

ASHLAND THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

LECTIO DIVINA AS A TOOL FOR THE RESTORATION
OF SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN FORMER CHURCH MEMBERS

A PAPER SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

JAMES VERNON GARRETT

ASHLAND, OH

APRIL 17, 2007

To Cheri, my loving wife and best friend

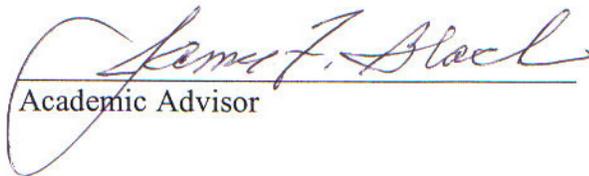
To my children and their mates: Crystal, Amber, and Jamie

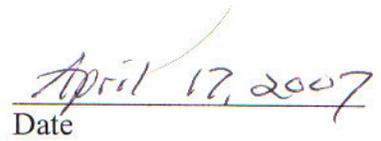
To my grandchildren: Christian, Aubrianna, Carson, Isaac, and all yet to come

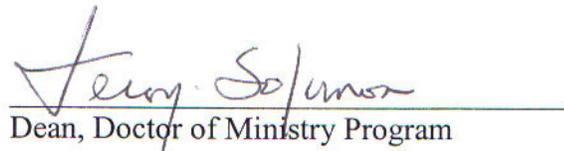
To my mom, Frances Garrett, who believed in me before I was born

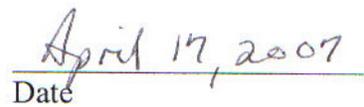
ACCEPTANCE PAGE

Accepted by the faculty and the final demonstration examining committee of Ashland Theological Seminary, Ashland, Ohio, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree.


Academic Advisor


Date


Dean, Doctor of Ministry Program


Date

ABSTRACT

Using the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*, the purpose of this project was to restore spiritual vitality to a group of individuals who believed they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church.

This project brought together sixteen individuals in ten weekly sessions of training in and practicing of *lectio divina*. Although *lectio divina* worked as expected, the discovery of the overwhelming need among this group for community proved to be an unexpected asset in the quest for renewed spiritual vitality. One participant exclaimed, “I didn’t realize how my need for fellowship affected my walk with Christ.”

CONTENTS

APPROVAL PAGE	iv
ABSTRACT	v
TABLE OF CONTENTS	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE	1
2. BIBLICAL, HISTORICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	24
3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	72
4. METHOD, PROCEDURES, AND RESEARCH DESIGN ...	116
5. RESULTS	130
6. SUMMARY AND REFLECTIONS	148
Appendix	
1. PROPOSAL	165
2. PRE- AND POST-SESSION ASSESSMENTS	199
3. WORKS CITED	204

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Graph A. Relationship with God	131
2.	Graph B. Perception of self	134
3.	Graph C. Relationship with others	137
4.	Graph D. Knowledge of and participation in Spiritual Disciplines	139
5.	Graph E. Relationship with the church	142

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has been a long time in coming. Correspondingly, there are many people who have contributed in some manner to this final project. For fear of omitting some important facet of my process, I will hold my thoughts to key family members, friends, educators, and congregations.

I must start with sincere gratitude to my family who believed in me even when I did not believe in myself. Cheri, you encouraged me, prodded me, and made me write when I did not feel like lifting the screen on the laptop. Because of your continuous and loving support, I have reached yet another major goal in my life. It is not as simple as saying, "I could not have done it without you." The truth is, "I am not without you." I love you.

Crystal, my first-born, you stood beside me from the onset of this project acting as field consultant, proofing pages, making suggestions, and serving as a sounding board. This final project is directly attributable to you. Amber and Jamie, you were faithful in calling to offer encouragement and prayer. This project is also attributable to you. Thank you.

Aunt Gloria, you have been a proofreader extraordinaire. Your insights and suggestions helped me to improve my work as it progressed from page one to the end. Thank you.

Dr. Jim Black, my advisor, you have acted as both an encourager and an advisor. You have already walked the path that I set out on with this project. You succeeded. You helped me to succeed. Thank you.

To my friends throughout the United States, to my academic and pastoral

colleagues, especially at Ashland Theological Seminary. You have been tough on me, but it has made me a better man. Thank you.

Finally, to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, this is for Your Kingdom: *Excelsior!*

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

As we sat around the room and chatted for a few moments following our group project, Ben stated:

You mean that what we have just done here tonight is all we really need to have a devotional life? I have spent most of my life understanding that we had to read so many chapters of the Bible or to pray for a certain length of time. This stuff that you have just shown us is easy. I can do this. (Ben 2006)

This exemplified the attitude that permeated much of our time of modified group *lectio divina*. *Lectio divina*, also known as “holy reading” (Irwin 1993, 596), is, as used in my project, the approach and encounter with a text, either scripture or writings of sacred writers, that allows the text to become a transforming encounter with God. In the efforts for the project to utilize *lectio divina*, our group discovered that a devotional life did not have to be rigorous and time consuming. Instead, there was a realization that each person needed to read as little as one paragraph, or perhaps even one sentence, to meditate upon it, and to allow the Holy Spirit to use that passage to impress thoughts upon our minds and hearts. It was through this process of dwelling upon brief passages that each of us found a deeper sense of the particular reading’s meaning and, in turn, that each of us grasped a sense of what God was speaking to us.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who had expressed their beliefs that they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church and, correspondingly, were relatively uninvolved

in church.

Research Question

The research question posed in this project was: Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?

Overview

The focus of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality upon a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believed they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. Specifically, this project focused on the development of a new spiritual habit of modified *lectio divina* among these participants in order to restore their relationship with and vitality for Jesus Christ.

Participants gathered in a small group setting and were provided with both instructions and demonstrations of a modified version of *lectio divina*. This effort took place in weekly sessions of approximately one hour each for a period of ten weeks. A comparison of pre-session and post-session self-evaluations was used to assess the development of each participant's growth. Individual journaling was also used in this assessment. Furthermore, I personally observed each participant and recorded weekly comments and assessments of my perception of each individual's standing in the restoration journey. My goal for these assessments was not to measure the depth of restoration in these individuals, but instead, to measure the progress of their restoration.

Rationale

Personal Rationale

My personal experience enlightened me to the significance of this project because the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* has proven effective in several areas of my own life. Although I, in the past, did not comprehend the activity by its Latin name, I did understand it in a simplified form by another designation: “devotional reading.” It has been through such devotional reading of spiritual authors and of the Bible that I have witnessed both personal growth and development in the lives of others.

Through my research of *lectio divina*, I have observed that its historical practice has been primarily used in individual situations. I conducted group *lectio divina*, a relatively new practice, because I believed the exercise would be enhanced by the dynamic of a small group. In addition to the enhanced dynamic, I felt the small group interaction could be an initial step toward involvement in Christian community, a necessary aspect of one’s vitality in Christ.

Furthermore, these individuals with whom I worked were important to me. Having been youth pastor and closest spiritual leader for ten developmental years to many of these individuals, I sensed a responsibility to nurture those who felt left behind. My wife and I planted spiritual seeds into these lives and witnessed much fruit from our labor. In November 2000, when our advocacy on behalf of these individuals within the local church ceased, some of that fruit came to a halt. I correspondingly discerned that these vulnerable individuals felt suddenly and unexpectedly abandoned spiritually.

Concerning the notion of spiritual abandonment, one author has stated:

Spiritual [abandonment] has a devastating effect on people. A very high level of trust is often placed in spiritual leaders. It is, and ought to be, expected that the

trust will be honored and guarded. When such trust is violated, the wound is very deep. Sometimes the wound is so deep that the wounded person cannot trust even a legitimate spiritual authority again. (Henke 1996)

It was my sincere desire to see the individuals in my project overcome their distrust, once again have confidence in spiritual authority, and re-engage in a growing relationship of vitality in Jesus Christ.

Biblical Rationale

The Bible indicates that the word of God is given to its audience with a distinct purpose. That purpose is presented by the writer to the Hebrews, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb 4:12, NIV). (All scriptures used within this document are from the New International Version unless otherwise noted). Although this “word” is possibly that of “an oral word through an authoritative mouthpiece — either a prophetic word or a priestly announcement” (Hawk 2006), it can be conceived as “anything God utters and particularly the word that came through Jesus Christ” (Morris 1981, 44). Therefore by extension, “word of God” may be understood in the context of the written word as well as the oral word. Thus, this project was deemed important because our modified *lectio divina* incorporated a reading of both scripture and spiritual writers. The spiritual writers served the purpose of allowing the modern reader to see situations and experiences of fellow Christians in a non-contemporary setting. The scriptures served the purpose of clearly addressing the vitality of the believer from the standpoint of the Addressee (God) who strongly desires for His people to know truth and to walk in guidance. Jesus, in His well-known prayer for unity, spoke these words regarding the validity of the message of

God, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (Jn 17:17). In my project, this truth and corresponding guidance was used to draw these willing participants into renewed vitality in Christ.

In addition, I came to understand that God does not intend for any of His people to be nurtured or restored in a vacuum. He gave each of us the greater body of Christ, fellow believers, to act as a community intertwined in one another’s lives. Supporting interaction of community, one author stated:

None of us on the Christian path is ever a lone traveler. We always journey with companions at our side, before us, and trailing behind us. A great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), a communion of saints both living and departed, surrounds us. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, which is both a descriptive reality and a great grace. To be a Christian means we are part of the body of Christ. The local communities in which we live out our faith give faces and names to our companions on the journey. (Dean and Foster 1998, 124)

The purpose of this community, therefore, was and is to love one another and to be concerned for one another. According to Paul’s letter to the church in Philippi, we are not called to nurture our salvation in an exclusive, stand-alone manner. Christians are, indeed, to work in tandem with one another in mutual fellowship with and encouragement of one another. “Therefore, my dear friends, as you [plural] have always obeyed — not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence — (you [plural]) continue to work out your [plural] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:1 *et seq.*). This sentiment is supported by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12 wherein he compares the individual components of the body of Christ (the believers) with the individual components of the human body (various appendages and organs). The objective of the comparisons in 1 Corinthians is the intertwined necessity of mutual interdependency upon one another (both persons and body parts.)

Historical Rationale

The historical rationale of this project is significant because the various spiritual disciplines have played a strong role in the shaping of the lives of believers throughout many centuries. As substantiated by the current practices of various ascetic Christians; by the writings of pertinent mystical spiritual authors such as Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Robert Mulholland, and others; and by the resurgence of the search for ancient paths of spirituality, there has been a corresponding renewal of interest in the various spiritual disciplines. It was because of both my personal interest and the contemporary interest that I used the discipline of *lectio divina* to guide my audience into a position for restoration of spiritual vitality.

The practice of *lectio divina* has been a historically proven avenue of helping the believer draw closer to God and of having Him to draw closer to the practitioner.

The earliest Christians practiced a form of *lectio divina*. For example, in about 250 A.D. Cyprian of Carthage wrote a letter to a man named Donatus and suggested he be, "Constant in prayer as in reading; speak with God, then let him speak with you. Let him instruct you in his precepts, let him direct you." The *lectio divina* method has been advocated and practiced by a wide range of Christians over the centuries, including the Benedictine monks, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. (Hughes 2004)

As this practice had proven beneficial in the lives of these and other historical figures, so I believed that through the practices of such discipline the restoration of spiritual vitality could flow to the project participants. Similarly, Thérèse de Lisieux stated that the prayer aspect of *lectio divina* was "a vast, supernatural force which opens out [the] heart, and binds [one] close to Jesus" (Collins 1995, 147). This was the result I anticipated. In addition, I believed that great cleansing and edification could take place through *lectio divina* as these individuals read both scriptures and short passages of several great works

produced by saints both present and prior.

Furthermore, there has been a renewed focus on the concept of community within the body of Christ. It has been clear throughout history that the values of companionship and friendship have brought spiritually-minded individuals through the toughest, most difficult times of their lives. Rarely, if ever, have individuals successfully acted alone in the history of the Church. Similarly, the biblical record has indicated that individuals seldom succeed alone in any journey or endeavor (i.e. Moses and Aaron, Esther and Mordecai, etc). Jesus Himself illustrated this need for community by His association with those disciples known as “the twelve.” Of these twelve, He showed an even closer relationship and community with three of them: Peter, James, and John. It is my comprehension, as discerned from these and other examples, that Christian community was and is a necessary part of the believers’ growth and health process.

Theological Rationale

My theological understanding indicated that spiritual vitality and wholeness arrive through practical, spiritual exercise. Indeed, the Apostle Paul has reminded us that we are to “train [ourselves] to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Tm 4:7-8). This encapsulates the theological concept of spiritual discipline or exercise. Of spiritual discipline, one author has stated:

[This type of] ministry does not merely “incorporate” spiritual disciplines into a curriculum ... It is a spiritually disciplined way of life through which Christians of all ages draw sustenance from the deep wells of historic Christian practice. By the grace of God, we practice the “ways of perfection” — not because practice helps us get it right, but because practice helps us “get it,” period. (Dean and Foster 1998, 120)

It was and is important to me that this select people of God would be able to move beyond “getting it right.” Thus, it was important for the spiritual disciplines to be explored as well as regularly practiced. For the purpose of this study, I focused on the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*.

Additionally, there was the matter of using a new vocabulary with individuals in this project. The book, *Cadences of Home: Preaching among Exiles*, recorded that there is a special language to be enlisted among those observed as exiles (including those wounded by perceived abandonment and abuse). In the book, the author presents a metaphor of the “exile” including individuals who are portrayed in six different categories. 1) They are grieving at their loss of what was, is not, and never will be again. 2) In recognition of Lamentations 5:20, they are like abandoned, motherless, vulnerable orphans. 3) They feel helpless in overcoming their circumstances. 4) They live with the sense that God, and thus, His glory, has departed them. 5) They feel as if they are being punished by God for something they or someone else has done. 6) They have difficulty thinking beyond themselves and thus, have no energy or creativity to propel themselves out of these situations. This vocabulary and imagery occurred throughout the Old Testament, particularly but not exclusively, in the writings of the prophets (Brueggemann 1997, 4-10).

It is for this reason I chose to use a guided form of *lectio divina*. These wounded individuals (exiles) were in need of hearing a different voice as it spoke to them of their restoration. The individuals whom I selected had never been corporately exposed to the classical spiritual disciplines; therefore, *lectio divina* appeared as a distinctive voice. The aforementioned spiritual authors, Walter Brueggemann, Thérèse de Lisieux, Dallas

Willard, Richard Foster, Robert Mulholland, and others, have experienced this restoration and have effectively proclaimed an appeal to the reader in a new vocabulary. Their voices seemed relevant to the needs of these exiles with whom I conducted this project.

Finally, it has been historically a part of the salvific nature of God to bring His people back into relationship with Himself. The Apostle Peter reminded his audience, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). As a part of the *missio Dei* (mission of God), God made His commitment to redeeming the lost. Clearly, that mission encompassed the wounded as well. God desired all humanity, including those within my project, to be restored to a place of spiritual vitality.

Contemporary Rationale

The current situation in the modern church informed me this project is important. The late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries proved to be times of great general disillusionment with the church. Frequently, media has reported of sexual abuse in connection with the church (Heilemann 2005), the toppling of major ministries due to sin, and moral failure on the part of a few particular ministries’ respective leaders (Riser n.d.). Because of this disillusionment, it has not been surprising to observe many who have or are currently turning away from the church. It was clear, in spite of the enormous growth of a few mega-churches (Thumma 2001), that many other congregations were struggling with attendance due, in part, to this turning away (O’Bryan 2006). It was important, therefore, for the individuals in my study to be guided to a supportive foundation upon which they could be strengthened and encouraged.

In addition, the particular individuals whom I selected found themselves fitting

within the pattern of those typically affected by authoritarian abandonment or abuse. They were young adults who stood in need of self-direction, purpose, and an external, authoritative source to provide a framework for their lives (Enroth 1979, 48). When they felt neglected, misused, abandoned, or abused, as was the case that these expressed, they also felt disillusioned, exiled, and left with a sense of abandonment and loss of hope. In these and similar circumstances it has been realized, however, that individuals “do not have to rebel or walk away from [their] faith” (Moreland and Matlock 2005, 73). It was with these thoughts, then, that I embarked on a journey to attempt to bring the restoration of spiritual vitality to this contemporary group of people whom God genuinely loves and for whom He authentically cares.

Rationale Conclusion

I anticipated that using this platform of *lectio divina* in a small group setting would bring about the desired and expected results in these young adults. I felt they would be stronger in both mind and spirit. As an additional result, I predicted they would once again engage in a relationship with God and that their spiritual vitality would be restored. What I did not foresee, however, was the magnitude of the contribution that the sense of community would factor into my results. I knew that unity would play a large role but was overwhelmed by the enormity of its input. Even though these persons were cautious of fellowship because of their experience within the church, there was still an obvious longing for that interaction with fellow believers.

Context

There were several variables regarding the context of my project. First was the

location of this particular project. Toledo, Ohio is the area where my wife and I were able to minister in various capacities to this group of people for a period of approximately ten years. As I formerly knew these individuals, they were part of a Neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic church in which strong emphasis was given to the experience of worship, the confrontational preaching of the word of God, and the dynamics of small groups within that church.

Second, the individuals whom I selected for my project, without regard to gender, were of varied social, ethnic, economic, and educational backgrounds. Included among them were those with minimal high school education as well as those with college degrees. Financially, there were individuals with six-figure incomes as well as those with minimum-wage salaries. Racially, the group included those who are of Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, and mixed descent. Although they were once a part of the youth ministry in Toledo, there was little, if any, interaction between them at the time of my project. Furthermore, at this given time, most were either not involved or were peripherally involved in church. These factors served as the simple demographic context wherein we formerly interacted with one another.

Additionally, young adults were explored for several reasons. There was a tremendous burden within me to minister to this particular age group. I have sensed a personal calling to ministry to teens and young adults for more than thirty years. I also felt that this target audience had been critically positioned by both media and society in such a manner that these same young adults were equipped with knowledge, yet were highly inexperienced in utilizing that knowledge. In others words, there was a sense of seeing these individuals as being set up for a downfall. I wanted to help prevent a further

demise of these vulnerable, inexperienced persons with whom I was working. In support of this concept:

For early critics, the media was seen as the means whereby the interests associated with business and industry manipulated the ‘masses’ by the use of popular forms of entertainment. ... Karl Marx had talked of the way that those who owned industry also controlled the means of cultural producing. This interpretation was widely accepted in the ‘cultural industry’ understanding of popular or mass culture. Religion may have declined in significance, but now it is television which has become the opiate of the masses. (Ward 1999, 83)

My selected participants were individuals in whom I had invested ten years of my life attempting to divert them away from such media and societal manipulation. In other words, I did not want to continue to see these individuals whom I loved decline further into Marx’s given cultural production.

Finally, I worked with this group in the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* for the following reason: they were from a neo-Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition and were thus unfamiliar with the practice of *lectio divina*. It was my quest to see if the lack of familiarity of such a practice combined with the historically evidenced value of the same could be used effectively to bring about the desired change.

Project Goals

The purpose of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believed that they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. At the time of my project, most of these individuals were completely uninvolved in church and the others were relatively uninvolved, meaning they rarely attended any more. The goals of this project were that these selected individuals would:

- Re-engage in a growing, vibrant, daily experience of a relationship with God.
- Come to a place of spiritual aspiration wherein they once again desired God's will for their lives.
- Have a greater sense of intimacy with God and of His desired intimacy with them through reading, prayer, meditation, and contemplation.
- Develop their spiritual vitality beyond that level wherein they once interacted with God.
- Know how to use the modified techniques of *lectio divina* as a daily, devotional practice.
- Modify a personal practice of *lectio divina* for the purpose of deeper engagement in their relationship with God.
- Benefit from the struggles, wisdom, and direction of historical spiritual writers in order to gain a renewed perspective of God's grace, forgiveness, and wholeness.
- Continue to use, develop, and promote the practice of *lectio divina* within their personal lives.

Assessment Strategy

The first goal of this project was that those individuals to whom I administered this process would re-engage in their daily relationship with Jesus Christ. I ascertained my assessment primarily through subjective observations, and from entries documented by participating individuals. Because of the intimacy with which some persons wrote in their journals and the corresponding reluctance of those individuals to hand over their journals, I issued a third assessment, which was completed based upon their journal entries. It is to be noted that:

The religious studies scholar, having done his or her research in the areas of history, psychology, sociology, and other related areas, would seek to produce a description of different spiritualities, a presentation that would be derived from the sources, widely conceived, that have been studied. These sources would frequently include a faith-content and the response to it as an important and

perhaps decisive element, but these would be given a descriptive analysis.
(Principe 2000, 52)

In this statement, Walter Principe, professor of medieval studies at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, recognizes that different aspects of spirituality can be noted through a variety and multitude of sources. Certainly, the journal entries allowed me to observe each individual's inner assessment of their spirituality. Further, I was able to ascertain much information regarding this assessment through the comparisons of the pre-session assessment and the post-session assessment.

Prior to the onset of this project, an assessment questionnaire was presented that allowed an initial measurement of the individual's perceived state of spirituality, knowledge of and participation in the various spiritual disciplines, and current level of interaction with others and the church. At the end of the ten-week session, an identical self-evaluation was given.

Each questionnaire used a five-point Likert Scale to assess individual's responses regarding the level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements:

- I have an active relationship with God.
- I am excited when I hear the word "church."
- The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.
- I understand God's purpose for my life.
- I desire to have a close relationship with other believers.
- I feel safe at church.
- I am growing in my walk with Christ.

With the final self-assessment, there were also a few open-ended questions:

- Describe what you would consider an ideal devotional time.

- What hinders you from maintaining prayer and scripture reading time?
- Why do you seek prayer and scripture reading time?
- Do you practice a daily prayer and scripture reading time?

A second goal of this project was to bring these individuals to a place of spiritual aspiration wherein they once again desired God's will for their lives. It was my longing that all participants would regain an understanding that God has a will and plan for them. As a side benefit, perhaps they could once again feel safe and sheltered within the structure of the church. Nevertheless, at a minimum, their relationship with God would hopefully become one that was growing and contagious. Again, renderings from their journals (produced from a previously unplanned questionnaire based upon the journals) and the two self-assessments recorded the perceived state of each individual's relationship with Christ. It was my plan to observe, both in the review of each journal and in the comparison between the pre-session and the post-session assessments, a forward and upward motion of each one's relationship with Christ and an awareness of God's purpose for each one's life.

The journaling activity specifically addressed issues such as:

- What is my understanding of God's love for me?
- What is my understanding of God's purpose for my life?
- How does God's purpose in me affect others?
- Describe what God is revealing to me in my time of prayer and meditation.
- Is *lectio divina* helping me to sense God's presence in my life? How?
- Does God have a place of forgiveness and restoration in my life? What is that place?
- What is God doing to draw me into active relationship with Him?

Finally, it was my goal that the participants would use the modified *lectio divina*, as presented, to enhance their daily relationships with Christ beyond the ten weeks of the project. As an alternative, they could modify the *lectio divina* process further to suit their particular needs. Although I did not and could not measure the ultimate goal of this project, which would be a life-long endeavor, I have been able to make longer-term observations and measurements in the months that have followed my project. It is my observation and assessment that through the initiation of the *lectio divina* process and its continued usage over a short period of time, these project participants will establish a pattern or habit, and this habit of devotional life through *lectio divina* will continue for a lifetime. Obviously, there is a need to make periodic visits in the future to the individuals of my project for the purpose of checking up on their personal spiritual growth.

Design and Procedure

The research question posed in this project was: Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*? The design of this project was to develop a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a process of devotional guidance using a singular spiritual discipline.

The procedure for the project was as follows:

First, I approached prospective participants concerning the project. This included all former youth, youth leaders, and parents of youth who previously were actively involved in the youth ministry that my wife, Cheri, and I pastored in the Toledo, Ohio area between the years 1990 and 2000. Another specification of these individuals was that they were no longer involved in Christian ministry. This initial approach was made

through personal contact, a phone call, email, or a letter sent to individuals inviting them to participate. Those who were willing to participate received a letter with specific information regarding the time and location of the ten meetings.

Second, a pre-session assessment was administered to each participating individual. The purpose was to gather necessary information regarding their current Christian commitment, church involvement, status of relationship with Christ, and awareness of the various spiritual disciplines, especially *lectio divina*.

Third, instructions regarding the method of procedure for the project were given to participating individuals. The first meeting was the only instructional session of the project. All other sessions consisted of the guided practice of *lectio divina*. The six steps of the modified *lectio divina* taught were:

- *Silencio*– a brief time of centering oneself for the purpose set before him/her (Mulholland 1993, 112).
- *Lectio*– Guided devotional/spiritual reading for the evening.
- *Meditatio*– Meditation/rumination on that which has been read.
- *Oratio*– A prayer of devotion and surrender.
- *Contemplatio*– Contemplation of what has been read, including what it means to the hearer, and what action/decision needs to be performed as a response to that reading.
- *Journaling*– An opportunity to record those thoughts and responses in a tangible manner for the purpose of later self-evaluation and observation. This also provided me with a viable and observable insight into the thinking and growth processes of the participants. Individuals were not required to furnish their names when they submitted their journals. I did state, however, the reason I desired to observe those writings: to assess each individual's personal self-observation. In retrospect, I did not anticipate that the personal information entered into these journals would inhibit the participants from handing in the journals. I therefore issued a third assessment in the form of open-ended questions. This questionnaire required answers drawn from their journals. It also allowed the participants to keep their journals and thus, not to

risk undesired disclosure.

Fourth, the ten-week project utilizing the modified methodology of *lectio divina* as outlined began. Each session lasted approximately one hour and presented an actual practice of *lectio divina*. The modified six-step process, as presented, was designed to lead all participants into a revitalization of their relationship with Jesus Christ. It also provided them with an ingrained routine of the daily exercise of deepening and enhancing their relationship with God.

Fifth, personal insights regarding the things that I could observe about individuals concerning their spiritual level and growth along the journey were assessed while they were going through the ten-week project. It was understood that my observations would be highly subjective, but would be compared with each individual's responses from their journals with reference to their progress at a later point in the project.

Sixth, a post-session self-assessment was administered at the conclusion of the ten-week project. This assessment was identical to the pre-session assessment. The information gathered from these two was quantitatively compared.

Seventh, journals were to be collected from all participants. The purpose of this was so that I could gather insights into the effectiveness of the practice of modified *lectio divina*. These journals were intended to be compared with my personal notes and were to be observed in order to consider each individual's personal evaluation of their spiritual journey. Specifically, I was looking for anger, contemplations, rejection, changes in emotions, and similar aspects of the journey. As it turned out, most journals were so personal that individuals were uncomfortable submitting them to me. I, therefore, assembled another questionnaire that probed for responses from each individual's journal

for the purpose of comparison.

Finally, an overall assessment was ascertained through my personal entries, individual journal entries, and the comparisons of the two questionnaires.

Personal Goals

The original intent of this project began nobly: to see the spiritual vitality of a select group of individuals restored. Another important element, however, became obvious to me. My family and I also stood in need of restoration of spiritual vitality. Therefore, it became a personal goal that my family would be restored to a place of spiritual vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ. No longer would we minister solely out of duty and calling; instead, we would minister out of joy and a desire to please Him.

In addition, because of my years of hermeneutical, theological, homiletic, and linguistic training, I found it difficult to read the word of God for simple, devotional value. Therefore, it was my goal to use modified *lectio divina*, utilizing classic writings of the great spiritual writers, as a devotional basis to walk once again in restored spiritual vitality. I witnessed a daily desire to take that which I enjoy, the discipline of reading, and to allow it to be applied to my life in a spiritually restorative manner. To that end, my itemized personal goals for this project were:

- My wife, three children, and I would be restored to a place of vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ by using *lectio divina*.
- I would once again minister out of joy and a desire to please God.
- I would once again desire to read, enjoy, and allow the word of God to be applied to my personal life.

Significant Terms

This project addressed the use of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting. The desire was to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believed they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. At the time of the project, they were relatively uninvolved in church. Specifically, this project focused on the development of a new spiritual habit of devotional reading, *lectio divina*, among these participants in order to restore their relationship and vitality with Jesus Christ. Terms significant to this project included the following:

Abandonment and abuse. For the purposes of this project, “abandonment and abuse” are defined as designated by the Watchman Expositor, “an independent, nondenominational Christian research and apologetics ministry focusing on new religious movements, cults, the occult and the New Age” (Watchman Fellowship 2006):

[Spiritual abandonment and abuse] is the misuse of a position of power, leadership, or influence to further the selfish interests of someone other than the individual who needs help. . . . Spiritually abusive religious systems are sometimes described as legalistic, mind controlling, religiously addictive, and authoritarian. (Henke 1996)

Lectio divina. For the purposes of this project, “*lectio divina*” is defined as “holy reading” (Irwin 1993, 596). It is, as used in my project, the approach and encounter with a text, either scripture or writings of sacred writers, which allows that text to become a transforming encounter with God. One writer has characterized it as “a posture of approach and a means of encounter with a text that enables the text to become a place of transforming encounter with God” (Mulholland 1993, 112). Another author stated similarly:

Lectio divina ... is a holistic way of prayer which disposes, opens, and ‘in-forms’ us for the gift of contemplation God waits to give, by leading us to a meeting place with Him in our deepest center, His life-giving dwelling place. It begins this movement by introducing us to the power of the word of God in scripture to speak to the most intimate depths of our hearts, to gift and challenge and change us, and to promote genuine spiritual growth and maturity. (Hall 1988, 7)

This ancient activity of spiritual reading guides the reader in a four-step process: *lectio* [reading], *meditatio* [meditation], *oratio* [prayer], *contemplatio* [contemplation]. I used a modified, six-step process that incorporated these original four, an additional step known as *silencio* [silence] that prefaced the other steps (Mulholland 1993, 112), and a sixth and final step to which I refer simply as “journaling,” [private, introspective recording of the assimilation process of those things heard, read, and pondered in *lectio divina*].

It must be noted that there are some individuals who consider what we did in my project as something other than *lectio divina*. Such authors specify *lectio divina* as that practice which exclusively uses scripture as the point of reading and is “not the same as spiritual reading, which moves beyond the exclusive reading of sacred scripture to include other spiritual books such as the lives and writings of the saints” (Keating 2005). For the purposes of my study, however, *lectio divina* is inclusive of the reading of both scripture and spiritual writings.

Restoration. For the purposes of this project, “restoration” is defined as a relational engagement of the human individual with God. The relational engagement that takes place within restored individuals is described by one specialist in spiritual formation: The best indicator is union with Christ through a faith that is active in love (Collins 1995, 114). “Restoration” is thus seen as a relational union of an individual with God. It is observed in the individual by a visible faith that is active in love. This love includes desire for fellowship or community with other likeminded individuals, concern for the

needs of others, and hunger for the things of God. All of these aspects do not necessarily manifest simultaneously nor immediately; however, initial observation of these actions may be an indication of the commenced work.

Spiritual Disciplines. For the purposes of this project, the term “spiritual disciplines” is defined as those techniques utilized to position the believer for a close encounter with God. The various disciplines include fasting, *lectio divina*, meditation, prayer, and other tools for said positioning. It must be noted that these techniques are neither for the function of manipulating God nor for the attainment of any great accomplishment on the part of the practitioner. They are simply positioning tools for the believer. A good source for a deeper study of the spiritual disciplines is Richard Foster’s book, *Celebration of Discipline* (Foster 2003).

Rumination. For the purpose of this project, “rumination” is defined as that process which is manifested within believers as they read and meditate upon the word of God, or upon spiritual writings. I have used the word “rumination” because I want its concept to conjure up the image of eating, chewing, and allowing the material (in this case, words) to become life-sustenance. Thus, as the reading is perused, pondered, processed, settled, and repeated, it eventually becomes spiritual life-sustenance to the believer. Rumination is paralleled with meditation.

Conclusion

This project was a remarkable undertaking. It allowed me to gather with dear friends from the past and to share time once again. Although I did anticipate many of the details of the project, I discovered a few surprises along the way.

The following chapters outline those expectancies and surprises and include:

biblical, historical, and theological foundations (Chapter Two); a review of contemporary literature (Chapter Three); a detailed description of the method, procedures, and design for the project (Chapter Four); and results (Chapter Five). The final chapter (Chapter Six) will reflect on the findings as they relate to ministry.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

As my twenty-two-month-old grandson Christian was winding up his time of play at the playground, several other children began to assemble nearby. Suddenly, instead of wanting to go back home, he again wanted to play; it was as if a fresh fire had been lit within him. At this point, I realized, even at an early age, there exists a longing and a need for community and acceptance. If only I could promote that need within my grandson without having to expose him to the abuses he may soon face in the pursuit of those requirements for community and acceptance.

The purpose of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who had expressed their beliefs that they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church and, correspondingly, were relatively uninvolved in church. Because of the complications involved in the lives of these individuals on the part of their church relationships, it became easy to relate this episode concerning my grandson with the perceived needs of the individuals in this project.

Again, regarding my approach to this project, the research question posed is: Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?

Introduction

I have engaged in a search for biblical, historical, and theological foundations of the practice of *lectio divina* as a tool for a deeper and more intimate relationship with Christ, as a vehicle for restoration of one's state in connection with Christ, and as an

instrument for enhanced fellowship with and participation in the body of Christ. I have also sought answers to questions regarding spiritual abuse and the attitude of the Bible and the church toward the concept of wholeness. Additionally, I have asked questions regarding community and relationship with God. For the purpose of resolving my search for biblical, historical, and theological foundations, I used the following questions as my outline to embark on the quest for proper responses:

- Are there biblical examples of devotional life?
- Are there biblical mandates for the reading of the word of God (also known as the Law of God)?
- Are there biblical examples of spiritual abuse?
- Are there any spiritual admonitions regarding spiritual abuse?
- What is the historical record of *lectio divina*?
- Who have been notable practitioners of *lectio divina*?
- What are some of the historical concepts of Christian community?
- What are historical records of spiritual abuse, its effects, and its treatment?
- What theological concepts are entailed in *lectio divina*?
- What theological theories are involved in the concept of spiritual abuse?
- What are some of the theological concepts of community?
- What are some of the theological concepts of one's relationship with God?
- Are there scriptural directives regarding God and His desire for relationship with His people?
- Is there a connection between faith and relationship?
- If there is an affiliation between faith and relationship, what actions does God perform in order to initiate that relationship?

Biblical Foundations

As part of my research in this project, I wanted to know what the Bible says regarding four different topics. For one, I wanted to recognize some biblical examples of the devotional life. Second, I wanted to identify some biblical mandates for the devotional reading of the word of God (also known as the Law of God and other similar titles.) Third, I wanted to ascertain some of the biblical examples of spiritual abuse. Finally, I wanted to acknowledge several biblical admonitions regarding spiritual abuse. I researched these four concepts because I wanted to gain an understanding of how they are addressed scripturally and of how the Bible deals with their interconnectedness. Most important to my biblical investigation was and is the application of these four aspects as they affect the individuals and situations that I dealt with in this project.

Biblical Examples of the Devotional Life

Scripture records various narratives concerning acts and methods of devotional lives. Because of the understood value of scripture, it is important to delineate some of these records. First will be an exploration of various models of the ingredients in the process of *lectio divina*. Following those ingredients will be an exploration of some examples of devotional lives as observed in specific biblical characters. Finally, scriptural admonitions for the devotional life will be delineated.

The Example of *Silencio* (Silence)

Silence and solitude are found throughout the Bible as aspects of the devotional life of God's people. One of the Gospels records Jesus' need to be alone, both for a time of rest and for a time with God the Father as an act of devotion and of the renewing of

His strength.

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. (Mk 6:30-32)

One author has suggested that this excursion from the crowds of people to whom Christ had been ministering was for the purpose of not only resting but for a time of example to and of teaching for His disciples.

In addition to seeking rest, it is possible that there was another purpose in the withdrawal of Jesus to the wilderness. Mark seems to have in mind the “rest in the wilderness” theme in scripture. It was in the wilderness that God gave rest to his ancient people in the Exodus from Egypt. In the preaching of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, this became a type of a second rest promised to the new people of God in a second exodus. Jesus and his disciples fulfill this promise. Jesus is God’s presence (instead of the pillar and the cloud), and the Bread (instead of the manna) is God’s provision of sustenance. (Wessel 1984, 672)

This was a case of practice and example on the part of Christ as he sought to both seek a fleshly, natural rest and to portray for His disciples a supernatural rest that is found in a life of silence and devotion to God.

Another facet of silence as an act of devotion is found in the simple scriptural command pronounced by the psalmist, “Be still, and know that I *am* God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth” (Ps 46:10, KJV). Specifically referring to the cessation of making war, the psalmist addresses his hearers with the command to both observe and know that God is the Supreme One.

“Cease,” cries He to the nations, “from making war upon my people, and know that I am God, the invincible One, — invincible both in Myself and in My people, — who will be acknowledged in My exaltation by all the world.” A similar inferential admonition closes Ps 2. With this admonition, which is both warning and threatening at the same time, the nations are dismissed; but the church yet once more boasts that *Jahve Tsebaoth* is its God and its stronghold. (Keil and Delitzsch 2000)

It is taking the opportunity to cease from that which one is doing, especially if that deed is violent and against God's people, and to know and experience God and His sovereignty. In this respect, silence is an act of ceasing from one's deeds, an act of observing the handiwork and magnificence of God, and an act of experiencing a relationship with the Father.

The Example of *Lectio* (Reading the Word of God)

Not only is silence found to be an act of devotion, but the reading and hearing of the word of God is also an act of devotion. Regarding itself, the Bible indicates that it has been given to its audience with several distinct purposes. One such purpose is clearly presented: "For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart" (Heb 4:12). Although this "word" is often connected with the spoken word of God through an angel, God Himself, or one of His prophets, I am connecting the word of God as mentioned by the author of Hebrews with the entire corpus of writing that is referred to by evangelical Christians as the Bible. In light of Hebrews 4:12, it is to be noted that individuals throughout the biblical narratives have looked to the scriptures as more than simple instruction and judgment. Jesus Himself is recorded as having said, "You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life" (Jn 5:39-40). In other words, scripture was observed as a testimony of and a path to eternal life in God Himself. Although there is certainly a notoriety of scripture having been used as instruction and judgment, there is also another aspect of scripture in which examples were given and expectations were established.

The Example of *Meditatio* (Meditation)

Meditation is also observed in many occasions throughout scripture. Meditation is defined within this writing as that act of perusing, pondering, processing, settling, and repeating a particular passage or thought until that passage or thought eventually becomes spiritual life-sustenance to the believer. Perhaps one of the clearest passages concerning meditation is found in the narrative of God's command to Joshua:

This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go. (Jo 1:8-9, NASB)

In this passage, meditation culminates with the act of doing what was recorded within the meditated-upon reading. Certainly, in the context of *lectio divina*, meditation is concluded with the response of appropriate action. For the purpose of my project, however, I have chosen to distinguish meditation as those acts of processing the read or observed word prior to fully comprehending and acting upon that word. Certainly, in the case of Joshua, there is the command to not only "meditate" on His word, but the further command to "meditate day and night." This illustrates that meditation is a process that consumes time. This is a clear indication of a mechanic of meditation.

Another well-known and beloved biblical passage concerning meditation is found in the writing of the psalmist:

How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, nor stand in the path of sinners, nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in its season and its leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers. (Ps 1:1-3, NASB)

This passage illustrates three things standing in opposition to scriptural meditation:

walking in the counsel of the wicked, standing in the path of sinners, and sitting in the seat of scoffers (or taking up company with scorners). It also presents a biblical parallel to meditation: delighting in the law (or word) of Yahweh. It further gives the fruit of the action of meditation upon God's word: bearing fruit and strong leaves as a healthy tree and prospering in all that one does. Certainly, this passage also illuminates meditation to the point that the practice of such should be desirous to everyone. At the very least, the value of meditation for *lectio divina* is apparent.

The Example of *Oratio* (Prayer)

An action that naturally accompanies meditation is the act of prayer. Prayer has been defined as the key to the heart of God (Foster 1992, 2). It has also been equated with "change" (6). From these concepts of prayer, it may be quickly observed that there is a personal submission that is necessary in the act of prayer. Prayer is very simply an encounter through conversation with God. It normally requires more listening than talking on the part of the believer. If properly practiced, it results in change.

One can observe prayer as conversation with God in the very first chapter of the first book of the Bible:

God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Then God said, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you; and to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to every thing that moves on the earth which has life, *I have given* every green plant for food." (Gn 1:27-30, NASB)

From this passage, one can observe that God openly and plainly spoke with humankind.

One can also see that God was concerned with humankind and their comforts. This same

outlook toward an understanding of God and conversation with Him can be carried into the concept of personal prayer today. God desires to speak with humankind and is deeply concerned about its needs.

Another biblical passage concerning prayer is found in the writings of the psalmist as he gave clear description of the details of prayer:

Come and hear, all who fear God, and I will tell of what He has done for my soul. I cried to Him with my mouth, and He was extolled with my tongue. If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear; but certainly God has heard; He has given heed to the voice of my prayer. Blessed be God, Who has not turned away my prayer nor His lovingkindness from me. (Ps 66:16-20, NASB)

This passage describes the concept that God hears one's prayers, that He can ignore the prayers of the wicked, and that God's response to one's prayers is an outpouring of His lovingkindness. One author has described this passage as the psalmist's celebration of deliverance from trouble including lament, a declaration of commitment or fidelity, a declaration of innocence in suffering, and praise (VanGemeren 1991, 439). Certainly, these aspects of prayer are desirable and should be sought in *lectio divina*.

A New Testament observation of prayer is given in the words of Jesus:

So I say to you, "Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened. Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; he will not give him a snake instead of a fish, will he? Or if he is asked for an egg, he will not give him a scorpion, will he? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?" (Luke 11:9-13, NASB)

One author has noted that this passage portrays the "extravagant sense of the accessibility of God and His willingness to respond to us as we come to Him fit well with the radical simplicity of the faith of Jesus" (Nolland 1993, 632). It is attracting to think of the act of prayer being an extravagant sense of accessibility. This extravagant sense of accessibility

acts as a magnet drawing the believer to a prayer-encounter with God. Nolland further tells his readers, “Luke would have [the reader] encounter this [concept of prayer] in all its starkness” (632). Not only is there an attraction, but here is an overt invitation to prayer. All of these biblical illustrations progressively direct the participant to a culminating action within *lectio divina* of contemplation.

The Example of *Contemplatio* (Contemplation)

Contemplation has been observed as an act of consideration or deliberation with purpose and intention. *Contemplatio* can be thought of in the context of *lectio divina* as the consideration of what God would have practitioners of *lectio divina* to do with the things that God has directed toward their hearts. The author of Proverbs writes:

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. (Eccl 2:12-14)

It is as the writer of Ecclesiastes contemplates thoughts, and as he begins to apply those thoughts to his life, that direction and change come upon him. So this passage is directed to the readers so that they, too, can contemplate the direction of their lives.

The New Testament also records important observations of the act of contemplation. One important narration is given in the life of Joseph, husband of Mary, mother of Jesus:

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was a righteous man and did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly. But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth

to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. (Matthew 1:18-21)

In this passage, Joseph observed the occasion of Mary's pregnancy and pondered what he should do. It is certain that such thought came through great anguish. As he contemplated the situation, a revelation occurred to him with clear direction of the actions he should take. This is the biblical intent of contemplation. This is not to suggest that practitioners of contemplation should expect an angelic visitation, but it is to say that they should expect a revelation from God regarding the direction and actions they should take. Contemplation, then, is the act of consideration or deliberation with purpose and intention. It is a consideration of what God would have practitioners of *lectio divina* to do with the things that He has directed toward their hearts. This and other practices of the devotional life can be observed in the many human examples throughout the Bible.

Old Testament Human Examples of Devotional Life

The Example of King David

One example found in scripture is that of the Psalmist using the word of God as an instrument of שְׁלוֹמִים (*shalom*) or peace in times of deep distress and turmoil. The

Psalmist David records:

Rulers persecute me without cause, but my heart trembles at your word. I rejoice in your promise like one who finds great spoil. I hate and abhor falsehood but I love your law. Seven times a day I praise you for your righteous laws. Great peace (שְׁלוֹמִים) have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble. I wait for your salvation, O LORD, and I follow your commands. I obey your statutes, for I love them greatly. I obey your precepts and your statutes, for all my ways are known to you. (Ps 119: 161-168)

It is suggested from the psalmist's comments that the word of God was held in great esteem and was considered full of treasure, inspiration, truth, salvation, comfort,

direction, and peace (שלום).

Consider the passage in Luke's historical recording where God has stated, "After removing Saul, He made David their king. He testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do'" (Acts 13:22). It appears that David did not come to the conclusions recorded in Psalm 119 arbitrarily but, instead, did so by devotionally spending time with these thoughts and words of which he spoke. It was through David's life of obedience and through his longing after God's heart that he developed a relationship with God. This relationship stands as illustrative to all of God's people of a life longing for relationship with God.

The Example of Hebrew Corporate Worship

Throughout the Bible, however, it is clear that King David did not hold a monopoly on the knowledge and experience of the things of God. My quest, therefore, became to both seek and acknowledge other biblical examples of devotional life. In my search, I discovered several incidents throughout the Bible of men and women who sought a deeper relationship with God. In one case, the people of God gathered to hear the word of God and to worship Yahweh as a corporate act of seeking deeper relationship with Him:

All the people assembled as one man in the square before the Water Gate. They told Ezra the scribe to bring out the Book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had commanded for Israel.

So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women, and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.

Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiyah, Uriah, Hilkiyah, and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah,

Zechariah, and Meshullam.

Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, “Amen! Amen!” Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground.

The Levites — Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, and Pelaiah — instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read. (Neh 8:1-8)

Clearly, the words chronicled in Nehemiah 8 are a recording of corporate worship. It must be noted through an observation of the people in this passage, however, that there was a corresponding hunger within them, both corporately and individually, for a deeper relationship with God. This illustration was given as historical record but also was presented as an example of how God’s people should desire relationship with Him.

The Example of Abraham

Although there are many individuals and groups recorded in the Bible who were faithful and devoted to God and His word, one prominent individual to be noted is Abraham, whose interaction with God is partially recorded:

You are the LORD God, who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and named him Abraham. You found his heart faithful to you, and you made a covenant with him to give to his descendants the land of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Jebusites and Girgashites. You have kept your promise because you are righteous. (Neh 9:7-8)

In this passage, Abraham’s faithfulness to God is shown through his obedience of performing God’s commands and through his faithful heart. It is to be noted that this recording is a historical testimony of Abraham and not one attributed to him within his particular time.

In the book of Genesis, a precedent of Abraham’s faithfulness is set forth as he

“went forth as the LORD had spoken to him” (Gn 12:4, NASB). Although this also is a historical record, it mentions Abraham from a vantage point more closely related to his particular historical time than does the passage in Nehemiah. In other words, the comments regarding Abraham within the Genesis account show that he was acknowledged and respected as early as the fifteenth century B.C., a time much more closely related to the time of Abraham’s existence.

Abraham again revealed his faithfulness and devotion through his obedience to God’s command to sacrifice his son, Isaac:

The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time and said, “I swear by myself,” declares the LORD, “that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore. Your descendants will take possession of the cities of their enemies, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed, because you have obeyed me.” Then Abraham returned to his servants, and they set off together for Beersheba. And Abraham stayed in Beersheba. (Gn 22:15-19)

Although there is a clear allusion to God’s desire to bless Abraham for his obedience, there is also a distinct act of obedience to God on the part of Abraham. There have been many treatises and debates concerning the intent of Abraham as he acted in this recorded incident; however, most of those issues transcend the purpose of this writing. Instead, it should suffice to be said that Abraham was operating in obedience, regardless of other mitigating motivations, and that this compliance was enacted out of submission to, respect for, and devotion to God.

The writer of Hebrews, a New Testament writing generally attributed to the late first century A.D., further illuminates Abraham’s devotion to God through obedience, referring to these acts as “faith”:

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had

received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death. (Heb 11:17-19)

Although there are other records of Abraham’s acts of devotion and faith, and of his failures and doubts, these few examples of his loyalty allow the reader to glimpse that Abraham, even in his frailty and humanity was a biblical example of a devoted life.

The Example of King Hezekiah

Another testimony of biblical devotion is found in the record of King Hezekiah, who, after being faced with the reality of his impending death, pled with God in these words: “Remember, O LORD, how I have walked before you faithfully and with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes” (Is 38:3). Hezekiah reminded God of his faithfulness, his devotion, and his lack of an heir to the throne (Keil and Delitzsch 1949, 112-113). In response to Hezekiah’s loyalty and because of his reminder to God of his faithfulness, God honored trust and persistence by extending Hezekiah’s life fifteen more years. Isaiah records:

Then the word of the LORD came to Isaiah: “Go and tell Hezekiah, ‘This is what the LORD, the God of your father David, says: I have heard your prayer and seen your tears; I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city.’” (Is 38:4-6)

The prayer, reminders, and tears of Hezekiah persuaded God. God honored the devout prayer of the leader of His people because of the position that Hezekiah held, because of the need for an heir to his throne, and because of his devotional love for God (Watts 1982, 51). Because God was impressed enough with Hezekiah’s devotional strength to extend his life, Hezekiah is added as a biblical example of a true devotional existence and its effects.

New Testament Human Examples of Devotional Life

The Example of Paul and His Instructions to God's People

Just as the Old Testament records these previous examples of the devotional life of the people of God, so also the New Testament gives example of and instruction to individuals regarding the devotional life. The Apostle Paul gives instruction to individuals regarding their relationship with one another as well as their relationship with God:

I would like you to be free from concern. An unmarried man is concerned about the Lord's affairs — how he can please the Lord. But a married man is concerned about the affairs of this world — how he can please his wife — and his interests are divided. An unmarried woman or virgin is concerned about the Lord's affairs: Her aim is to be devoted to the Lord in both body and spirit. But a married woman is concerned about the affairs of this world — how she can please her husband. I am saying this for your own good, not to restrict you, but that you may live in a right way in undivided devotion to the Lord. (1 Cor 7: 32-35)

In this instruction and observance, Paul is demarcating the undistracted devotion to God that one who is unmarried may have. As Paul sets forth this example of the single one's devotion, he seeks to promote a similar undistracted devotion to God among those who are married. Because of the preponderance of marital unions that took place in that time and since, Paul is setting forth reminders and implications for those who are in the situation of matrimony that they might exercise a similar undistracted devotion to God. This clearly points to the level of importance that Paul held for one's devotional life.

The Example of the Early Disciples

Not only did Paul, who is often deemed as the “teacher of the early church,” create a record of devotional life, but many of the early practitioners of Christianity also illustrated the devout life. Luke records the lifestyle of the earliest Christians as the

Church was in its initial stages:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

These individuals exhibited an extraordinary devotion, not only to God but also to one another. They showed their devotion by owning nothing and by caring for the needs of one another. Although these are but a few illustrations of biblical devotional lives, these recordings are significant in that they provide clear examples for the believer toward a life of devotion.

Lectio Divina in the Old and New Testaments

That life of devotion took place in many different forms. Although *lectio divina* was not known by its given name in these Old and New Testament recordings, its principles are evident in practices such as: “reading God’s word” (Ps 119: 11 *et al*), “meditation” (Ps 1:2 *et al*), “prayer” (Mt 6: 5-13 *et al*), “contemplation” (Ps 119:15-16 *et al*), and other similar thoughts. It is my assertion that *lectio divina*, although not known by that particular name, was a legitimate practice of the early people of God and of the early church as a devotional tool to build one’s relationship with God.

Biblical Admonitions

New Testament Admonitions

As previously mentioned, Paul establishes in 1 Corinthians 7:32-35 a reminder for both those who are married and those who are unmarried of the necessity of undistracted

devotion to God. In writing this, Paul is making a statement regarding the priority that the word of God is to have for the person devoted to God. While the principle established in Paul's passage does not decidedly state such priority as a command, it does clearly establish a standard that Paul feels his readers should heed. It also echoes, albeit in a quieter and less direct manner, the admonitions found elsewhere in the Bible for individuals to read the word of God.

One such encouragement is located in the book of Revelation, where its author pronounces a blessing upon the individual who simply reads and upon those who merely hear the words recorded therein: "Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near" (Rev 1:3, NLT). If God declares a blessing upon those who read or hear and regard the word of God, how much more blessing He must have for those who seek to hide this same word within their hearts by reading it, meditating upon it, praying about it, contemplating it, and performing it (which, altogether, are the essence of *lectio divina*.) Again, although this particular passage is found in and is specifically attributed to the book of Revelation, I am stretching the principle established within Revelation 1:3 to all books contained within its greater context, the Bible.

Old Testament Admonition

Another strong admonition for devotion to God is found in the Pentateuch, wherein the word of God is equated with the commands of God, and wherein God issues a command to "Hear!" His commandments:

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength. And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands I am giving you

today. Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are away on a journey, when you are lying down and when you are getting up again. Tie them to your hands as a reminder, and wear them on your forehead. Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates. (Dt 6:4-9, NLT)

Of special importance here is the Hebrew word, שָׁמַע, (*shema*) translated “hear!” This term actually bears the much grander concept of “hear, listen to, and obey” (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1980, 938). This speaks of an action beyond the simple task of passively hearing or reading. Emphatically, there is an intentional, active endeavor (obeying) that must accompany the passive action of “hearing.” This is further evidenced in the writer’s of Deuteronomy admonition to surround oneself and one’s family with visible, tangible words recorded in the commands. The importance of this command is that these issues are crucial and must be dwelt upon continually by the reader, hearer, and seer. However, just as there are biblical admonitions to live the devoted life of the community of God, there are also biblical records of maltreatment upon individuals by that same community of God.

Biblical Records of Spiritual Abuse

New Testament Concept of Spiritual Abuse

Spiritual abuse “occurs when someone (usually a pastor) has power over another and uses that power to hurt” (Blue 1993, 12). Although direct references to spiritual abuse are few within the pages of the Bible, there are principles mentioned throughout regarding pride, self-indulgence, spiritual manipulation, and other similar concepts on the part of leadership, especially among the people of God. One reference to the misuse of spiritual leadership and authority is found in the words of Paul as he wrote to the Christians in Corinth:

Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. (1 Cor 9:16-18)

In this reference, Paul acknowledges the manipulative capabilities of one who stands as a spiritual leader or as a communicator of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul also states his refusal to practice such abuse. Although this reference is not given to illustrate a command to Paul's audience, it does stand as a clear and appropriate example from the one who wrote most of the instruction to the Church.

Not only does Paul speak to the issue of spiritual abuse, but also, in one of the Gospel narratives, Jesus indicts the Pharisees as abusers of spiritual authority:

Woe to you, blind guides! You say, 'If anyone swears by the temple, it means nothing; but if anyone swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound by his oath.' You blind fools! Which is greater: the gold, or the temple that makes the gold sacred? (Mt 23:16-17)

In this passage, Jesus not only acknowledges the Pharisees as spiritual abusers, but He states that their teaching is as that of "blind guides." Clearly, Jesus was accusing these men of abuse of authority. He further indicted them of being hypocrites. He voiced His disdain at their spiritual leadership as they led away those who followed them. One author furthered this concept when he said:

Now when we think of spiritual abuse, we probably think in terms of practice as opposed to teaching, or doctrine. This is a valid distinction, but we have to be careful -- because biblical teaching or doctrine does not merely consist of instruction on abstract, intellectual matters, but also on very practical matters -- especially our attitudes toward God, ourselves and others; and also how these attitudes are reflected in our behavior, i.e., how we treat others. (Henzel 1998)

As observed through the concepts espoused by Henzel, the Pharisees were guilty of abusive practice as well as abusive teaching. The fruit of the Pharisee's labor was

observed through individuals who showed a wrong attitude toward God. Such attitudes were addressed by a verbal rebuke from Jesus Himself.

Old Testament Concept of Spiritual Abuse

The Old Testament records several instances of spiritual abuse. One such reference was aimed at the actions of self-focused prophets. The Lord makes clear that He is angry with them and seeks to punish them for their abuses.

“Among my people are wicked men who lie in wait like men who snare birds and like those who set traps to catch men. Like cages full of birds, their houses are full of deceit; they have become rich and powerful and have grown fat and sleek. Their evil deeds have no limit; they do not plead the case of the fatherless to win it, they do not defend the rights of the poor. Should I not punish them for this?” declares the LORD. “Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land: The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?” (Jer 5:26-31)

In this passage, the priests and the prophets are described as self-governing, self-righteous, and self-indulgent. The congregation is also presented as a group of individuals who actually desire such leadership. It is apparent in this incident that the people of God are deceived into accepting such leadership behavior as normal. Certainly, such acceptance of spiritual abuse was not and is not always the case, although it was clearly the situation presented in the previous passage.

The prophet Jeremiah further echoes the circumstances of abusive spiritual leaders. Again, such recording is not reflective of every leader but is reflective of an important and notable group of individuals.

“From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when

I punish them,” says the LORD. (Jer 6:13-16)

Not only is there recognition by the prophet Jeremiah and by God of the selfishness, vanity, and deceitfulness of these leaders, but there is also a false proclamation of peace by the leaders, a lack of concern for the congregation by the leaders, and, correspondingly, a strong pronouncement of punishment by the Lord. This passage, seen in conjunction with Jeremiah 5:26-31, provides evidence that God both hates and deals firmly with spiritual abuse.

Another key passage of the denunciation of spiritual abuse found in the Old Testament states:

The word of the Lord came to me: “Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: ‘This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals. My sheep wandered over all the mountains and on every high hill. They were scattered over the whole earth, and no one searched or looked for them.’” (Ez 34:1-6)

This harsh indictment against the spiritual leaders who are labeled within the passage as shepherds, acknowledges that these individuals were not performing their designated tasks. They had been positioned to care for their flocks by binding up wounds, healing the sick, and strengthening the weak. These leaders, however, had taken care of themselves and neglected their flocks. In doing so, these shepherds had scattered their flocks, causing them to be hindered in their relationship with God. The tone of this passage indicates a distinct judgment inherent in Ezekiel’s indictment. Again, it is clear that God both hates and deals firmly with spiritual abuse.

It becomes apparent in this section regarding biblical foundations that scripture has much to say regarding the issues of the devotional life, the reading of the word of God, and spiritual abuse. Although not necessarily using that specific terminology, the biblical challenge to the community of God today is to seek His purpose and to walk within that will with all of our being. Although many individuals have been hurt by spiritual abuse from establishments and leaders, the Bible makes it clear God wants a relationship with His people through those acts included within this dissertation as ingredients in *lectio divina: silencio, lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*, and journaling. It is also clear that I have embarked on a proper path to this recovery from spiritual abuse through the application of such activities found within *lectio divina*.

Historical Foundations

In researching this project, I also wanted to know what the historical record had to say about four different elements of my endeavor. First, I wanted to identify the historical record of *lectio divina* including some of its practitioners. Second, I wanted to identify historically some of the effects of *lectio divina*. Third, I wanted to acknowledge various historical concepts of Christian community. Last, I wanted to identify some of the historical records of spiritual abuse and its consequences and treatments. As I did regarding the scriptural record, I also wanted to see what applications I could use and expect regarding these issues from the historical aspect.

Historical Concepts of *Lectio Divina*

Historically, the subject of *lectio divina*, or divine reading, proved its great capacity as an effective instrument for Christian devotion from the very inception of

Christianity (Hall 1988, 7). In fact, *lectio divina* and various other spiritual disciplines played strong roles in the shaping of the lives of believers throughout the early years of the newly conceived church.

The earliest Christians practiced a form of *lectio divina*. For example, in about 250 A.D. Cyprian of Carthage wrote a letter to a man named Donatus and suggested he be, “Constant in prayer as in reading; speak with God, then let him speak with you. Let him instruct you in his precepts, let him direct you.” The *lectio divina* method has been advocated and practiced by a wide range of Christians over the centuries, including the Benedictine monks, Martin Luther, and John Wesley. (Hughes 2004)

Originally, *lectio divina* was used as a tool for individual spiritual enhancement. There has, however, been some adaptation for group use in recent years (Watson 2005).

Although I believed restoration of spiritual vitality could flow to the project participants through group *lectio divina*, it was important to observe further the historicity of *lectio divina* as both a solitary practice as well as a corporate one.

I discovered that *lectio divina* was originally equated with another title, which has since fallen into practical disuse:

Found most commonly, but not exclusively in literature on monastic spirituality and originally equated with *sacra pagina*, *lectio divina* refers to a “holy reading” of the scriptures (almost always) or of the Fathers of the Church or other spiritual writers requiring prayerful reflection on the text leading to communion with God in prayer. (Irwin 1993, 596)

One of the earliest historical records we have regarding *lectio divina* actually using the Latin name “*lectio divina*” also happens to be one of the most celebrated records of the practice. It was written in the early sixth century and is ascribed to the Patriarch of Western monasticism, Saint Benedict of Nursia (Theisen 1995). In his famous *Rule of St. Benedict*, he exemplifies much of the early monastic and patristic literature as it addressed *lectio divina*:

Lectio [divina] includes reading, private prayer, and meditation, with “meditation” meaning the memorization, repetition, and prayerful rumination (“chewing over”) of texts as a stimulus to personal prayer. The desired result of application to *lectio divina* is a thorough assimilation of sacred truth and life lived according to this truth. Chapter 48 of the *Rule of St. Benedict* begins with the general instruction: “Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the brothers should have specified periods for manual labor as well as for prayerful reading (*lectio divina*)” and contains specific times for *lectio [divina]* in the daily and Sunday *horarium*, with special attention to Lent. (Irwin 1993, 596)

St. Benedict’s rule directed his audience beyond the simple admonition, “*ora et labora*” (pray and work) (St. Benedict 1949). He further directed them to engage in “a humane, moderate program of prayer, sacred readings, and manual labor.” Benedict saw these as necessary aspects of the monastic lifestyle. Furthermore,

the wisdom of Benedict's Rule lies in its flexibility, its tolerance for individual differences, and its openness to change. For 1500 years, it has remained a powerful and relevant guide for those who would seek God in the ordinary circumstances of life. (McClure 2005b)

Lectio divina, in its truest form, is not actually a technique *per se*, but is instead a conversation between the practitioner and God (Watson 2005). St. Thérèse de Lisieux stated that *lectio divina* was “a vast, supernatural force which opens out [the] heart, and binds [one] close to Jesus” (Collins 1995, 147). Notice there is a strong emphasis on the supernatural aspect of *lectio divina* and a supporting thought that this meditative approach to scripture transcends the “natural” skills of those who practice it. Evelyn Underhill has stated, “Spiritual reading is, or at least can be, second only to prayer as a developer and support of the inner life” (Manning 2000, 13).

As noted earlier, *lectio divina* was initially practiced as an individual (as opposed to a group) effort of devotion. As also previously noted, the practice transcended the aspect of “technique.” In part, this means that the steps traditionally and currently observed as *lectio divina* (*lectio, meditatio, oratio, contemplatio*) were not necessarily

observed in that order. Instead, this pattern serves merely as a framework for dialogue with God (Watson 2005).

At the point that *lectio divina* began to be used as a group effort, however, the importance of staying within the confines and structure of the established pattern increased. It then became necessary, for the benefit of accomplishing the desired task, to work within the patterned and restrictive framework of *lectio, meditatio, oratio*, and *contemplatio*:

When used in a group setting, *lectio [divina]* involves hearing a passage read aloud several times in succession. After each reading, those present reflect on the passage at a certain level of consideration. By the end of the experience, the passage has been heard four [or more] times, and participants have responded at ever-deepening levels of reflection and prayer. While personal *lectio [divina]* may vary in its sequence, group *lectio [divina]* of necessity follows a fixed pattern. (Watson 2005)

This fixed pattern would be used in a modified form for my project. Additionally, it was clear that a historical precedent had been established with and for such group practice.

Historical Concepts of Community

In addition to the concept of group *lectio divina*, I also wanted to examine the concept of community within the body of Christ. Community, a simplified word for the group dynamic, has a particular place of importance in both Jewish and Christian history.

The early church sought to establish a way in which individuals could become recognized as a part of the Christian community. Some of these efforts still stand in modernity as a means of recognition of one's admission into the community of the church. One such effort is the act of baptism based upon a simple confession of one's faith (Latourette 2005, 193-194). Of course, the concept of baptism as a profession of one's allegiance to and identity with Christ reaches back to the day of Pentecost as

recorded in Acts 2. Baptism stems from the Hebrew מִקְוֵה (*mikvah*), or ritual bath.

Because baptism was such an important part of the church and because it was an important indicator of one's identification with the church, a significant portion of the early church's manual of Christianity, the *Didache*, was given to the concept and practice of baptism.

As the church grew, a perceived need to categorize and self-legislate within the church also arose. In the course of this systemization, political structures surfaced, and in turn, some Christians began to rebel against those structures' concepts. This initiated the movement that is often referred to as monasticism, the move of individuals away from the structure and institution of the church into a sub-community of like-minded, fellow believers. This movement did not initially begin among those in spiritual authority but instead, among those without any authority, also known as the laity. Of course, the monastic movement soon became a movement for spiritual leaders as well (222).

In the fourth century, a small movement among Christian monks took place. In this movement, these men, later known as hermits, began to move to the deserts in an effort to "abandon the cities of the pagan world to live in solitude" (Merton 1960, 3). Even though these and others, known as coenobites, sought a sense of solitude, they also recognized the need for fellowship and would occasionally seek out one another to fulfill partially their need for community. I point this out because even in the midst of the desire and longing for solitude, there was also a recognized need for fellowship with others in the body of Christ. Admittedly, this need for fellowship was purported to be a quest for further wisdom, but it also fulfilled an inner need for community.

Throughout the course of Christianity, there have been many other movements

within the church to align like-minded individuals. Again, this illustrates the inner need of individuals to experience community. It frequently happened that, as individuals began to align themselves with one another, a simultaneous separation from others would also occur. One can read historically of splinter groups moving into the mountains or into the deserts in order to avoid persecution from “other-minded” individuals and in order to unite with like-minded individuals. Through these efforts, various denominations and sects have developed within the community of Christ. I do not note this in either a positive or a negative light; I simply draw it to the reader’s attention in order to emphasize the fact that Christians need community and seek it among like-minded persons.

In further support of this thought, one Christian psychologist has stated that the church was intended historically to be a “community of spiritual friends and spiritual directors who journey together for God. [Because of that intention], we must become that community.” He also, however, went on to say, “Prayer is the starting point” (Crabb 1999, 184). The same author has further stated, “In the community of faith where the Bible is trusted, you will find all you need to know to live as you were re-created to live” (Crabb 1999, 9). These two statements held great relevance to my project because in my endeavor I posited this one element, prayer (which is a part of *lectio divina* known as *oratio*), as a “starting point” to our acts of community. The other pertinent element was that of the “trusted Bible” which, when read (*lectio*), acted as a further point of growth toward community.

Historical Concepts of Spiritual Abuse

Just as there have been and are strong elements of community within the church,

there have been and are allegations of spiritual abuse within the church. Some of the most widely know instances of spiritual abuse include the Medieval and Spanish Inquisitions and the Salem Witchcraft Trials. Some individuals include the Crusades among instances of spiritual abuse as the church used military might to overtake lands and possessions as well as to proselytize converts to the Christian faith.

Some of this abuse also took place under the guise of establishing proper teaching and understanding, and it served to alienate those who refused to agree with certain policies and doctrines. Certainly, there was a necessity to understand proper teaching and practice. Nevertheless, there were times when community was split and individuals were elevated or maligned based upon their confession of faith. These types of conflicts often opened the doors for spiritual abuse to enter. In the eleventh century, such tension came into the community of faith based upon two points of doctrine: clerical celibacy and the celebration of the Eucharist with or without unleavened bread. This schism culminated in the split of the church into what we now know as the Western and Eastern branches (Gonzalez 2001, 265). Records exist of abuse's effects being escalated into a severe division that is still felt in the twenty-first century.

Another notable abuse of spiritual power came upon the military order within the church of the fourteenth century known as the Knights Templar. This military order had been established during the Crusades for several purposes, including the overtaking and protection of Jerusalem and the guarantee of safe passage of pilgrims to and from Jerusalem. The Templars presented opposition to the then-current leadership in France. The French king forced the leader of the Western church, Pope Clement, to accuse, arrest, and torture the Knights Templar. Perhaps this was simply a move by the French to gain

the enormous wealth that the Templars had accumulated; nevertheless, the event did illustrate the tremendous power of the church and the ability to use and abuse that power for ungodly or worldly gain.

Contemporary Concepts of Spiritual Abuse

This draws us to the contemporary issue of spiritual abuse. There are many unconcerned leaders of congregations and communities throughout the world today. Many within these congregations are either ignorant of the abuse that is directed toward them or have been subtly desensitized by the leadership under which they dwell. In contrast, the leader of one ministry geared toward ministering to those who have been spiritually abused states:

We suspect that many ... can attest to having experienced these kinds of things in churches and/or religious organizations in our day as well. There are still many leaders who “rule by their own authority,” many followers who “love it this way,” and many who do not take seriously the wounds of God’s people. (Ryan and Vonderen 2000)

Because of the seriousness with which God views and deals with this issue, it is necessary to develop an awareness of both actualities of and potentialities for spiritual abuse among spiritual communities today. One individual who was affected by spiritual abuse stated:

Community adults would decide what my sin was, [and] then just lay into me ... I wasn’t allowed to speak to my father when he phoned; they told me it was the Lord’s will that I not speak with him. ... The way I was making beds looked ‘rebellious’ to them, so I was assigned to scrub the bathrooms. Each day I’d get yelled at and forced to scrub them again. (Bussell 1993, 52)

Although this presents an extreme case of spiritual abuse, and one that would certainly be labeled as cultic, it expresses a valid occurrence of contemporary spiritual abuse. This same individual, illustrating another extreme occurrence of spiritual abuse, went on to

say, “They pushed me into saying I lusted after my little daughter ... Their idea was that only when you recognize your total depravity can you let Jesus go to work” (52). Again, this is an extreme situation, but it is real and does express the potential of contemporary spiritual abuse to move toward extreme situations, whether through manipulation, intimidation, or authoritarianism.

Perhaps a more prevalent circumstance of spiritual abuse is found in the testimony of one well-respected Christian author:

Often I have been asked, “Brennan, how is it possible that you became an alcoholic after you got saved?” It is possible because I got battered and bruised by loneliness and failure, because I got discouraged, uncertain, guilt-ridden, and took my eyes off Jesus. Because the Christ-encounter did not transfigure me into an angel. Because justification by grace through faith means I have been set in right relationship with God, not made the equivalent of a patient etherized on a table. (Manning 2000, 31-32)

Brennan Manning writes from the standpoint of one who has experienced God’s grace and simultaneously has witnessed the lack of grace often asserted at the hands of the institutional church and its leadership. Manning writes because he wants his readers to experience fully God’s grace and to understand that His grace reaches beyond the abusive situations that many of them have experienced in church from its leaders. It is from the standpoint of one such as Manning that others can understand spiritual abuse is not necessarily an end, but that it is a situation that, when experienced and allowed to be processed through the grace of God, can be healed and overcome.

Historical records do reveal much regarding the issues of *lectio divina*, Christian community, and spiritual abuse. The challenge to the community of God today is to learn from the past, even the recent past, and to allow God to shape our lives within His plan. Again, although many individuals have been hurt by spiritual abuse from establishments

and leaders, the historical record indicates that relationship with God and healing from hurts brought on by the church and spiritual leaders can take place. Of course, “the only cure for the abused, is a sufficient dose of God’s mercy and grace” (Blue 1993, 119). It is also further evidenced that I have embarked on a proper path to this recovery from spiritual abuse through the application of such activities found within *lectio divina*.

Theological Foundations

Even as I explored biblical foundations of *lectio divina*, spiritual abuse, and community, I also wanted to know the theological foundations of several different concepts pertaining to my project. I sought to identify theological models that are entailed in *lectio divina*. Also, I looked to identify theories regarding spiritual abuse. Additionally, I wanted to acknowledge various theological ideas engaged in community. I also wanted to explore theological impressions of one’s relationship with God as well as various scriptural directives regarding God’s desire for relationship with His people. Further, I wanted to recognize the connection between faith and relationship. Finally, I wanted to examine the various actions God performs in order to initiate relationship between Himself and His people.

Theological Concepts of Lectio Divina

During my research, I visited Lourdes College, a Catholic institution located in Sylvania, Ohio. There, I conversed with a nun regarding the concept of *lectio divina*. She spoke of *lectio divina* as if it was merely another method of prayer, with no particular weight or influence over any other method of devotion. In fact, she seemed somewhat amused that I would be spending the time to write a doctoral dissertation regarding the

matter: it was a normal, regular practice for her and for those with whom she associated. How distant her reaction seemed from the responses I had been getting from non-Catholic individuals. Certainly, within the Catholic Church, there is a deep respect for the concept of *lectio divina*.

One profound theological concept of *lectio divina* arose from my research. As God supernaturally inspired the Bible, so also is He capable of inspiring the reader and meditator with an understanding of that reading. This inspiration by God takes place while the reader or meditator is practicing *lectio divina*. Of this thought, Trappist monk Thomas Keating states:

I mean sitting with a sentence, phrase or even one word that emerges from the text, allowing the Spirit to expand our listening capacity and to open us to its deeper meaning; in other words, to penetrate the spiritual sense of a scripture passage. This leads to the faith experience of the living Christ and increases the practical love for others that flows from that relationship. (Keating 2005)

Keating's concept of God places a special emphasis on His inspiration of the word of God. According to some, including Michael Casey, this, in turn, stretches the theological notion of inspiration to certain non-canonical texts including the writings of the early Church Fathers (Casey 1995, 110). Again, to some, this is a stretch. It does point, however, to an ever-present God working within His people for the purpose of motivating them, wooing them, and having fellowship with them.

Lectio divina is a contemporary spiritual discipline utilizing an ancient methodology. It is a corresponding development of post-modern individuals' longing for a mystical relationship with God. One author has stated, "Contemporary attention to *lectio divina* beyond monastic circles concerns the importance of an informed yet spiritual interpretation of and reflection on scripture for all the baptized and its usefulness

for a preacher's spirituality and ministry" (Irwin 1993, 596). It is this contemporary, post-modern search for ancient practices that initially drew me to *lectio divina*.

Lectio divina as a practice fits well with the concept of post-modernism which sits prevalent among the contemporary youth culture and among the culture of the individuals with whom I conducted my task. Project participants noticed that the church has "been consumed with maintaining political power, conquering lands, writing laws, and a lot of other things that Jesus did not seem to be the least bit concerned with" (Jones 2001, 39). Again, many were and are looking for a mystical relationship with God and have not been fruitful in finding such within the institute of the church.

Theological Concepts of Spiritual Abuse

The political and institutional aspect of Christianity is what has turned many victims of spiritual abuse away. They felt they had been used and then thrown aside after their usefulness had been rendered. Donald Miller addressed a similar aversion to the political aspect very appropriately. Miller is a recognized spokesperson within the Emergent Church movement, a Christian response to Postmodernism:

In a recent radio interview I was sternly asked by the host, who did not consider himself a Christian, to defend Christianity. I told him that I couldn't do it, and moreover, that I didn't want to defend the term. He asked me if I was a Christian, and I told him yes. "Then why don't you want to defend Christianity?" he asked, confused. I told him I no longer knew what the term meant. Of the hundreds of thousands of people listening to his show that day, some of them had terrible experiences with Christianity; they may have been yelled at by a teacher in a Christian school, abused by a minister, or browbeaten by a Christian parent. To them, the term *Christianity* means something that no Christian I know would defend. By fortifying the term, I am only making them more and more angry. I won't do it. Stop ten people on the street and ask them what they think of when they hear the word Christianity, and they will give you ten different answers. How can I defend a term that means ten different things to ten different people? I told the radio show host that I would rather talk about Jesus and how I came to believe that Jesus exists and that he likes me. The host looked back at me with tears in his

eyes. When we were done, he asked me if we could go get lunch together. He told me how much he didn't like Christianity but how he had always wanted to believe Jesus was the Son of God. (Miller 2003, 115)

Many are hurt by these abuses and tend to deal with their hurts by hiding and withdrawing. Others assert a proactivity in the midst of their experience of abuses by working to overcome or, at least, to circumvent the causes of their abuse. A normal response in dealing with such abuse initially would be to retreat from the source of the pain and to hide. However, after a significant time of such hiding, it becomes important to reintegrate into the society from which one has retreated.

Miller's preferred method was somewhat of a circumvention of the process in that he did not enter into the world from which he left (the institutional church) but he did reenter into the framework he had left (the modified, emergent church.) In other words, he maintained a distance from that society which was perceived as "Christianity," but he reentered into that mystical relationship with that person who was foundational for Christianity, Jesus Christ. Miller was looking for wholeness in Christ, and this is not always found within the church. Nonetheless, wholeness is what God seems to desire for His people.

Theological Concepts of Wholeness

A theological idea upon which this concept of God's desire for wholeness is based is set forth in the writings of the author of 3 John who penned:

Dear friend, I pray that you may enjoy good health and that all may go well with you, even as your soul is getting along well. It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth. (3 Jn 2-4)

In this passage, which is addressed to a certain believer, Gaius, John writes words of

wholeness and prosperity to his beloved friend. There are certain key issues involved here. First is the term of endearment, ἀγαπητέ (*agapete*), which is translated in other passages as “beloved” or “beloved friend.” This noun is written in the vocative case, signifying that the individual indicated by the noun is being addressed. Thus, it is established that the author is writing a message to someone whom he knows closely and to whom he is endeared.

Secondly, the author is communicating a positive message to this beloved individual. He states, “I pray for you to prosper and to be in good health” (my translation). The terms, εὐδοοῦσθαι καὶ ὑγιαίνειν (*euodousthai kai hugiainein* or “to prosper and to be in good health”) are used to indicate the desire of the author for the individual being addressed. Both verbs here are written in the present tense, probably indicating an ongoing or continuous aspect of both actions (Mounce 2003, 302). In other words, it is probable that the author of 3 John desired for his beloved friend to be in an ongoing state of prosperity and health.

I note that this letter, 3 John, is clearly written to an individual, Gaius. I am also convinced that 3 John was intended to be shared with other members of Gaius’ community (Barker 1981, 371). If that is the case, then it becomes clear that the author of 3 John desired ongoing health and prosperity for an entire community, and further, there are aspects of 3 John that are relevant for the contemporary church: As God inspired the writing of 3 John, He also wants prosperity and health to be upon His church. Although there have certainly been extreme theologies and doctrines propounded from this statement, I intend it in a simple form: God wants a wholeness and spiritual health upon His people. The extended point is that spiritual abuse, in any fashion, is not healthy or

prosperous, and thus, is not God's desire for His church.

In the absence of health and prosperity in the Christian community, there exists dysfunction. While it is God's desire that His people are whole, healthy, and prosperous, it should be noted that this concept of dysfunction is not new. Instead,

Religious dysfunction was apparently very common throughout the entire biblical period. There is no "golden age" in the history of the Christian community, no early pristine period when everything worked just like it was supposed to. As far back as you look, you find broken people struggling to support each other in their efforts to free themselves from religious bondage. If we were really successful in "restoring" the early Christian community, we would not find an ideal, pure community where everyone liked everyone else and got along and didn't have problems. The evidence is exactly to the contrary. If we restored our churches to the New Testament model, they would still be full of struggling people, still susceptible to all kinds of dysfunction. Naive idealism that leads to reinventing history about earlier periods of the church is just not helpful. (Ryan and VanVonderen 2000)

God desires for His people to grow beyond this concept of dysfunction within the Christian community. As Ryan and VanVonderen have projected, true biblical and Christian community is not a perfected utopia; instead, it is full of difficulties and struggle. Nonetheless, it was and is a community in which individuals work together to overcome their struggles and to work through their difficult issues with one another.

Theological Concepts of Community

There is more to the concept of Christian community than the simple old adage, "One is known by the company one keeps." The Greek word most often translated as "church" is ἐκκλησία (*ekklesia*). Morphologically, this is a combination word formed from the preposition ἐκ (*ek*) and the verb καλέω (*kaleo*). ἐκ denotes a separation, with the thought of a direction from which something comes, or an origin, cause, motive, or reason (Bauer 1979, 234-236). Thus, the preposition ἐκ is generally understood as

meaning, “out of” or “away from” The second part of this word is a derivative of the verb καλέω which has the meaning “I call” or “I summon” (398-400). Biblically, ἐκκλησία, then, is understood to mean “church,” “assembly,” or “meeting.” Similar meaning was used in apocryphal writings. Additionally, philosopher Philo and historian Josephus both used the word ἐκκλησία with similar meaning. The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, used the word ἐκκλησία to translate the Hebrew word לְקָהָל (*qahal*) which also has the connotation of “assembly,” “convocation,” or “congregation.” This lends credence to the concept that “the Old Testament people of Israel were the prototype of the peoples of God — the New Testament Church of Christ” (Russian Orthodox Church 2006).

Community is inherent in the Greek word ἐκκλησία. Common origin is understood in the Greek wording because of the concept of individuals being mutually called out of or away from something. In the case of ἐκκλησία, the calling is out of “darkness.” The author of 1 Peter tells his audience:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
(1 Pet 2:9-10)

Not only has the group of individuals intrinsic in ἐκκλησία been called out of darkness; they have been given a destiny of being the people of God and of obtaining mercy. This passage refers to a people who were once nameless, perhaps even in slavery, having no identity as a people. These people have not only been redeemed with a freedom wherein they are free yet without a name; they have also obtained a freedom accompanied by an identity: that of being the people of God. This is the church, the called-out ones, the

ἐκκλησία.

The church as a community of called out ones is sometimes associated with being “against” those from whom they are called out. Other times, the association of being called out seems to relate to the idea of being apart from something. One theologian described the idea of being called apart in these words:

“Celsus, the most significant critic of Christianity in the second century, wrote: ‘If all men wanted to be Christians, the Christians would no longer want them’” (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton 1985, 221). In fact, he insisted that Christians were so fascinated with rejecting what is common to all people that they themselves would no longer want to be Christians if everyone decided to become one. In his view, the primary point of reference for Christian identity was the non-Christian world. Christian identity is established through the negative activity of setting oneself apart from others. Christian distance from society is a spiteful difference for the sake of difference, nourished by a deep-seated resentment against the dominant social order which rejected them. Is this what we find in 1 Peter? (Volf 2003)

Volf’s concept is that the church, that called out body of believers, must be more than simply against something; they must also be “for” something. Indeed, those in relationship with Christ are not only called “out of darkness [but] into his wonderful light” (1 Pet 2:9).

With similar thoughts regarding 1 Peter 2:9-10, another theologian states:

The impact of this passage will be greater if we remember that its author was writing to a group of predominantly Gentile Christians in northern Asia Minor, probably in the 80s of the first century. They were feeling that they were like ‘aliens and exiles’, cut off from the surrounding society, alienated from their pagan neighbours and even despised and ostracized by them. Knowing their feelings of hurt and discouragement, the author offers these isolated Gentile Christians affirmation, assurance and encouragement, and a sense of pride in belonging to God’s people, the Church. He tells them that just as the enslaved tribes of Israel were brought out of Egypt and transformed into God’s people, so have they been changed into God’s people through their conversion to Christ and their incorporation into him by their baptism. (Gleeson 2005)

In that respect, then, Christian community is, in essence, like a family. The theological

concept of Christian community is one place that a sense of family is perceived. One theologian recorded, “a person’s family of origin is the primary source for his or her status and location in the world and an essential reference point for a person’s identity” (DeSilva 2000, 158). There is strong similarity between family and Christian community. Another theologian who is also a moral ethicist stated, “Every human being, Christian or not, is less than he or she could and ought to be, if not part of a body, in organic interdependence with many peers” (Yoder 1992, 50). It is because of this mutual interdependence that true Christian community merits exploration and experience; Christian community is a necessary and vital part of each believer’s identity, health, and growth.

A further reason community is necessary is because Christians “are not shaped in isolation. [Believers] are shaped in community. And they are shaped by community. [These individuals] cannot be separated from the formative processes of community” (McNeal 2000, 115). “The Apostle Paul, outlining the qualifications for congregational leadership, granted disproportionate space to family relationships. Failure here, he implied, cannot be overcome by great talent and gifts” (121). Many churches and pastors who are deemed “abusive” strike at believers who are in a very vulnerable position: that of needing interdependency through community with other believers. “Spiritual abuse is a kind of abuse which damages the central core of who we are. It leaves us spiritually disorganized and emotionally cut off from the healing love of God” (Ryan and Ryan 1992, 9). Either abused Christians, then, walk in deception or they walk in hurt with lingering cynicism, confusion, hurt, anger, and avoidance (Blue 1993, 15). Unfortunately, as one priest intimated, “the church is the community that keeps alive the memory of

Jesus, but it is also the community that, because of weakness and sin, forgets some dimensions of the message of Christ” (Fahey 1991, 32). Because of this particular concept of weakness and sin, “the church is often referred to as ‘*ecclesia semper reformanda*,’ i.e. the church always needing to be reformed and purified, always being called by God to repentance and conversion” (Gleeson 2005).

As continual spiritual shaping, rebirth, or reformation is taking place, the church is constantly evolving into the image Christ has ordained it to be. The theological concept of sanctification comes to mind here as those in relationship with Christ are progressively being molded into His image and into His hope.

The statements that celebrate Christian calling “out of darkness into his marvelous light” notwithstanding, 1 Peter does not operate with the stark black-and-white opposition between “divine community” and “satanic world.” Correspondingly, the author seems less interested in hurling threats against the unbelieving and aggressive non-Christian neighbors, than in celebrating Christians’ special status before God. Christian hope, not the damnation of non-Christians, figures centrally in the letter. (Volf 2003)

Christian community is an acknowledgement of separation from darkness but is much more a celebration of something else: a unity and mutual companionship with fellow believers who are united around a singular cause, Jesus Christ. It makes sense that such unity should supersede differences and disagreements (which is not always, nor even usually, the case). Indeed, it is allowed, “one group in the church will always believe one thing while another group believes something quite different” (Richardson 1996, 55). Such is the true spirit of unity and community that is inherent to the concept of church. An underlying issue for this unity and community is the desire of God Himself to have relationship with His people.

Theological Concepts of Relationship between God and His People

The relationship God desires between Himself and His people might gain new understanding by exploring the concept of relationship within the Godhead itself. Unity resides in the midst of the triune Godhead. Godhead is defined as the “essential being or nature of God” (Easton 1996). The Godhead, also referred to as the Trinity, is the title of a singular God, manifest in three distinct personalities, known as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Much has been written regarding the relationship and unity within the Godhead. In fact, it is within that unity that Trinitarians, or Christians who believe in one God revealed in three separate and distinct manifestations, best understand the concept of the Godhead. Because of the importance of the concept of the unified Godhead, several treatises have been written addressing the issue. One Church Father of the fourth century wrote:

All those Catholic expounders of the divine scriptures, both Old and New, whom I have been able to read, who have written before me concerning the Trinity, Who is God, have purposed to teach, according to the scriptures, this doctrine, that the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God: although the Father hath begotten the Son, and so He who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He who is the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and of the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the Trinity. (St. Augustine 1996, 32-33)

St. Augustine points to the co-equality of all three aspects of the Godhead. This co-equality indicates perfect relationship among the Godhead. The purpose for acknowledging these references to the Trinity and to the tri-unity of God is to show that God desires relationship with His people because He, in His very being, His tri-unity, is a relationship.

Not only is the Godhead a community (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit), but He has created humankind in that same image. The testament of the creation event records God's thoughts and actions:

Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gn 1:26-28)

Although there is much theological discussion regarding the meaning of "in Our image," there certainly exists the possibility and, I believe, the certainty that as the Godhead exists with community, so humankind was created "in His image" with the concept of community as a necessary issue.

Faith Based upon Relationship

Having considered God's creation in His image for the purpose of community and relationship, one's faith thus exists based upon relationship. In other words, because of the relational aspect of God, faith and trust in God are built, therefore, upon relationship. Correspondingly, it is no surprise to find that Christianity itself is a relational faith. One author states of this relationship:

Christianity is fundamentally a love relationship with God, available through faith in Christ and nurtured through the faithful embrace of a variety of spiritual disciplines. The Holy Spirit will empower [one's] participation in such activities as prayer, scripture reading, solitude, silence, and service. The purpose of this empowerment is relational, drawing [one] toward spiritual union with God and maturity for character and service. (Wardle 1998, 26)

This sentiment was stated differently in an important seventeenth century document of the church, the *Westminster Confession*:

After God had made all other creatures, He created man, male and female, with reasonable and immortal souls, endued with knowledge, righteousness, and true holiness, after His own image; having the law of God written in their hearts, and power to fulfill it; and yet under a possibility of transgressing, being left to the liberty of their own will, which was subject unto change. Beside this law written in their hearts, they received a command, not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which while they kept, *they were happy in their communion with God*, and had dominion over the creatures. (The Westminster Assembly of Divines 2006, 4:2)

Although God created man to have dominion over the creatures of the earth, He also created humankind for the purpose of living in relationship with Him. The *Westminster Confession* testifies to the inner understanding of humankind, the “law written upon their hearts,” as pertaining to that relational aspect between God and man and therefore as contributing to humankind’s happiness in communion with God.

God Initiates Relationship

As the *Westminster Confession* and other treatises focused on foundational issues, the relational aspect between God and man began to come to the forefront. Spurgeon’s *Puritan Catechism* initially states: “What is the chief end of man? Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him for ever” (Spurgeon 1995, 9). A later question in Spurgeon’s *Catechism* asks and responds: “What is adoption? Adoption is an act of God’s free grace, whereby we are received into the number [or fellowship of Christian believers], and have a right to all the privileges of the sons of God [including that of relationship itself]” (9). As noted in such statements as “adoption,” “to glorify God,” and “to enjoy Him forever,” it appears that much of the *Puritan Catechism* contains strong statements regarding the relational aspect between God and humankind.

It is in this relational aspect that a key Christian concept is birthed: “communion.” Note that this particular communion is not that which is also referred to as “the Lord’s

Supper” or the “Eucharist”; instead, it is morphologically understood as a derivative of the Latin prefix “*cum*,” meaning “with or together with” (Obrien 2006, 16) and the Latin verb “*munere*,” meaning “to give” (Cawley 2006). Combined, this word “communion” has the sense of “giving among each other.” When this concept morphs into a relational aspect, the sense of individualism is cancelled and the thought of being together and united rises to the forefront. One author who specializes in spiritual formation among pastors stated:

Communion involves the conscious awareness and cultivation of the person of God in the [believer’s] life. “Life” here means life in its broadest sense, involving individual, family, and community dimensions, as well as ministry enterprise. Through communion, God shapes the [Christian’s] heart toward displaying the character of Christ in all life pursuits, thoughts, and transactions. Through communion, God pursues that [individual] relentlessly, searching for entrance into every area of the leader’s heart — ambitions, emotions, passions, fears, loves, prejudices, assumptions, character, behaviors. (McNeal 2000, 149-150)

It may be derived from McNeal’s comments that communion or community not only absorbs the believer’s individualism, but also changes the believer to be conformed into His image. The same author in an earlier portion of his writing to pastors compared this communal relationship with that of a marriage: “Our marriages usually succeed because we develop a satisfying relationship, not because the wedding vows are posted on the refrigerator door. Communion is about relationship, not about fulfilling obligations” (140-141). This is a good picture of the community of Christ, the church.

It is evident from within scripture itself that God desires this communal relationship with His people. From the very first book of the Bible, Genesis, God is observed spending His time with humans (3:8), carrying on relational conversations with humans (2:15), and even passionately pursuing humans after they had committed their initial sin (3:9-10).

It seems clear from the Bible that God is the One who initiates the relationship between Himself and humankind. Again, acknowledging the earlier references to the various catechisms, the church has early and often held the conviction that God created humankind for the express purpose of acknowledging Him, worshipping Him, and living in relationship with Him. Concerning the concept of God initiating relationship, the Apostle Paul reminds his readers:

For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will hardly die for a righteous man; though perhaps for the good man someone would dare even to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only this, but we also exult in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation. (Rom 5:6-11, NASB)

Not only did God, through the person of Jesus Christ, initiate relationship, but He also, through Christ's work on the cross, purchased the means for that relationship: reconciliation.

Further, we are also reminded, through the writing of Thomas Kelly, that God initiates relationship with humankind:

In this humanistic age, we suppose man is the initiator and God is the responder. But the Living Christ within us is the initiator and we are the responders. God the Lover, the accuser, the revealer of light and darkness presses within us. 'Behold I stand at the door and knock.' And all our apparent initiative is already a response, a testimonial to His secret presence and working within us. (Kelly 1992, 4)

Perhaps one of the greatest examples of God's relational aspect with humankind was recorded within the writings of Paul:

The way God designed our bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church: every part dependent on every other part, the parts we mention and the parts we don't, the parts we see and the parts we don't. If one part hurts, every other part is involved in the hurt, and in the healing. If one part flourishes, every

other part enters into the exuberance.

You are Christ's body — that's who you are! You must never forget this. Only as you accept your part of that body does your "part" mean anything. (1 Cor 12:25-27, MSG)

In other words, all who call upon the name of the Lord and who dwell in relationship with Him are important parts of His "body," the called out ones. As such, it is important that each part of the body seeks to live in close relationship with Him and in unity with one another. Thus, the concepts examined within this project and within this dissertation are relevant and important.

It becomes clear in this section regarding theological foundations that there is strong support for matters regarding *lectio divina*, spiritual abuse, Christian community, relationship, and faith. The challenge to the community of God today is to learn from the doctrine, science, and theology and to allow God to shape our lives through His knowable plan. Although many individuals have been hurt by spiritual abuse from institutions and leaders, it is clear from a theological framework that closeness of relationship with God and healing from hurts brought on by the church and spiritual leaders can take place. Additionally, it is evidenced theologically that God desires and initiates such relationship and healing. Finally, it is evidenced that I have embarked on a proper path to this recovery from spiritual abuse through the application of such activities found within *lectio divina*.

Conclusion

This dissertation is based upon certain relevant assumptions. It is assumed that God is good and loving. Although recent surveys have shown that not all of America subscribe to that opinion (Grossman 2006a, 1), the "good and loving God" scenario is

relevant and popular. A similar assumption follows suit: God is genuinely concerned about and longing for His creation. With those assumptions in mind, it seems natural to make a further assumption that if God is good and loving, and if He is genuinely concerned for and longing for His creation, then He has a similar desire that His creation exists in a whole and complete state. This is not to iterate that God's creation does exist in said whole and complete condition.

As mentioned previously, the Hebrew word שָׁלוֹם (*shalom*) often receives the understanding of simple "peace." The word actually means much more than "peace" or "absence of war." The Semitic word שָׁלוֹם involves completion, wholeness, maturity, harmony, and fulfillment. It is suggested that this word is among the most important theological words in the Old Testament. The completeness of the meaning of this word is found only with its source in God. It is שָׁלוֹם that God desires for His people: not only existence and peace, but wholeness, completeness, and maturity (Harris, Archer, and Waltke 1990, 931).

It is for this wholeness that I have endeavored upon this project and the corresponding presentation regarding the project. I believe that I have shown that God's desire for His creation is wholeness. I believe that I have further shown that some individuals have had their wholeness shattered and, therefore, have stood in need of renewal or revitalization. Biblically, God has continually shown His desire for the wholeness of His people. This has been presented not only through the works of God Himself but also through the works and actions of His prophets, national leaders, and spiritual principals. Historically, those individuals known as the church have, at least outwardly, worked for the wholeness of the people included within its ranks.

Theologically, the great minds of the church have written about spiritual wholeness and have sought to teach the people who would listen to them. It is because of these truths, or at least my perception of these truths, that this particular project has been initiated, performed, completed, and recorded. It is my desire that, in the future, individuals can benefit from the work that I have done and in turn, can lead the people of God, especially those who have been wounded, hurt, and damaged at the hands of abusive leaders and churches, to a place of true שלום.

CHAPTER THREE

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

I watched as my three grandchildren played together one particular morning. All were two years and younger. They had not yet developed the intricacies of sharing and playing together, yet there was certainly a move in the direction of learning as they crawled, walked, and stumbled together. I specifically watched Carson, the youngest of the three, as he was trying to learn to walk with the other two. He longed to play and to belong, and yet his young age and inexperience only served to hinder his efforts.

Inexperience as a hindrance has been paralleled throughout much of my research and writing. To seek, read, and digest material regarding a singular subject is one thing. Seeking, reading, and digesting material regarding three different but interrelated subjects is quite another. To then process such materials and subsequently put them into practice is a daunting task. To do all of this through the hindrance of inexperience proved to be a mountainous task. Yet, such is the goal that I have undertaken and one that I seek to put into words within this chapter. Just as Carson is slowly gaining the experience to walk, to play, and to interact with others, so will my development come through the experience of writing this chapter.

It is my hope that Carson, even through inexperience, can be reared with the attitude expressed by Marianne Williamson in her book, *A Return to Love: Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*:

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to

make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we're liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others. (Williamson 1992, 190-191)

Individuals must have a realization of their sense of worth based solely upon their relationship with God and nothing else. This realization is developed through interaction with God, His word, and His people. It is my desire that this same attitude can be fostered among those to whom I minister and with whom I work in spiritual healing. If this thought can be cultivated, perhaps I can see my grandchildren become strong men and women of God. Perhaps, too, I can see those with whom I work become whole men and women of God.

Introduction

In Chapter One, I presented the felt need for a group of individuals to be restored to a place of vitality in their spiritual walk. These individuals all believed that they had been abused previously by the church and by pastors. They stated that they had been manipulated, used, and cast aside. They were all leery of pastors and the church, yet they still loved God deeply. After much research and prayer, I decided to gather these individuals and present them with a fresh method of devotional exercise. My reason for choosing this devotional method was two-fold: to resuscitate the once-vibrant spiritual conditions of participants in this group and to restore these participants to a place of community within the body of Christ.

In Chapter Two, I explored the foundations of spiritual formation through *lectio divina*, the foundations of spiritual and pastoral abuse, and the foundations of community from a biblical, theological, and historical vantage. Through the gathering of this

foundational material, I gained the assurance that my task was God-ordained and that renewal was not only a possibility but also a desire of God Himself. I also drew the conclusion that the presence of spiritual abuse and pastoral abuse has been in existence since the foundation of the church and that many individuals equate the concept of church to these abuses. Further, I observed that *lectio divina*, although practiced under other titles, has been a vital portion of the devotional lives of God's people since the creation of the written word. Finally, I discovered the experience of community within a body of Christian believers is not an alternative but is, instead, a necessity for the vibrancy of God's people.

In Chapter Three, I will review the relevant literature that influences the foci of my project. Specifically, I will present material concerning *lectio divina*, spiritual abuse, and community.

The outline of the chapter is as follows:

- Introduction
- *Lectio divina*
 - Major theories
 - Models and practices
 - Application
- Spiritual abuse
 - Major theories
 - Models and practices
 - Application
- Community
 - Major theories
 - Models and practices
 - Application
- Conclusion

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina, the spiritual discipline that I chose to practice with my project

group, is an ancient approach to an encounter with God through the process of digesting the written words of divine authors. It was used in Jewish circles prior to the foundation of the Christian church although the nomenclature of *lectio divina* came many years after the practice began.

Major Theories Regarding *Lectio Divina*

The Development and Evolution of *Lectio Divina*

Lectio divina has been observed traditionally as a four-step process of interaction with God through the reading of small portions of the Bible or writings of the early church fathers. Some in the early church deemed this practice so important that they established special precedent for it. “When Saint Benedict compile[d] his Rule for monasteries in the first part of the sixth century, he made provision for each monk to spend several hours every day reading or listening to books being read” (Casey 1995, 3). This practice, however, was never intended to be reduced to a simple process. In author Michael Casey’s comments regarding Guigo II, a twelfth-century Carthusian monk who wrote *Scala Claustralium* (The Monk’s Ladder), he notes, “The four steps that Guigo envisages – reading, meditation, prayer, contemplation – do not constitute a ‘method’ of prayer to be implemented mechanically in one session” (59).

Guigo II’s intent for the practice of *lectio divina* in *Scala Claustralium* is clear. He describes the ancient systemization and practice of the spiritual discipline, and he clarifies that *lectio divina* is relevant for contemporary society. Another author, reflecting the thoughts of Vatican II, suggests that contemporary attention to *lectio divina* concerns the importance of an informed yet spiritual interpretation of and reflection on scripture for all the baptized and its usefulness for a preacher’s spirituality and ministry (Irwin

1993, 596). It is my opinion, because of its contemporary pertinence, that *lectio divina* is a viable and vital practice for the twenty-first century.

The Process of *Lectio Divina*

For the sake of clarification, even though *lectio divina* was not created to be nor is it observed as a simple process, it is important to note the four steps as designated by Guigo II. These steps are identified as *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation). *Scala Claustralium* illuminates the principles behind these four steps:

You can see by the examples already proposed how the steps belong together and how some precede others both in time and in causation. *Lectio* is like a first foundation; it gives us matter for *meditatio*. *Meditatio* seeks more diligently what is to be sought. It is like the digging that finds a treasure and brings it to light. However, of itself it is unable to gain possession of the treasure, and so we are led to *oratio*. *Oratio* raises itself up with all its might towards God and pleads for the desirable treasure that is the sweetness of *contemplatio*. With the advent of *contemplatio* comes the reward of all these previous labors. The thirsting soul is inebriated by the dew of heavenly sweetness. *Lectio* is an exterior exercise; *meditatio* belongs to the interior intellect. *Oratio* operates at the level of desire. *Contemplatio* transcends every sense. *Lectio* is proper to beginners, *meditatio* to proficients, *oratio* to those with devotion, and *contemplatio* to the blessed. (Guigo II n.d.)

In this passage, Guigo II acknowledges the pattern or steps of *lectio divina* as *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*. Post-modern youth ministry expert Tony Jones penned the process another way. He wrote:

The process is usually fourfold: a short biblical passage is read (three or four times, aloud and slowly), meditated on (listening for a word or phrase that seems to have a special urgency), prayed over (asking God for guidance), and contemplated (listening for the intersection of this passage with one's life). (Jones 2001, 191)

In both of the above-mentioned recordings, the four-step process does not suggest the value of one step over another, nor does it dictate that all four steps must be followed

in a particular order. It does denote, however, a progressive pattern. Dallas Willard further illustrated this point when he penned, “We not only read and hear and inquire, but we meditate on what comes before us; that is, we withdraw into silence where we prayerfully and steadily focus upon it” (Willard 1991, 177).

Although Willard avoids the step of *contemplatio* in this writing, he shows a regard for the process of *lectio divina* and its effects. It is to be noted that he does not divide the portions of *lectio divina* from the whole; instead, he shows the interconnectedness of the elements of *lectio divina*. Catholic scholar Michael Casey addressed this concept from another angle when he wrote, “Without prayer, *lectio* is less *divina*; it becomes mere reading” (Casey 1995, 83). Again, Casey does not divide the process, but he focuses on the interconnectedness. He takes that thought one step further when he writes, “the ultimate goal of *lectio divina* is contemplation” (60).

Catholic ascetic Thomas Merton, portrays the goal of *contemplatio* with these words

The life of the television watcher is a kind of caricature of contemplation: passivity, uncritical absorption, receptivity, inertia. Not only that, but a gradual progressive yielding to the mystic attraction until one is spellbound in a state of complete union. The trouble with this caricature is that it is really the exact opposite of contemplation ... [Contemplation] is the summit of a life of spiritual freedom. The other, the ersatz, is the nadir of intellectual and emotional slavery. (Merton 1984, 269-270)

As stated earlier, there are four traditionally prescribed actions within *lectio divina*: *lectio*, *oratio*, *meditatio*, and *contemplatio*. St. Benedict addressed the concept of personal *lectio* stating, “reading [is] one of the sources of spiritual energy, something that puts us into contact with grace and thus makes possible an enhanced level of fervor and unselfishness in daily living” (St. Benedict 1995, 5). The Benedictine monks looked at

reading as “an essential element in living a spiritual life and were prepared to invest considerable resources in ensuring that it would be possible both for themselves and for future generations” (Casey 1995, 3). Reading was and is understood by some as a necessary portion of one’s Christian life. Turn-of-the-twelfth century abbot and mystic William of St. Thierry authored these words regarding reading as well as meditation:

The scriptures need to be read and understood in the same spirit in which they were created. You will never enter into Paul’s meaning until, by good intention in reading and diligent zeal in meditating, you drink of His Spirit. You will never understand David, unless by experience you clothe yourself with the feelings expressed in the psalms. And so for the other books. In all scripture, diligent reading is as far from superficial perusal as friendship is distinct from acquaintance with a stranger, or as affection given to a companion differs from a casual greeting. (William of St. Thierry in Casey 1995, 15)

In William of St. Thierry’s comments, the importance of *lectio* is clearly delineated. He also identifies certain portions of scripture that should be read, such as the writings of Paul and the psalms of David. Additionally in this passage, he brings out a mystical aspect by referring to the act of reading as “drinking of His Spirit.”

Dallas Willard, philosopher and proponent of spiritual formation, also touts the benefits of reading and meditating upon the word of God. Having written extensively on the positive effects of spiritual disciplines, he says:

As I spent time chewing over the endless assurances and promises to be found in the Bible, so my faith in the living God grew stronger and held me safe in His hands. God’s word to us, especially His word spoken by His Spirit through the Bible, is the very ingredient that feeds our faith. If we feed our souls regularly on God’s word, several times each day, we should become robust spiritually just as we feed on ordinary food several times each day, and become robust physically. Nothing is more important than hearing and obeying the word of God. (Willard 1991, 176-177)

William of St. Thierry and Willard both bring out the aspect that *lectio divina* and other spiritual disciplines are nurturing elements necessary for the sustenance and growth of the

believer's spirit and as the motivating impetus for that same believer's Christian actions.

The Effects of *Lectio Divina*

In further understanding the concept of *lectio divina* and other spiritual disciplines, it is noted, "most Christians do not feel that they have been called to a deep, inward relationship to their Lord. But, [they] have all been called to the depths of Christ just as surely as [they] have been called to salvation" (Guyon 1975, 1). It is because of the "calling to the depths of Christ" that Christians should be encouraged to pursue relationship with God. "Prayer is [the proper Christian] response to the God who speaks to [them]. God's word is always first" (Peterson 1992, 104). "Prayer [then becomes] the connecting thread binding these ... stories; prayer is the articulation of human response to the word of God: the word that creates and saves" (72).

Regarding the interaction of reading and prayer, Catholic monk and ascetic of the fourth and fifth centuries, John Cassian, wrote:

The mind is shaped during its prayer [and in *lectio divina*] by what it was beforehand. When we prostrate ourselves in prayer, our previous actions, words, and impressions continue to play before the minds of our imagination, just as they did before, making us angry or sad, or causing us to relive past lusts or foolish laughter. I am ashamed to admit that we are even entertained by comic words and deeds and our mind is diverted by recalling conversations we have had previously. (Cassian 1995, 147)

Michael Casey wrote, "What [then] are we doing in *lectio divina*? We are seeking God. We are hoping to hear God's voice and to do God's will, but we are operating in search mode" (Casey 1995, 8). In order to explain this concept of "operating in search mode," Casey went on to write, "*Lectio divina* involves allowing ourselves to be led to God by an experienced guide. Our attitude toward the author who acts as our mentor is one of openness, trust, and confidence" (15). Casey appears to have a strong grasp on the

practice of *lectio divina*. It is his concept of the practice that the practitioner is positioned to have an encounter with God.

There are some, however, who would label such a positioning for confrontation as mystical and who would attach, therefore, a stigma of heresy to that positioning. One pastor has said of this alleged mysticism: “Participants are being groomed so as to make future instruction on mystical meditation more palatable. A form of occult mysticism is practiced with the hope and intention of gaining a mystical experience. It is a form of mantra-style meditation” (Oberbrunner 2006). I am fearful that such caution toward mysticism may greatly impede the access of Christians to a genuine experience with God. Meditation is a viable Christian spiritual discipline and is advocated strongly throughout the Bible in passages such as:

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. (Ps 1:1-2)

Just as many Christians have missed the God-ordained blessing and opportunity of meditation because of meditation’s association with Zen Buddhism and other Eastern mystical practices, many may potentially miss the blessing of *lectio divina* and Christian mysticism as a valid method of spiritual discipline because of its association with other forms of mysticism. I hold the opinion that a purpose of *lectio divina* is to experience a mystical encounter with God.

Models and Practices of *Lectio Divina*

Variations of the Steps of *Lectio Divina*

Some have suggested additional steps to the process of *lectio divina*. Robert Mulholland brought up two, and I have added one for the specifics of my project. Dr.

Mulholland adds the preliminary step of *silencio* (silence) and a concluding step of *incarnatio* (Mulholland 1993, 112). One author insists this initial step, *silencio* (silence), is necessary for the preparation of the inward journey through which *lectio divina* will take the practitioner (Bohrer 2002, 62). Regarding this issue, Mulholland writes:

Silencio is our preparation for spiritual reading. Shaped as we are by an informational culture, trained to approach a text as the ones who are in control of the text, we need to take time, at the beginning of the process of spiritual reading, to engage in a deep internal shift in the posture of our being. (Mulholland 1993, 112)

Silencio allows practitioners to quiet themselves and to allow new material to enter into their place of receptivity in order to initiate the process of spiritual formation. It is only within this sphere of receptivity that practitioners can adequately dismiss all extraneous thought and therefore, can prepare for the change *lectio divina* is intended to produce.

Recognizing the benefits of *silencio*, I adopted for my project this fifth step.

Mulholland also included a sixth step in his procedure of *lectio divina: incarnatio* (112). *Incarnatio* is the practical application in everyday life of that which one has gained from *lectio divina*. I followed his reasoning for the use of *incarnatio*, and I agree with his inclusion of such, but because my desired outcome for this project was to see an inward change in the individuals and to re-establish the connectivity between them and the Lord, I did not see the immediate need for *incarnatio* in my project. *Incarnatio* is, perhaps, a concept for another D. Min. project.

In addition, I added a step to my project: journaling. One author focused on the process of journaling has written, “Listen and record. Record what God impresses on your heart. His voice will always line up with His written word” (Bosacki 2006). I chose journaling because the practice of keeping a written log presents a tangible means of

expressing one's inner thoughts and illuminations as brought forth through *lectio divina*. One journaling specialist expressed this thought more succinctly when she noted, "Your thoughts and prayers can be helpful to write out and see in the written word" (Chekal 2005). I felt that as these thoughts and illuminations were produced in written form, a transformation was enabled because of the tangibility.

Can *lectio divina* be adequately practiced without the additions of *silencio* and journaling? Respecting *silencio*, I think not. Journaling, on the other hand, is not a necessary aspect of, but is instead, an enhancement to *lectio divina*. The enhancement found through journaling is that there is a tangible means of recording the effectiveness of *lectio divina*.

Material for *Lectio Divina*

A controversial aspect of *lectio divina* is found in its content. Some have suggested that the only true material to read during *lectio divina* is scripture itself (Keating 2005). Michael Casey suggests "scriptures are the primary source of guidance; the Fathers constitute an 'echo'" (Casey 1995, 110). He further insists, "The writings of tradition never replace the scriptures. What they do is to broaden the base of our biblical understanding and somehow make the scriptures more fresh and alive" (117). In addition, Robert Mulholland writes concerning spiritual reading in modernity:

Ours is a culture which seeks more information (new facts, new bodies of knowledge, new techniques, new methods, new systems, new programs) in order to improve its functional control of its environment. The acquiring of knowledge, information, techniques, methods, and systems, rather than serving to change the quality of our being, is for the primary purpose of improving or enhancing our ability to function so as to change the world to our parameters. (Mulholland 2000, 48)

One seminary professor affirmed this thought noting: "When *lectio divina* first came into

use, the only source individuals had was the scriptures. Certainly, with the large influx of theological writings since that time, there is an allowance to read spiritual writings as *lectio*” (Flora 2006). With these thoughts in mind, I chose to broaden my base of material for *lectio divina* to include divine authors.

Audience of *Lectio Divina*

There is additional debate regarding the practice of *lectio divina*. Some have suggested that *lectio divina* was originally practiced as a solitary act. Others have suggested that the practice, in its origin, was a corporate act. Youth leader Tony Jones has noted, “For 1,500 years, the Bible was most often read and heard in community” (Jones 2001, 105). Michael Casey affirms this position when he writes, “*Lectio divina* was originally the term used for liturgical readings, and as such, was necessarily communal” (Casey 1995, 41).

Finally, Casey brings up one more point of controversy. He notes, “Whether we should be attempting to develop techniques of ‘audio *divina*’ and ‘video *divina*’ to meet the needs of a post-literate age is a question that is beyond the ... competence of [the] author” (136). Who knows what future lies in store for this wonderful spiritual discipline that brings the practitioner into the mystical presence of Christ?

Application

I have observed the short-term effects of guided *lectio divina* as a tool to facilitate revitalization among spiritually wounded individuals. Although I am sure that long-term practice will yield great results, I was greatly impressed with the power and effects of participating together in the short-term, ten-week project sessions.

Through the utilization of *lectio divina*, I observed what amounted to a cleansing of the project individuals' spirits. It was as if genuine transformation by the renewing of the mind was taking place (Rom 12:2). Casey noted a similar process, "Reading the scripture is the opposite of self-programming or any kind of brain washing. It is allowing God to speak to our hearts, minds, and consciences" (Casey 1995, 9-10). In addition, St. Augustine addressed the need for prayer (as a foundational portion of *lectio divina*): "Because we are human, we are also weak; because we are weak, we pray" (143). It is because of our weakness and our want for the presence of God in our lives that such encounters with Him, through tools such as *lectio divina*, are needed.

Spiritual Abuse

Major Theories

It seems spiritual abuse is becoming more public in recent years. Unfortunately, there are many more cases of spiritual abuse and pastoral abuse than what is reported. No matter how subtle these infractions might be, spiritual abuse affects people's receptivity to the Gospel. One author points out, "It is hard to escape the conclusion that today one of the great roadblocks to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the institutional church" (Guder 2000, 198). People are emphatically confusing the issue of the church with the God of the church. The differentiation must be made between God and that body which represents Him (although poorly at times), the church and its leadership.

The topic of spiritual abuse manifests itself in several facets, and is often silent, overlooked, and accepted. The pastor of one of Ohio's mega-churches, Ginghamburg United Methodist, wrote:

We [pastors] become bully-leaders who make critical decisions in churches while

we beat up others, verbally or emotionally. Bullies like that keep God's purpose from being accomplished. In Luke 22:25, Jesus had harsh words for people who "lord it over" others. (Slaughter 2002, 135)

It is in such cases that spiritual abuse works its greatest damage: the victimization of the people of God and of spiritually healthy churches at the hands of an (usually) unknowing pastor.

On the other hand, says one statistician, "a spiritually healthy local church will always have a valid and valuable role within God's Kingdom on earth" (Barna 2005, 36). The purpose of this dissertation is not to defame the church; instead, it is intended to explore misconceptions some may hold toward the church because of spiritual abuse. It is also intended to explore the misrepresentation of the church by those who have victimized others through spiritual abuse. Pastor Michael Slaughter summed up this situation from another vantage point in these words: "The enemy's purpose is to distract us to a lower level of living until we [God's people] die" (Slaughter 2002, 162). Distraction, or getting one's eyes off God and His true community of faith and on to one's self and one's tendencies toward performance, is a venue through which spiritually healthy churches are destroyed. Distraction is a tool, although perhaps unknown to the abused, that abusive leaders use for manipulation and spiritual abuse.

Known for his works of Christian fiction and Christian apologetics, C. S. Lewis once wrote, "If the divine call does not make us better, it will make us very much worse. Of all bad men, religious bad men are the worst" (Lewis 1958, 31-32). This thought mandates that the paths of religious men who misuse authority must be explored. Ken Blue informs his readers that although the term "spiritual abuse" is a relatively new term, the concept has "been a problem for the people of God from the start" (Blue 1993, 12).

Ronald Enroth, a noted expert of spiritual abuse and cultic Christianity has written:

Unlike physical abuse that often results in bruised bodies, spiritual and pastoral abuse leaves scars on the psyche and soul. It is inflicted by persons who are accorded respect and honor in our society by virtue of their role as religious leaders and models of spiritual authority. They base that authority on the Bible, the word of God, and see themselves as shepherds with a sacred trust. But when they violate that trust, when they abuse their authority and when they misuse ecclesiastical power to control and manipulate the flock, the results can be catastrophic. (Enroth 1992, 29)

The outcome of spiritual abuse and manipulation can be catastrophic and serves to disable Christians. This serious issue must be addressed. I do not believe that most pastors or leaders intentionally commit spiritual abuse; nevertheless, the effects of abuse are not dependent upon the intent. In fact, Blue labeled such leaders and their actions:

Spiritual abusers are curiously naïve about the effects of their exploitation. They rarely intend to hurt their victims. They are usually so narcissistic or so focused on some great thing they are doing for God that they don't notice the wounds they are inflicting on their followers. (Blue 1993, 12-13)

Again, most offending pastors and leaders are unintentional in their abusive tendencies; they usually have both a good cause and a wonderful intention. Nonetheless,

Negative experiences are so common in churches and parachurch groups that a genre of self-help books has appeared on the market with titles like *The Subtle Power of Spiritual Abuse* and *Healing Spiritual Abuse*. These books describe the signs of an unhealthy organizational system, marked by controlling, domineering leaders who drive people to perform in order to build a celebrity image. Believers who find themselves in such a system, whether in unpaid volunteer work or in a paid position, often find themselves subject to many of the classic forms of workplace abuse. (Pearcey 2004, 370)

As the frequency of reported incidents of abuses spirals upward, not only must leaders be examined, but individuals who become the wounded also must be examined.

Occurrences of Spiritual Abuse

Ken Blue acknowledges that victims of spiritual abuse have incurred both

spiritual damage and emotional baggage. “People who ‘survive’ spiritual abuse often wander in a kind of limbo; they are confused, hurt, and angry. Some victims of pastoral abuse blame themselves for their suffering, thinking that they must have deserved it” (Blue 1993, 15). Another similar assessment estimates: “Spiritual abuse is a kind of abuse which damages the central core of who we are. It leaves us spiritually disorganized and emotionally cut off from the healing love of God” (Ryan and Ryan 1992, 9). In other words, the offended individuals are left in a shattered situation; a situation that left unaided and unrepaired has the full potential of creating a lifetime of distance between the abused and God as well as a distance between the abused and others.

As noted previously, the nomenclature of spiritual abuse has been only recently defined, yet occurrences of spiritual abuse were prevalent in the early church. This was because spiritual leaders often displaced spiritual gifting and calling with so-called spiritual authority. Blue notes, “Jesus and Paul make very clear, however, that no office, position, or title automatically carries with it any spiritual authority” (Blue 1993, 19). This admonition indicates that there were elements of misuse and abuse even in the midst of first century Jews and Christians.

There are also recorded indications of spiritual abuse within the writings of the Old Testament. One chronicle by the prophet Ezekiel states:

Son of man, prophesy against the shepherds of Israel; prophesy and say to them: “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: ‘Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! Should not shepherds take care of the flock? You eat the curds, clothe yourselves with the wool, and slaughter the choice animals, but you do not take care of the flock. You have not strengthened the weak or healed the sick or bound up the injured. You have not brought back the strays or searched for the lost. You have ruled them harshly and brutally. So they were scattered because there was no shepherd, and when they were scattered they became food for all the wild animals.’” (Ez 34:2-5)

Of these biblical incidents, author Ken Blue writes:

Both Ezekiel and Jesus condemned one fundamental error in the shepherds: they used the sheep rather than served them. They acted as if the sheep existed to meet their needs rather than the other way around. When shepherds today look out over their congregations and see their people as church growth statistics, tithing units and workers in their programs, they follow the pastoral style that Jesus and Ezekiel prophesied against. (Blue 1993, 41)

The contemporary connection should be evident: modern pastors are equated with shepherds. As shepherds were admonished in scripture, so that admonishment should be understood as relevant for today. As Blue has noted, these admonitions are applicable in the twenty-first century. Blue also referred to Matthew 3 to observe, “Authoritarian, narcissistic, ecclesiastical abusers of our day are the modern equivalent of the Pharisee whom Jesus scolded” (17).

Models and Practices

Effects of Spiritual Abuse

Much of the difficulty with spiritual abuse is that it emotionally and spiritually disfigures its victims for, perhaps, a lifetime. Certainly, it can manifest with other effects as well. Unfortunately, in the cases of spiritual abuse, the lives of abuse victims often are found lacking in aspects of the fruit of the spirit. There can be a lack of compassion or a haughtiness of attitude. There can also be a general apathy for the things of God as well as a complete disdain for the church in general and for a specific church and pastor in particular. Often, the abuse victim displays a tendency to please the spiritual abuser and, thus, risks a display of apathy and lack of spiritual fruit.

Methods of Spiritual Abuse

There are several methods apparent where spiritual abuse occurs. Many of these

stem from a misunderstanding of spiritual authority or an unintentional use of manipulation and self-aggrandizement. Most of the books that I read on this subject drew their readers back to the writings of Ken Blue or Ron Enroth. Because of their preponderance of written material, I have gathered most of my information from Blue and Enroth and have supplemented with some additional material from other authors.

Regarding the issue of a misunderstanding of spiritual authority, Blue reminds his readers “there was no hierarchy of any kind in the early church” (143). Blue is referring to the concept of authority as in the condition of one individual standing in political position over another. I agree with Blue’s understanding that authority was not intended to subjugate one individual under another. Instead, biblical occurrences of authority deal with individuals’ influence over sickness, secular individuals’ authority over others, and authority as a means of delegated influence or freedom.

Perhaps the most widely used instances of authority in the New Testament are those which are translated from the Greek word, ἐξουσία (*exousia*) generally carrying the idea of privilege, force, competency, mastery, or delegated influence. From these shades of meaning, I understand this word as martial arts instructors might, not as a simple position that one has attained but as a skill that one has mastered and is capable of administering upon others. Although I prefer the route of competency as being the means of authority, I recognize that authority can be derived by the appointed or elected acquisition based upon the empowerment of the appointing agency.

Based also upon the Greek, it seems as if a problem with authority comes into play in the mind of the offending individual: from the place of ἐξουσία to one of ὑπεροχή (*huperochay*), a position of prominence or superiority. This, in my mind, is what Blue

addressed in his previous comment regarding there being no hierarchy in the early church: there was no ὑπεροχή in the church.

This concept of political authority is furthered by Blue as he notes a hierarchical “upline” of information:

Another effective means of information control is what one group refers to as “uplining.” Uplining means that members of the group must bring all questions and concerns to the leader over them. They are never to discuss any problem with anyone other than this person. This leader is then to keep this concern to himself or pass it up to the leader above him. Such a closed system enables the leaders to control the flow of information and to silence any person or issue they choose to. (74)

The uplining system presents a clear parallel to the business world’s pyramid system wherein genuine and authentic uplining occurs. In this pattern, one head leads several sub-heads, who lead others. This pattern replicates until, when visually illustrated, a pyramid is portrayed. Some who walk in this path of hierarchical leadership maintain that such behavior is normal and scriptural. One pastor has observed:

The structure of postmodern churches includes both strong spiritual leaders and ministry experienced through empowered teams. Most churches of the 1950’s, 1960’s, and 1970’s were board-led. Many of the effective models of the 1980’s and 1990’s viewed the pastor as the chief executive officer who told everyone else, “It’s my way, or the highway to find your way to another church!” (Slaughter 2002, 47)

A lot of the current church philosophy as presented by Slaughter derives from a business model. Some of this is a reference to the Christian world of the 1970s and 1980s when the church faced a faction known as both the Discipleship Movement and the Shepherding Movement. Although I make no attempt to criticize those leaders at the forefront of the Shepherding Movement, I recognize that many of those in leadership exercised great liberties and that many innocent, loving individuals were seriously damaged by those leaders’ authoritarianism.

“How could and can innocent individuals be so duped?” we might ask (Blue 1993, 97). An answer is not difficult. Authors Lee and Bakke, in fact, labeled such individuals who were predisposed to become victims of abuse. These authors considered that abuse victims’ experiences with scripture were a prime concern. In their article for the journal *Conversations*, entitled “The Lord is My Light and My Salvation: Scriptures in Spiritual Formation and Direction,” Lee and Bakke recorded that victims’ experiences range from 1) those who have been abused by leaders who interpreted scripture in ways intended to control others, to 2) those who have not spent much time or intentionality in reading or prayerfully reflecting upon scripture, to 3) those who have been happily immersed in scripture for a long time. There are also many variations of these backgrounds (Lee and Bakke 2005, 26). But, is an experience with scripture the only predisposition?

Blue poses a leading question “How could and can innocent individuals be so duped?” and responds:

First of all, abusive spiritual leaders gain followers because they are, in one way or another, attractive. Their attractiveness may very well be their genuine commitment to the work of God and their sincere desire to train mature disciples. The intention to maim people may not be present in them at all. I know several pastors whom I consider to be significantly abusive. I know them well enough to say that they are not deliberately abusive. Members of their congregations recognize their sincerity regarding the things of the Lord and so continue to support them, and thus continue to absorb their abuse. (Blue 1993, 97)

This is an indication that an innate or cultivated need exists within those who become victims. Something within them, beyond the normal need to be simply lead, draws them to the place where they are positioned for such abuse. I refer to the innate need as “predisposition.”

There is also a cultivated need that exists within some who become victims. Blue

refers to the cultivated need as “being groomed,”

What type of person is attracted to the abusive leader? In my experience, the victims have often been unwittingly groomed for such a relationship. That is to say, something in the backgrounds of these people predisposes them to submit to a manipulative, controlling style of leadership. (104)

This grooming takes place in many facets. One such facet is the grooming that the church itself has imposed upon its people through the years. John Driver stated this case when he authored:

In its struggle with heterodoxy, the church gradually came to institutionalize its authority in the form of episcopacy, creed, and canon. To be God’s people now was coming to mean submission to the bishop of Rome (and to other bishops who were in communion with him), to subscribe to the contents of the Apostle’s creed, and to recognize authority only in those books of the NT which were generally coming to be recognized as canonical. (Driver 1997, 37-38)

What Driver is implying here is that the church has created itself as an establishment throughout the years and has set itself up, therefore, as a hierarchal system susceptible to and prone to authoritarian abuse. In another place, Driver succinctly writes, “the use of the empire image for the church’s self-identity has inflicted a blow to the church from which it has never fully recovered” (18). Tony Jones acknowledges this concept using slightly different terminology: “For a long time, Christians have been consumed with maintaining political power, conquering lands, writing laws, and a lot of other things that Jesus did not seem the least bit concerned with” (Jones 2001, 39). It seems as if the church has strayed a great distance from its foundational purpose.

Others have also observed this discrepancy between God’s intention for His church and the reality of the church as it has become. George Barna has noted, “One of the greatest frustrations of my life has been the disconnection between what research consistently shows about churched Christians and what the Bible calls us to be” (Barna

2005, 31). There is, however, a new awareness of the disconnection between the church's intent and reality. Because of this awareness, new literature is being written and new lectures are being delivered addressing the phenomenon. One set of authors has issued this warning, however: "In the process of rewriting the rules [of how church should be], the congregation's leaders must not break [those] rules" (Herrington, Bonem, and Furr 2000, 77). In other words, while a new reformation is taking place, precautions and boundaries must be established that will prevent further spiritual abuse from taking place.

Another predisposition drawing individuals toward spiritual abuse is the innate craving of some potential victims to be a part of something larger than themselves. Individuals who see that they can be a part of something grand and important manifest this predisposition. They do not necessarily desire to be in the seat of recognition; they simply need to be an integral, background part of something that is observed as making a difference. This need is played upon by spiritual leaders who see these individuals as vehicles to accomplish their magnificent schemes and visions, often without concern for the individual's sense of esteem, usefulness, and separation from those outside of the local church community.

Damages from Spiritual Abuse

One of the most damaging effects of spiritual abuse is observed in the large amount of people who have been hurt. Hurts range from individuals withdrawing from Christian community to others withdrawing from God Himself. "Many people have been rendered [emotionally and spiritually] useless by bitterness resulting from abuse, but forgiveness opens the way back to spiritual vitality" (Blue 1993, 137). Fortunately, this sense of uselessness has not deterred them from Christ, only from His people and from

the institutions that are produced in His name. What a privilege this provides the community of Christ today, if we can present forgiveness as the way to spiritual vitality.

Suspicion and turning away can have diverse ultimate effects. Consider this encounter recorded by Michael Slaughter:

A religion editor from a local newspaper came to interview me about a conference we were having at Ginghamburg. At the end of the interview, I asked if she went to church. I assumed she did, since she was a religion editor. She said, “No I am a Buddhist. I was raised in the church, but about ten years ago, I became involved in Buddhism because the highest value of Buddhism is the value of compassion.” Her next comment made me feel as if she had put her hand in my chest and squeezed my heart. “The people I grew up around in the church were some of the least compassionate people I ever knew,” she added. Ouch. (Slaughter 2002, 57)

Certainly, spiritual and authoritarian abuse has affected individuals in all aspects of society. Further, the manner in which some have dealt with the effects of spiritual abuse has been as diverse as the effects themselves.

Consider some of the bizarre manifestations of spiritual and authoritarian abuse as found in the brutally honest writings of Christian journalist Philip Yancey:

In thirty years as a journalist, I have had the freedom to investigate all sorts of people. I have met characters who belong in a Flannery O’Connor novel. I interviewed televangelist Jim Bakker at the height of his bizarre reign of oversold condos and air-conditioned doghouses at the extravagant PTL television studio and Christian theme park, and then watched as he publicly denied statements he had made to me on tape. I listened to a Las Vegas showgirl tell how she met God while on the operating table “to get my busties enlarged,” and under anesthesia had a dream of semi-tractor trailers made of human flesh — “ever’thing was made of flesh, even the mud flaps” — dumping a cargo of America’s teenagers into a lake of fire.

For the most part, though, I tried to avoid such people, entertaining as they may be. They reminded me too much of my past, from which I was still trying to escape. Instead, I decided early on in my journalistic career to scout out people I could learn from, people I might want to emulate. Having grown up with mostly negative role models, I longed for some positive ones. (Yancey 2001, 8)

Although not all have dealt with abuse in a positive manner, Yancey chose a positive

angle with which to deal with such behavior within the church. He purposefully chose to select positive role models and to write about them as well as to expose his distrust and disdain for the spectacular, strange, and abusive.

Again, there are many facets to spiritual abuse and its effects. Ken Blue writes that many emotions are engaged in the process, even when attempting to leave abusive situations: “If you must leave an abusive church, you may go through a painful period of anger, depression, even despair” (Blue 1993, 135). Abusive situations often lead to separation from the church and from God. One expert in the writings of C. S. Lewis, upon analysis of Lewis’ book *The Screwtape Letters*, notes these letters are instructions regarding the methodologies the enemy uses to “lead people away from God, distract them from what matters most, and lead them to Hell” (Graham 2004). Separation from the church and from God is the most dangerous consequence of spiritual abuse.

As one further examines *The Screwtape Letters*, one notices that several avenues are presented for effecting the failure of Christian believers. These same tactics arise within the mindset of victims of spiritual abuse as they engage some of the reactionary responses to abusive situations. Observe the further words of Uncle Screwtape as he addresses his young nephew, Wormtail:

If this fails, you must fall back on a subtler misdirection of his attention. Whenever they are attending to the Enemy Himself (referring to God) we are defeated, but there are ways of preventing them from doing so. The simplest is to turn their gaze from Him toward themselves. Keep them watching their own minds and trying to produce feelings there by the actions of their own wills. When they meant to ask Him for charity, let them, instead, start trying to manufacture charitable feelings for themselves and not notice this is what they are doing. When they meant to pray for courage, let them really be trying to feel brave. When they say they are praying for forgiveness, let them be trying to feel forgiven. Teach them to estimate the value of each prayer by their success in producing the desired feeling; and never let them suspect how much success or failure of that kind depends on whether they are well or ill, fresh or tired, at the

moment. (Lewis 1982, 19-20)

Misdirection of attention is the very element that attracted some victims into abusive situations to begin with. Rather than being attracted to the things of Christ, they were drawn into a performance-oriented mentality with the ultimate purpose of luring the victim into despair and futility.

Application: Healing of Spiritual Abuse

Is it possible to be healed spiritually after facing such occurrences of spiritual abuse as mentioned above? There are individuals who have received such healing. But what were the methods used? What can be learned from cases of such healings that can be utilized by abused believers of the twenty-first century?

One author, addressing victims of spiritual abuse, presented opening remarks toward his reading audience:

To readers who are victims of spiritual abuse. This book will most likely heighten your awareness of what you suffered and (for a time at least) intensify the pain. If the pain promotes healing, well and good. But if it incites bitterness toward the abuser or an abusive institution, then you will be worse off than before. As angry as Jesus was toward the spiritual abusers of his day, he stood ready to forgive them in an instant. His own power to forgive resides within us, and we are wise to avail ourselves of it. (Seamands 1982, 21)

In his text, Seamands tackles the concept of creating healing among abused individuals. He recognizes that spiritual and emotional healing can take place. The engagement of such healing will be, in all probability, a lengthy and time-consuming process. It is Seamands' assessment, however, that such healing is viable. It is also his judgment that the key ingredient in the healing process is a willingness of the victim to forgive the offender.

Regarding forgiveness, Christian psychologist Bruce Narramore writes, "We need

to follow a motivational approach that communicates the fact that forgiveness and acceptance is the right of every person who trusts in Christ and that proper behavior flows from these rather than earns them” (Narramore 1984, 301). It is Narramore’s assessment that forgiveness must be a substantial part of the healing process, and, according to the Bible, is essential for that healing. Jesus states, “For if you forgive others for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions” (Mt 6:14-15, NASB). According to *The New Oxford American Dictionary, Second Edition*, forgiveness literally means a cancellation of a debt (Jewell, Abate, and McKean 2005, 660). This implies a choice on the part of the victim no longer to hold to account the victimizer for infractions caused upon the abused. According to Matthew 6:14-15, this choice of forgiving is a necessary part of being forgiven by God. One author made his case for such necessity:

To be human is to be in conflict, to offend, and to be offended. To be human in the light of the Gospel is to face conflict in redemptive dialogue. When we do that, it is God who does it. When we do that, we demonstrate that to process conflict is not merely a palliative strategy for tolerable survival or psychic hygiene, but a mode of truth finding and community building. That is true of the Gospel; it is also true, *mutatis mutandis*, in the world. (Yoder 1994, 13)

Although forgiveness seems to be optional, it is in fact the destiny of all believers as they seek to come into proper relationship with God.

What does forgiveness look like? Forgiveness requires the offended simply to hold the offender no longer responsible for the damage performed upon the offended. Forgiveness, therefore, is a choice of the heart and thus, can take place in an instant at the point of a decision.

Forgiveness is not the same as trust, however. Trust is an ability to rely on

someone or something. Trust requires the offended individual to re-enter the situation with the offender having a *tabula rasa* (clean slate.) In the case of spiritual and authoritarian abuse, confidence has been violated and will involve a time factor in order to change. Trust toward someone, whether the offending leader, God, or the church is necessary, in my estimation, for the spiritual and emotional healing of the offended. Such trust, however, may be a set-up for such occurrence of spiritual abuse to come again. The victim must exercise great personal care in order to assure against spiritual abuse reoccurring.

An additional, corresponding question must also be asked: to whom or to what is this reestablishment of trust directed. It is my assessment that most people in life who claim to dislike God are not accurately communicating their real dislike. More likely than not, their dislike is directed at God's people. This point is well illustrated by author Walker Percy in his novel, *The Second Coming*:

I am surrounded by Christians. They are generally speaking a pleasant and agreeable lot, not noticeably different from other people — even though they, the Christians of the South, the U.S.A., the Western world have killed off more people than all other people put together. Yet I cannot be sure they don't have the truth. But if they have the truth, why is it the case that they are repellent precisely to the degree that they embrace and advertise the truth? One might even become a Christian if there were few if any Christians around. Have you ever lived in the midst of fifteen million Southern Baptists? ... A mystery: if the good news is true, why is not one pleased to hear it? (Percy 1999, 188)

Philip Yancey reacts to this statement with a question that goes to the crux of my presentation of trust and forgiveness: "Percy's character's last question rings loud. If the gospel comes as a *eucatastrophe*, J. R. R. Tolkien's word for a spectacularly good thing happening to spectacularly bad people, why do so few people perceive it as good news?" (Yancey 2001, 6). It is my assessment that individuals are generally not angry with God; instead, most

victims are deeply disturbed by the people of God and the manner in which they have acted.

It is my further assessment, then, that trust on the part of those abused needs first to be directed toward God, second toward His people, the church, and finally and if possible, toward the leaders, the pastors. A useful aid in the process of regaining this series of trust is the exercise I refer to as “re-establishing one’s voice.” This occurs through disclosing and voicing one’s opinions and feelings, or through impromptu conversations. Author Philip Yancey noted such encounters:

Sometimes in a waiting room or on an airplane I strike up conversations with strangers, during the course of which they learn that I write books on spiritual themes. Eyebrows arch, barriers spring up, and often I hear yet another horror story about church. My seatmates must expect me to defend the church, because they always act surprised when I respond, “Oh, it’s even worse than that. Let me tell you my story.” I have spent most of my life in recovery from the church. One church I attended during formative years in Georgia of the 1960s presented a hermetically sealed view of the world. A sign out front proudly proclaimed our identity with words radiating from a many-pointed star: New Testament, Blood-bought, Born-again, Premillennial, Dispensational, Fundamental ...” Our little group of two hundred people had a corner on the truth, God’s truth, and everyone who disagreed with us was surely teetering on the edge of hell. Since my family lived in a mobile home on church property, I could never escape the enveloping cloud that blocked my vision and marked the borders of my world. (Yancey 2001, 1)

In observing the benefit of such encounters for Yancey, similar encounters can be healthy for recovering abuse victims.

Yancey further expressed his ability to work through these various situations of abuse and confusion by finding another aspect of his voice, writing:

I became a writer, I now believe, to sort out words used and misused by the church of my youth. Although I heard that “God is love,” the image of God I got from sermons more resembled an angry, vengeful tyrant. We sang, “Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight . . .” but just let one of those red, yellow, or black children try entering our church. Bible college professors insisted, “We live not under law but under grace,” and for the life of me I could not tell

much difference between the two states. Ever since, I have been on a quest to unearth the good news, to scour the original words of the gospel and discover what the Bible must mean by using words like *love*, *grace*, and *compassion* to describe God's own character. I sensed truth in those words, truth that must be sought with diligence and skill, like the fresco masterpieces that lie beneath layers of plaster and paint in ancient chapels. (6).

Although it is not possible for all who are abused to be able to work through their situations by writing to a public audience, it is possible for each victim to find an ear that will listen to their story. It is through time, forgiveness, reestablishing of trust, and finding one's voice that true spiritual healing is activated. These have been elements of my project.

A final step toward the healing of spiritual abuse on the part of the victim and the circumvention of spiritual abuse on the part of the potential victim may be found in the realization that God is separate from the church. The church designed by God is a gathering of believers focused on a relationship with God. "Christian spirituality should be centered ... on a relationship with Jesus Christ as Savior, Lord, and friend" (Borgman 1997, xiv). Already, a revolution back to this original design for the church is taking place wherein

Millions of devout followers of Jesus Christ are repudiating tepid systems and practices of the Christian faith and introducing a wholesale shift in how faith is understood, integrated, and influencing the world. Because human beings become what they believe, and practicing what they believe is the swiftest and surest means of generating lasting change, this revolution of faith is the most significant transition [we] will experience during our lifetime. (Barna 2005, 11)

This "revolution" is not a revolt against God; it is, instead, a movement among believers in Christ to interact with God and with one another outside of the walls of the traditional (and institutional) church.

Darrell Guder goes further to say, because "from Genesis 3 on, human existence is described and defined as *simul creatus et peccator*, simultaneously created and sinner"

(Guder 2000, 75), so then the church, that marvelous creation of humans by God, must “be open to its (the church’s) continuing conversion” (202). Guder consummates his proposition with this written statement: “Only when the institutional church becomes the church penitent, the church candid about its compromises and reductions, can its renewal be expected” (204). That renewal includes the realization of the true purpose of church, which does not include spiritual abuse. Only when the church positions itself in a state of continual repentance and conversion can she effectively perform the task for which God has called her. Only then can spiritual abuse be abolished. Only then can the people of God be in true community with one another and with God.

Community

Major Theories

Meaning of Community

Community has existed since creation. God created the first man to dwell in community with Him. God then created woman to dwell in community with man. The word “community” derives from Latin with the meaning of “giving among each other” and thus, “many dwelling in unity or as one” (Cawley 2006). Community is often used as a catchword in the church or as the identification of a place of many homeowners’ dwellings. The full purpose of community, however, is the mutual companionship and relationship of one human with others and with God. Post-modern author Donald Miller described community through its antonym, loneliness:

Loneliness is real painful, and I will know it when I feel it. I think it is interesting that God designed people to need other people. We see those cigarette advertisements with the rugged cowboy riding around alone on a horse, and we think that is strength, when, really, it is like setting your soul down on a couch and not exercising it. The soul needs to interact with other people to be healthy.

(Miller 2003, 154)

Community, then, is a necessary part of the faith. Of that concept Kenda Dean writes, “Faith never grows in a vacuum” (Dean and Foster 1998, 164).

Characteristics of Healthy Community

Christian community is not easily defined. For this reason, it is best observed by its characteristics. Perhaps Christian author John Ortberg stated this nebulous concept most succinctly when he penned, “With billions of people in the world, someone should figure out a system where no one is lonely ... Someone did ... That Someone is God ... That something is called community” (Ortberg 2003, 34). Larry Crabb has suggested that a system where no one is lonely supersedes mere freedom from loneliness. That system, community “offers an individual a relationship that forcefully communicates four messages: We accept you. We believe in you. We see you and are glad to stay involved. We give to you” (Crabb 1999, 141).

The beauty of such community is found in the concept that all who dwell in that community are dwelling in the place that God made for them with an anticipation: that God will meet them there (Ortberg 2003, 21). Such community is also beautiful because membership in that community is not based upon one’s achievements or natural heredity; instead, one’s “community with ... another consists solely in what Christ has done to ... us” (Bonhoeffer 1999, 326). This mutually caring, giving, supporting relationship called Christian community constitutes that which God designed for His church and is both a healthy and growing model of that for which the church of the twenty-first century should strive. Community is participation in “something that matters, something larger than ourselves” (Ortberg 2003, 19).

Importance of Community to the Biblical Writers

Community was highly important within Hebrew society. “In ancient Israel, everyone belonged to a family. This was a foundational element in their identity as persons” (Driver 1997, 142). Community was not simply a nebulous objective but was, instead, a viable and necessary portion of the ancient Hebrews’ existence. “To be fully a person in ancient Israel, one needed to participate in a family whose story included a past of covenant grace, a present of covenant faithfulness, and a future of covenant promise” (142). The Israelites’ concept of family, even within households, extended beyond the presence of mother, father, sons, and daughters. Family also included grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. Because ancient Israel represented a pattern for the church, it was intended that “the church and all the ministries therein should be a reflection of the communal nature of . . . God” (Jones 2001, 106).

Images of Community in the Bible

The Bible contains several observations of community. “Both morally and spiritually, [the nation of] Israel understood its identity in terms of a community of sojourners in relation to God, by whose will and mercy alone they lived” (Driver 1997, 58-59). Perhaps one of the most obvious indications of such community in relation to God is found in the writings of the Apostle Paul, particularly as he wrote to the church in Corinth with these words:

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another *various* kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as

He wills. (1 Cor 12:7-11, NASB)

This recording indicates the gifting of God to His community of faith in order to create a whole people. This is more completely indicated when observed within its greater context, including 1 Corinthians 12:12-27, wherein Paul writes further regarding the interconnectedness of various parts of the human body in comparison with members of the spiritual body of Christ, the church. The point delivered in these passages is a clear reference to the interdependence of one member of the body to another. This term, “interdependence” is recognized as a facet of the community. True community is the interdependence of one member with another member of that body. As Paul iterated, “The way God designed our [physical] bodies is a model for understanding our lives together as a church [community]: every part dependent on every other part” (1 Cor 12:25a, MSG).

Statistician George Barna has written this another way, then expounded on the fact that this concept of acting out community is an extended action of devotion to God Himself: “Being in a right relationship with God and His people is what matters. Scripture teaches us that devoting [one’s] life to loving God with all [one’s] heart, mind, strength, and soul is what honors Him” (Barna 2005, 37). True community, then, should be practiced as a valid and integral part of one’s Christian experience. It is the assessment of many that true Christianity cannot be understood outside of community. One pastor wrote:

We forget how the body of Christ works, how we are connected to each other with complementary gifts in a community of promise. The only way [one] live[s] as a person of promise in God’s eyes is to be connected. What makes [one] a member of the body is that [s/he is] connected to Christ. If [one is] connected to Him, [one has] to be connected to His people. (Slaughter 2002, 135)

Further observation of biblical community is noted by one author who penned, “The NT pictures the church as exiles, sojourners, and strangers. The Christian community is made up of sojourning strangers in the midst of the kingdom of darkness, whose values are derived from ‘human passions’” (Driver 1997, 57).

This assessment stands parallel with a comment found in a previously addressed passage attributed to the Apostle Peter:

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

Again, this passage refers to individuals who have not only been called away from or out of something, but who have been called into “His marvelous light” and into community. The community of God is the people of faith referred to in 1 Peter: the called out body of Christ that is designated to be a community brought together to show forth God’s marvelous light.

Images of Community through History

Not only is community observed throughout scripture, but biblically-based community is also observed throughout history. The historical record indicates believers have gathered since the establishment of Christianity for the purpose of bonding together, protecting one another from the influence of the world, and disseminating the good news of Jesus Christ. One author succinctly iterated this case when he observed, “there [has not been nor cannot be a] biblically based theology of mission and witness which does not emphasize the centrality of the ‘called out people’ for that mission” (Guder 2000, 68).

Of great interest is the concept that often, some individuals who drew together

into community were those who may have had no other commonality than their faith in Christ. Henri Nouwen once wrote, “Community is the place where the person you least want to live with always lives” (Nouwen 1995, 83). As Jesus was observed gathering individuals who were mutually antagonistic towards one another and then seeing them reconciled, so historically has the community of the body of Christ drawn together men and women who may have been antagonistic toward one another, and created community among them (Driver 1997, 113).

Certain individuals chose to separate themselves from society and from one another for the purpose of living separated lives as hermits. Often, however, either they sought others in order to share books and thoughts or they engaged themselves in a coenobitic tradition wherein community was observed with order and regulations. The term, “coenobite” derives from the Greek words κοινή (*koinay*, common) and βίος (*bios*, life). It is interesting that one aspect of κοινή as “common” is found in one of its derivatives, κοινωνία, accompanied by the meanings, “partnership” and “joint participation” (Thayer 1889, 353). This stands in stark opposition to the term “eremitic,” from which we take the word “hermit,” that derives from the Greek word, ἐρημίτης, (*eraymitays*) which carries the meaning “desert” or “one who dwells in the desert or isolation.” Notice the words penned by Michael Casey, “Even though the individual monk might read his own book and think his own thoughts, his reading tended to communion rather than alienation” (Casey 1995, 4).

David Hume made one point against the solitary life. Note that he is recognized as both a philosopher and historian, therefore providing a unique vantage.

Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues: — for what reason are they everywhere

rejected by men of sense, but because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world; nor render him a more valuable member of society; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company, nor increase his power of self-enjoyment? We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupefy the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper . . . A gloomy, hair-brained enthusiast, after his death, will have a place in the Calendar; but will scarcely ever be admitted, when alive, into intimacy and society, except by those who are as delirious and dismal as himself. (Hume 1957, 270)

Hume does not indicate a Christian point of view. He does portray, however, a realistic observation of a human understanding of the need for community and the lack of virtue found in the life of solitude. The point being made is simple: from a purely humanistic standpoint, humankind is inherently in need of community. From a scriptural standpoint, it is more clearly stated: God created humankind for community and interdependence.

Models and Practices

The Need for Community in Modern Society

It is difficult to express fully in words the contemporary need for community. Yet the example of such need is observed throughout the day. For instance, it is clear that neighborhood gangs are formed in order to establish some type of system where individuals can belong and where they are a part of something larger than they, as individuals, are. “Most young people — even those in cliques or gangs — have a great desire for coming together” (Borgman 1997, xvi).

It is observed in contemporary culture itself that likeminded individuals tend to gather together. Take for instance the modern culture of the Goths, wherein teens and young adults dress in black, use black make-up, and have a morbid fantasy for things dead. One will rarely find such individuals alone in public; instead, they congregate as a group to celebrate their mutual morbidity.

It is not surprising that Christianity operates under a similar guise. Yet, it is not a simple need for companionship or belonging that lies at the crux of the Christian faith and community. Instead, it is an innate and necessary drive within the Christian faith itself that draws its members into community. One author succinctly stated the rationale behind this drive: “It is a profound and at times uncomfortable truth that our Christian faith does not rest totally in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. For to know Jesus is to be connected through him to His body — the church” (Ward 1999, 130). An intrinsic factor within Christianity draws believers into community.

A side-benefit of Christian community is the sense of vitality that comes through the very effort of such kinship.

We may often find that the text of the Bible comes alive in an atmosphere of love, community, and service. Conversely, its meaning is obscured when we allow ourselves to become isolated and concerned with ourselves. “Religion” cannot, in God’s plan, become a substitute for humanity or community. (Casey 1995, 44)

Thus, it is not in the rituals that individuals find their place of spirituality in Christ; it is in the love and service toward one another that true belonging is found. Italian film star and writer, Luciano De Crescenzo iterated his sentiment regarding this issue of needed community thus, “We are all angels with only one wing; we can only fly while embracing one another” (De Crescenzo 1999, 43). According to De Crescenzo, we need one another even to exist.

Another aspect of present Christian community is that it is a small foretaste of what the greater, ultimate community of Christ should be. “The church itself, is not the kingdom. It is, rather, the messianic community in the service of the kingdom. It witnesses to the kingdom. In its life and values, [Christian community] anticipates the kingdom” (Driver 1997, 94). As such, it is based wholly upon the work that Christ has

performed in each of us who are members of that community (Crabb 1999, 39).

Dallas Willard expressed the concept that community is a requirement of belonging to the body of Christ:

Because of this reciprocal nature within the corporate body of Christ, fellowship is required to allow realization of a joyous and sustained level of life in Christ that is normally impossible to attain by all our individual effort, no matter how vigorous and sustained. (Willard 1991, 187)

Certainly, these observations regarding community and its necessity among the body of Christ hold some merit. They, indeed, point the reader to a target for which believers should strive in their Christian commitment.

Methods of Community Building in Modern Society

One of the targeted aspects that must be explored as a method of community building is a revisit to the concept of God the Trinity as a community. When believers recognize the concept that their very model and aim (as presented in the Trinity) is that of community, the desire to strive toward such a model should be initiated. Tony Jones writes:

When our ... ministries reflect a Trinitarian/communitarian layout, we'll not only tap into the postmodern longing for community in a world filled with divorce and division, but also we'll point with our lives toward a God who is a community and who created us to be in community. (Jones 2001, 107)

Dallas Willard further expounds Jones' concept of community within the Trinity:

God is in himself a sweet society of love, with a first, second and third person to complete a social matrix where not only is there love and being loved, but also shared love for another, the third person. Community is formed not by mere love and requited love, which by itself is exclusive, but by a shared love for another, which is inclusive. And within the Trinity there is, I believe, not even a thought of "First, Second, and Third." There is no subordination within the Trinity, not because of some profound metaphysical fact, but because the members of the Trinity will not have it. (Willard 2002, 184)

Because this Trinitarian model of community has been presented for the believer and because such a model imparts an inclusive, non-subordinate relationship, it is my belief that a first step toward community-building is recognition of the model that has been placed before the body of Christ: the Trinity.

Second, I believe there should be an intentional movement by the constituents of the body of believers toward a unified aim, community. Community is, in part, a sense of belonging. Sometimes the process of operating in a functional manner takes hard work and effort. So it is in the case of the quest for community. The reality of true community does not occur by default or by accident; it takes intentional and targeted effort.

A third step toward community is found in the recognition of that which draws the believer toward the place of community.

The technical term for this [is] the ‘anagogical’ sense, referring to the Bible’s power to lift up hearts to spiritual realities and to make us feel a greater desire for the things of God, to lead us ever deeper into prayer. This is the component of the Good News that is constantly calling us into communion — with God and with our neighbor. As we read [God’s word] we become more aware of an attraction within to transcend the pettiness that characterizes so much of our lives and to open ourselves more fully to God present in the sacrament of the word. (Casey 1995, 56)

It is not a normal human effort that draws one into Christian community. It is not a natural phenomenon that calls believers into an effectual bond to one another and to Christ. Instead, it is an attraction by God Himself that effects true Christian community among the body of believers. It is through the recognition of and yielding to a concept that individuals enter into the relationship with God and with one another. This is how true Christian community is engaged.

Effects of Community Today

There is left little doubt that community is an essential aspect of the church. While the reality of community often is found lacking, the necessity for such exists. Even resting at the very core of how ministry is performed within the church, there is recognition that all church ministry “is primarily relational ministry” (Springer and Smith 1995, 7). Derived from this concept, one pastor has disavowed his previous ideas of where true ministry must take place. He states:

I’m unlearning the idea that God works only in places set apart for spiritual purposes, such as church buildings. Just as Jesus used mud and spit, today God still uses everyday people in ordinary places to do the work needed. God matches these raw resources to the need represented at any time and place. (Slaughter 2002, 35)

What I comprehend in Slaughter’s statement is a confirmation of Springer’s and Smith’s statement that ministry is inherently relational: real ministry is not confined to a place or to a function but is also performed among and between individuals in relationship, irrespective of the location or the event.

Christian community is designed to be an attraction or a model to others of their need for relationship. “The nations [should] be attracted by covenant relationships of righteousness, peace, and salvation — which characterize God’s people” (Driver 1997, 110). It is my aim to show the vast possibilities that are imparted in true relationship and community. In fact, Dallas Willard shows how such true relationship and community present themselves as a model for others to desire:

Personalities united can contain more of God and sustain the force of His greater presence much better than scattered individuals. The fire of God kindles higher as the brands are heaped together and each is warmed by the other’s flame. The members of the body must be in *contact* if they are to sustain and be sustained by each other. Christian redemption is not devised to be a solitary thing, though each individual of course has a unique and direct relationship with God, and God alone

is his or her Lord and Judge. But the Life is one that requires some regular and profound conjunction with others who share it. It is greatly diminished when that is lacking. (Willard 1991, 187)

Community, therefore, must be a goal within the body of Christ for the benefit of achieving among humanity the Kingdom of God: a people in relationship with the Father.

Additionally, Christians must remember that “although scripture has much that applies to the individual, it is always in the context of community” (Jones 2001, 103).

Humankind must strive for true relationship. It is an admonition by God for the proper behavior of those in the Christian faith to engage. It is further for this purpose that

Our [constituency needs] to hear that they cannot do it alone. For example, no one can be a Christian middle school student without the support of other Christians. For it is impossible to live out the imperatives of the Christian life outside of the Christian community. (Jones 2001, 122)

It is in this interdependency that the seeds of one’s understanding of the Kingdom of God are sown. Relationship and community enhance one’s understanding of the church’s structure and purpose (Driver 1997, 182).

Having observed such interdependency, it should be recognized that

Radical church is not a place; it is a people. You really can’t say, “I’m going to church.” Church is a gathering, a collection of people called together and called out. We are unique. We possess a common heart and a common mind. We have a passion to do things for Jesus. (Slaughter 2002, 76)

It is in the common heart and the common mind that God’s effectiveness through His people is best given a chance to be observed. This can only happen through a people united in relationship. Another noted author made a similar and confirming observation:

The church is not a club where people with common hobbies meet. It is not a voluntary association, such as the American Medical Association, in which members guard and tend their shared interests. Nor is it simply a helping organization, an Alcoholics Anonymous that people seek out after they determine they have an unmanageable problem. People choose to join AA or a civic club but, in that sense, no one really ‘joins’ the church. The members of the church are

called, gathered together by the God who showed Himself in Jesus Christ. (Guder 2000, 174)

Truly, Christians are called to be more than a simple gathering, a place, or a club. They are called to be a people group, a family. It is in this sense of family that all who are affiliated benefit.

From a seemingly opposing angle, yet one that, in fact, undergirds this concept of community, Dietrich Bonhoeffer penned:

The spiritual unity of the church is a primal synthesis willed by God. It is not a relationship that has to be established, but one that is already posited, and remains invisible. It is not made possible by concord, similarity, or affinity between souls, nor should it be confused with unity of mood. Instead, it is real just where seemingly the most intractable outward oppositions prevail, where each man leads his quite individual life, and it is perhaps absent where it seems to prevail most. It can shine more brightly in the conflict between wills than in accord. (Bonhoeffer 1963, 137)

Bonhoeffer is stating that this framework for community has already been established by God and, in fact, surrounds the body of Christ with example and with precedence. He has observed, further, it is in the midst of opposition that such community has its greatest opportunity to shine.

Application

I had seen the community of Christ shine before. I knew community would be a strong factor in the healing of the individuals with whom I worked. I also knew from my research that assisting these individuals in regaining their sense of a place in community would be a prevailing factor for their healing. What I did not foresee was the deep longing that each of these individuals possessed for such community. They were living incompletely. I noticed the immediate bonding that took place among the individuals within my group. It was not planned, nor was it expected. Obviously, however, it was

needed.

One of the most prominent aspects among our group was that of each taking a willing place in allowing God to use them through speaking forth the impressions of a particular night's *lectio divina*. Every person was highly participatory and usually expressed astonishment at what God was speaking to and through them. This was very different from the type of instruction they had been brought up in where the pastor spoke and everyone else listened. In our case of guided *lectio divina*, all were used of God to gather and express their own understanding of the various readings. It was from such observations that the words of the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle became a reflection of truth in my understanding:

The individual, when isolated, is not self-sufficing, and therefore he is like a part in relation to the whole. But whoever is unable to live in society, or who has no need of it because he is sufficient for himself, must be either a beast or a god. (Aristotle in Willard 2002, 184)

This concept was paralleled by an illustration about Mother Teresa and an untouchable in Calcutta's streets.

[This person] had lived beyond human care, upon the streets or wherever he could find a place simply to be. Dying, he was brought by Mother Teresa into her shelter and cleaned and cared for. His words were, "I have had to live my life like an animal, but now I can die like a human being." Simply because he had been "taken in" by others who gave to him! To merely welcome another, to provide for him or her, to make a place, is one of the most life-giving and life-receiving things a human being can do. (Willard 2002, 183)

As humans, we all stand in need of others; as Christians, we stand in even greater need of one another's word and company. The beauty of community, however, is that as more effort is given to grow community, the giver encounters reciprocal reception of community. In other words, efforts toward building community are both giving and receiving endeavors.

Conclusion

As I began my research in general and this chapter in particular, I could not see the coherence between *lectio divina*, spiritual abuse, and community. As I have finished my present research and my project, I cannot separate the concepts and, indeed, find them interconnected. Author Michael Casey printed a relevant comment when he wrote, “God’s word is unitary; it cannot be simultaneously welcomed and rejected. It is useless to embrace Christ in prayer of *lectio [divina]* and then spurn Him in our brothers and sisters” (Casey 1995, 91). In other words, if we as the body of Christ are going to live together, it is important that we learn how to grow together and how to watch out for one another. This applies in spiritual disciplines, in guarding one another from abuse, and in simply living with one another as a community. Perhaps Kenda Dean best summarized this concept with these words:

None of us on the Christian path is ever a lone traveler. We always journey with companions at our side, before us, and trailing behind us. A great cloud of witnesses, a communion of saints both living and departed, surrounds us. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, which is both a descriptive reality and a great grace. To be a Christian means we are part of the body of Christ. The local communities in which we live out our faith give faces and names to our companions on the journey. (Dean and Foster 1998, 124)

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD, PROCEDURES, AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Most small children love to receive toys for Christmas. At one year of age, however, my granddaughter Aubrianna's joy and excitement was found in the vibrantly colored clothing that she received. I was enthralled by witnessing her delight. My pleasure was due to the fact that she was thrilled to receive what she had been given. She expressed her delight in “oohs” and “ahs.” Similarly, in my project, I delighted in receiving that which I had been given: to be involved in healing among a group of friends whom I loved and treasured.

The purpose of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church members in the Toledo, Ohio area who had expressed their beliefs that they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church and, correspondingly, were relatively uninvolved in the local church. The research question posed in this project was, “Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?”

The purpose of this chapter is to detail the design and methodology used in the project. The outline of this chapter is as follows:

- Introduction
- Purpose, Overview, and Goals
- Context
- Participants
- Procedure
- Assessment
- Conclusion

Purpose, Overview, and Goals

Specifically, this project focused on the development of a new spiritual habit of modified *lectio divina* among specific participants with feelings of abandonment regarding their local church, in order to restore their relationship with and vitality in Jesus Christ. Participants gathered in a small group setting and were provided with instructions and demonstrations of a modified version of *lectio divina*. This project involved weekly one-hour sessions for a period of ten weeks. A comparison of pre-session and post-session self-evaluations was used to measure the development of each participant's perceived growth. Comments from individual journals were also used in this assessment. Furthermore, I personally observed each participant and recorded my perceptions of each individual's progress in their journey to restoration. My goal for these assessments was not to measure the depth of restoration, but instead, to measure the progress of restoration. In other words, although I could not observe that full healing had taken place, I wanted to see that healing had commenced.

The goals of this project were for the participants to:

- Re-engage in a growing, vibrant, daily personal relationship with God.
- Come to a place of spiritual aspiration wherein they once again desired God's will for their lives.
- Have a greater sense of intimacy with God and of His desired intimacy with them through reading, prayer, meditation, and contemplation.
- Develop their spiritual vitality beyond the level at which they had previously interacted with God.
- Know how to use the modified techniques of *lectio divina* as a daily, devotional practice.
- Modify a personal practice of *lectio divina* for the purpose of deeper intimacy with God.

- Benefit from the struggles, wisdom, and direction of biblical, historical, and contemporary spiritual writers in order to gain a renewed perspective on God's grace, forgiveness, and wholeness.
- Commit to continued use, development, and promotion of the practice of *lectio divina*.

Context

The location I chose for this particular project was Toledo, Ohio. Toledo is the city where my wife and I were able to minister as youth pastors, associate pastors, children's pastors, and friends to most of the participants for a period of approximately ten years. The location has much to offer including four distinct seasons, a strong economy, a variety of entertainment choices, and multi-culturalism. These ingredients foster residents who are proud of who they are, excited about what they do, and loyal to those whom they serve. These dynamics of community, pride, and loyalty factor in to the predisposition for spiritual abuse mentioned earlier in this writing.

Besides the location of the participants and their familiarity with me, another commonality among them was their having once been a part of a neo-Pentecostal church in which strong emphases were placed on the experience of worship, the confrontational preaching of the word of God, and the dynamics of small groups. In spite of the strengths of this neo-Pentecostal setting, many of these individuals felt used up, cast aside, and belittled. As would be expected, they began to feel they would never be able to measure up to the standards of leadership. It was from this caldron of context that the practices and persons for my project were drawn.

Participants

The sixteen participants involved in the project were persons of varied cultural,

spiritual, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. Ethnically, eleven were Caucasian, one African-American, three Hispanic, and one Asian. Culturally, they bridged a range of religious backgrounds: nine had been reared neo-Pentecostal, four mainline Protestant, two Catholic, and one Buddhist. Looking at the participants from a socio-economic perspective, one participant was a student, nine were categorized as white-collar workers, and six were classified as blue-collar workers. The educational attainments of the participants also varied. There were seven participants who had only high school diplomas and nine who held college degrees including one who was working on his masters and another on his doctorate. Concerning gender, the participants were evenly divided at eight males and eight females.

Thirteen of these participants had been a part of the ministry over which I was the youth pastor. These thirteen participated as youth, adult volunteers, or other capacities. The remaining three who were not formerly youth who had been involved with me were simply friends who felt a personal need to overcome past difficulties with churches or pastors, and who, therefore, needed a time of healing. There was very little, if any, current involvement in local congregations among all sixteen of the project participants.

The past involvement of most of these participants in a particular youth ministry created a commonality. However, the range of ages became an important factor to our group dynamic. One individual was in her mid-sixties, another in his early-fifties, three in their late-forties, one in her late-thirties, nine in their mid- to late-twenties, and another in his early-twenties. An interesting aspect concerning the variety of ages was observed in the lack of regard for spiritual maturity when discussions took place of what was being read.

The chronological difference created other unique dynamics and observations. There was a definite targeting by society taking place among the younger and the older participants. Those who were energetic and youthful were sought by society and the church for the energy they provided. In turn, society and the church sought those who were older and more financially stable for their maturity and monetary contributions. These observations made for interesting conversations as participants sought the intended healing offered by the project. Such conversations helped each participant to see what drew them into a predicament of being wounded in the first place, with the self-given admonition to avoid that potential for injury in the future.

Finally, I chose to lead this group in the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* because most participants were from neo-Pentecostal or Charismatic traditions. These particular traditions do not practice the spiritual disciplines, including *lectio divina*. It became my quest to see if their lack of familiarity with *lectio divina*, combined with the historically evidenced value of the same, could be used effectively to bring about an initiation of spiritual wholeness.

Procedure

The research question posed in this project was, “Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?” The intended design of this project was to develop a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a process of devotional guidance using this singular spiritual discipline.

The procedure for the project was as follows:

Prospective participants were initially approached concerning this project. Those

approached included several former youth, youth leaders, and parents of youth who were actively involved in the ministry where my wife, Cheri, and I pastored in the Toledo, Ohio area between the years 1990 and 2000. Additionally, I chose a couple of friends who also stood in need of spiritual healing and who, I felt, could benefit from the project's intent, as well as contribute some much-needed, non-judgmental fellowship to the group. A further specification of these individuals, other than being friends, was that they were no longer involved in Christian ministry.

I approached these individuals through personal contact, phone call, email, or by letter inviting them to participate. Those who were willing to be included in the project received a detailed letter with specific information regarding the time and location of the ten one-hour sessions. The initial contact provided a warm greeting, a description of my intentions for the project, another invitation to participate, and information regarding how to respond.

In the first session, sixteen individuals gathered in my home. I was careful to avoid certain things that I felt could influence my findings beyond the scope of my project. Even the fact that I had assembled this cast of individuals from my past leadership experiences could be perceived as a skewing influence. For instance, I did not serve refreshments. I knew that food could help to influence the result. Instead, I wanted to focus on the practice of *lectio divina*. I explained to all gathered that there would be no praise and worship music in these sessions. I did this because the entire group knew me, in part, for my ability to lead a worship experience through music. I did not want the influence of music to be a factor in my findings. Community, however, was a factor that I had to take into consideration because it was an inevitable influence due to the gathering

of familiar people. Again, my primary focus for the project was *lectio divina*.

During the first session, I administered a preliminary assessment. There was no explanation given regarding the responses because I did not want to influence the results. I informed all participants to use their social security numbers instead of their names allowing freedom for everyone to respond honestly and providing the means to compare accurately the initial and the final assessments (Appendix 2). The purpose for the questionnaire was to gather necessary information regarding each person's current Christian commitment, current ministry involvement, current relationship with Christ, and current awareness of the various spiritual disciplines, especially *lectio divina*.

Following the administration of the questionnaire, I presented instructions regarding the procedures for the project. At this time, I notified the participants this would be the only instructional aspect of the entire project; all other sessions would be the guided practice of *lectio divina*. My instructions were that the six steps of the modified *lectio divina* to be observed each week consisted of:

1. Silence (*silencio*) - A brief time of centering for the purpose at hand.
2. Reading (*lectio*) - Guided devotional reading for the evening.
3. Meditation (*meditatio*) - Meditation upon the reading.
4. Prayer (*oratio*) - A prayer of devotion and surrender.
5. Contemplation (*contemplatio*) - Contemplation of what has been read, what it means to the hearer, and what action or decision needs to be performed as a response to that reading.
6. Journaling - An opportunity to record those thoughts and responses in a tangible manner for the purpose of later self-evaluation and observation. Journaling also was intended to provide me with an observable insight into the thinking and the growth processes of the participants. Individuals were not required to furnish their names when they submitted their journals. I eventually had to issue an additional questionnaire note to several participants.

This additional questionnaire sought to draw responses from the journals in lieu of everyone submitting their entire journals because some information was too personal to share. This additional questionnaire resulted in good responses from several regarding their journal entries. These entries indicated observations of each individual's personal self-assessment during the project.

Following the assessment and instructions, the actual practice of modified *lectio divina* began. Again, the assessment and instructions were given only in the first session. The remainder of the first session and the entirety of sessions two through ten were given to *lectio divina*. Each week, every participant was presented with a copy of the reading for the evening as well as additional readings for the remainder of the days until the next gathering. (I desired for the modified six-step process to be used daily, leading all participants into a revitalization of their relationship with Jesus Christ. This daily practice also provided the participants with a briefly ingrained routine of the daily exercise of deepening and enhancing their relationship with God.)

I presented an alternating aspect to the traditional rendering of *lectio divina*. I prepared weeks one, four, seven, and ten with readings from spiritual writers of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Weeks two, five, and eight were prepared using the writings of spiritual authors from the first through nineteenth centuries. Finally, scripture itself was used in weeks three, six, and nine. Instead of limiting the readings to only scripture, as many practitioners of *lectio divina* do, I wanted to present a historically broad range of Christian spiritual writings.

Each week, I began the session with a simple prayer of cleansing and quieting. My goal was to shut out all that could further influence our findings for the evening. Next, I read the evening's allotted passage, usually asking everyone to close their eyes as I read the first time so they could focus solely on the reading of the day. I also instructed

them not to look for personal meaning from the passage at this initial rendering; instead, they were simply to seek words or phrases that seemed to stand out and then, to meditate upon them. I encouraged the group that there were no right or wrong words or phrases.

After this initial reading, we spent a few moments of silence to ponder what we had just read. I then appointed someone else to read the same passage aloud. In subsequent readings, I attempted to alternate between masculine and feminine voices so that all participants were hearing different renderings of the passage. I did not want a person's voice inflections or tones to sway the hearer. Again, as we listened and meditated, we were looking for words or phrases that seemed to stand out. Everyone was assured that they had an equal voice in this time of recognizing words or thoughts and notably, everyone eagerly participated. We repeated this process one to four times depending on how much participation was coming forth from the group.

After the repetitive readings and meditations, we began to perceive what the authors were attempting to communicate to their given audiences. We were attentive to the fact that we were not looking for what the author was saying to each of us personally; we were looking for what we felt the author was saying to the original intended audience. Again, this was performed through alternating readings, with two to four renderings and meditations on the passage. After we felt that we had sufficiently explored the author's intended meaning, we prayed as a group, asking God to show us what He intended each of us to receive personally from the passage. I explained that we did not all have to take away the same things, and that we did not necessarily have to sense anything from a given passage.

Following this time of prayer, which usually lasted only two to five minutes, we

once again read the given passage, looking for a personal meaning. Subsequently, we discussed briefly what each of us felt coming from the reading. At this time, we sought to verbalize how to apply that personal revelation. To do this, we contemplated the question, “What will a response to God’s intended meaning look like?” Typically, this brief time of sharing practical applications concluded the session.

Except for sessions one and ten, I set a timeframe of one hour. I wanted to honor the time commitment of the participants, and I wanted to limit further influences, such as extended fellowship, that might skew the findings.

Session ten took place in the same manner as sessions two through nine with the exception that I concluded it with a post-session assessment. This final questionnaire was identical to the initial one except that it included a couple of open-ended questions intended to give further insight into what each participant had gained from the project experience.

I made personal written recordings of my assessments from each session watching and listening intently to each participant every evening. I made note of body language and voice inflection in order to see how each person was responding and growing. Although these insights were highly subjective, they acted as a point of comparison with each individual’s journal entries regarding their progress in the project.

A comparison was made of the pre-session self-assessments and the post-session self-assessments. The information garnered allowed me to make a quantitative comparison of each individual. (These quantitative findings, accompanied by corresponding graphs can be found in Chapter Five.) I developed these questionnaires with a “backwards” response. I wanted everyone to think seriously regarding their

responses. I requested their responses in reverse order to the normal, expected sequence as a means of facilitating that intention. In one instance, a participant named Jason responded to his assessment in the normally accepted manner. When he finally realized that his responses were opposite of his intent and would, thus, skew my findings, he acknowledged his failure to think through the process. He also commented that he saw my reasoning for presenting the responses backward from the normally expected manner, thus causing the participants to give more consideration to their responses. Jason's observation substantiated my intentions regarding the assessment response process.

My intent to collect everyone's journals brought an unexpected setback for me. Several felt their written materials were too personal to submit. This prompted me to issue an additional questionnaire seeking responses from the journals. Since this action rendered the desired results, I felt it unnecessary to carry the journaling aspect any further. My intention of the journaling process was to gather participants' insights into the effectiveness of the practice of modified *lectio divina*. Specifically, I looked for anger, contemplations, rejection, changes in emotions, as well as other aspects of the journey. The submitted entries, taken from the additional questionnaire, were compared with my personal notes.

The final aspect of this project was the compilation and evaluation of the assessments, journal entry submissions, and personal notes, accompanied by appropriate reporting of these findings via means of dissertation. I assured the participants that they were welcome to view the results should they so desire.

Assessment

At the beginning of this project, a questionnaire was presented that provided an

initial measurement of the individual's perceived state of spirituality as well as knowledge of and participation in the various spiritual disciplines. The questionnaire also served as a means to detect the level of interaction with other believers and the church. At the end of the ten-week session, an identical questionnaire was given as a post-assessment.

Both questionnaires used a five-point Likert Scale to assess each individual's response regarding the level of agreement or disagreement with statements, which included:

1. I have an active relationship with God.
2. I am excited when I hear the word "church."
3. The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.
4. I understand God's purpose for my life.
5. I desire to have a close relationship with other believers.
6. I feel safe at church.
7. I am growing in my walk with Christ.

Along with the final self-assessment, there were also a few open-ended statements, which included:

1. Describe what you consider to be an ideal devotional time.
2. What hinders you from maintaining prayer and scripture reading time?
3. Why do you seek prayer and scripture reading time?
4. Do you practice a daily prayer and scripture reading time?

Another aspect of this project was to bring these individuals to a place of spiritual aspiration wherein they once again desired God's will for their lives. As a side benefit,

perhaps they could again feel safe and sheltered within the structure of the church. At a minimum, however, their relationship with God would become one that was growing and contagious. The practice of journaling was intended as a self-assessment to record the perceived state of this growing and contagious relationship with Christ.

The journaling activity specifically sought to address the issues of:

1. What is your understanding of God's love for you?
2. What is your understanding of God's purpose for your life?
3. How does God's purpose in you affect others?
4. Describe what God is revealing to you in your time of prayer and meditation.
5. Is *lectio divina* helping you to sense God's presence in your life? How?
6. Does God have a place of forgiveness and restoration in your life? What is that place?
7. What is God doing to draw you into active relationship with Him?

Finally, in order to ascertain a level of success or failure for my project, I compared my personal observations, the journal entries submitted by the participants, and the comparison between the pre-session and post-session assessments. It was my ultimate goal that a daily relationship with Christ would be enhanced through this project beyond the ten weeks and into the rest of the participants' lives. Although this ultimate goal cannot be measured in the course of such a short-term project, it still was my desire that the initiation of the process and its continued use would establish a habit that would continue for a lifetime. Detail and interpretation of my findings will be found in Chapter Five.

Conclusion

This project was enjoyable! Some results were readily apparent based upon the glowing faces of the participants. Many outcomes were validated through objective comparison of the two assessments. One could sense the beginnings of genuine healing being rendered upon everyone involved through this project using the process of *lectio divina*.

I was surprised that no one in the group was timid in verbally sharing their insights in each session. Instead, the participants seemed delighted to be a part of the study. Although traditional practitioners of *lectio divina* would disagree with my modifications, such as the use of spiritual authors outside of scripture, I remember the differences that I saw in the people involved. When I recall their look of having begun to take control of their lives once again, and when I think upon the difference I felt within my own life, I am glad that I was able to capitalize on the opportunity afforded by this project. Noted statistician George Barna once wrote, “Americans want control over their lives” (Barna 2005, 62). Barna’s truth regarding control was made evident among these participants throughout this project. In summary, even apart from finalizing my doctoral work, I am honored to have conducted this research and project. Lives were changed, including my own, and that fact has fulfilled my entire purpose for this project.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The purpose of this chapter is to report on the results of my project which asks the question, “Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?” These results are derived from the evaluation and comparison of two self-assessments (Appendix 2), participants’ individual journal entries, and my observation notes taken during the project.

The outline of this chapter is as follows:

- Introduction
- Demographic Information
- Relevant Information
- Results of goal concerning relationship with God
- Results of goal concerning perception of self
- Results of goal concerning relationship with others
- Results of personal goals
- Conclusion

Demographic Information

The assemblage of the sixteen persons for my project consisted of a diverse range of cultural, spiritual, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. Culturally, eleven participants were Caucasian, one African, three Hispanic, and one Asian. Most of these had been reared in neo-Pentecostal settings. In addition, four were from mainline Protestant denominations, two from Catholic upbringing, and one from a Buddhist culture. Socio-economically, our group consisted of one student, six white-collar workers, and nine blue-collar workers. Educational backgrounds of the study participants varied: six had earned only high school diplomas, six had college degrees,

two had completed trade schools, and two were engaged in graduate or post-graduate studies.

The gender division of the group of sixteen was eight men and eight women. This number included five married couples. Experientially, two were parents of a small child, one was the parent of teenagers, three were parents of young adults, three were grandparents, and one was a great-grandparent. In addition, the ages of the participants ranged from one who was in her mid-sixties, one in his early-fifties, three in their late-forties, one in her late-thirties, nine in their mid- to late-twenties, and one in his early-twenties. In other words, demographically, there was a broad presentation of individuals assembled for this project.

Relevant Information

I explored five broad areas in this project, with focused goals in each one. The five elemental goals were:

- Goal concerning relationship with God.
- Goal concerning perception of self.
- Goal concerning relationship with others.
- Goal concerning knowledge of and participation in spiritual disciplines
- Goal concerning relationship with the church.

These five goal groupings encompassed the following desires I had for each participant in order to determine individual success in the project:

- To re-engage in a growing, vibrant, daily experience of a relationship with God.
- To come to a place of spiritual aspiration wherein they once again desired God's purpose for their lives.

- To have a greater sense of intimacy with God and of His desire for them through reading, prayer, meditation, and contemplation.
- To develop spiritual vitality beyond the level wherein they once interacted with God.
- To know who they are in Christ.
- To develop strong community with other believers.
- To know how to use *lectio divina* as a daily, devotional practice.
- To modify a personal practice of *lectio divina* for deeper engagement in their relationship with God.
- To benefit from the struggles, wisdom, and direction of historical spiritual writers in order to gain a renewed perspective of God's grace, forgiveness, and wholeness.
- To continue to use, develop, and promote the practice of *lectio divina* within their personal lives.
- To re-engage in the spiritual community of the church at some point.

Furthermore, the following personal goals were addressed in my project:

- My wife, children, and I would be restored to a place of vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ by using *lectio divina*.
- I would once again minister out of joy and a desire to please God.
- I would once again begin to allow the word of God to be applied to my personal life.

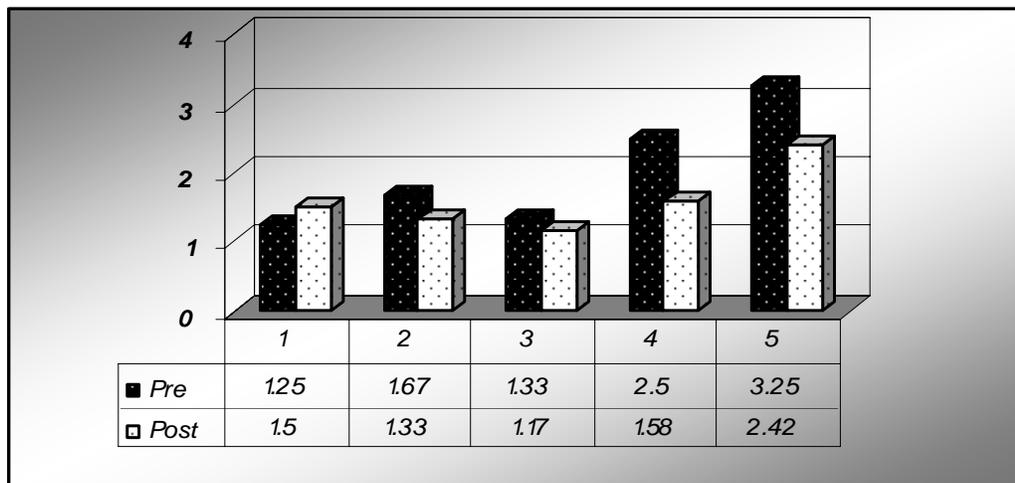
Due to necessary brevity, I have sought to report only on those areas that have shown evidence of having the most profound findings in this project.

Results of Goal Concerning Relationship with God (Graph A)

The results of my first goal indicated that my project was successful in drawing the participants into a renewed relationship with God. The statements addressed in the assessments read as follows and are graphed from left to right respectively in Graph A:

1. I believe that God loves me.
2. I have an active relationship with God.
3. My faith is an important part of my life.
4. I am growing in my walk with Christ.
5. I am satisfied with my relationship with God.

Graph A. Relationship with God.



1 represents a response of “I strongly agree with this statement.” 5 represents a response of “I strongly disagree with this statement.” A downward trend between “Pre” and “Post” responses represents a movement of self-perceived growth on the part of project participants.

Because of the scale I used, with “1” signifying a response of “I strongly agree with this statement” and “5” signifying “I strongly disagree with this statement,” the participants were required to think differently than normal regarding their responses. Due to this structure of responses, between the “pre-session” score and “post-session” score, I was looking for the numbers to indicate a downward trend. This downward trend would demonstrate a movement of self-perceived growth on the part of the participants.

The growth in the project participants’ relationships with God was indicated in their response to statement 2, “I have an active relationship with God.” Between the two assessments, there was a .34 point decrease in these responses. I considered this decrease minimally indicative of growth in the group members’ relationships with God. This development was further confirmed, however, through statements 4 and 5, “I am growing

in my walk with Christ,” and “I am satisfied with my relationship with God,” which showed .92 and .83 point decreases, respectfully. Remembering that my goal was to observe a decrease in points as an indication of success, I considered these responses significant concerning the participants’ personal assessment of progress in their relationship with Christ.

Statement 3, “My faith is an important part of my life,” showed a positive movement but, again, presented a relatively insignificant difference of .16 points. It is noted, however, that when these individuals were asked what constituted a hindrance from maintaining one’s faith, the most common responses were “lack of personal discipline” (ten responses) and “busy lifestyles” (eight responses). These responses indicated one of two things: either the participants did not equate their relationships with God with their faith or they did equate their faith in God with a relationship with church.

Regarding statement 1, “I believe that God loves me,” the difference in the two assessments showed a positive variation in number and thus, an overall indication of lack of growth. I do not think, however, that the .25 point discrepancy is significant. Instead, the difference could be attributed to something as simple as a margin of error or as complicated as a discrepancy in mood between the two given evenings used for the pre- and post-session assessments.

Regarding my first set of goals concerning participants’ relationships with God, I felt success throughout the project. On several occasions, I noted moments of insight in individuals. I could observe visibly on individuals’ faces when occasions of “Aha!” moments took place. I recall the time when Ben received the revelation of the simplicity of the *lectio divina* process and its fruitfulness in his devotional life. He responded, “This

stuff that you have just shown us is easy. I can do this” (Ben 2006). Ben’s vocalization was indicative of the emotions taking place within all of the participants.

I further thought it significant that eight of the participants stated, as of the post-session assessment, they practiced a daily period of prayer and devotion. Even the remaining participants were observing a five-day per week time of devotion. These comments about the rate of devotional life offered credence to my assertion that those engaged in the project were hungry for a relationship with God. Because of these observations, I consider my first goal of observing a growth in project participants’ relationships with God as successful.

Results of Goal Concerning Perception of Self (Graph B)

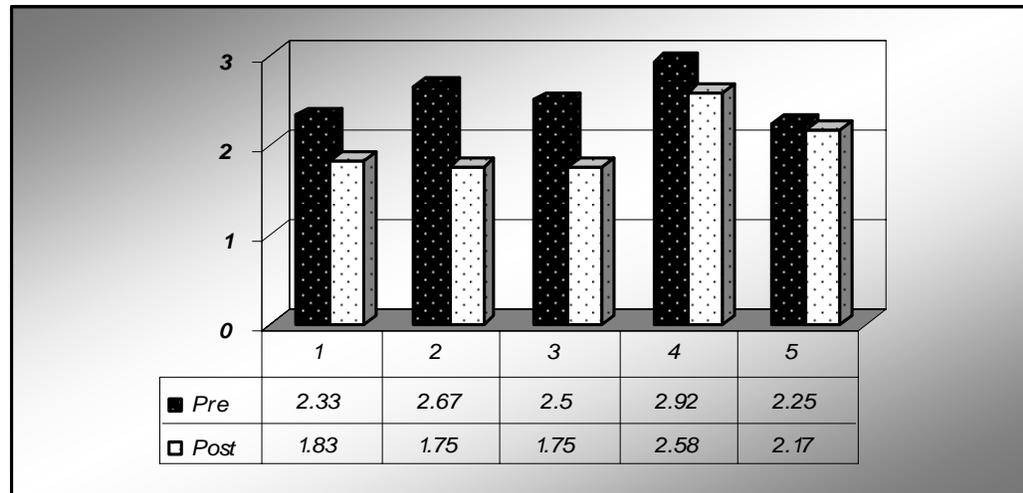
I expected positive results in the set of goals concerning the participants’ perception of selves. I realized the pains of being wounded probably had an effect on the inner-persons of all of the participants. I also expected this effect to be seen within the self-esteem of each member. What I was looking for was an increase in self-esteem and self-perception by each individual. As anticipated, there was tremendous growth across the gamut of the statements within this goal. These statements addressed in the assessments read as follows and are graphed from left to right respectively in Graph B:

1. I understand God’s purpose for my life.
2. I have a clear sense of purpose.
3. I know what I contribute to the world around me.
3. My life is close to my ideal.
4. I would change part of my life if I could.

Regarding participant’s responses to statement 2 of this section, “I have a clear sense of purpose,” I observed a decrease of .92 points. This indicated that the understanding regarding God’s plan for project individuals’ lives was increasing. The

responses on the assessments gave measurable credence to the subjective change and acceptance that I witnessed in facial expressions and which I recorded in my field notes. Positive change was taking place in the individual participants. Spiritual healing was being initiated.

Graph B. Perception of self



1 represents a response of “I strongly agree with this statement.” 5 represents a response of “I strongly disagree with this statement.” A downward trend between “Pre” and “Post” responses represents a movement of self-perceived growth on the part of project participants.

Another aspect that brought further weight to this concept of growth and healing was found in participants’ responses to statement 3 of this section, “I know what I contribute to the world around me.” Regarding the responses to this statement, there was a decrease of .75 points. This difference represented significant growth. In my field notes, I recorded that several participants spoke of having gained understanding concerning their place in the world. These same participants also held a better view of the contribution God expected from them. This too represented a sign of growth in the participants and success in the project. It also served to validate the goal that I had set beforehand.

Regarding statement 1 in this section, “I understand God’s purpose for my life,” I observed a decrease in their response of .50 points. This decreased response indicated growth on the part of the participants. The participants understood and were accepting the concepts that God had a purpose and design for each of them. Again, this was an indication of successful spiritual growth.

Regarding statement 4 in this section, “My life is close to my ideal,” I observed the range of growth of .37 points. I was not looking for an ideal life but rather an approach toward a more ideal life. Although there was not a huge difference in this area, there was enough to note some growth. My interpretation is that there was a growing satisfaction on the part of all participants of a life more in tune with what God had in store for them and thus, they each approached a more ideal life than when they first began the project. Their response to statement 4 again suggested success in this fourth goal.

The final statement in section four was “I would change part of my life if I could.” This statement produced a .08 point decrease in responses. I found this difference insignificant. What I did find significant was that their responses ranged in the “I mildly agree with this statement” portion of responses. This indicated a mildly recognized need to change aspects of their lifestyle; yet, there was also a focus on other areas of their lifestyles that overrode this recognition of need. Again, I see a movement toward health in the lives of the participants of this project. What was not indicated in this response was that this observed movement toward health was the result of this ten-week project.

Regarding the success or lack thereof concerning the goal of the participants’ perceptions of self, I deem my findings overall as successful. I found through personal

observations that all of the participants exhibited a healthy and growing perception of self. The responses between their pre-session and post-session assessments verified this health and growth concept.

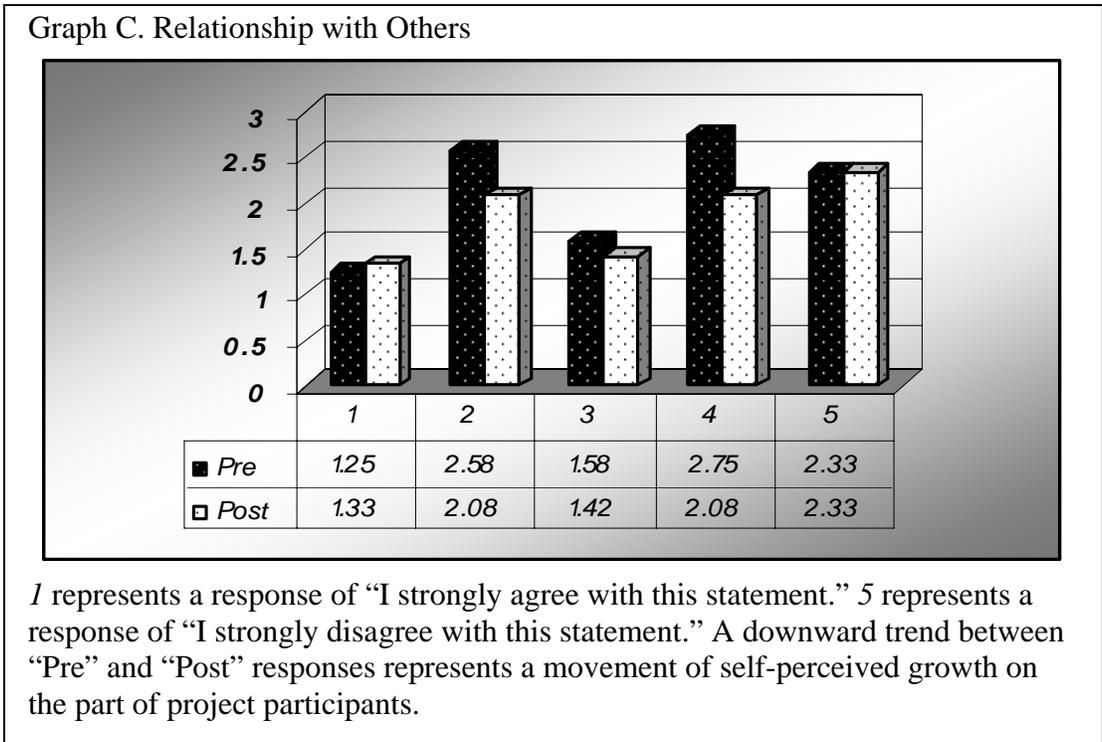
Results of Goal Concerning Relationship with Others (Graph C)

When I began this project, I did not know what to expect as an outcome for this set of goals. I desired project participants to develop a growing hunger for fellowship with others and for Christian community. I hoped that the desire for community would be overwhelming, even in the midst of pain and frustration. In some ways, I was the one overwhelmed. I was also excited. There still remained a spark of desire for Christian fellowship among everyone in the group. As our sessions continued, that spark was fanned into a great flame. The pain caused by spiritual abuse had not diminished the need for Christian community. Regarding the issues within my third set of goals, the statements addressed in the assessments read as follows and are graphed from left to right respectively in Graph C:

1. I desire to have a close relationship with other believers.
2. I am satisfied with my relationship with others.
3. I am sensitive to the needs of others.
4. I have many friends.
5. I care what others think about me.

Regarding statement 4 in this section, “I have many friends,” I observed the greatest range of growth within the third section of goals. Although the project participants may have had many friends prior to this project, they now indicated their relationship with others had grown, and their circle of fellowship and friendship was increasing, apparently to include those within this particular project group. An overall decrease of .67 points indicated the trend of growth among friendships. This indication

was clearly one that I had set out to observe as I began the project: Christian friendship circles enlarged.



Regarding participant responses to statement 2 of this section, “I am satisfied with my relationship with others,” I observed a decrease of .5 points. That was an indication of the growing desire to be in fellowship with other Christians. Although the initial response to this statement garnered a mere 2.58 points, indicating a stance of not being concerned one way or another concerning their relationships with others, participants were once again seeking for and succeeding in Christian community. In fact, in the post-session assessment, they mildly agreed with the statement of satisfaction in their relationships with others.

Regarding their responses to statement 3 of this section, “I am sensitive to the needs of others,” there was a decrease of .16 points. I do not consider this difference as relevant to my findings. The moderately low level of response, however, indicated a mild

agreement with the statement, "I am sensitive to the needs of others." This agreement gave further indication that these project individuals still held to their basic Christian beliefs. Although they perceived themselves as having been misused and abused by the church and spiritual leadership, they did not disavow their normally expected Christian duties of proper concern for their fellow human beings. This, again, affirmed that my research findings were correct: many individuals who have been damaged by the church are not in a state of non-fellowship with God; they simply avoid the place of their hurt: the church.

Statement 5 in section three of my goals was "I care what others think about me." There was no change in the response from the pre-session assessment to the post-session assessment. Concern for the thoughts that others direct toward those in the project group probably indicates some of the teaching that participants had received during their time of former church attendance. Many were taught that one should not be concerned with what others thought about them. Instead, one should only seek to please God.

Regarding statement 1 in this section, "I desire to have a close relationship with other believers," I observed an increase in their response of .08. I did not consider this difference as pertinent. I knew these individuals, however, and formerly observed them as people who desired Christian community. Both the pre- and post-session responses lent credence to this though; they once again indicated they were highly sociable persons.

Regarding the success or lack thereof concerning the project participants' relationships with others, I deem my findings overall as inconclusive. Perhaps more research could be done in this area. Based upon my personal observations during the project, however, I witnessed a great growth in the interaction with and acceptance of

others. I cannot account for the reasons why this did not show up on the assessments.

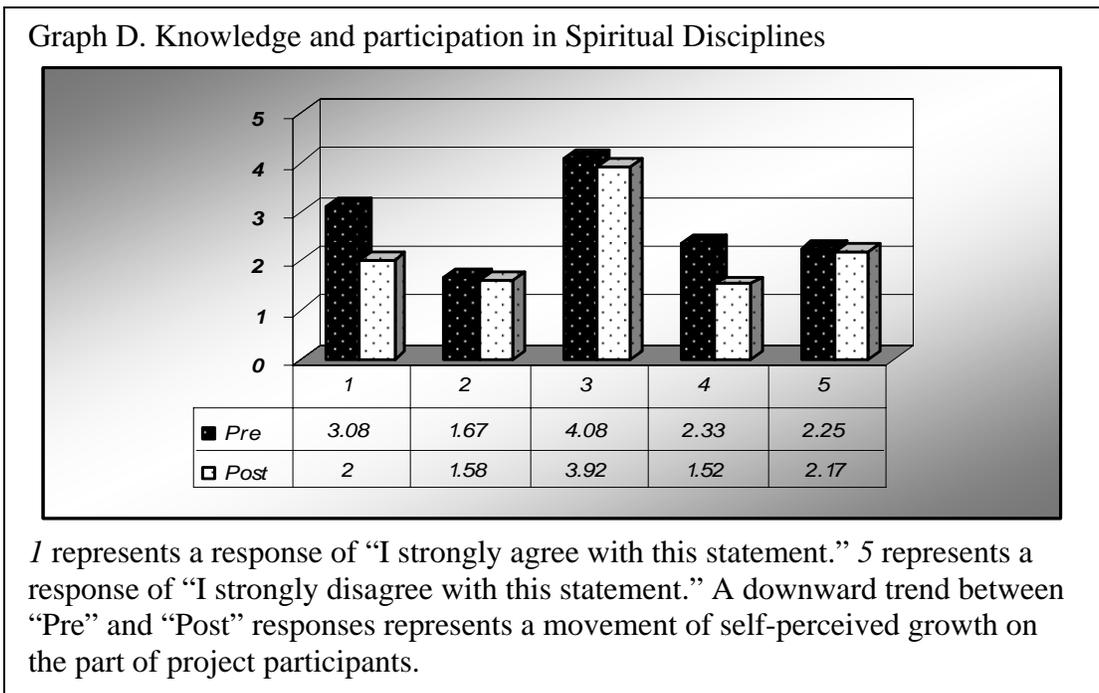
Results of Goal Concerning Knowledge of and Participation in Spiritual Disciplines (Graph D)

I expected great results in this set of goals because I knew that most of the project participants had minimal, if any, knowledge of classical spiritual disciplines. What I failed to consider in the fusion of project and assessment was that I was not offering any particular instruction regarding spiritual disciplines beyond the first session. While in some ways I might count this as a failure, I also consider it an attribute that my line of statements in both assessments did not seek deep understanding of the classical spiritual disciplines. Instead, my statements allowed me to observe the participants' desire for the newly practiced spiritual discipline, *lectio divina*. The responses to the statements in section five of my goals reflect a minute sense of growth in the area of spiritual disciplines. These statements addressed in the assessments read as follows and are graphed from left to right respectively in Graph D:

1. I practice meditation on the scriptures.
2. I look forward to a daily time spent with God.
3. I participate in a fast on a regular basis.
4. The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.
5. I have a daily prayer time.

Concerning statement 1, "I practice meditation on the scriptures," the difference in the assessments showed an overall 1.08 point decrease. This was a significant change indicating a movement from a stance of "I neither agree nor disagree with this statement" to a solid position of "I mildly agree with this statement." This concept showed evidence of a decision by the participants to engage in a classical spiritual discipline. I directly attribute this point of growth to the project because many of these group members did not

practice meditation as a discipline on a regular basis. I know that the concept was not taught consistently and routinely in the church in which many of these participants once participated. One of my specific goals regarding the spiritual disciplines was for the participants to know how to use, modify, and continue to use *lectio divina* within their personal lives. I counted this measure of growth as a highly significant step toward the total success of my project.



Regarding statement 4 in this section, “The Bible comes alive to me when I read it,” I observed a .81 point decrease. This number indicated a significant measure of growth in an area of participants’ interest. The beginning assessment showed that the participants were exhibiting a 2.33 or mild agreement with the statement “The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.” After ten weeks of the exercise of *lectio divina*, this same group returned with a 1.52 point assessment showing a relatively strong agreement with the same statement. This difference made it clear that growth was occurring concerning the participants’ desire for the word of God and the life that it radiated.

Regarding their responses to statement 3 of this section, “I participate in a fast on a regular basis,” I observed a .16 point decrease and did not render the decrease as a relevant reflection of growth to the project. This discovery bothered me because all responses between the pre-session and post-session assessments ranged in the “I mildly disagree with this statement” area. I had personally taught the spiritual discipline of fasting to some of these individuals. Apparently, the discipline of fasting was one with which they were familiar but not one in which they placed any value or which they chose to practice.

Pertaining to their responses to statement 2 of this section, “I look forward to a daily time spent with God,” I observed a decrease of .09 points. I did not consider this difference relevant to my research. I did note, however, the moderately low level of response, 1.58 to 1.67, indicating that there was already a significant agreement with the statement, “I look forward to a daily time spent with God.” This again gives evidence that these individuals, for the most part, had maintained a deep hunger for the things of God, even in the midst of their pain and difficulty. This is not to suggest that this project *per se* had succeeded in this area, but it does suggest that the desired goals of seeing these individuals hunger for the things of God was successful.

Statement 5 in this section of goals was “I have a daily prayer time.” I was disappointed with a decrease of .08 points. This revealed a mild agreement with the statement. I had hoped that the response would move from a mild to a strong agreement. In the open-ended questions section of the post-session assessments, however, all participants mentioned that they exercised a daily time of prayer. Although I cannot correlate the apparent discrepancy between the two areas of response, I believe that these

participants exercise a conversational prayer life as a matter-of-fact practice and therefore, they consider such practice as being neither notable nor special. In other words, daily prayer is such a normal occurrence in their lives that it does not rate special note in their understanding.

Regarding the success or lack thereof concerning my goals about the participants' knowledge and participation in spiritual disciplines, I deem my findings overall as mildly successful. Through personal observations, I discovered that all of the participants exhibited an interest in the concept of spiritual disciplines, particularly *lectio divina*. The practice of *lectio divina* interested them because it presented a viable way to carry out daily devotions. It allowed them to sense that they were still useable by God. In essence, I believe the participants appreciated the sense of knowing that God could speak through His word directly to and through each of them.

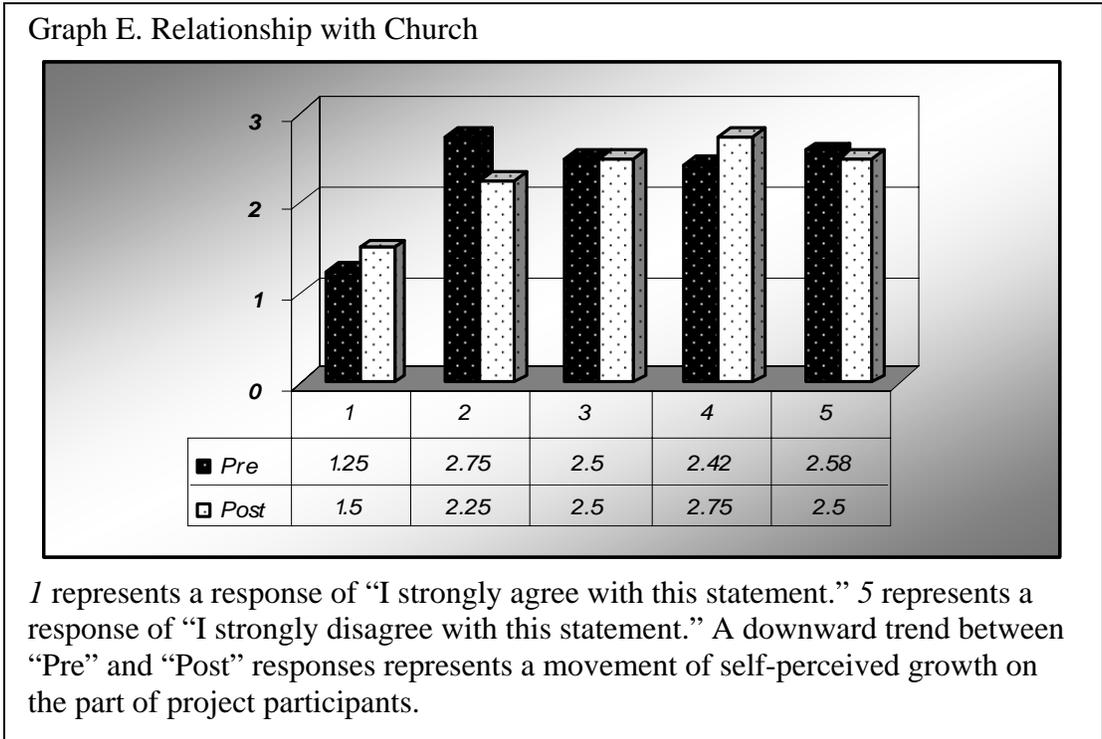
Results of Goal Concerning Relationship with Church (Graph E)

I did not expect great results in this set of goals. I knew that wounds were deep and that healing would take longer than the ten weeks I had set aside for this project. Nevertheless, I had a goal of seeing the project participants reacquainted with needed church fellowship. The statements addressed in the assessments read as follows and are graphed from left to right respectively in Graph E:

1. I see myself as a spiritual/religious person.
2. I am excited when I hear the word "church."
3. I feel safe at church.
4. I have a good relationship with the church.
5. I am actively involved in my church.

To statement 2, "I am excited when I hear the word 'church,'" there was a minor amount of growth indicated by a .5 point difference. This was surprising because the

project did not include any teaching regarding church *per se*; instead, there were purposed readings regarding one’s relationship with Christ and with one another. It is my observation that our times of meeting together on a weekly basis brought a restoration of their desire for fellowship.



Regarding statement 4, “I have a good relationship with the church,” there was a variance of .33. While this is a positive variance, indicating a lack of growth, it is difficult to know properly how to evaluate the finding. It is my opinion from the observations I made and recorded, that there was no further disdain for the church and for having a relationship with it; instead, there was a realization on the part of participants that their hurt from the church had effectually removed them from needed relationships and community. On this basis, even though the assessment results showed a lack of growth in the area of good relationship with the church, I count the findings as a realization of what should be rather than a disdain for what was. Again, long term observations may bear this

out. Regarding their attitudes toward the church, however, I was surprised by the degree in which the participants responded negatively to the concept of church *per se*. This response was in accordance to the research I had performed and indicated a deep hurt and distrust for the church. Again, I was deeply moved by the thought that their distance from the church did not equate a distance from God; they were able to distinguish between God and the church.

Regarding statement 1 in this section, "I see myself as a spiritual/religious person," I observed an increase in their response by .25. Because of this low degree of difference, I did not consider this variance significant. Both responses, however, were not surprising; I knew these individuals to be good people and did not expect to see a change in their attitudes regarding how they observed themselves.

Concerning statement 5, "I am actively involved in my church," there was a minimal difference of .08 between the responses. I also did not see this difference as significant. The mild responses of 2.5 and 2.58, however, lent further credence to my observation that the participants in my project have been hurt by the church and its leadership and therefore hold themselves distant from and apathetic toward the church.

Regarding statement 3, "I feel safe at church," the assessments indicated that there was an attitude of non-concern regarding this issue. That is to say that there was neither an excitement nor a disdain in the participants' regard for their personal safety within the church. This emotion did not waiver in the ten-week project.

Concerning my goal regarding the participants' relationships with church, I find the project inconclusive. I do not render the work and expectations in this area as invalid; instead, the results were expected, knowing that relationships with the church would take

time to mend. Perhaps a better perception of this set of goals would be that the results were inconclusive based upon the observable time allotment. It is my desire that additional time will show a complete healing of trust on the behalf of these participants toward the church.

Conclusion

My assessment of this entire project is that it was a success. The ultimate goal of seeing my family, my friends, and me re-engaged in viable Christian growth was realized. Many of the individuals in the project are now involved in the local congregation that I pastor. Their presence allows me to continue to monitor their growth. There are still some within the group who have not yet reconnected with a local congregation. They have been confronted with their need for community.

Obviously, there exists a need to engage these participants in longer-lasting observation in order to evaluate properly their continued well-being in Christian community. For some this is possible; for others it is not. It thus becomes my prayer that everyone involved in this project will receive God's watchful eye and protection.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

As I write this document, I am awaiting the birth of my fourth grandchild. He will arrive any day now, and I anticipate both a healthy delivery for him and joy for my daughter, Crystal and her husband, David. Because I have already raised three children to adulthood, I am familiar with many aspects regarding this newest grandson and his entry into our world. There are other facets, however, that will cause me to stand in awe, no matter how much I may think I know about the subject of babies.

At the same time, I am considering the fact that I have two other grandchildren on the way. My son, Jamie, and his wife, Crystal, are expecting a baby girl in May, and my daughter, Amber, and her husband, Eddie, are preparing for the birth of their second child in September. Each of our expectancies — my own as well as those of my children and grandchildren — are certain to hold a few surprises in the outcome.

This opening monologue serves as an introduction to my summary and conclusion. There were several aspects of my project wherein I knew what to expect. At least I thought I did. There were other portions wherein I was surprised by my findings. Still other facets served as woeful reminders that some expectancies do not turn out the way one may hope. Overall, I consider this project a success. I realize that I learned a great deal about God, others, and myself. Additionally, I learned that not everything turns out as it had been planned and anticipated.

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the

Toledo, Ohio area who had expressed their beliefs that they had been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church and, correspondingly, were relatively uninvolved in church. The research question that was addressed was: Could restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the conclusions I have gleaned from this project and study. This chapter also allows an opportunity for reflection on some of the outcomes of this project and study including conclusions, dynamics, implications, and insights. Additionally, it allows me to voice possible future work.

The outline of this chapter is:

- Introduction
- Reflections
- Applications
- Suggested further study
- Personal goals
- Conclusion

Reflections

Results

Project Design

The design of my project was such that I was able to accomplish several goals with a single venture. For one, I was able to reunite with several old friends for a time of fellowship. I sensed that proper companionship was a missing ingredient in their lives because of their dispersal from the church. The simple concept of fellowship, however, was as far as the project intentionally reached into a community aspect. I did not add certain controllable facets that would have enhanced camaraderie because I did not want

to skew my findings concerning *lectio divina*. I knew that such friendship was a critical issue needed for the healing from perceived spiritual abuse for these individuals.

However, I also knew that I wanted to limit the influence of fellowship as much as possible so that I could focus critically on *lectio divina*. It was with intentionality, therefore, that I sought to reduce outside influences such as serving refreshments and participating in corporate singing. I conducted the weekly one-hour meetings with such restrictions because I felt the focus was narrowed appropriately to group *lectio divina*.

In retrospect, there was one aspect of the project that I would change if I conducted the project again. The journaling facet did not turn out as I had anticipated. The journal entries were so personal that the participants were not comfortable submitting their journals to me. I improvised, however, and issued a handout of relevant thought provoking questions with reference to the participants' journals. A smaller-than-intended amount of material was yielded. This material was insightful. It did hinder my assessment somewhat in the fact that I did not receive as much material as I wanted. If a similar project is to be performed in the future, a handout of thought provoking questions should be distributed solely to gain insights from the participants. This handout could be given at the beginning of the project in addition to the assignment of journaling.

Assessment Tools and Procedures

The questionnaires regarding the journal entries were not the only tools used. I also included two identical questionnaires: one given at the first session of the project and the other given at the final session. These questionnaires sought responses concerning participants' relationships with God, perception of self, relationships with others, knowledge of and participation in spiritual disciplines, and relationships with the church.

Through the differences in responses between these two questionnaires, I was able to ascertain some of the self-perceived growth of each of the participants. In conjunction with the post-session assessment, I issued a survey with the following open-ended statements:

- Describe what you would consider an ideal devotional time.
- What hinders you from maintaining prayer and scripture reading time?
- Why do you seek prayer and scripture reading time?
- Do you practice a daily prayer and scripture reading time?

Through this open-ended portion of the final assessment, I was able to determine the self-perceived level of devotional life from each participant. While this did not necessarily tell me where the participants were in their relationship with God, it did allow me to glimpse into the efforts being made toward that relationship.

A final method of assessment was that of recording my weekly observations of the participants' involvement, reflections, and comments. My notes included records of body language, facial expressions, and verbal inflections. These various clues allowed me to observe subjectively the growth that was taking place within each individual. From what I observed in this project, I know that each participant matured.

Participants

The individuals assembled for this project were both needy and responsive. I originally desired to add more to our assembled cast because my sphere of ministry included many more than these select few. Obviously, not all those with whom I once had influence held the same needs as did this group. Many were healthy, and many others still stand in need of healing. I am saddened by their absence. Unless someone brings

healing to them or unless God performs a miracle, these individuals will continue to live their lives in pain, defeat, and bitterness. That being said, I am pleased with those who did participate in the project. Sixteen individuals gathered in one place on a weekly basis constitute enough people to create an exciting atmosphere. The smallness of the group also created a sense of safety that allowed those assembled to share openly and honestly.

Reasons

My intention for this project was to focus on the results of *lectio divina* in a small group setting as it was used to restore spiritual vitality to a group of people who felt they had been abandoned and abused by the church. I understood that community would play a part in the project but initially chose not to focus on it. Instead, I sought to immerse fully the participants in an one-hour session of *lectio divina* and nothing else. I felt that I was partially successful in this effort. One thing I did not realize at the beginning, however, was the impact that community would end up creating. Because of this noticeable impact, I shifted some of my research and writing to the subject of community. Fellowship played as much a part toward the project's success as did *lectio divina*. This was an important find. Even though I tried diligently to avoid the concept of community as an influence in my project, I discovered that community was an unavoidable and necessary aspect in the healing process.

Foundations for the Chapter

Lectio divina proved to be popular among the participants. Several acknowledged the difference the practice of *lectio divina* was making in their personal devotions. This fact fulfilled both a desire and expectation I held from the beginning of the project. I had

felt the participants' lack of familiarity with *lectio divina* would provide an impetus for interest among them. I also sensed they would appreciate something that was new to them. My assumptions were correct. What I did not anticipate, however, was that part of the appeal of *lectio divina* to the participants was found in the practice's simplicity. Several had been reared under a strong discipleship model that expressed the need for reading five chapters from the Bible each day accompanied by a forty-five minute to one-hour long session of prayer. The concept that they could read less, pray less, and come away having gained more spiritually was thrilling to the project participants.

Unexpected Observations

I did not fully anticipate the difference this project would make in these individuals, at least not within the set period of ten weeks. All participants exhibited growth and change in their relationship with God and with His word. All participants were eager to engage in the discussion of insights they received from a particular evening's readings. The individuals were not intimidated by one another's perceived level of spiritual maturity; nor were they conscious of one another's knowledge regarding the topic at hand on any particular evening. Instead, each was aware that the others were using their newly discovered gift of meditation and enthusiastically shared that gift through their discussion. This was noticed especially in one of the participants, Trish, who was a young Christian. Even as a young Christian in the middle ages of life, she expressed herself and her newly found insights with effervescence. All participants shared in her excitement and then expressed their own as well.

I was overwhelmed with the participants' obvious need for Christian community. I did not anticipate that particular inner need among the participants as strongly as it

showed itself. These people were hungry for Christian fellowship, and they voraciously engaged it. While I was surprised, I was also pleased. Their hunger made my project much easier.

Conclusions Drawn

It is my assessment that the entire project was successful. My ultimate goal of seeing these friends on the path to spiritual wholeness and re-engaged in viable Christian growth and community was realized. Some of the individuals in the project are now involved in my local congregation, the Oasis. This allows me, as their pastor, to continue to monitor their growth. There are still some within my project group, however, who have not yet reconnected with a local congregation. While I could deem this aspect as one lacking in success, I do know that these individuals are regularly connecting with other believers in some spiritual manner. They now are aware of their need for community.

In order to judge properly the continued well-being of these project participants in Christian community, a lengthier observation is needed. For some this is possible; for others it is not. It is my prayer that everyone involved in this project will receive God's watchful eye of protection, thus causing my project to become ultimately successful.

Suggested Dynamics

Could other assessment measures have been used, thus producing different results? Certainly! I could have altered the verbiage in the questionnaires and, therefore, rendered somewhat different results. I feel that the line of comments initially produced in the two questionnaires, however, was sufficient for the purpose of the limited project. I also could have offered worship music and snacks as part of the community-building

effort. I was not attempting to explore this avenue. Instead, my focus was on the utilization of *lectio divina* as a means to bring about healing and restoration to this special group of individuals who had been affected by spiritual abuse. Again, it should be noted that, even though I attempted to avoid means to encourage community, community developed and proved itself a vital part of the healing process.

At the beginning of this project, a better system also should have been devised for the journaling aspect. I am now aware of the deep sense of intimacy and privacy that is necessary for true, purposeful journaling. This awareness was not present prior to this endeavor. A revised system may have produced more detail in my conclusions. As it turned out, I feel that my findings were sufficient, particularly after I devised the alternative, thought-provoking questionnaire designed to draw comments from the journals.

Short-term projects such as the one I have undertaken are capable of producing relevant results. What they do not show, however, is evidence of long-term consequences. What short-term projects accomplish is that they sow seeds of future change, create seedbeds for future habits, and bring immediate relief to given situations much as a band-aid might do in the case of an injury. As the nature of this type of project suggests, short-term projects do not produce long-term results; instead, they simply initiate those results. In my brief assignment, I observed that permanent results had been initiated. It is only through long-term observation measured specifically over many months and years that permanent results can be properly assessed. It was not in the scope of this venture to devote such long-term observation to these individuals. I have established with some of my project participants, however, a renewed relationship

wherein I can make some of those longer-term observations. Weekly, I am witnessing continued growth in these few individuals as they continue to use *lectio divina*.

One aspect that has been very influential in the acceptance of *lectio divina* as a tool for spiritual healing and growth has been its freshness. My project participants had been familiar with only one type of daily devotion. They affectionately knew it as “Kamikaze Discipleship” because the practitioners dedicated themselves to a minimum of forty-five minutes of daily devotions including prayer and the act of reading five chapters from the Bible. This rigid sense of personal time usually acted as a detractor from instead of an attractor to a relationship with God. The discipleship model as they knew it set goals that many felt unattainable, discouraging, and thus, unrealistic. *Lectio divina*, however, was seen as something attainable, encouraging, and realistic. In addition, the novelty of *lectio divina* made it fun. It is my assessment that persons who have been reared in evangelical circles, particularly Pentecostal ones, are open to the various spiritual disciplines such as *lectio divina*. I will continue to use *lectio divina* and to encourage others to use it in the future for spiritual growth.

Implications

While I cannot say that these individuals were healed from the hurts of spiritual abuse, I can assert that such healing has begun. I believe that true and firm healing will be a long process, possibly measured in years instead of weeks or months. However, to quote Lao Tzu (or some say, Confucius,) “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step” (Lao Tzu n.d.). In all of the project participants, the healing has begun. They have been issued proper tools to continue their healing process through the practice of *lectio divina* and through the realization that Christian community is a necessary aspect

of their continued healing and growth. They have also re-established some ties with other believers through our ten-week project. I pray that each participant will continue to take part in a regular spiritual discipline and in their search for and engagement in Christian community.

Another implication from this project is that spiritual abuse is a real problem. Although I cannot properly assess whether all of the participants in the project have been spiritually abused, I can attest to the fact that each of them felt they had been abused. Most of their experiences include cases of being belittled spiritually at the hands of a spiritual leader, being used and then cast aside, and being presented with unattainable goals for the purpose of building some pastor's personal kingdom (instead of the Kingdom of God.) In Chapter Two and Chapter Three, I explored some biblical references to spiritual abuse and observed how God views those situations. God's view of spiritual abuse has not changed over the years and He, too, is heart-broken over the spiritual and emotional condition of those who have been wounded by spiritual abuse. Although the process of healing from spiritual abuse is one that must be worked through by the victim, it is done so by the empowerment of God Himself.

In addition, I personally witnessed the spiritual abuse of some of these participants. These individuals were drained of their energies for the goal of promoting a kingdom. Unfortunately, that kingdom was not fully the Kingdom of God. It was partially the kingdom of a particular leader. In these situations, it is impossible to go back and undo what has been done. It is possible, however, to initiate a restorative work wherein the damage done may be reversed. This project has allowed me to be an instrument in the restoration of some of these individuals. This process, of which I am a part, is the apex of

my doctoral project. It excites me to know, observe, and be a part of a situation wherein spiritual abuse can be overcome and healed.

I, however, am but a small part of that healing. None of this process could be worked without the benefit of Christian community. The project participants made me acutely aware of their need for one another. It is implied within the project that Christian growth is impossible apart from Christian community. This is not to suggest that community is simply a part of one's Christian faith. Instead, I have learned that community and Christianity are linked inextricably.

Insights

I found this project to be interesting, insightful, and encouraging. As stated earlier, I assessed the levels of growth through two identical questionnaires, open-ended questions, perusal of journal comments, and personal observations made during the project. Although the objective tools proved to be a great asset to my evaluations, the subjective observations I made of each participant provided me with some of my greatest insight and encouragement. The change that was occurring within the various individuals was apparent on their countenances and in their voices.

Application

Personal Findings

Some participants were victims of spiritual abuse. I witnessed and may have contributed, in part, to that abuse. I think one of the reasons why I desired to do this project is because I may have inadvertently contributed to the spiritual abuse of some. Admittedly, part of the work of this project was the personal healing that began in me. In

other words, I am not only a witness to the healing of spiritual abuse; I am also an ongoing product of such healing. Not only that, I am a reformed abuser who has seen the damages that have been inflicted upon himself and who further sees evidence of the damages he has been a part of inflicting upon others. Because of the healing that is taking place in me, I can be an instrument in the restoration of others for whom I was a part of the wounding process.

Other Application of Findings

One of the greatest findings from this project has been the discovery of a vast number of people formerly associated with churches who have been victims of spiritual abuse and who are, at best, marginally involved with the church. They have been hurt, yet they continue to walk around in their pain. They no longer trust the church or its leadership. They have no desire to become involved again; in fact, they equate church involvement with pain. This scenario is one that I am finding through further reading and observation to be increasingly true.

The good news from this scenario, however, is that most damaged individuals have been able to disassociate the actions of the church and its leadership from the actions of God Himself. They still desire to experience the things of God as well as to have a relationship with Him. They simply lack the understanding of how to walk in this relationship. The best news is that full restoration of relationship with God can take place. Certainly, the practice of *lectio divina* in a small group setting is one way to encounter God and to respond to His invitation to relationship with Him.

Further Study

Areas of Additional Research

Several aspects of my project and studies could be springboards for further research. One concerns Robert Mulholland's sixth facet of *lectio divina, incarnatio* (Mulholland 1993, 112). The outward change that is displayed in *incarnatio* would make excellent fodder for either another project or a long-term extension of my current project. Again, *incarnatio* is defined as an "en-fleshment" or living externally what one possesses internally. My goal was simply to re-establish the connectivity between the believers within my group and the Lord. I excluded Mulholland's step of *incarnatio* from my project. The exercise of *incarnatio*, however, would allow tangible fruit from *lectio divina* to manifest among the community of Christ and among the world-at-large.

Another project could explore specifically the dimensions of community and its effect on individuals in the healing process. For my project, I intentionally limited aspects that would have greatly enhanced community. I did so in order to focus solely on *lectio divina*. I do believe, however, that intentional provisions for fellowship can greatly enhance the healing process. For one, community thrusts the participants into an inherent aspect of Christianity: fellowship. For another, it presents the pattern of church life that God established instead of the political aspect of the modern church that God did not. Finally, true Christian community allows God the platform through which to supply one's needs. These above-mentioned areas of research pertaining to my project are possible needs. There are other extensions of my project, however, that someone else may contemplate engaging in for the purpose of further Doctoral studies.

Other Potential D. Min. Projects

One such aspect of further exploration is that of using other and, perhaps, combinations of, spiritual disciplines to re-establish one's relationship with God. *Lectio divina* holds no monopoly regarding what is effective and what is not. For a more complete understanding of various methods of spiritual discipline, readers are referred to Richard Foster's informational book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, in which he lists several spiritual disciplines used to draw the practitioner closer in relationship with Christ.

Another possibility for further research is that of training pastors and church leaders in the awareness and prevention of spiritual abuse. It is my firm belief, and one that was substantiated through my readings, that most spiritual abusers do not engage in spiritual abuse intentionally. These leaders, in fact, are relatively naïve to the concept that they are producing damage among their parishioners. A series of creative seminars could be prepared and delivered with the purpose of leadership education and spiritual abuse prevention.

A final recommendation for further research is that of educating parishioners concerning the danger of spiritual abuse and some preventative measures they can exercise. There are personality predispositions that some individuals possess wherein they make themselves vulnerable for spiritual abuse. Further study could explore this conditioning, and aggressive teaching could be prepared to make the individuals aware of such predispositions. If I had been more aware of the dangers and of the pre-conditioning I had groomed within myself, I may have prevented some personal pain as well as pain in others.

Personal Goals

It is to that end, resolving the divergence my life took along the path of spiritual abuse, that I draw these conclusions. As stated in Chapter One, the original intent of this project began nobly: to see the spiritual vitality of a select group of individuals restored through *lectio divina*. Another important element, however, was obvious to me. My family and I also stood in need of restoration of spiritual vitality. It was, therefore, a personal goal that my family would once again be restored to a place of spiritual vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ. No longer would we minister solely out of duty and calling; instead, we would minister out of joy and a desire to please Him.

In addition, because of my years of hermeneutical, theological, homiletic, and linguistic training, I found it difficult to read the word of God for simple, devotional value. Therefore, my goal was to employ modified *lectio divina*, utilizing classic writings of the great spiritual writers, as a devotional basis to walk once again in restored spiritual vitality. Thus, my itemized personal goals for this project were:

- My wife, three children, and I would be restored to a place of vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ by using *lectio divina*.
- I would once again minister out of joy and a desire to please God.
- I would once again hold a daily desire to read, enjoy, and allow the word of God to be applied to my personal life.

My family and I grew through this time of *lectio divina*. Some things I learned about myself would not have been realized if I had not participated. For one, until this project I did not comprehend that I, too, had felt abused and misused. I discovered that I did not feel that I measured up to the stature Christ designated for me. As I participated in this project, I realized that I did not have to measure up. In fact, I could not do so alone. It

was only through the enabling power of Christ that any of us measure up.

God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so that we can do the good things he planned for us long ago. (Eph 2:8-10, NLT)

I additionally realized that God had enabled me with a gifting to lead others into an experience of spiritual healing. This leading came first because I was willing to be led into an encounter of healing. This was followed by a desire to lead others to a place of similar occurrence. Most of my family followed this same path to a deeper, healing relationship with God. The only exception in my family was my son who was one hundred miles away and could not participate with the rest of us. While this was a disappointment, it provides me with an impetus to conduct a similar project without time constraints in order to see others, including my son, receive spiritual healing through *lectio divina* and other spiritual disciplines.

Overall, I deem my goal of personal healing and growth as successful because I have seen a transformation in my family and in myself. I once again desire to read the word of God for what it can and will do in me. I feel that I can once again minister out of joy and a desire to please Him instead of mere duty and discipline.

Conclusion

I have discovered that, in some ways, I did not choose the subject for my project; it chose me. I say this because I am the sum of all the integrated parts of my history, learning, heredity, and experience. Together, these parts totaled into a need in my life to change and to help implement change in others. I have been privileged to conduct the research for this project, and further, to conduct the project with the goal of influencing

others as well as myself in a period of healing from spiritual abuse and of growth in Jesus Christ. Although this at-large task is not complete, my established short-term period of study and project has ended. I believe that proper instruction and practice have been implemented within the project participants and that lasting change has been initiated. I know that such change has begun in my life. Thus, it is with the words of Henri Nouwen that I conclude this paper, and that I launch forth into a renewed aspect of my journey: “Those things which seem like interruptions in one’s life may actually be opportunities for developing and maturing one’s innermost being” (Nouwen 1975, 53). God has taken those interruptions in my life and has turned them into opportunities for not only the development and maturing of my innermost being, but also for ministry to others. May God be richly praised and highly exalted in all healing efforts.

APPENDIX 1

PROJECT PROPOSAL

EXPLORING THE FEASIBILITY OF *LECTIO DIVINA* AS A TOOL FOR RESTORING SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN FORMER CHURCH ATTENDEES

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believe they have been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church and, thus, are relatively uninvolved in church.

The research question posed in this project is: Can restoration of spiritual vitality be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*?

Overview

The focus of this project is to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality upon a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believe they have been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. They are relatively uninvolved in church. Specifically, this project will focus on the development of a new spiritual habit of *lectio divina* among these participants in order to restore their relationship and vitality with Jesus Christ.

Participants will gather in a small group setting and will be provided with both instructions and demonstrations of a modified version of *lectio divina*. This effort will take place in weekly sessions for a period of ten weeks. Comparison of pre-session and post-session self-evaluations will be used to assess the development of each participant's

growth. Individual journaling will be used in this assessment. In addition, I will observe each participant and will record weekly assessments of where I perceive each individual might be in the restoration journey. My goal for this assessment is not to measure the depth of restoration, but instead, to measure the progress of such.

Rationale

Personal Rationale

My experience informs me this project is significant because the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* has proven effective in my own life. Although I once did not comprehend the activity by its Latin name, I did understand it by another: “devotional reading.” It is through such devotional reading of spiritual authors and of the Bible that I have witnessed both personal growth and growth in the lives of others.

Through my research of *lectio divina*, I have observed that the historical practice of such has been primarily for individual situations. I will be conducting group *lectio divina*, a relatively new practice, because I believe that the exercise will be enhanced by the dynamic of a small group. In addition to the enhanced dynamic, this small group interaction will be an initial step toward church involvement, a necessary aspect of one’s vitality in Christ.

In addition, these individuals with whom I will be working are important to me. As their youth pastor and closest spiritual leader for ten developmental years, my wife and I have a responsibility to nurture those who were left behind. We planted spiritual seeds into these lives and witnessed fruit from that labor. Unfortunately, we also have seen that fruit come to a halt since our departure in 2000. When we left, our advocacy on behalf of these individuals within the local church ceased. Although I am aware of the

need to leave a people behind once one has concluded his/her pastoring of them, I also understand that these were vulnerable individuals who felt spiritually abandoned in a sudden and unexpected manner. One author has stated:

Spiritual [abandonment] has a devastating effect on people. A very high level of trust is often placed in spiritual leaders. It is, and ought to be, expected that the trust will be honored and guarded. When such trust is violated, the wound is very deep. Sometimes the wound is so deep that the wounded person cannot trust even a legitimate spiritual authority again. (Henke 1996)

It is my sincere desire to see these selected individuals overcome this distrust, once again have confidence in spiritual authority, and re-engage in a growing relationship of vitality in Jesus Christ.

Biblical Rationale

The Bible indicates that the written word of God is given to its audience with a distinct purpose. That purpose is clearly delineated in Hebrews 4:12, “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.” This project is therefore deemed important because *lectio divina* will incorporate a reading of both scripture and spiritual writers. The scriptures will serve the purpose of clearly addressing the vitality of the believer from the standpoint of an Addressee (God) who strongly desires for His people to know truth and to walk in guidance. Jesus, in His well-known prayer for unity spoke these words regarding the validity of the message of God, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). This truth and corresponding guidance will be used to draw these willing participants into renewed vitality in Christ.

In addition, I have developed a deeper Biblical comprehension that God does not

intend for any of His people to be nurtured or restored in a vacuum. He has given each of us the greater body of Christ, fellow believers, to act as community intertwined in each other's lives. Supporting interaction of community, one author stated:

None of us on the Christian path is ever a lone traveler. We always journey with companions at our side, before us, and trailing behind us. A great cloud of witnesses (Heb. 12:1), a communion of saints both living and departed, surrounds us. There is no such thing as a solitary Christian, which is both a descriptive reality and a great grace. To be a Christian means we are part of the body of Christ. The local communities in which we live out our faith give faces and names to our companions on the journey. (Dean 1998, 124)

The purpose of this community, therefore, is to love one another and to be concerned for one another. We are not called to nurture our salvation in an exclusive, stand-alone manner. It is further evidenced in Philippians 2:1 that Christians are indeed to work in tandem with one another in mutual fellowship with and encouragement of one another: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you [plural] have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence— (you [plural]) continue to work out your [plural] salvation with fear and trembling . . .”

Historical Rationale

The historical rationale of this project is significant because the various spiritual disciplines have played a strong role in the shaping of the lives of believers throughout the centuries. Due to the current practices of various ascetic Christians, to the writings of pertinent mystical spiritual authors such as Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Robert Mulholland, and others, and to the resurgence of the search for ancient paths of spirituality, there is a corresponding renewal of interest in the various spiritual disciplines. It is because of these values and this interest that I will be using the discipline of *lectio divina* to guide my audience into a position of restoration of spiritual vitality.

The practice of *lectio divina* is a historically proven avenue of helping the believer draw closer to God and of having Him to draw closer to the practitioner:

The earliest Christians practiced a form of *lectio divina*. For example, in about 250 A.D. Cyprian of Carthage wrote a letter to a man named Donatus and suggested he be, "Constant in prayer as in reading; speak with God, then let him speak with you. Let him instruct you in his precepts, let him direct you."

The *lectio divina* method has been advocated and practiced by a wide range of Christians over the centuries, including the Benedictine monks, Martin Luther and John Wesley. (Hughes 2004)

It is through the practice of such discipline that I believe the restoration of spiritual vitality can flow to the project participants.

Thérèse de Lisieux has stated that the prayer aspect of *lectio divina* is "a vast, supernatural force which opens out [the] heart, and binds [one] close to Jesus" (Collins 1995, 147). This is the result I hope to achieve. In addition, I believe that great cleansing and edification can take place through this practice as these individuals read both scriptures and short passages of those great works produced by saints both present and prior.

Furthermore, there is a renewed focus on the concept of community within the body of Christ. It is clear throughout history that the value of companionship and friendship has brought spiritually minded individuals through the toughest, most difficult times of their lives. Rarely, if ever, have individuals successfully acted alone in the history of the Church. Additionally, the Biblical record similarly indicates that individuals seldom succeeded alone in any journey or endeavor (i.e. Moses and Aaron, Esther and Mordecai, etc).

Theological Rationale

My theological understanding indicates that spiritual vitality and wholeness arrive

through practical, spiritual exercise. Indeed, Paul has reminded us that we are to “train [ourselves] to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Timothy 4:7-8 NIV). This is the theological concept of spiritual discipline or exercise. I concur with another author who stated:

[This type of] ministry does not merely “incorporate” spiritual disciplines into a curriculum... It is a spiritually disciplined way of life through which Christians of all ages draw sustenance from the deep wells of historic Christian practice. By the grace of God, we practice the “ways of perfection”—not because practice helps us get it right, but because practice helps us “get it,” period. (Dean 1998, 120)

It is important that the people of God move beyond getting it right. Thus, it is important for the spiritual disciplines to be explored and practiced. For the purpose of this study, I will focus on the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*.

Additionally, there is a matter of using a new vocabulary with individuals in this project. The book, *Cadences of Home: Preaching Among Exiles*, records that there is a special language to be enlisted among those observed as exiles (including those wounded by perceived abandonment and abuse.) This vocabulary occurred all throughout the Old Testament, particularly but not exclusively in the writings of the prophets (Brueggemann 1997, 2). It is for this reason that I have chosen to use guided *lectio divina*. These wounded individuals (exiles) are in need of hearing a different voice as it speaks to them of their restoration. These targeted persons are individuals who have never been corporately exposed to the classical spiritual disciplines; therefore, *lectio divina* will appear as a distinctive voice. The aforementioned spiritual authors, (Walter Brueggemann, Thérèse de Lisieux, Dallas Willard, Richard Foster, Robert Mulholland, and others), have experienced this restoration and can effectively proclaim an appeal to

the reader in a new vocabulary.

Finally, it is part of the salvific nature of God to bring His people back into relationship with Himself. The Apostle Peter reminds his audience, “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). As a part of the *missio Dei* (mission of God), God has made this commitment to redeeming the lost. Clearly, that mission encompasses the wounded as well. God wants these individuals restored with spiritual vitality.

Contemporary Rationale

The current situation in the modern church informs me that this project is important. Accordingly, the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have proven to be times of turmoil within the church. Frequently, one hears media reports of sexual abuse in connection with the church (Heilemann, 2005). The world has also seen the toppling of major ministries due to sin and moral failure on the part of these ministries’ respective leaders (Riser). It is not surprising that many are turning away from the church. It is clear that in spite of the enormous growth of mega-churches (Thumma 2001), many smaller congregations are struggling with attendance (O’Bryan). It is important that these churches and individuals are guided to a supportive foundation upon which believers can be strengthened and encouraged.

In addition, these particular, targeted individuals find themselves fitting within the pattern of those typically affected by authoritarian abandonment or abuse. They are young adults who stand in need of self-direction, purpose, and an external, authoritative source to provide a framework for their lives (Enroth 1979, 48). When they feel

neglected, misused, abandoned, or abused, as was the case in these with whom I will be working, they are wounded and left with a feeling of abandonment and loss of hope. A decree needs to be proclaimed amidst those in leadership ministries that their people are in need of genuine, caring shepherds to love and to nurture them. In addition, it has been stated that individuals “do not have to rebel or walk away from [their] faith” (Moreland 2005, 73). It is with these thoughts that I embark on a journey to attempt to bring the restoration of spiritual vitality to this contemporary group of people whom God genuinely loves and for whom He authentically cares.

Rationale Conclusion

I anticipate that using this platform of *lectio divina* in a small group setting will bring about the desired and expected results in these young adults. They will be stronger in mind, body, and spirit. As an additional result, they will once again engage in a relationship with God and their spiritual vitality will be restored.

Context

Several aspects need to be addressed concerning the context of this ministry. First is the location of this particular project. Toledo, Ohio is the area where my wife and I were able to minister in various capacities to this group of people for a period of approximately ten years. These individuals were a part of a Neo-Pentecostal/ Charismatic church in which strong emphasis was given to the experience of worship, the confrontational preaching of the word of God, and the dynamics of small groups.

These persons are of varied social, economic, and educational backgrounds. Included among them are those with minimal high school education as well as those with

college degrees. Additionally, there are individuals with six-figure incomes as well as those with minimum-wage salaries. Racially, the group includes those who are of Caucasian, Hispanic, African-American, and mixed descent. Although these individuals were once a part of the youth ministry in Toledo, there is little if any interaction between them at this time. Furthermore, most are either not involved or peripherally involved in church. Nothing of further, particular importance regarding this area or this people sets them apart from any other area or people. These simply served as the locale and group wherein we interacted with one another.

Secondly, young adults are explored for two separate reasons. Initially, there is a tremendous burden within me to minister to this particular age group. I have had a personal calling to teens and young adults for more than thirty years. I feel that this target audience has been positioned by both media and society in such a manner that these same young adults are equipped with knowledge, yet are highly inexperienced in utilizing that knowledge.

Furthermore, this audience is part of a targeted demographic distinction that stands as particularly interesting to various media and advertising influences. They are vulnerable stemming from inexperienced knowledge. In support of this concept:

For early critics, the media was seen as the means whereby the interests associated with business and industry manipulated the 'masses' by the use of popular forms of entertainment... Karl Marx had talked of the way that those who owned industry also controlled the means of cultural producing. This interpretation was widely accepted in the 'cultural industry' understanding of popular or mass culture. Religion may have declined in significance, but now it is television which has become the opiate of the masses. (Ward 1999, 83)

In addition, this is a segmented group upon whom I invested ten years of my ministry life attempting to divert them away from such media and societal manipulation.

Finally, I am working with this group in the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* for the following reason: because they are from a Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, they are unfamiliar with the practice of such. It is my quest to see if the lack of familiarity of such a practice combined with the historically evidenced value of the same can be used effectively to bring about change.

Significant Terms

This project addresses the use of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting. The desire is to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believe that they have been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. They are relatively uninvolved in church. Specifically, this project will focus on the development of a new spiritual habit of devotional reading, *lectio divina*, among these participants in order to restore their relationship and vitality with Jesus Christ. Terms significant to this project include the following:

Abandonment and abuse: For the purposes of this project, *abandonment and abuse* will be defined as designated by the Watchman Expositor:

[Spiritual abandonment and abuse] is the misuse of a position of power, leadership, or influence to further the selfish interests of someone other than the individual who needs help. ... Spiritually abusive religious systems are sometimes described as legalistic, mind controlling, religiously addictive, and authoritarian. (Henke 1996)

Lectio Divina: For the purposes of this project, *lectio divina* will be defined as one writer characterized it: “a posture of approach and a means of encounter with a text that enables the text to become a place of transforming encounter with God” (Mulholland 1993, 112). This ancient activity of spiritual reading guides the reader in a four-step process: *lectio* [reading], *meditatio* [meditation], *oratio* [prayer], *contemplatio*

[contemplation]. I will use a modified six-step process that incorporates these original four, an additional step known as *silencio* [silence] that will preface the other steps (Mulholland 1993, 112), and a sixth step that I refer to simply as “journaling,” [private, introspective recording of the assimilation process of those things heard, read, and pondered in *lectio divina*]. Again, my six-step process will include *lectio* [reading], *meditatio* [meditation], *oratio* [prayer], *contemplatio* [contemplation], *silencio* [silence], and journaling [keeping a diary/journal].

Restoration: For the purposes of this project, *restoration* is defined as a specific actuality to take place within those individuals with whom I am practicing *lectio divina*.

The best indicator, perhaps, that one belongs to Christ and is a part of His body, the Church, is not the reception of baptism nor even participating in the Lord’s Supper—though these sacraments are clearly valuable—but union with Christ through a faith that is active in love. (Collins 1995, 114)

In some instances, I have referred to this as “engagement.” In others, I have used the phrase, “restoration of spiritual vitality;” therefore, I summarize “restoration” by stating that it is a relational engagement of the individual with God.

Spiritual Disciplines: For the purposes of this project, *spiritual disciplines* will be defined as those techniques utilized for the purpose of positioning the believer for a close encounter with God. The various disciplines include fasting, *lectio divina*, meditation, prayer, and other tools for said positioning. It must be noted that these techniques are neither for the function of manipulating God nor for the attainment of any great accomplishment on the part of the practitioner. They are simply positioning tools for the believer. A good source for a deeper study of the spiritual disciplines is Richard Foster’s *Celebration of Discipline*.

Rumination: For the purposes of this project, *rumination* will be defined as that

process which is mirrored within the believer as s/he reads and meditates upon the word of God, or upon spiritual writings. As the reading is processed, perused, pondered, settled, and repeated, it eventually becomes spiritual life-sustenance to the believer. Ruminantion is paralleled with meditation.

Project Goals

The purpose of this project is to use the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina* in a small group setting to restore spiritual vitality to a group of former church persons in the Toledo, Ohio area who believe that they have been abandoned and abused by the institution of the church. They are relatively uninvolved in church. The goals of this project are that these selected individuals will:

1. Know how to use the modified techniques of *lectio divina* as a daily, devotional practice.
2. Modify a personal practice of *lectio divina*, for the purpose of deeper engagement in their relationship with God.
3. Benefit from the struggles, wisdom, and direction of historical spiritual writers in order to gain a renewed perspective of God's grace, forgiveness, and wholeness.
4. Continue to utilize, develop, and promote the practice of *lectio divina* within their personal lives.
5. Have a greater sense of intimacy with God and of His desired intimacy with them through reading, prayer, meditation, and contemplation.
6. Re-engage in a growing, vibrant, daily experience of a relationship with God.
7. Develop their spiritual vitality beyond that level wherein they once interacted with God.

Design and Procedure

The research question posed in this project is: Can restoration of spiritual vitality

be activated within a small group through the understanding and practice of the spiritual discipline of *lectio divina*? The design of this project is to develop a qualitative and quantitative analysis of a process of devotional guidance using a singular spiritual discipline.

The procedure for the project will be as follows:

First, prospective participants will be approached concerning this project. This will include all former youth, youth leaders, and parents of youth who were actively involved in the youth ministry that my wife, Cheri, and I pastored in the Toledo, Ohio area between the years 1990 and 2000. Another specification of these individuals is that they are no longer involved in Christian ministry. This approach will be done through personal contact, a phone call, email, and/or a letter sent to each individual inviting him/her to participate. Those who are willing to participate will receive a letter with specific information regarding the time and location of these ten meetings.

Second, a pre-session assessment will be administered to each participating individual. The purpose is to gather necessary information regarding their current Christian commitment, current Christian involvement, current engagement in relationship with Christ, and current awareness of the various spiritual disciplines, especially *lectio divina*.

Third, instructions regarding the method of procedure for the project will be given to participating individuals. It should be noted that this will be the only instructional session of the project. All other sessions will be the guided practice of *lectio divina*. The six steps of the modified *lectio divina* to be taught are:

1. *Silencio* - a brief time of centering oneself for the purpose set before him/her.

2. *Lectio* - Guided devotional/spiritual reading for the evening.
3. *Meditatio* - Meditation/rumination on that which has been read.
4. *Oratio* - A prayer of devotion and surrender.
5. *Contemplatio* - Contemplation of what has been read, what it means to the hearer, and what action/decision needs to be performed as a response to that reading.
6. *Journaling* - An opportunity to save those thoughts and responses in a tangible manner for the purpose of later self-evaluation and observation. This also provides me with a viable and observable insight into the thinking and growth processes of the participants. It should be noted that individuals will not be required to furnish their names when they submit their journals. I will state, however, why I desire to observe those writings: in order to observe each individual's personal self-observation.

Fourth, the ten-week project utilizing the modified methodology of *lectio divina* as outlined will begin. The modified six-step process used in a daily manner is intended to lead all participants into a revitalization of their relationship with Jesus Christ. It will also provide them with an ingrained routine of the daily exercise of deepening and enhancing their relationship with God.

Fifth, personal insights regarding that which I can observe about each individual regarding his/her spiritual level and growth along the journey will be assessed while s/he is going through the ten-week project. It is understood that these insights are highly subjective, but they will be compared with each individual's journal entries regarding their progress at a later point in the project.

Sixth, a post-session self-assessment will be administered at the conclusion of the ten-week project. This assessment will be identical to the pre-session assessment. The information gathered from these two will be quantitatively compared.

Seventh, journals will be gathered from all participants. The purpose of this is so

that I might gather insights into the effectiveness of the practice of modified *lectio divina*. These journals will be compared with my personal notes and will be observed for the purpose of considering each individual's personal evaluation of their spiritual journey. Specifically, I will be looking for anger, contemplations, rejection, changes in emotions, and similar aspects of the journey.

Finally, an overall assessment will be ascertained through my personal entries, individual journal entries, and the comparisons of the two questionnaires.

Assessment Strategy

The *first* goal of this project is that those individuals to whom I am administering this process will re-engage in their daily relationship with Jesus Christ. This assessment will be ascertained primarily through subjective observations noted and recorded by me and from journal entries documented by participating individuals. It is to be noted that:

The religious studies scholar, having done his or her research in the areas of history, psychology, sociology, and other related areas, would seek to produce a description of different spiritualities, a presentation that would be derived from the sources, widely conceived, that have been studied. These sources would frequently include a faith-content and the response to it as an important and perhaps decisive element, but these would be given a descriptive analysis. (Principe 2000, 52)

Further, some information regarding this assessment can and will be ascertained through the comparisons of the pre-session assessment and the post-session assessment.

Prior to the onset of this project, an assessment questionnaire will be presented that allows an initial measurement of the individual's perceived state of spirituality, knowledge of and participation in the various spiritual disciplines, and level of interaction with others and the church. At the end of the ten-week session, an identical self-evaluation will be given.

Each questionnaire will use a five-point Likert Scale to assess each individual's response regarding his/her level of agreement or disagreement with statements such as:

1. I have an active relationship with God.
2. I am excited when I hear the word "church."
3. The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.
4. I understand God's purpose for my life.
5. I desire to have a close relationship with other believers.
6. I feel safe at church.
7. I am growing in my walk with Christ.

With each self-assessment, there will also be a few open-ended questions such as:

1. Describe what you would consider to be an ideal devotional time.
2. What hinders you from maintaining prayer and scripture reading time?
3. Why do you seek prayer and scripture reading time?
4. Do you practice a daily prayer and scripture reading time?

A *second* goal of this project is to bring these individuals to a place of spiritual enlightenment wherein they once again want God's will for their lives. I desire that each one regains an understanding that God has a will and plan for him/her. As a side benefit, perhaps they can once again feel safe and sheltered within the structure of the church. Nevertheless, at a minimum, their relationship with God will become one that is growing and contagious. Again, the journal and the self-assessments will record the perceived state of each individual's relationship with Christ. It is my plan to observe, both in the review of each journal and in the comparison between the pre-session and the post-session assessments, a forward and upward motion of each one's relationship with Christ

and an awareness of His purpose for each one's life.

The journaling activity will specifically address issues such as:

1. What is my understanding of God's love for me?
2. What is my understanding of God's purpose for my life?
3. How does God's purpose in me affect others?
4. Describe what God is revealing to me in my time of prayer and meditation.
5. Is *lectio divina* helping me to sense God's presence in my life? How?
6. Does God have a place of forgiveness and restoration in my life? What is that place?
7. What is God doing to draw me into active relationship with Him?

Finally, it is my goal that each participant personally will utilize the modified *lectio divina* as presented, or that s/he will further modify the process to meet her/his needs. Further, it is my goal that a daily relationship with Christ will be enhanced through this project beyond the ten weeks and into the rest of their lives. Although this latter goal will not be measured, the initiation in the process and the continued usage of such should establish a pattern, or a habit, that will continue for a lifetime.

Personal Goals

The original intent of this project began nobly: to see the spiritual vitality of a select group of individuals restored. Another important element, however, became obvious to me. My family and I also stand in need of restoration of spiritual vitality. Therefore, it is a personal goal that my family will once again be restored to a place of spiritual vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ. No longer will we continue to minister out of duty and calling. Instead, we will minister out of joy and desire to please Him.

In addition, because of my years of hermeneutical, theological, homiletic, and linguistic training, I find it difficult to read the word of God for simple, devotional value. Therefore, it is my goal to use modified *lectio divina*, utilizing classic writings of the great spiritual writers, as a devotional basis to walk once again in restored spiritual vitality. Observably, I will witness a daily desire to take that which I enjoy, the discipline of reading, and to allow it to be applied to my life in a spiritually restorative manner. To that end, my itemized personal goals for this project are:

1. My family and I will be restored to a place of vitality and vibrancy in Jesus Christ through the use of *lectio divina*.
2. I will once again minister out of joy and desire to please God.
3. I will once again hold a daily desire to read, enjoy, and allow the word of God to be applied to my personal life.

Calendar

Project approval	March 2006
Preparation of materials	March 2006
Recruitment of individuals	March 2006
First assessment	April 2006
Program	April 2006 through mid-June 2006 (ten weeks)
Second assessment	End of program in mid-June 2006
First draft	July 2006
Final draft	August 2006
Defense	September 2006

Core Team

Academic Advisor

Jim Black, D. Min
Graduate of Ashland Theological Seminary
Pastor of College Corner Brethren Church, Wabash, Indiana

Field Consultant

Crystal Garrett-Bunts, BA
Graduate of Lee University

Resource Persons

Dawn Morton, EdD
Adjunct Professor, Christian Education, Ashland Theological Seminary

Russell Morton, PhD
Research Librarian, Ashland Theological Seminary

Robert Rosa, DMin
Ashland Theological Seminary

Kenneth Walther, PhD
Professor of New Testament and Greek, Ashland Theological Seminary

Linda Walther, PhD
Adjunct Professor, English, Foreign Languages, Ashland University/ Ashland
Theological Seminary

Support Team

Cheri Garrett, Wife of author
Pastor Ernie Brown, Neighboring Pastor
Gloria Dahl, Proofreader
Dr. Dan Hawk, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew, Ashland Seminary
Darcy Miller, Neighboring Pastor
Dr. Edley Moodley, Professor of Intercultural Studies, Lee University
Pat Pope, Prayer team member
Lora Purpura, Prayer team member
Ricky Vaughan, Mentor
Laurie Wade, Church member
Dr. Joann Watson, Professor of Theology at Ashland Theological Seminary

The support team will not meet *per se* due to the distance between where most of them live from one another; however, phone calls and emails on a bi-weekly basis will serve as a platform for communication and progress. Their questions, continual reminders, gentle prods, and prayers will serve as impetus to complete the tasks before me pertaining to this DMin project.

Resources

- Ackerman, John. 2001. *Listening to God: Spiritual formation in congregations*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute.
- Adams, J. E. 1970. *Competent to counsel*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- Aigner, Jill, OSB. 1987. *Foundations last forever: Lectio divina, a mode of scripture prayer*. Weston, VT: Priory Productions.
- Anderson, Keith, and Randy Reese. 1999. *Spiritual mentoring: A Guide for seeking and giving direction*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Anderson, Neil T. 1990a. *Victory over the darkness: Realizing the power of your identity in Christ*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- _____. 1990b. *The bondage breaker*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers.
- _____. 1993a. *Living free in Christ: The truth about who you are and how Christ can meet your deepest needs*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- _____. 1993b. *Released from bondage*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- _____. 1996. *The steps to freedom in Christ*. New York, NY: Gospel Light.
- Anderson, N. T., and H. Baumchen. 1999. *Finding hope again*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books.
- Arico, Carl. 1997. *A taste of silence*. New York, NY: Continuum Press.
- Arterburn, Steve, and Jack Felton. 1991. *Toxic faith: Understanding and overcoming religious addiction*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc.
- _____. 2000. *More Jesus, less religion: Moving from rules to relationship*. New York, NY: WaterBrook Press.
- Backus, W. 1985. *Telling the truth to troubled people*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Bakke, Jeannette A. 2000. *Holy invitations: Exploring spiritual direction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Baum, Gregory. 1975. *Religion and alienation: A theological reading of sociology*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.

- Bautista, Liberato C. 2000. Spirituality in the new millennium. *Christian Social Action* 13, No. 1 (January-February 2000) : 26-27.
- Bianchi, Enzo. 1998. *Praying the Word*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications.
- Bloom, Anthony. 1966. *Living prayer*. Springfield, IL: Templegate.
- _____. 1970. *Beginning to pray*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Bloomer, Charles. 1997. *Witchcraft in the pews, revised edition*. Lanham, MD: Pneuma Life Publishers.
- _____. 2002. *Authority abusers: Breaking free from spiritual abuse*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House.
- Blue, Ken. 1993. *Healing spiritual abuse: How to break free from bad church experiences*. Downer's Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 1954. *Life together*. New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- _____. 1959. *The cost of discipleship*. New York, NY: SCM Press Ltd.
- Brother Lawrence. 1996. *The practice of the presence of God*. New York, NY: Bantam, Double Day Dell.
- Brueggemann, Walter. 1997. *Cadences of home: Preaching among exiles*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Cairns, Earle E. 1981. *Christianity through the centuries: A history of the Christian church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Casey, Michael. 1995. *Sacred reading: The ancient art of lectio divina*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph.
- Chittister, Joan. 1998. Finding God. *The Other Side* 34 (July-August 1998) : 26-28.
- Collins, Kenneth J. 1995. *Soul care: Deliverance and renewal through the Christian life: A spirituality for hurting people*. Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint/Victor Books.
- Crabb, Larry. 1977. *Effective Biblical counseling*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- _____. 1988. *Inside out*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress.
- _____. 1999. *The safest place on earth*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing.

- _____. 2005. Strange spot hermeneutics: The role of Scripture in letting me be who I am as I do what I should. *Conversations* 3:1 (Spring 2005) : 16-21.
- Cunningham, Lawrence S. 1999. On reading spiritual texts. *Theology Today* 56, No. 1 (April 1999) : 98-104.
- Curtis, Brent, and John Eldredge. 1997. *The sacred romance: Drawing closer to the heart of God*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- de Caussade, Jean-Pierre. 1982. *The sacrament of the present moment*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- de Sales, Francis. 1972. *Introduction to the devout life*. Garden City, NY: Image.
- _____. 1997. *Treatise on the love of God*. Rockford, IL: Tan Books and publishers.
- de Wahl, Esther. 1995. *A life-giving way: A commentary on the rule of St. Benedict*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. 1998. *The Godbearing life: The art of soul tending for youth ministry*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy, Jurgen Moltmann, Cynthia L. Rigby, and Eugene F. Rivers III, eds. 2000. *The 1999 Princeton lectures on youth church and culture: An unexpected prophet: What the 21st century can learn from youth ministry*. Princeton, NJ: Institute for Youth Ministry.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn, editors. 2001. *Starting right: Thinking theologically about youth ministry*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Academic.
- Driver, John. 1997. *Images of the Church in mission*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Dumm, Demetrius. 1987. *Flowers in the desert: A spirituality of the Bible*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- _____. 1996. *Cherish Christ above all: The Bible in the rule of St. Benedict*. New York, NY: Paulist Press.
- Earle, Mary C. 2003. *Broken body, healing spirit: Lectio divina and living with illness*. New York, NY: Morehouse Publishing.
- Edwards, Gene. 2002. *100 days in the secret place*. Shippensburg, PA: Destiny Image Publishers, Inc.
- Enroth, Ronald. 1979. *The lure of the cults*. Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books.

- _____. 1993. *Churches that abuse*, reprint edition. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- _____. 1994. *Recovering from churches that abuse*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Fehlauer, Mike. 2001. *Exposing spiritual abuse: How to rediscover God's love when the church has let you down*. Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House.
- Fenelon, François. 1942. *The seeking heart*. Sargent, GA: SeedSowers.
- Foster, Richard, J. 1983. *Meditative prayer*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- _____. 1992. *Prayer: Finding the heart's true home*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing.
- _____. 1998. *Streams of living waters*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- _____. 2003. *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*, revised ed. San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing.
- Foster, Richard J., and James Bryan Smith, eds. 2005. *Devotional classics: Selected readings for individuals and groups: A Renovaré resource for spiritual renewal*, Revised and expanded edition. San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins Books.
- Frangipane, Francis. 1994. *Discerning of spirits*. Cedar Rapids, IA: Arrow Publications.
- Gaiser, Frederick J. 1998. Spirituality and popular culture. *Word and World* 18 (Winter 1998) : 2-83.
- George, Carl. 1994. *The coming church revolution*. Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell.
- Goldsmith, Malcolm. 1997. *Knowing me--knowing God: Exploring your spirituality with Myers-Briggs*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.
- Gonzalez, Justo L. 2001. *The story of Christianity: The early Church to the present day*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press.
- Grenz, Stanley. 1994. *Theology for the community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Groff, Kent Ira. 2000. *The soul of tomorrow's Church: Weaving spiritual practices in ministry together*. Nashville, TN: The Upper Room.
- Gronvik, Knut. 2005. Letting Scripture read you. *Conversations* 3:1 (Spring 2005) : 28-32.

- Guder, Darrell L. 2000. *The continuing conversion of the Church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Guenther, Margaret. 1998. *The practice of prayer*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications.
- St. Andrews Abbey. 1990. "The ancient art of lectio divina: The ladder of monks by Guigo II." Available: http://ldysinger.com/MONS_423/02_lectio/00a_start.htm (accessed October 26, 2005).
- Guyon, Jeanne. 1975. *Experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ*. Sargent, GA: Seedsowers.
- Hall, Thelma. 1988. *Too deep for words: Discovering lectio divina*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Hauerwas, Stanley. 1983. *The peaceable kingdom*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Heilemann, John. 2005. "The Choirboy." Available: <http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/features/12061/index.html> (accessed February 7, 2006).
- Henke, David. 1996. "Watchman fellowship profile: Spiritual abuse." Available: <http://www.watchman.org/profile/abusepro.htm> (accessed November 14, 2005).
- Herrington, Jim, Mike Bonem, & James H. Furr. 2000. *Leading congregational change: A practical guide for the transformational journey*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hick, John and Paul Knitter. 1987. *The myth of Christian uniqueness: Toward a pluralistic theology of religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis.
- Holloway, Julia Bolton. 2005. "The ladder of four rungs: Guigo II on contemplation." Available: <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html> (Accessed October 26, 2005).
- Horning, E. B. 1993. The rule of Christ: An exposition of Matthew 18:15-20. *Brethren Life and Thought* 38 (Spring 1993) : 69-78.
- Hougen, Judith. 2005. Becoming flesh: Relating with God in Scripture. *Conversations* 3:1 (Spring 2005) : 81-85.
- Hughes, Donald L. 2004. "Getting closer to Jesus with lectio divina". Available: http://www.jesusjournal.com/articles/publish/article_105.html (accessed December 2, 2005).
- Hughes, Gerard. 2003. *God in all things*. London, UK: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Hunter, George G. III. 2000. *The Celtic way of evangelism*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon.

- Jenkins, Philip. 2002. *The next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- John of the Cross. *The dark night of the soul*, 3rd revised edition. New York: Image Books. 1959. [book online]; Available: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.htm (accessed October 6, 2005).
- Johnson, David, and Jeff VanVondoren. 1991. *The subtle power of spiritual abuse*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Johnson, Jan. 2005. Welcoming God each time. *Conversations* 3:1 (Spring 2005) : 33-37.
- Jones, Cheslyn, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Edward Yarnold, SJ, eds. 1986. *The study of spirituality*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, W. Paul. 1997. Faithful imagination: Spirituality as renewing our image of the Church. *Weavings* 12, No. 1 (January-February 1997) : 34-43.
- Jurisson, Cynthia. 2000. Evangelical spirituality: Captive to the Word of God. *Word and World* 20, No. 1 (Winter 2000) : 90, 92-93.
- Keating, Thomas. 1994. *Intimacy with God*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- _____. 2005. "The classical monastic practice of *lectio divina*." Available: <http://www.centeringprayer.com/lectio/lectio.htm> (accessed October 26, 2005).
- Kelly, Thomas. 1992. *A testament of devotion*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Kirk, J. Andrew. 1992. *Loosing the chains: Religion as opium and liberation*. London, UK: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Kline, Joel D. 1991. *Reaching out in word and deed*. Elgin, OH: faithQuest.
- Kouzes, James M., Barry Z. Posner. 2003. *Credibility: How leaders gain and lose it, why people demand it*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Kraft, Charles H. 1992. *Defeating dark angels*. Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications.
- _____. 2005. *Deep wounds: Deep healing*. Ventura, CA: Gospel Light.
- Lancaster, Sarah Heaner. 2002. *Women and the authority of Scripture: A narrative approach*. Harrisburg, PA. Trinity Press International.
- LeBeau, Didier. 2001. "Brother Lawrence (Nicholas Herman c.1605-1691)". Available: <http://www.ccel.org/l/lawrence/lawrence.htm> (accessed 09 27 2005).

- Leech, Kenneth. 1980. *True prayer*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Lewis, C. S. 1955. *Surprised by joy: The shape of my early life*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, & World, Inc.
- _____. 1964. *Reflections in the Psalms*. Fort Washington, PA: Harvest Books.
- _____. 1982. *The Screwtape letters*. Revised Edition. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- _____. 1994. *The chronicles of Narnia*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- _____. 2001. *Mere Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Little, Paul E. 1979. *Know why you believe*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Lueking, F. Dean. 1998. The gotcha game. *Christian Century* 115 (October 28, 1998) : 993.
- Macaluso, Mary Christelle. "Discovering joy in spirituality". Available: <http://www.learningplaceonline.com/spirit/life/joy-spirituality.htm> (accessed October 14, 2005).
- MacDonald, Gordon. 1998. Monday morning restoration. *Leadership* 19 (Winter 1998), 28-32
- Magrassi, Mariano. 1998. *Praying the Bible: An introduction to lectio divina*. Translated by Edward Hagman. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press.
- Masini, Mario. 1998. *An ancient prayer that is ever new: Lectio divina*. New York, NY: Alba House.
- Mathias, Anita. 2000. Learning to pray. *Christian Century* 117, no. 10 (March 22-29, 2000) : 342-343, 345-346.
- May, Gerald. G. 1982. *Will and spirit*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- _____. 1988. *Addiction & grace*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- _____. 1992. *Care of mind, care of spirit*. San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco.
- McClaren, Brian D. 2001. *A new kind of Christian*. Somerset, NJ: Jossey-Bass/Leadership Network.

- _____. 2002. *More ready than you realize: Evangelism as dance in the postmodern matrix*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- McKim, Donald K. 1999. *The Bible in theology and preaching: How preachers use Scripture*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers.
- McNeal, Reggie. 2000. *A work of heart: Understanding how God shapes spiritual leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merton, Thomas. 1969. *Contemplative prayer*. Garden City, NY: Herder and Herder.
- _____. 1986. *Opening the Bible*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- _____. 1998. *Contemplation in a world of action*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Meyer, Lauree Hersch. The abuse of power and authority: A believer's church perspective. *Brethren Life and Thought* 38 (Spring 1993) : 79-95.
- Migliore, Daniel. 1991. *Faith seeking understanding*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Miller, Calvin. 2000. *Into the depths of God*. Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House.
- Miller, Robert J. 2000. *Falling into faith: Lectio divina series*. Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward.
- _____. 2001. *Fire in the deep*. Franklin, WI: Sheed and Ward.
- Moreland, J. P. and Mark Matlock. 2005. *Smart faith: Loving your God with all your mind*. Colorado Springs, CO: Th1nk.
- Mulholland, M. Robert. 1993. *Invitation to a journey: A roadmap for spiritual formation*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- _____. 2000. *Shaped by the Word: The power of Scripture in spiritual formation, revised edition*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room.
- Mutch, Barbara Horkoff. 2005. Shaped by the story: Narrative, formation, and the Word. *Conversations* 3:1 (Spring 2005) : 62-67.
- Muto, Susan A. 1973. *Approaching the sacred: An introduction to spiritual reading*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books.
- _____. 1975. *Steps along the way: The path of spiritual reading*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books.

- _____. 1976. *A practical guide to spiritual reading*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books.
- _____. 1977. *The journey homeward: On the road of spiritual reading*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books.
- _____. 1979. *Renewed at each awakening: The formative power of sacred words*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books.
- Netland, Harold. 1991. *Dissonant voices*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. 1972. *Here and now*. New York, NY: HarperSanFrancisco.
- _____. 1975. *Reaching out*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- _____. 1979. *The wounded healer*. New York, NY: Image Books Doubleday.
- O'Bryan, Paul. "Building Church in Streets and Neighbourhoods". Available: http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/diocesan/small_church.htm (accessed February 7, 2006).
- Oswald, Roy M., and Otto Kroeger. 1988. *Personality types and religious leadership*. Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, Inc.
- Ozment, Robert V. 1965. *Putting life together again*. Westwood, NJ: Fleming H. Revell.
- Paget, Doug, and the Solomon's Porch Community. 2003. *Reimagining spiritual formation: A week in the life of an experimental church*. El Cajon, CA: emergentYS Books.
- Payne, Leanne. 1996. *Restoring the Christian soul: Overcoming barriers to completion in Christ through healing prayer*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Pennington, Basil. 1980. *Centering prayer*. New York, NY: Image.
- _____. 1996. The call to contemplation. *Weavings* 11, No. 3 (May - June) : 31-37.
- _____. 1998. *Lectio divina: Renewing the ancient practice of praying the Scriptures*. New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company.
- Peterson, Eugene, 1980. *Under the unpredictable plant: An exploration in vocational holiness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- _____. 1996. *Take and read: Spiritual reading: An annotated list*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- _____. 1998. What's wrong with spirituality? *Christianity Today* 42 (July 13, 1998) : 51-55.

- Poling, James Newton. 1991. *The abuse of power: A theological problem*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press.
- Principe, Walter. 2000. Toward defining spirituality. In *Exploring Christian spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Quinn, Robert E. 1996. *Deep change: Discovering the leader within*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Robbins, Duffy. 1991. *Youth ministry that works: 6 essentials for staying on course*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Richardson, Ronald W. 1996. *Creating a healthier church: Family systems theory, leadership, and congregational life*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Riser, Steven C. "The Great Pretender! (The Anatomy of Hypocrisy)". Available: <http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/practical-christianity/PC0305W2.htm> (accessed February 7, 2005).
- Sabatino, Charles J. 1998. Spirituality: Experiencing the everyday world as grace. *Horizen*, 25 (Spring) : 84-94.
- Saint Benedict. 1910. *Patrologia Latina*, 66. London: George Bell and Sons.
- Salvail, Ghislaine. 1996. *At the crossroads of the Scriptures: An introduction to lectio divina*. Boston, MA: Pauline Books and Media.
- Senter III, Mark H., Wesley Black, Chap Clark, and Malon Nel, eds. 2001. *Four views of youth ministry and the Church*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Academic.
- Shupe, Anson, ed. 1998. *Wolves within the fold: Religious leadership and abuses of power*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press.
- Smedes, Lewis B. 1984. *Forgive & forget: Healing the hurts we don't deserve*. New York, NY: HarperCollins.
- Smith, Fred. 1998. Conducting a spiritual audit. *Leadership* 19 (Winter) : 41-46.
- Smith, Martin. 1989. *The Word is very near you: A guide to praying with Scripture*. Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications.
- Snyder, Howard A. with Daniel V. Runyon. 2002. *Decoding the Church: Mapping the DNA of Christ's body*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- _____. 1986. *The divided flame: Wesleyans and the charismatic renewal*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

- Springer, Mark, and Cheryl Smith. 1995. *The seven principles of effective youth ministry*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications.
- Stedman, Ray C. 1995. *Body life: Revised and expanded edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Discovery House Publishers.
- Steere, Douglas. 1963. *Dimensions of prayer*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.
- Stewart, Columba. 1998. *Prayer and community: The Benedictine tradition (Traditions of Christian spirituality)*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Stortz, Martha Ellen. 2000. Evangelical spirituality: Practice the marks of the Church. *Word and World* 20, No. 1 (Winter) : 91, 94-95.
- Strommen, Merton, Karen E. Jones, Dave Rahn, editors. 2001. *Youth ministry that transforms: A comprehensive analysis of the hopes, frustrations, and effectiveness of today's youth workers*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties Academic.
- Thomas, Owen. 2000. Some problems in contemporary Christian spirituality. *Anglican Theological Review* 82, no. 2 (Spring) : 267-281.
- Thompson, Marjorie J. 1995. *Soul feast: An invitation to the Christian spiritual life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press.
- Thrall, Bill, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath. 1999. *The ascent of a leader: How ordinary relationships develop extraordinary character and influence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Thumma, Scott. 2001. "Megachurches Today 2000: Summary of data from the Faith Communities Today 2000 Project". Available: http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html (accessed February 7, 2006).
- Townsend, Michael J. 2000. Jesus, source of all things. *Expository Times* 111, no. 10 (July) : 343-344.
- Tyson, John R. ed. 1999. *Invitation to Christian spirituality: An ecumenical anthology*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Wagner, C. Peter. 1979. *Your spiritual gifts can help your church grow*. Ventura, CA: Regal Books/Gospel Light.
- Ward, Pete. 1999. *God at the mall: Youth ministry that meets kids where they're at*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.
- Wardle, Terry. 1994. *Wounded: How to find wholeness and inner healing in Christ*. Ashland, OH: Cornerstone Formation Ministries Inc.

- _____. 1998. *Draw close to the fire: Finding God in the darkness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books.
- _____. 1999. *Whispers of love in seasons of fear*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books.
- _____. 2001. *Healing care, healing prayer: helping the broken find wholeness in Christ*. Fairmont, CA: New Leaf Books.
- _____. 2003. *The transforming path: A Christ-centered approach to spiritual formation*. Siloam Springs, AK: Leafwood Publishers.
- _____. 2004. *Outrageous love, transforming power: How the Holy Spirit shapes you into the likeness of Christ*. Kent, UK: Sovereign World.
- Ware, Corinne. 1997. *Connecting to God: Nurturing spirituality through small groups*. Bethesda, MD: The Alban Institute.
- Warren, Rick. 1995. *The purpose driven church*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.
- Weems, Renita. 1999. *Listening for God: A minister's journey through silence and doubt*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.
- Willard, Dallas. 1991. *The spirit of the disciplines*. San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins.
- _____. 1998. *The divine conspiracy: Rediscovering our hidden life in God*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- _____. 1999. *Hearing God: Developing a conversational relationship with God*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- _____. 2002. *Renovation of the heart*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress.
- Wright, H.N. 1986. *Self-talk, imagery and prayer in counseling*. Waco, TX: Word.
- Wuellner, Flora Slosson. 1995. *Prayer, stress, and our inner wounds*. Nashville, TN: The Upper Room.
- Yancey, George. 2003. *One body, one spirit: Principles of successful multiracial churches*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Yancy, Philip. 2000. My to-be list: What I learned from a 50-year spiritual checkup. *Christianity Today* 44, no. 4 (April 3) : 104.
- Yoder, John Howard. 1994. *Body politics: Five practices of the Christian community before the watching world*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources.

Zimmerman, Benedict. 1912. "St. Teresa of Avila". *The Catholic encyclopedia, volume XIV*. Available: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14515b.htm> (accessed September 27, 2005).

_____. 1910. "St. John of the Cross". *The Catholic encyclopedia, volume XIII*. Available: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/08480a.htm> (accessed September 27, 2005).

APPENDIX 2

PRE- AND POST-SESSION ASSESSMENTS

Pre-Session Self-Assessment

SSN (4)_____

Use last four digits of your Social Security Number so that I can collect your assessments together after the final session. This will secure your privacy while allowing me to view your self-assessed change/growth.

Please respond to these questions by circling the response that most closely agrees with your assessment. This questionnaire will use the following convention:

1	2	3	4	5
I strongly agree with this statement	I mildly agree with this statement	I neither agree nor disagree with this statement	I mildly disagree with this statement	I strongly disagree with this statement

(In the event that you do not know how to respond to a comment OR if you prefer NOT to mark a certain comment, please circle the number 3. All responses must be tallied; otherwise, I have an invalid scale.)

- | | | | | | | |
|----|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. | I believe that God loves me. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. | I see myself as a spiritual/religious person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. | I desire to have a close relationship with other believers. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. | I understand God’s purpose for my life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. | I practice meditation on the scriptures. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. | I have an active relationship with God. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. | I am excited when I hear the word “church.” | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. | I am satisfied with my relationship with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. | I have a clear sense of purpose. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

10.	I look forward to a daily time spent with God.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	My faith is an important part of my life.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	I feel safe at church.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I am sensitive to the needs of others.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I know what I contribute to the world	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I participate in a fast on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I am growing in my walk with Christ.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I have a good relationship with the church.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I have many friends.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	My life is close to my ideal.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I am satisfied with my relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I am actively involved in my church.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I care what others think about me.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I would change part of my life if I could.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I have a daily prayer time.	1	2	3	4	5

Post Session Self-Assessment

SSN (4) _____

Use last four digits of your Social Security Number so that I can collect your assessments together after the final session. This will secure your privacy while allowing me to view your self-assessed change/growth.

Please respond to these questions by circling the response that most closely agrees with your assessment. This questionnaire will use the following convention:

1	2	3	4	5
I strongly agree with this statement	I mildly agree with this statement	I neither agree nor disagree with this statement	I mildly disagree with this statement	I strongly disagree with this statement

(In the event that you do not know how to respond to a comment OR if you prefer NOT to mark a certain comment, please circle the number 3. All responses must be tallied; otherwise, I have an invalid scale.)

1.	I believe that God loves me.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I see myself as a spiritual/religious person.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I desire to have a close relationship with other believers.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I understand God's purpose for my life.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	I practice meditation on the scriptures.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I have an active relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	I am excited when I hear the word "church."	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I am satisfied with my relationship with others.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I have a clear sense of purpose.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	I look forward to a daily time spent with God.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	My faith is an important part of my life.	1	2	3	4	5

12.	I feel safe at church.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	I am sensitive to the needs of others.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	I know what I contribute to the world	1	2	3	4	5
15.	I participate in a fast on a regular basis.	1	2	3	4	5
16.	I am growing in my walk with Christ.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	I have a good relationship with the church.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	I have many friends.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	My life is close to my ideal.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	The Bible comes alive to me when I read it.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	I am satisfied with my relationship with God.	1	2	3	4	5
22.	I am actively involved in my church.	1	2	3	4	5
23.	I care what others think about me.	1	2	3	4	5
24.	I would change part of my life if I could.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	I have a daily prayer time.	1	2	3	4	5

Questions:

- A. Do you practice a daily prayer and scripture reading time?
- i. Where?
 - ii. When?
 - iii. How often?
 - iv. Describe a typical time of your personal devotion. What do you do?

 - v. Describe what you would consider to be an ideal devotional time.
- B. Why do you seek prayer and scripture reading time?
(Mark all that apply)
- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Example to others | <input type="radio"/> Desire to experience God's presence |
| <input type="radio"/> Build my relationship with God | <input type="radio"/> Be energized |
| <input type="radio"/> Start my day properly | <input type="radio"/> Find peace |
| <input type="radio"/> Spiritual priority | <input type="radio"/> Habit |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (describe) _____ | <input type="radio"/> Sense of obligation |
- C. What hinders you from maintaining prayer and scripture reading time?
(Mark all that apply)
- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Constant interruptions | <input type="radio"/> Family expectations |
| <input type="radio"/> Busy life | <input type="radio"/> Not necessary |
| <input type="radio"/> Lack of personal discipline | <input type="radio"/> I have not found an effective method |
| <input type="radio"/> Lack of interest | <input type="radio"/> Lack of motivation |
| <input type="radio"/> Not a high priority in my life | <input type="radio"/> Lack of time |
| <input type="radio"/> Other obligations | <input type="radio"/> Other (describe) _____ |

APPENDIX 3

WORKS CITED

- Aristotle. 2002. *See* Willard, Dallas. 2002.
- Barker, Glenn W. 1981. *See* Gæbelein, Frank E., ed. 1981b.
- Barna, George. 2005. *Revolution*. Ventura, CA: Barna Books.
- Bauer, Walter. 1979. *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature: A translation and adaptation of the fourth revised and augmented edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches wörterbuch zu den schriften dea Neuen testaments un der ubrigen urchristlichen literature*. Translated by William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich. Revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Bellah, Robert, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven Tipton. 1985. *Habits of the heart*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ben. Church youth group volunteer leader. 2006. Interview by author, 19 April, Sylvania, OH.
- Blue, Ken. 1993. *Healing spiritual abuse: How to break free from bad church experiences*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Bohrer, Brad. 2002. Creating a spiritual space: introducing lectio divina as a devotional method for the heightening of the spiritual lives of the pastors in the Northern Ohio District, Church of the Brethren. D. Min. diss., Ashland Theological Seminary.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. 1963. *The communion of saints*. Translated by R. Gregor Smith. New York, NY: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- _____. 1999. *A testament to freedom: The essential writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: Revised edition*. Edited Geoffrey B. Kelly and F. Burton Nelson. New York, NY: Harper- Collins Publishers.
- Borgman, Dean. 1997. *When kumbaya is not enough: A practical theology for youth ministry*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Bosacki, Debra. 2006. Prayer and journaling tips. Available: http://www.gardenoftheheart.com/prayer_and_journaling_tips.htm (Accessed November 24, 2006).

- Brueggemann, Walter. 1997. *Cadences of home: Preaching among exiles*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press.
- Bussell, Harold. 1993. *By hook or by crook: How cults lure Christians*. New York, NY: McCracken Press.
- Casey, Michael. 1995. *Sacred reading: The ancient art of lectio divina*. Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph.
- Cassian, John. 1995. *See* Casey, Michael. 1995.
- Cawley, Kevin. 2006. University of Notre Dame: Latin dictionary and grammar aid. Available: <http://archives.nd.edu/latgramm.htm> (accessed March 3, 2007).
- Chekal, Sherri. 2005. Christian journaling. Available: <http://www.journalinglife.com/jl-type-christ.html> (accessed December 1, 2006).
- Collins, Kenneth J. 1995. *Soul care: Deliverance and renewal through the Christian life: A spirituality for hurting people*. Wheaton, IL: Bridgepoint/Victor Books.
- Crabb, Larry. 1999. *The safest place on earth*. Nashville, TN: Word Publishing.
- Dean, Kenda Creasy, and Ron Foster. 1998. *The Godbearing life: The art of soul tending for youth ministry*. Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books.
- deCaussade, Jean-Pierre. 1982. *The sacrament of the present moment*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- De Crescenzo, Luciano. 1999. *See* Thrall, McNicol, and McElrath, 1999.
- DeSilva, David A. 2000. *Honor, patronage, kinship & purity: Unlocking New Testament culture*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Driver, John. 1997. *Images of the church in mission*. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press.
- Easton, G. 1996. *Easton's Bible dictionary*. Digital ed. Albany, OR: SAGE Software USA.
- Enroth, Ronald. 1979. *The lure of the cults*. Chappaqua, NY: Christian Herald Books.
- _____. 1992. *Churches that abuse*. Reprint ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Fahey, Michael. 1991. Church. In *Systematic theology: Roman Catholic perspectives*, ed. F. Schussler Fiorenza and J. P. Galvin. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.

- Flora, Jerry. Seminary Professor Emeritus of Theology and Spiritual Formation. 2006. Interview by author, 13 October, Ashland, OH.
- Foster, Richard, J. 2003. *Celebration of discipline: The path to spiritual growth*, revised ed. San Francisco, CA: Harper Publishing.
- Gæbelein, Frank E., ed. 1981a. *The expositor's Bible commentary with the new international version: Hebrews through Revelation: Vol. 12, Hebrews*, by Leon Morris. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- _____. 1981b. *The expositor's Bible commentary with the new international version: Hebrews through Revelation: Vol. 12, 3 John*, by Glenn W. Barker. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- _____. 1984. *The expositor's Bible commentary with the new international version: Matthew, Mark, Luke: Vol. 8, Mark*, by Walter W. Wessel. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- _____. 1991. *The expositor's Bible commentary with the new international version: Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon: Vol. 5, Psalms*, by Willem A. VanGemeren. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Gleeson, Brian. 2005. The church as the people of God: A people in communion. Available: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/theology/ejournal/aejt_5/Gleeson.htm (accessed August 29, 2006).
- Gonzalez, Justo L. 2001. *The story of Christianity: The early church to the present day*. Peabody, MA: Prince Press.
- Graham, Adam. 2004. The wit and wisdom of Dave Screwtape. Available: <http://adamsweb.us/screwtape.html> (accessed August 24, 2005).
- Gregory of Nyssa. 2005. Running the race. In *Devotional classics: Selected readings for individuals and groups: A Renovaré resource for spiritual renewal*, ed. Richard J. Foster and James Bryan Smith, 123-128. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Grossman, Cathy Lyn. 2006a. View of God can reveal your values and politics: Baylor University survey maps four images of God that shape how Americans see the world. *USA Today* (September 12) : 1, 4A.
- Guigo II. The ladder of four rungs: Guigo II on contemplation. Available: <http://www.umilta.net/ladder.html> (accessed June 23, 2006).
- Guder, Darrell L. 2000. *The continuing conversion of the church*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

- Guyon, Jeanne. 1975. *Experiencing the depths of Jesus Christ*. Sargent, GA: Seedsowers.
- Hall, Thelma. 1988. *Too deep for words: Rediscovering lectio divina*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Harris, R. Laird, Gleason L. Archer, and Bruce K. Waltke. 1980. *Theological wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers.
- Hawk, Dan. Seminary Professor of Old Testament. 2006. Interview by author, 08 August, Ashland, OH.
- Heilemann, John. 2005. The choirboy. Available: <http://www.newyorkmetro.com/nymetro/news/features/12061/index.html> (accessed February 7, 2006).
- Henke, David. 1996. Spiritual abuse. Available: <http://www.watchman.org/profile/abusepro.htm> (accessed November 14, 2005).
- Henzel, Ron. 1998. The Bible and Spiritual Abuse. Available: <http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Forum/9575/biblespirab.html> (accessed September 25, 2006).
- Herrington, Jim, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr. 2000. *Leading congregational change: A practical guide for the transformational journey*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hughes, Donald L. 2004. Getting closer to Jesus with lectio divina. Available: http://www.jesusjournal.com/articles/publish/article_105.html (accessed December 2, 2005).
- Hume, David. 1957. *Enquiry into morals*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Irwin, Kevin W. 1993. Lectio divina. In *The new dictionary of Catholic spirituality*, ed. Michael Downey, 596. Collegeville, MN: A Michael Glazier Book, The Liturgical Press.
- Jason. Church youth group volunteer leader. 2006. Interview by author, 19 April, Sylvania, OH.
- Jewell, Elizabeth J., Frank Abate, and Erin McKean, eds. 2005. *The new Oxford American dictionary, second edition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- John of the Cross. *The dark night of the soul*, 3rd revised edition. New York: Image Books. 1959. [book online]; Available: http://www.ccel.org/ccel/john_cross/dark_night.htm (accessed October 6, 2005).

- Jones, Tony. 2001. *Postmodern youth ministry: Exploring cultural shift, creating holistic connection, cultivating authentic community*. El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties.
- Keating, Thomas. 2005. The classical monastic practice of lectio divina. Available: <http://www.centeringprayer.com/lectio/lectio.htm> (accessed October 26, 2005).
- Keil, Johann C. F., and Franz Delitzsch. 1949. *Keil & Delitzsch commentaries on the Old Testament: Biblical commentary on the prophecies of Isaiah, Volume II*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Kelly, Thomas. 1992. *A testament of devotion*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- Lao Tzu. n.d. Available: <http://www.quotationspage.com/quote/24004.html> (accessed February 8, 2007).
- Lattourette, Kenneth Scott. 2005. *A history of Christianity: Volume I: Beginning to 1500*. Revised ed. Peabody, MA: Prince Press.
- Lee, Simon Yiu Chuen, and Jeannette A. Bakke. 2005. The Lord is my light and my salvation: Scriptures in spiritual formation and direction. *Conversations 3:1* (Spring) : 22-27.
- Lewis, Clive S. 1958. *Reflections on the psalms*. New York, NY: Harcourt Brace.
- _____. 1982. *The Screwtape letters*. Revised ed. New York, NY: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- _____. 2001. *Mere Christianity*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Manning, Brennan. 2000. *The ragamuffin gospel*. Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, Inc.
- McClure, Jane Michelle. 2005b. The rule of St. Benedict. Available: <http://www.thedome.org/AboutUs/rule.html> (accessed December 14, 2006).
- McNeal, Reggie. 2000. *A work of heart: Understanding how God shapes spiritual leaders*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merton, Thomas. 1960. *The wisdom of the desert*. New York, NY: New Directions Press.
- _____. 1984. "Inner experience: Problems of the contemplative life (VII)." *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 19.3 (1984) : 267-282.
- _____. 2004. *The inner experience: Notes on contemplation*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.

- Miller, Donald. 2003. *Blue like jazz: Nonreligious thoughts on Christian spirituality*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.
- Moreland, J. P. and Mark Matlock. 2005. *Smart faith: Loving your God with all your mind*. Colorado Springs, CO: Th1nk.
- Morris, Leon. 1981. *See* Gæbelein, Frank E., ed. 1981a.
- Mounce, William D. 2003. *Basics of biblical Greek: Grammar*. 2^d ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Mulholland, M. Robert. 1993. *Invitation to a journey: A roadmap for spiritual formation*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- _____. 2000. *Shaped by the Word: The power of Scripture in spiritual formation*. Revised ed. Nashville, TN: Upper Room.
- Narramore, Bruce. 1984. *No condemnation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Nolland, John. 1982. *Word Biblical commentary: Volume 35b: Luke 9:21-18:34*. Waco, TX: Word Books.
- Nouwen, Henri. 1975. *Reaching out*. New York, NY: Doubleday.
- _____. 1981. *Making all things new*. San Francisco, CA; Harper Collins Publishing.
- _____. 1995. Moving from solitude to community to ministry. *Leadership Journal* 16:2 (Spring 2005) : 81-87.
- Oberbrunner, Kary. 2006. Doorways to deception? Available: <http://www.ministrytodaymag.com/display.php?id=14025> (accessed November 13, 2006).
- O'Brien, Paul. 2006. *Book of roots: Reference and vocabulary building*. Louisville, KY: Memoria Press.
- O'Bryan, Paul. 2006. Building church in streets and neighbourhoods. Available: http://www.mn.catholic.org.au/diocesan/small_church.htm (accessed February 7, 2006).
- Ortberg, John. 2003. *Everybody's normal till you get to know them*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.
- Pearcey, Nancy. 2004. *Total truth: Liberating Christianity from its cultural captivity*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books.
- Percy, Walker. 1999. *The second coming*. New York, NY: Picador.

- Peterson, Eugene. 1992. *Under the unpredictable plant: An exploration in vocational holiness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.
- Principe, Walter. 2000. Toward defining spirituality. In *Exploring Christian spirituality*, ed. Kenneth J. Collins, 43-59. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- Richardson, Ronald W. 1996. *Creating a healthier church: Family systems theory, leadership, and congregational life*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press.
- Riser, Steven C. 2006. The great pretender! (The anatomy of hypocrisy). Available: <http://www.ankerberg.com/Articles/practical-christianity/PC0305W2.htm> (accessed February 7, 2005).
- Russian Orthodox Church. 2006. Church and nation. Available: <http://incommunion.org/articles/resources/the-orthodox-church-and-society/ii> (accessed August 29, 2006).
- Ryan, Dale, and Juanita Ryan. 1992. *Recovering from spiritual abuse*. Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Ryan, Dale S., and Jeff VanVonderen. 2000a. When religion goes bad: Part 1. Available: <http://www.spiritualabuse.com/dox/gobad1.htm> (accessed 08/03/2006).
- St. Augustine. 1996. Doctrinal treatises: On the Trinity. In *The Nicene and post-Nicene fathers*, first series, volume 3. Electronic ed., ed. Philip Shaff. Albany, OR: SAGE Software USA.
- St. Benedict. 1981. *The rule of St. Benedict in English*. Edited by Timothy Fry. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press.
- _____. 1995. See Casey, Michael. 1995.
- Seamands, David. 1982. *Putting away childish things*. Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.
- Slaughter, Michael. 2002. *Unlearning church*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing.
- Springer, Mark, and Cheryl Smith. 1995. *The seven principles of effective youth ministry*. San Jose, CA: Resource Publications.
- Spurgeon, Charles H. 1995. *A Puritan catechism: With proofs*. Electronic ed. Albany, OR: SAGE Software.
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. 1889. *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament*. New York, NY: American Book Company.
- Theisen, Jerome. 1995. Saint Benedict of Nursia: Patriarch of western monasticism. Available: <http://www.osb.org/gen/bendct.html> (accessed July 31, 2006).

- Thrall, Bill, Bruce McNicol, and Ken McElrath. 1999. *The ascent of a leader: How ordinary relationships develop extraordinary character and influence*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Thumma, Scott. 2001. Megachurches today 2000: Summary of data from the faith communities today 2000 project. Available: http://hrr.hartsem.edu/org/faith_megachurches_FACTsummary.html (accessed February 7, 2006).
- VanGemeran, Willem A. 1991. *See* Gæbelein, Frank E., ed. 1991.
- Volf, Mirslav. 2003. Soft difference: Theological reflections on the relation between church and culture in 1 Peter. Available: <http://www.northpark.edu/sem/exaudit/papers/volf.html> (accessed August 29, 2006).
- Ward, Pete. 1999. *God at the mall*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers.
- Wardle, Terry. 1998. *Draw close to the fire: Finding God in the darkness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Chosen Books.
- Watchman Fellowship. 2006. Available: <http://www.watchman.org/> (accessed August 8, 2006).
- Watson, JoAnn. Seminary Professor of Theology and Spiritual Formation. 2005. Interview by author, 27 October, Ashland, OH.
- Watts, John D. W. 1982. *Word Biblical commentary: Volume 25: Isaiah 34-66*. Waco, TX: Word Books.
- Wessel, Walter W. 1984. *See* Gæbelein, Frank E., ed. 1984.
- Westminster Assembly of Divines, Cornelius Burges, Henry Roborough, and Adoniram Byfield, eds. 2006. *The Westminster confession: The humble advice of the assembly of divines*. Electronic ed. Cedar Rapids, IA: Parsons Technology.
- Willard, Dallas. 1991. *The spirit of the disciplines: Understanding how God changes lives*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco.
- _____. 2002. *Renovation of the heart*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress.
- William of St. Thierry. 1995. *See* Casey, Michael. 1995.
- Williamson, Marianne. 1992. *A return to love: Reflections on the principles of a course in miracles*. New York, NY: Harper Collins.
- Yancy, Philip. 2001. *Soul survivor: How thirteen unlikely mentors helped my faith survive the church*. New York: Doubleday Publishing.

Yoder, John Howard. 1994. *Body politics: Five practices of the Christian community before the watching world*. Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources.