been able to find a sense of meaning in my life.			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
4	Looking at my life as a whole, things seem clear to me.		1		5	4	4.20	0.919
5	I believe strongly in humanity and the power of people.		1	2	3	4	3.90	1.101
6	I have a core set of beliefs, Ethics, and values that give my life a sense of meaning and purpose.				4	6	4.60	0.516
7	I often think about a "grand plan" or Process that human beings are a part of.			2	2	6	4.40	0.843
8	The greatest moral decision is doing the greatest good for human beings.		1	4	2	3	3.70	1.059
9	Being of service to others is an important source of meaning in my life.				2	8	4.80	0.422
10	I can find meaning and purpose in my everyday experiences.			1	2	7	4.60	0.699
11	I believe in God or a higher power.						1.00	1.000
12	I feel God's love for me.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
13	I look to God for strength, support, and guidance.				4	6	4.60	0.516
14	I feel God's presence.			1	4	5	4.40	0.699
15	I am grateful for all God has done for me.				1	9	4.90	0.316
16	God comforts and shelters me.				4	6	4.60	0.516
17	I've decided to place my life under God's direction.				3	7	4.70	0.483
18	Religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.		1		3	6	4.40	0.966

APPENDIX K: RETREAT EVALUATION RESULTS

Sabbath Session

- I thought the information provided on the importance of observing Sabbath was meaningful and experiencing communion as a small group was beautiful
- Very positive experience I wish we'd have known where our children were younger. How to implement with grandchildren?
- I appreciated seeing and experiencing communion outside of a church setting
- Great time to set the tone for the rest of the time... Slow Down and Reflect.
- The Friday Sabbath was awesome! I loved the idea of being intentional with one meal per week and incorporating communion.
- Big fan of the sabbath session.
- I am excited to implement restful play in the context of my life. Examples from your family were very helpful.

Examen and Bonfire

- I hesitate to linger on practices that focus on imagery or unstructured contemplative or meditative experiences because I have had some concerning experiences in the past. However, I was deeply moved by the bonfire experience and covenant of silence.
- Did not enjoy the examen. Feels spooky and Buddhist. I am very wary of mystical experiences generated by a process. I like resources and silence and solitude. A third thing was a gold nugget

- Examine: helped set the tone for the rest of our activities, which I appreciated. Bonfire: it felt symbolic to go through this exercise not knowing what we were going to do with the card. Almost like a TRUSTFALL exercise. I had to trust that God was there for me to see me through what I have put on the card.
- Excellent teaching by Jill
- I really enjoyed the examine. I like the chance to experience it firsthand and be walked through the process. I appreciated the bonfire experience and its reflection to God as fire.
- Tons of value and the daily examine. Brought me to tears. Very meaningful.
- Really cool. A little out of first, but turned out pretty neat.
- Really enjoyed. Leaving in silence was just OK for me. I don't feel strongly that it is needed. Singing to him at the fire would have been great.
- I realized I needed more time to do this as a reflection from the day or even specific events

Daily Devotion Experience

- I enjoyed the devotion session immensely and learned much I will continue to implement in my daily routine.
- Solid practice which I engage and Farias levels of intentionality the seasons of my life ebb and flow.
- This activity made me realize that it might be helpful to find a daily devotional journal with prompts/questions already built into it.
- Nothing
- I enjoyed learning about the third thing and realizing it's not just me who this is helpful for.

- Enjoyed the loose guidance and chance to see what Garden needed from my devotional time.
- Well taught. Good to have indoor and outdoor options. The app suggestions and resources are very helpful.
- Pulling away from normal and on setting – intentional. The teaching was good to game others' perspectives before practice.

Spiritual GPS

- GPS experience was helpful for my current experience.
- A good practice I can see myself adopting a couple times a year
- This activity brought on reflection and realization that there are things I need to work on that could quiet my mind. It's fitting that my compass had psalm 46:10 engraved on it.
- Very helpful we must determine where we are before determining the path forward
- I appreciated the strategy for looking at where you are in evaluating it with the guided questions. Great exercise to be able to bring into my life.
- Good worksheet. Enjoy the small group breakout session afterward.
- I didn't fully understand the difference between the GPS exercise and daily devotion experience.
- Locating current and hope in future very beneficial to have time to do this for us vs waiting until the new year. I could see growth also!

Reflection and Prayer

- The prayer experience was refreshing and a reset that provide a new life for what I've become somewhat habitual.
- Felt redundant to the previous two activities. I didn't hate it but I didn't obtain a take away from it.
- This activity helps set a plan in motion towards walk working on my relationship with God.
- I appreciate the intentional time to listen to what God's direction was for me and learning about the breath prayers.
- Resources provided were very helpful.
- I like to have this built on the whole weekend and seemed like a combination of everything.
- 45 minutes was more time than needed for this exercise for me. Great packet of questions to answer in a variety of examples breath prayers.
- Lingering. Going back for a second look with Jesus and Gabe more insight into a current situation extra time is great in a peaceful setting.

Strengths

- GPS six exercise and prayer experience. I felt extremely safe to share vulnerable and wasn't playing with the women.
- Great meeting fellow disciples in a world full of followers. Beautiful venue and hosts!
- It was great having dedicated time to working on my relationship with God.

- Not mentioned here but the social interactions contributed greatly to a healthy and encouraging experience during the retreat.
- Great guidance! I like the way everyone's thoughts were shared and the love and acceptance of the group the location was amazing!
- Resources provided. Blue sky team of exercises. Communal meals. Worksheets. Uninterrupted quiet time.
- Taking quiet alone time to practice
- Eating together and individual focus different in that way from similar events I have attended previously.
- Extended time in quiet one time with group of women and men

Improvements

- Everything was wonderful. I can't think of anything that could have made this experience better.
- Cheese on the cornbread yuck! What does follow-up look like? Is there an opportunity to connect more?
- Having more group breakouts ladies and gentlemen
- I thought it was great. Thank you very much for allowing me to participate!
- Really difficult to think of anything that could be done differently.
- A bigger space would be needed if any more people attend next time. But it was great for this group!
- I appreciate the asking of others to share to help draw others out.

Additional Comments

- I really enjoyed breaking away as men and women.
- Thank you for being our compass this weekend.
- Great team!

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Chapter 3: General Literature Review

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