

Please **HONOR** the copyright of  
these documents by not  
retransmitting or making any  
additional copies in any form

(Except for private personal use).

We appreciate your respectful  
cooperation.

---

Theological Research Exchange Network  
(TREN)

P.O. Box 30183  
Portland, Oregon 97294  
USA

Website: [www.tren.com](http://www.tren.com)

E-mail: [rwjones@tren.com](mailto:rwjones@tren.com)

Phone# 1-800-334-8736

---

ATTENTION CATALOGING LIBRARIANS

**TREN ID#**

Online Computer Library Center (OCLC)

**MARC Record #**

Digital Object Identification

**DOI #**

# Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

This ministry focus paper entitled

MARGIN-MAKING AS A MEANS OF GRACE IN RE-ENVISIONING  
DISCIPLESHIP AT HOUSTON CHINESE CHURCH

Written by

CYNTHIA K. HONG

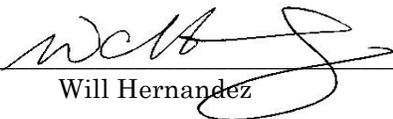
and submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary

upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

  
Will Hernandez

  
Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: March 22, 2013

MARGIN-MAKING AS A MEANS OF GRACE  
IN RE-ENVISIONING DISCIPLESHIP  
AT HOUSTON CHINESE CHURCH

A FINAL PROJECT  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

CYNTHIA K. HONG  
MARCH 2013



## ABSTRACT

### **Margin-Making as a Means of Grace in Re-Envisioning Discipleship at Houston Chinese Church**

Cynthia K. Hong

Doctor of Ministry

School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary

2013

Many years of programs and activities have left members busy and exhausted. The goal of this study was to re-envision discipleship at Houston Chinese Church within the broader context of spiritual formation: one must learn how to be and plan to grow with Jesus, not just serve and do for him. When God's people arrange their schedules and intentionally create space to be with him, true rest as described in Matthew 11:28-30 occurs. Practicing three contemplative disciplines in historical Christianity can help busy evangelicals live with margin in their lives and experience God's rest.

While God alone forms and transforms, effort is required by believers to create space for God. The spiritual disciplines of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer of examen help believers guide this effort, allowing God to do his work of formation and transformation. Because engagement in these practices enable God to work, they are a "means of grace," helping one experience and live by God's grace. It is argued that when grace is a lived truth in one's life, not just a theological concept for salvation, disciples of Jesus will live lives characterized by rest and refreshment rather than busyness and distractions.

To fulfill this goal, a new ministry initiative called Breakfast with Jesus provided people with space and time to practice these margin-making disciplines. Those who made an effort to participate and intentionally be with God did experience his grace through rest and refreshment. For this group, discipleship was re-envisioned within the broader context of spiritual formation. Due to the limited number of participants, further study is needed in how to best offer this space to other members in the church. However, the project shows that it is possible for busy evangelicals who hunger for something more, to find rest and be refreshed with God.

Theological Mentor: Kurt Fredrickson, PhD

Words: 300

To our triune God – Father, Son, and Spirit  
To my parents – Don and Jean Hong

For Life and Love  
For life and love

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To all who came and ate breakfast with Jesus these last three years at Houston Chinese Church, thank you. Your presence and appetite allowed this time to happen and enabled us to re-envision discipleship together: taking time to be with God as well as do for God.

More delicious than bacon and eggs, waffles and pancakes,  
your example and encouragement are food for the soul.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT	
Chapter 1. AN OVERVIEW OF HOUSTON, TEXAS	10
Chapter 2. HOUSTON CHINESE CHURCH: PAST AND PRESENT	25
PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	
Chapter 3. LITERATURE REVIEW	48
Chapter 4. A THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH	73
Chapter 5. THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER IN DISCIPLESHIP	93
PART THREE: MINISTRY STRATEGY	
Chapter 6. MARGIN-MAKING SPIRITUAL FORMATION EXERCISES	121
Chapter 7. IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF OUTCOMES	145
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	165
APPENDICES	170
BIBLIOGRAPHY	179

## INTRODUCTION

David is an elder at Houston Chinese Church (hereafter, HCC). He came to Houston, Texas, from Beijing, China, in the mid-1980s for graduate school. Within a couple of years, he became a follower of Jesus Christ and was baptized at HCC. He grew quickly in the Lord, attending Sunday morning worship, Sunday school classes, as well as Friday evening fellowship, a large-group meeting with other couples and families in similar life stages. With maturity in his Christian walk came added responsibilities at church, first becoming the chairperson in the fellowship, and then the advisor to the fellowship, all the while still an integral member of the group. Soon after, he was nominated to be a deacon in the church. In addition to doing the work of a deacon, responsibilities included a monthly church council meeting, along with his weekly ministry team responsibilities. Next came the elder nomination and confirmation by the congregation. As an elder these last few years, he has spent a good portion of ministry hours in meetings. An elder is part of the church council, but also includes elder-only meetings held twice a month. Often the elders will meet more than the assigned times to take care of various church business. He is also part of the long-range planning committee, made up of elders and two pastors. He has served on the council nomination committee, and with the church in a time of transition, he has served on another committee to explore ways the church leadership can lead more effectively. Because the church is looking for additional staff, he is also on multiple pastoral search committees. David is just one of many elders and deacons who spend countless hours in meetings. They rarely complain, but many are tired.

Elizabeth is another long-time church member, and is now part of the church staff since her graduation from seminary in 1999. She grew up in this church and loves the church as her own family. Since being on staff, her Sundays are no longer set aside for worship and celebration, but now include many meetings. As one of the ministers, she has monthly department meetings that last for three hours. On the other Sundays she meets with different fellowship groups that she oversees, nine in all, meeting with the leaders and other members to take care of fellowship needs and other administrative items.

Staff and elders notwithstanding, even for the average congregation member Sundays are still busy, sometimes even the busiest day of the week. Members are strongly encouraged to get involved in all facets of church life, beginning with worship and attending Sunday school classes at 9:15 a.m. With food being an integral part of Chinese culture, many Chinese churches in North America serve lunch, including HCC. The fellowships take turns serving lunch every Sunday. After lunch, the children's and youth choirs have their weekly rehearsals from 12:45 to 1:25 p.m. After choir the church offers Chinese language classes, another aspect of doing and being the Chinese church in North America. When classes let out, it is 3:30 p.m., and with HCC being a commuter church, it is another thirty-minute drive home for some, just in time to prepare for the school-week ahead. While walking the hallways at 2 p.m. on a Sunday afternoon, it is exciting to see the various ministries and activities occurring: Chinese school, choir practices, rehearsals for the Christmas pageant, along with many fellowship and departmental meetings. Yet at the same time, these programs and activities are taking families away from each other, only to reunite them at the end of the day, too tired to talk

or bond or play together. Furthermore, these programs and activities are not always intentional in helping people grow in their faith journeys, if at all.

The mission statement of HCC is to make God-loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations, and demonstrated through the five core values of worship, teaching, caring, serving, and outreach. The church's mission and core values seem innocuous enough on paper, but over the years, more and more programs came about that focused on doing rather than being the church. Membership has increased, but not disciples. The numbers look good, both for membership and the financial giving, but fewer disciples were being made and added. People are leading busier lives, church is becoming another activity, but not necessarily that "life to the full" Jesus describes in John 10:10. Unfortunately over the years, some are equating busyness with spirituality: the busier people are in serving the Lord, the more spiritual they are.

Historically, HCC is a doing church. With the previous senior pastor, mission and vision translated into projects and goals, the main project being to plant another church. This worked well for the first three church plants in 1979, 1991, and 1997. The three plants succeeded in part due to the number of mature believers from Taiwan and Hong Kong who were not afraid of the hard work required in a start-up. Since then, the demographics have changed as more and more immigrants are moving to Houston from mainland China. Yet because many immigrants are relocating to Houston and finding their way to the church, HCC still has a strong presence in the city's Chinese community. While equating busyness with spirituality has worked for many years, the last few years has seen even mature believers burning out and no longer desiring to serve. Enthusiasm is met with apathy, service and work with complacency. People are going through the

motions, and because they are not growing, many are leaving the church. At the same time, the new believers from mainland China want to plant their own church in Pearland, a suburb about fifteen miles south of Houston, but still lack the skills and maturity required of a church plant. While the church did start a campus in Pearland last year, the members are already exhausted and burning out from the work. With the exits and exhaustion, the leadership has been re-visiting the church's mission statement and what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ.

Oswald Chambers has said that “the greatest competitor of true devotion to Jesus is the service we do for him.”<sup>1</sup> In the midst of all the serving and doing for Jesus, his people at HCC are tired, in need of rest and renewal. The purpose of this final project is to develop a model and plan to intentionally integrate practices of margin-making as a means of grace that will help the congregation at HCC live into that rest and renewal, in short, to re-envision its discipleship journey with Jesus Christ. Instead of adding another activity or program to the weekly schedule, this paper is advocating for a way of life, a life of grace, characterized by the easy yoke of Matthew 11:29-30.<sup>2</sup> These margin-making and soul-care practices are simply ways to create space for God, one's self, and others in the midst of life. Such space is necessary to make one available and attentive to God, thus enabling him to work and provide rest in the lives of his people. When such rest is a reality, one can better follow Jesus Christ as his disciples without burning out and leaving for another church or leaving church altogether because it is just another activity or club

---

<sup>1</sup> Oswald Chambers , “January 18,” in *My Utmost for His Highest*, updated ed, James Reimann (Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 5.

on the schedule.

It is also hoped that this final project will help HCC in re-envisioning discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. In the past, discipleship has been about doing—doing worship, learning in Sunday school classes, attending prayer meetings, evangelizing new immigrants in the Houston area, and going on short-term mission trips. Much focus has been on knowledge and content, learning Scripture well and having the right convictions so that one can competently teach others. Less focus has been on one’s character before God. Re-envisioning discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation has to do with a way of being and arranging life to create space for God to work so that in attending to him and being with him, Christ can be formed in the life of his people at HCC (Galatians 4:19).

The first premise for this paper comes from the book *Margin* by Richard Swenson, showing the necessity of slowing down.<sup>3</sup> He writes as a medical doctor exhorting his readers to restore physical, financial, and emotional reserves in their lives instead of living pressured and overloaded lives. The word “margin” can be taken literally and figuratively, living with enough white space on the page so that one can take notes when God speaks, having room to write and reflect and even doodle. The second premise comes from understanding how God changes lives through the spiritual disciplines. But engaging in these disciplines takes time and space, and if one is serious about being a transformed follower of Jesus, one must intentionally arrange and re-arrange life for that to happen. Unfortunately for HCC, the effort in engaging the disciplines has become part

---

<sup>3</sup> Richard A. Swenson, *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).

of a doing spirituality, and such practices have made study and prayer an end unto themselves rather than the means God uses to transform lives. The leadership, while re-visiting the topic of discipleship, needs new ways to encourage the congregation to engage in their spiritual growth.

Beginning with the leaders, this paper will seek to integrate spiritual practices that will help them as disciples to care for their souls, that they would remember who they are before God and slow down to sit as followers at the feet of Jesus. Only then can they reflectively and creatively equip others to be and make disciples of Jesus Christ. These practices will extend to the congregation as well, helping them experience margins in their lives as the grace of God for living, giving them the motivation, inspiration, and encouragement to be followers of Jesus, not just members attending church on Sundays. Only when one is a disciple of Jesus, not just a member of a church, can he or she make other disciples, thus fulfilling the Great Commission of Jesus himself.

While many practices are considered part of the spiritual disciplines, particular practices that this ministry focus paper will be integrating into the leadership and congregational life of HCC include *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and the prayer of examen. This paper is composed of three major sections. Part One begins with the ministry context and challenge. The first chapter surveys the history of Houston, including its ethnic population and the influx of Chinese into the city over the last few decades, and describes the attraction of this city for the Chinese population. Chapter 2 continues to describe the ministry context with the local place of ministry, its beginnings, and its current tendency toward busyness and burnout. Part Two of the paper covers the biblical and theological foundations involved in margin-making, and begins with a

literature review of the necessity of cultivating space for God in Chapter 3. Ecclesiology is the topic of Chapter 4, where a theology of the church is explored. To conclude this second section, Chapter 5 looks at the role of Scripture and prayer in discipleship and how these themes from the contemplative tradition may help believers at HCC to re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation.

Part Three covers the strategy for engaging in margin-making practices and how discipleship can be re-envisioned in this local church. The three practices to be discussed in Chapter 6 include contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen. To write of contemplative practices as a strategy may seem contradictory to the topic of Christian spiritual formation, so the term “means of grace” is included in the title to highlight the fact that these margin-making practices to create space for God are not a strategy per se, but the means that God uses to speak to and transform his people into greater Christlikeness. It is also the means given to his people to arrange their lives so that they can hear him and experience him in more intimate ways. Both are grace. Effort is still needed in the Christian life, these practices to open oneself to God, but nothing is earned from him. Dallas Willard has said that grace is not opposed to effort, but to earning, and these practices are within one’s effort to do so that God can accomplish what one cannot do by direct effort.<sup>4</sup> The product of a transformed life belongs to God alone.

While many spiritual practices exist for formation purposes, this paper will focus on the above three as an initial start. Many at HCC are used to an exterior active life of Sunday services, weekly Bible studies, prayer meetings, and fellowship gatherings. The

---

<sup>4</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Recovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 200.

interior life is much weaker, and these three margin-making practices to create space for God include a “stop, look, listen” modality needed for a robust interior life.<sup>5</sup>

Contemplative prayer cultivates the inner life by pausing before God in silence. The practice of spiritual reading helps one pay attention to God by looking to see how he has revealed himself through the ages with his people. Finally, the prayer of examen, through reflection and discernment, sees how God may be speaking to his people in the specifics of their lives. Living with God in such a way will hopefully stop the busyness and activity as a measurement for spirituality. It is hoped that before engaging in another task or participating in another service area, God’s people would be in a better position to discern and attend to his desire for them in this situation.

Once these practices are part of one’s spiritual life, other practices can easily be taught and experienced, but the above will provide the foundational framework to be present with God by stopping, looking, and listening to him. It is hoped that practicing these at regular intervals will equip the believer at HCC to become more of a disciple of Jesus Christ rather than just a member doing the motions of service and church life. Chapter 7 will cover a strategy for implementation, giving an overview of how and when these three practices will be implemented among the leadership and congregation at HCC. It is hoped that by applying these margin-making practices, the congregation will find the easy yoke and rest for their souls, even in the midst of life and its challenges.

---

<sup>5</sup> Willy Hernandez, “Partial Content Evaluation” for Doctoral Project, March 1, 2012.

PART ONE  
MINISTRY CONTEXT

## CHAPTER 1

### AN OVERVIEW OF HOUSTON, TEXAS

Born in Shanghai, China, in 1946, Tang Pei-En became part of the Baby Boomer generation before he even knew what a Baby Boomer was. Eventually he would be initiated into the larger world of the West, but in the immediate aftermath of the war, Pei-En and his family lived their own lives in China. Normal came to an end sooner than anyone had planned as the Communist government in China began fighting against the Nationalists' Kuomintang Party, at the time considered the ruling party in China. By the late 1940s, the Communist Party under Mao Zedong had invaded many parts of China, including the capital, Nanjing. The Tang family, because they had enough money and sufficient resources to leave the country, did so.

In 1948, the family fled across the China Straits to Taiwan, making their new home on the island's capital, Taipei. Pei-En enrolled in elementary school and was a stellar student. His high scores on the national high school entrance exam enabled him to enroll in the top boys' high school in Taiwan. Three years later, due to his high scores on the national college exam, he was admitted to the top university in Taiwan, National Taiwan University. He majored in chemistry and after graduation, was admitted to the

Ph.D. program at Rice University in Houston, Texas. While studying at Rice, Pei-En officially took the name Patrick, and would professionally be Patrick Tang for the rest of his life. He excelled in his graduate work, and stayed on for his post-doctoral work as well. He met and married his wife, Jean Chen, who was also doing her graduate work at the university. Both received prestigious job offers in Houston: Patrick as an assistant professor of Chemistry at Rice University, his wife as a researcher at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Many Chinese share stories similar to that of the Tangs, although the details may differ, such as which part of China or Taiwan or Hong Kong they came from, which educational institutions they attended in the United States, their current places of employment, and how long they have been living in Houston. Despite the differences in their stories, the end is the same: they are living in Houston because of job opportunities and families, becoming fully hyphenated Chinese-Americans. These first-generation Chinese share the immigrant theme in their stories while the second generation share the storyline of being American-born Chinese (hereafter, ABC). These ABCs are finding their niches in Houston as well, and the same companies that employed their parents are employing them: M.D. Anderson, Rice University, hospitals in the Texas Medical Center, NASA, and with English being their native language, many are teachers in the public school system. The next section will give an overview of Houston and explain its appeal to the thousands of Chinese who now call Houston home. Houston attracts many immigrants who are willing to leave their homeland and begin new lives here, and reasons for this will be discussed.

## Houston's Humble Beginnings

David G. McComb penned these words to describe the largest city in Texas: “Houston blossomed like a native magnolia tree.”<sup>1</sup> Such was not always the case. As migration moved westward from the eastern cities, two brothers from New York, John K. and Augustus C. Allen, joined the western migration and founded Houston in 1836. Its beginning was hardly noticeable, a small town along the Buffalo Bayou, at the time barely navigable and difficult for people to locate from the bayou. While the bayou provided one means of transportation from Galveston Bay and the Gulf of Mexico, the city knew it needed other means in order to survive. The first railroads were built in the 1850s, giving the city another means to transport cotton from the fields of the Brazos Valley along with other goods.<sup>2</sup>

It was also during this decade that Texas underwent extraordinary population growth and economic development, as the population increased from approximately 35,000 in 1836, to 212,000 in 1850, and ushered in the next decade at 604,000.<sup>3</sup> The immigrants from the upper South and the mid-Atlantic states were European corn and cattle farmers, coming to Texas during the Mexican period. From the lower South came immigrants of the slave-cotton-plantation culture, including both Europeans and Africans. With the influx of new immigrants and their farming background, 95 percent of the Texas population was involved in agriculture, specifically cotton near the coastal plains

---

<sup>1</sup> David G. McComb, *Texas: A Modern History*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 126.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

surrounding Houston, its production increasing seven and a half times in the decade from 1850 to 1860.<sup>4</sup> With such growth came the need to regulate and systematize the trading of cotton, and so the Houston Board of Trade was established in 1867, with a charter in 1877 changing the name to Houston Cotton Exchange and Board of Trade.<sup>5</sup>

As Texas grew, so did the towns, both in the number of towns and their sizes. These were the focal points of Texas society, where people came together for commerce and the theater, education and religion. The denominational diversity that characterizes American religious history, from the Puritans to the Baptists, from the Anglicans to the Methodists, along with many others, all eventually made their way to Houston and other Texas towns, and planted their seeds in the lives of the townspeople.<sup>6</sup>

At the time, Galveston, due to its location on the Gulf of Mexico and the natural harbor Galveston Island provided, was the state's largest city in the 1870s and 1880s, and its port the most important in Texas. A hurricane in September 1900 curtailed the city's development and provided the impetus Houston needed to blossom. Houston, located fifty miles inland from Galveston, provided a point of shipment for goods on the way to Galveston, and from Galveston to New Orleans, New York, and beyond.<sup>7</sup> Due to this natural disaster, Houston became a major player in the shipping business in her own right. The hurricane also occurred in the midst of the oil boom: "The single most important

---

<sup>4</sup> McComb, *Texas*, 64.

<sup>5</sup> John Tweed Hannah, "Houston Cotton Exchange and Board of Trade," *Handbook of Texas Online*, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/drh01> (accessed September 3, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> McComb, *Texas*, 67.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

event in modern Texas history is the discovery of oil.”<sup>8</sup> Galveston, instead of capitalizing on this discovery, had to spend considerable time and money on cleaning up the city and fortifying her defenses against the sea.<sup>9</sup>

A few years before the Galveston hurricane, Congress had given permission to create a channel from Galveston Bay and up the Buffalo Bayou, the initial construction completed in 1908, with further deepening of the channel in 1914, and subsequent improvement creating even more depth and width to accommodate bigger ships.<sup>10</sup> Houston now became a world class player in the shipping business, not only matching Galveston’s natural advantage on the gulf, but with its inland location, providing an extra barrier from storms in the gulf. The Port of Houston became the major port in Texas and among the top four in the United States, both due to its shipments in oil and cotton, especially during World War I and II.<sup>11</sup> By 1948, Houston was known as the fastest-growing city in the United States.<sup>12</sup>

### **Ethnic Growth**

Within fifteen years after the Civil War, the population in Texas nearly doubled as people rushed to claim a piece of land to farm, and once the land rush was over, to eventually settle in the cities.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the European descendants entering Texas

---

<sup>8</sup> McComb, *Texas*, 118.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 126-27.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 79.

from the mid-Atlantic and southern states, the immigrants came directly from Europe, including Germany, France, England, Ireland, Sweden, and Italy, among others. The majority worked in agriculture, namely livestock, grain, and cotton.<sup>14</sup> Before the Civil War, Africans came to Texas with their English families as slaves, some eventually escaping to Mexico. Since the Civil War the influx of Africans and African-Americans has declined in the overall Texas population.<sup>15</sup>

The Asians, on the other hand, have continued to migrate to Texas. Before the gold rush of 1848, fewer than fifty Chinese lived in the United States.<sup>16</sup> The gold rush in San Francisco in 1848 brought many Chinese men from Canton, a province in southern China. Being a port city in China, the people of Canton were used to doing business with other countries. Due to the oppression of two hundred years of foreign rule by the Manchurians under the Qing dynasty, many in Canton desired to leave China for a better life. When word made it to the province that gold had been found in California, many hoped to strike it rich, solving all their financial and political problems. They began arriving by the thousands, and by the early 1850s, of all the Chinese in California, 85 percent were involved in mining gold.<sup>17</sup> A few became wealthy, but most did not. While some of the wealthy returned to China, most stayed in California, as many felt it a disgrace to return to China. The Chinese that stayed in San Francisco clustered around a

---

<sup>14</sup> McComb, *Texas*, 64.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>16</sup> Iris Chang, *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2003), 26.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

several block area and eventually went into business by opening grocery stores, laundries, restaurants, and herbal stores.<sup>18</sup>

Despite the population growth on both coasts, land travel between the coasts was hazardous and took months. It was safer to travel by boat through the Strait of Magellan near the southern tip of South America. When President Lincoln passed legislation to finance a transcontinental railroad, laborers were needed, and the Chinese provided the labor force to lay down hundreds of miles of track. By 1865, there were close to fifty thousand Chinese in California, and at least 90 percent were young men. With their propensity for hard work, many more Chinese were recruited from Canton directly.<sup>19</sup> Due to the dangerous nature of the work, including the use of dynamite to blast through the mountainous terrain, over one thousand Chinese lost their lives. When the transcontinental railways were completed in May 1869, many Chinese became homeless and jobless, and as a result, these thousands of Chinese began to disperse throughout the United States.<sup>20</sup>

In December 1869, about 250 Chinese men came to lay track for the Houston & Texas Central Railroad. Other Chinese came to work on various plantations and shrimp farms in the south.<sup>21</sup> Due to harsh and oppressive working conditions, many eventually quit, moved to the cities, and opened their own stores.<sup>22</sup> The 1880 census reported seven

---

<sup>18</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 49.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>21</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 97. See also Marilyn Dell Brady, *The Asian Texans* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2004), 11.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

Chinese in Houston, most in the laundry business, including Wah Yuan, whose son Lincoln is reported to be the first Chinese-American born in Houston.<sup>23</sup> During the pre-war years, the Chinese community in Houston numbered under fifty. Many were Cantonese merchants who opened their small businesses in Houston's Third Ward, selling to the city's African-American population and congregating around an area that became known as Chinatown. The Chinese community only grew to 121 by World War II, and finally reached 1000 in 1955.<sup>24</sup>

Despite the initial slow growth of the Chinese in Texas, they soon began to grow exponentially once the Exclusion Act was lifted in 1943, coinciding with events in China that caused additional waves of migration to the United States, including Houston. With the Communist government coming into power, the Nationalist government and its supporters left China, leaving almost everything behind. Many came to the United States, others to Hong Kong, and the majority to Taiwan. From November 1948 through the early months of 1949, one to two million refugees arrived in Taiwan from mainland China. These were citizens with the financial means to leave China or were part of the Nationalist government as bureaucrats or military personnel.<sup>25</sup> A few years later, with the United States government allowing more immigrants, and China under the Communist government allowing people to leave in order to ease the hunger problem, thousands left

---

<sup>23</sup> Edward C.M. Chen and Fred R. Von Der Mehden, "History of Houston's Chinatown," [http://www.chinatownconnection.com/houston\\_chinatown\\_history.htm](http://www.chinatownconnection.com/houston_chinatown_history.htm) (accessed September 3, 2011).

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 283.

in the early 1960s, many going to Hong Kong first, then coming to the United States.<sup>26</sup> Many of the children who first went to Taiwan excelled in their studies and eventually came to the United States for graduate school in the 1960s and 1970s. After obtaining their degrees, many settled in the United States and raised their children. Houston was a prime location for many of these Chinese from Taiwan.

With Mao Zedong's death in 1976, his successor, Deng Xiaoping, began to reverse the repression of Mao's regime and worked to open cultural exchanges with the United States, allowing many mainland Chinese students to study abroad in the U.S. At the same time, the American government doubled the immigration slots for the Chinese as separate from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This increase, along with those on student visas, which were considered non-quota immigrants, enabled more than eighty thousand Chinese nationals over the next couple of decades to enter the United States, with many eventually adjusting their status, first to permanent residents, and then to U.S. citizens.<sup>27</sup>

Houston attracted numerous Chinese students and scholars, and many decided to stay permanently. While the Chinatowns of San Francisco, Oakland, Chicago, New York, and Boston have stories and beginnings that hark back to the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth century, Houston's Chinatown only flourished in the mid-twentieth century as the Cantonese congregated near downtown in part of Houston's Third Ward. With the more recent migrations of Chinese from Taiwan and mainland China, the current Chinatown in Southwest Houston only flourished in the 1990s. And rather than the Cantonese and Toisanese sounds that filled the restaurants and supermarkets on both

---

<sup>26</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 263.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 314-15.

coasts and Chicago, Houston's Chinatown is made up of many Mandarin-speakers, both from Taiwan and China, in addition to the Cantonese. As Texans love their cars, so also Houstonians, including the immigrant population, thus Chinatown is, at six square miles, one of the largest automobile-centric Chinatowns in the United States.<sup>28</sup> As many Chinese relocated to the area and assimilated into life in America, it became more important to retain aspects of their culture, specifically the language, and so many Chinese language schools were started, along with the Chinese Community Center in 1979 to serve the growing Chinese population in Houston.<sup>29</sup> With such growth, the immigrant population in Houston doubled in the 1980s alone.<sup>30</sup>

### **Chinese Churches in Houston**

The denominational smorgasbord that characterizes American religious history now characterizes Chinese-American religious history in Houston. Being part of the United States Bible Belt, churches abound and Chinese churches are no different. Chinese Baptist Church is one of the older and larger churches in Houston, beginning in 1953 as a mission of First Baptist Church to reach out to Chinese immigrants in the downtown area. Given that this was the 1950s, the immigrants were Cantonese-speaking and involved in small businesses, and the church is still predominantly Cantonese- and English-speaking today. HCC began in 1975 as a Bible study fellowship for Chinese graduate students at Rice University and the University of Houston, and with the boom of

---

<sup>28</sup> Chen and Von Der Mehden, "History of Houston's Chinatown."

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Carol M. Highsmith and Ted Landphair, *Houston: Deep in the Heart* (Houston: Houston International Protocol Alliance, 2000), 86.

Chinese relocating to the area, planted Clear Lake Chinese Church in 1979, West Houston Chinese Church in 1991, and Fort Bend Community Church in 1997. In the shadow of Joel Osteen’s Lakewood Church, Ed Young’s Second Baptist Church, and the historic First Baptist Church, the Chinese churches are far from being comparable mega-churches. But within the Chinese community, these are the “mega” churches, with the exception of Clear Lake Chinese Church. Several others have a weekly attendance of a few hundred members, along with many smaller churches. All in all, Houston boasts over thirty Chinese Protestant churches.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the Chinese churches for Christians, Houston also has several Buddhist temples and another temple dedicated to traditional deities. The Chinese community also gathers during several secular but highly traditional celebrations, such as the Lunar New Year, Lantern Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, Mid-Autumn Moon Festival, and many Red Egg ceremonies.<sup>32</sup>

### **Houston’s Affordable Cost-of-Living**

According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate in August 2011 held at 9.1 percent, relatively unchanged since April.<sup>33</sup> According to the Texas Workforce Commission, Texas’s unemployment rate is 8.5 percent, while Houston’s unemployment rate hovers at 8.0 percent, lower than the state and national averages with labor availability better than many other metropolitan

---

<sup>31</sup> Brady, *The Asian Texans*, 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>33</sup> Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, “Economic News Release: Employment Situation Summary,” <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.nr0.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011).

areas in the United States.<sup>34</sup> The unemployment status of Asians in the United States is almost a percentage point lower than Whites, and when taking into account their higher educational attainment, the unemployment rate for those with college degrees and above is 4.6 percent.<sup>35</sup>

In addition to a lower unemployment rate, Houston boasts an affordable cost of living, including housing costs. Due to no-zoning laws, Houston has become a sprawling metropolis of nine thousand square miles, providing affordable housing to first time homebuyers and those upgrading to bigger homes in the suburbs. To have a house where children can play in safety, one's own spacious property, and plenty of bedrooms for extended family, many Chinese do not feel pulled to return to the crowded living conditions of their homeland, whether China or Taiwan or Hong Kong.

According to *Money* magazine, while the medium family income of \$48,055 ranks lower than many other cities, Asians earn far more than the city's medium. The medium home price of \$150,191 is affordable to many first-generation immigrants, as Asians also prefer to buy as soon as possible rather than pay rent.<sup>36</sup> However, as they settle down and maintain good jobs, they purchase homes of far greater cost than the

---

<sup>34</sup> Greater Houston Partnership, "Unemployment Rate," <http://www.houston.org/pdf/research/10CW001.pdf> (accessed September 22, 2011).

<sup>35</sup> For a breakdown of unemployment status of the civilian population by race, see Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor, "Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t02.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011). For a breakdown of unemployment status of the civilian population by educational attainment, see Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor "Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment," <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empstat.t04.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011).

<sup>36</sup> "Best Places to Live: Compare Cities," *Money*, [http://apps.money.cnn.com/bestplaces\\_2011/compare\\_tool\\_2011.jsp?id=PL4835000,&view=a](http://apps.money.cnn.com/bestplaces_2011/compare_tool_2011.jsp?id=PL4835000,&view=a) (accessed September 22, 2011).

medium price range. The lower unemployment rate, the steady nature of the health care industry and other local jobs, coupled with affordable cost of living, make Houston an ideal place for the immigrant family to live. After spending several years as graduate students and post-doctoral fellows, they no longer consider themselves new immigrants and are more than ready to settle down and plant roots in their adopted country.

### **Educational and Occupational Opportunities**

So much was accomplished in Texas from 1945 to 1982 that it was considered a Texas Renaissance.<sup>37</sup> In Houston specifically, the University of Texas, in addition to becoming a top-ranked higher education institution, also added a health science center in Houston and a medical school in Galveston. The University of Houston, founded in 1927, is the third largest university in Texas. Rice University, founded on the fortune of William Marsh Rice, is a preeminent research university with graduates all over the world. The thirteen colleges, universities, and professional schools in Houston attract Chinese professors, researchers, and staff, in addition to enrolling their second-generation offspring, as well as welcoming hundreds of international students from China every year.

At the secondary school level, Bellaire High School in the Houston Independent School District is ranked 0.5% academically, with Asian enrollment close to 20%.<sup>38</sup> The Houston Metroplex also includes Sugar Land and Missouri City, Pearland and Clear Lake and surrounding areas that provide the highest possible exemplary ranking by the Texas Education Agency. Most Chinese students, upon graduation from high school, continue

---

<sup>37</sup> McComb, *Texas*, 152.

<sup>38</sup> “Bellaire High School,” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellaire\\_High\\_School\\_\(Bellaire,\\_Texas\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellaire_High_School_(Bellaire,_Texas)) (accessed September 5, 2011).

their education by attending college, either in Texas or out-of-state. In addition to the numerical contribution of these Chinese students who stay in-state for college, 25 percent more adult Houstonians are college graduates than the national average.<sup>39</sup>

For those who graduate and begin their careers in Houston, along with those who come for graduate school or post-doctoral work, opportunities abound in health care, medical research, energy-related fields, and the aerospace industry, among many other fields. In 1939, M.D. Anderson, a partner in Houston's cotton brokerage, left his fortune to be used in caring for the sick, and today the world renowned M.D. Anderson Cancer Center is part of the Texas Medical Center core, now consisting of fifty independent health care institutions in over two hundred buildings on 1,300 acres of land in the heart of Houston.<sup>40</sup> Along with Anderson, George Hermann donated his money to build what is now Memorial Hermann hospital, the largest not-for-profit health system in Southeast Texas with twelve hospitals in the greater Houston area, along with a 278-acre public park in the heart of the city. William Marsh Rice left a fortune to start Rice University, just north of the medical center. NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center attracts many in the high-tech industry, designing and developing spacecraft and training astronauts. ExxonMobil, British Petroleum, ConocoPhillips, and Shell all have offices in Houston and access to nearby refineries. All provide thousands of jobs to the Chinese in Houston, giving them an income greater than the median income of the average Houstonian.

---

<sup>39</sup> Highsmith and Landphair, *Houston*, 86.

<sup>40</sup> Richard E. Wainerdi, "From the President," *Texas Medical Center News*, 1 May 2012, 3.

## **The Result: Busyness and Exhaustion**

While good opportunities for education and career are available, the work is hard and long hours are required to get ahead. For the immigrants wanting to stay in Houston, their work needs to succeed in order for their employers to apply for a long-term work visa or permanent resident visa for them. The importance of hard work and success is ingrained into the children as well, as Chinese parents enroll their children in piano and violin lessons, Chinese language school, extra classes and tutoring in math and writing, along with many other after school programs that provide classes in Chinese, Spanish, math, reading, creative writing, chess, and drawing. Church has become another extra-curricular activity for the family on the weekends. As a result, church can be just another “to do” item to check off on one’s weekly schedule, rather than the community life of members journeying together as disciples of Jesus Christ.

Getting ahead is the name of the game, even for Chinese immigrants. Because they are not afraid of hard work or long hours, they usually do succeed in education and work, willing to pay the necessary price and having already made the sacrifices to be in America. Houston is willing to grant success to the dreamers and doers. In the midst of the doing and succeeding, soul care is neglected, even for believers. The next chapter will show how this “can do” mentality has infiltrated HCC, creating a need and paving the way for margin-making, soul care, and grace-filled living.

## CHAPTER 2

### HOUSTON CHINESE CHURCH

Arriving in Houston as a graduate student in 1968, Tang Pei-En poured himself into his studies for the next several years. During this time, Pei-En officially changed his name to Patrick and would professionally be known as Patrick Tang for the rest of his life. Despite his busy schedule as a student and acclimating to life in America, he did find time to meet and marry his wife, Jean Chen, also from Taiwan and doing her graduate work in molecular biology at the university. After graduating in 1972, Patrick stayed on at Rice for his post-doctoral work. As their student days were coming to an end, both were applying to jobs around the United States. Because of their research and contribution in their respective fields, both eventually received prestigious job offers in Houston: Patrick as an assistant professor of Chemistry at Rice University and his wife as a researcher at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Beginning their careers after many years of hard work and preparation, the Tang family began putting down their roots in Houston. Patrick found working to be easier than studying, and with papers for his green card and permanent residency behind him, he finally had more time on his hands and began socializing with other Chinese in the

Houston area. Many were from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and China, along with several other counties in Southeast Asia. Several Chinese from Hong Kong and Taiwan were Christians and invited Patrick and Jean to their Bible study. The Tangs became believers and were part of the new church that began in Houston in the mid-1970s.

### **The Ministry Context of Houston Chinese Church**

With an overview of Chinese immigration to the United States, and specifically to Houston, Texas, given in Chapter 1, this chapter begins by covering the ministry challenge located at HCC. The chapter will trace the church's beginnings as a campus Bible study comprised of Chinese graduate students in Houston, its growth to one of the flagship Chinese-American churches in North America, and what it costs the congregation to keep up that appearance, especially in church planting and church programming. The last section points to the current challenge of ministry and what it means to be a church today, and how the opportunity and timing is ripe for change in re-envisioning discipleship.

#### **The Early Years: From Student Bible Study to Church**

Due to Mao's advancing forces in China, many who could afford to leave left the mainland, with most of the refugees eventually settling in Taiwan, others immigrating to Hong Kong or the United States. From November 1948 to the early part of 1949, many left China for Taiwan, with one to two million refugees relocating to the island.<sup>1</sup> Most of these refugees belonged to two groups: either they were part of the Nationalist Party's

---

<sup>1</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 283.

military or government, or had the financial means to leave China and settle elsewhere. Those with financial means were also able to provide the best educational opportunities for their children, both in China and in Taiwan. Many of the children of these “refugees” did well in their new schools and had high scores on their national entrance exams for high school and college. Many did well in college and were able to come to the United States for graduate school.

In the 1960s and 1970s with the Communist powers on the rise from mainland China and the Soviet Union, the United States began to expand their research and development in science and technology, in defense facilities and universities, enabling many students to study abroad.<sup>2</sup> They came from Taiwan, Hong Kong, and China during this time for graduate study. While the Chinese can be provincial by nature, when they are in a new country with ambitions for a graduate degree and the better life it will provide, they will stick together as a Chinese community. Those who were Christians in their homeland saw the opportunity in their new country and city to share the gospel with their Chinese classmates.

Houston is home to Rice University and the University of Houston. For those who came to Houston, the top students received scholarships and stipends to study at Rice, with others going to the University of Houston or another school. Despite the time required in learning a new language, studying for their degrees, and adapting to a new life, the Chinese Christians saw the need for a Chinese-speaking Bible study and fellowship, both for their own growth as well as to share the good news with their fellow students.

---

<sup>2</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 293.

Several students began gathering in 1972 on the campus of the University of Houston. They eventually borrowed facilities at South Main Baptist Church and in 1975 incorporated their group into a church with about eighty founding members.<sup>3</sup>

During these early years, first as a Bible study then as a young church, HCC has intentionally chosen to be a non-denominational<sup>4</sup> and evangelical<sup>5</sup> church in their desire to attract all Chinese Christians in Houston, regardless of their background. The commonality of being Chinese in Houston and the surrounding areas took precedence over whether they were from Hong Kong or Taiwan or China, whether Lutheran or Presbyterian, Methodist or Baptist. These early leaders wanted a church of their own that would meet their needs as Chinese Christians in America as well as to reach out to other Chinese immigrants.<sup>6</sup> They felt that in order to attract non-believers and to make it easier for new Christians to be part of this community, it would be better to focus on the few non-negotiables of the Christian faith. In addition to its independent organization, HCC's evangelical orientation provides the impetus and motivation to evangelize and gain converts, and this posture has helped the church grow in numbers over the years.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fenggang Yang, "Chinese Christian Transnationalism: Diverse Networks of a Houston Church," in *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002), 131.

<sup>4</sup> Yang notes that about half of the Chinese churches in the United States are nondenominational, with many others part of the Southern Baptist denomination with its substantial independence to the local congregation. This independence in organization allows the church freedom to receive people from diverse denominations (Yang, "Chinese Christian Transnationalism," 129).

<sup>5</sup> The evangelical tradition is characterized by several tenets and strengths: the call to conversion, its stress on the missionary mandate of making disciples, commitment to biblical fidelity and sound doctrine (Richard Foster, *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith* [San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998], 225-28).

<sup>6</sup> Yang, "Chinese Christian Transnationalism," 131.

With the decision early on to be evangelical in theology and independent in organization, HCC, like many other Chinese churches in the United States, attracted Chinese from different nations, the common denominator being Chinese and living in Houston.<sup>7</sup> With diversity already in the church's DNA from the beginning, this welcoming of Chinese from all over the world enabled the church to grow very quickly. Sunday attendance reached over two hundred in 1976, over six hundred in 1980, and over eight hundred in 1993, despite a mass exit due to the economic downturn in the mid- and late-1980s.<sup>8</sup>

As these students began to graduate several years later, only one in four students returned to Taiwan, the majority making Houston or other parts of the United States their home and settling down into upper-middle class society.<sup>9</sup> Those who remained in Houston worked in high-level jobs at NASA, oil and gas companies such as Shell, ExxonMobil, British Petroleum, and other energy companies. Many also worked in the Texas Medical Center, whether at M.D. Anderson Cancer Center or Baylor, or one of the fifty other institutions located on the twelve miles of streets that wind through the medical center. Many others work as lawyers, engineers, and school teachers in the Houston area.

---

<sup>7</sup> Yang, "Chinese Christian Transnationalism," 131.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Chang, *The Chinese in America*, 298-99.

## Generational Characteristics

When HCC began as a student Bible study in 1972, it was comprised of mainly international students from Taiwan and Hong Kong, thus a fairly homogenous first-generation group. As they graduated and found jobs, if they stayed in Houston, they began marrying and starting families, giving birth to the next generation. Added to the cultural complexity is the generational complexity as first-generation Chinese students began families and raised their children in Houston and HCC.

### **First-generation Immigrants**

Graduate students in the early to mid-1970s in Houston were born after World War II, many in China in the mid-1940s and were refugees to Taiwan and Hong Kong before the communist invasion throughout China in 1948-1949. Many were also born in Taiwan and Hong Kong after their families relocated from the mainland. Having the financial resources to leave China, these families were able to provide whatever was needed for their children to succeed in school whether in Taiwan or Hong Kong, such as extra tutoring or hiring household help so the children could spend their time studying rather than doing chores. High scores were needed on both the high school entrance and college entrance exams for students to enter the best high schools and universities. Scores on the college exams also determined their course of study at the university, as departments and majors were ranked. The top students in college were able to apply and receive scholarships to study overseas.

As they immigrated to Houston for school, they clustered together for survival and community, speaking Chinese with one another and cooking Chinese food together.

The believers among them saw this as an opportunity to reach out to others, and formed a Bible study in 1972. When the fellowship was incorporated into a church in 1975, many were beginning to settle down in Houston, start their careers and their families, and at the same time help the new church grow.

Valuing knowledge and diligence in their studies, these first-generation Chinese prefer content over experience. Many also studied the sciences and engineering, focusing on facts and numbers over the liberal arts and social sciences. Content-based Bible studies and Sunday school classes are still the norm for many of these older generation immigrants. They prefer the lecture style of learning and do not enjoy discussion or group work. Discipleship might be seen as a series of things to be learned, the study and mastery of biblical content. The evangelical commitments of doctrine and biblical fidelity weave in nicely with the Chinese bent toward loving God with the mind.

Even today, many first-generation immigrants are still attracted to HCC and enter the doors year after year, newly arrived from China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and elsewhere. Graduate students still arrive year after year, and more and more undergraduates are coming to Houston, paying their own way to study.<sup>10</sup> Many of them are coming to HCC for friendship and fellowship, some becoming believers during their time here. Given that HCC attracts recent first-generation immigrants and is able to reach many with the gospel, it will continue to be a Chinese church. The challenge is to do ministry that meets the needs of the various generations and to be sensitive to the different cultures.

---

<sup>10</sup> In the past, the majority of students were graduate students who attended Rice University and the University of Houston based on the scholarships and graduate stipends given. In recent years many universities are accepting undergraduate students from Asia, not as scholarship students, but their families are paying their way, including tuition, living, and other expenses. See also Justin Bergman, "A U.S. Degree at Any Cost," *Time*, 20 August 2012, 47-48.

## **Second-generation American-born Chinese**

With the first generation being the immigrant generation, the second generation consists of their American-born children, known as ABCs. Many of these children born to the former graduate students grew up in Houston and became part of the congregation. Worship services in the 1970s began as Mandarin-only services as most Chinese could speak Mandarin, even if they considered themselves Taiwanese or Cantonese. With the second generation becoming part of the church family, children's ministries, youth ministries, and English ministries started, with new staff joining the church. Eventually the second generation pressed for its own worship service, which began with side-by-side translation and finally to an all-English service a few years later.

As these ABCs grew up, some left for college out of state, while many others attended the University of Texas at Austin. Quite a few returned to Houston for work and came back to HCC. Many ABCs from other cities came to Houston for school or work and became part of the church community, helping to increase the need for a full-fledged second-generation English ministry. Currently the English worship service averages about 250-300 on a given Sunday. This second generation is taking more leadership on a church-wide level, serving as elders and deacons on the church council. As HCC is revisiting its ministry structure, directional discussion by the pastoral staff and elders include how the English congregation can flourish in this Chinese church context.

### **Educational and Cultural Characteristics**

It is no secret that the Chinese place a high value on education. Education does not represent learning alone, but what it means in prestige when one can graduate from

Harvard or Stanford. Education can also point to future earning potential and power, providing financial security and “face.” A person has “face” when he or she looks good in front of others, something that is very important to the Chinese. Chinese Christians are no different in this area. The graduate students in the 1970s made it to Houston because of their high school and college grades, enabling them to receive acceptances, scholarships, and stipends into American universities. As they raise their own children in Houston and in other cities across America, they also place a high value on education. While less than one-third of the American population has a college degree,<sup>11</sup> the majority of HCC members have college degrees, and many have graduate degrees. In 2012, all seventeen elders and deacons on the church council have college degrees, with almost all having post-graduate degrees. All eight pastoral staff members have at least the MDiv degree, with two pastors having PhDs in another field. Amongst the congregation, second-generation working professionals, products of their first-generation parents, almost all have an undergraduate degree with many possessing graduate degrees. The church boasts a high number of members in medicine and health care, engineering, research, teaching, law, business, finance, and the aerospace industry.

While many have professional jobs, HCC does have members who came not for education or work opportunities, but immigrated to give their children a better life. They have worked hard in labor-intensive industries, such as the postal service, restaurants and grocery stores, as mechanics and plumbers. While they may not have as high paying and prestigious jobs as some of their peers, their Chinese background has instilled in them a

---

<sup>11</sup> Camille L. Ryan and Julie Siebens, “Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009,” <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2012), 3-4.

sense of hard work and diligence, along with the value of a good education, which they pass on to their children.

Given the bent and bias for education in the Chinese culture, Christian education is accomplished through content-based Sunday school classes and Bible studies. Even young professionals in their 20s and 30s want more Bible study as part of their weekly small groups. The worship services are geared toward the preaching time, with the singing more of a preparation for the sermon than worship in and of itself. Even several in the youth group recently told the youth pastor that they want to go deeper in Scripture, but not sure what deeper really means, as the youth pastor desires for them to live out their faith in their schools, in their families, with their friends, rather than just sit in circles studying the Bible.

With faith being an intellectual pursuit of content and rationalized as loving God with the mind, HCC believers understand the theological construct of grace but have less first-hand experience with grace. They know that serving God is in response to his grace, but serving has become more about doing for God rather than an overflow of God's grace in one's life. After years of learning and studying, people are hungering to experience more of God and to live based on faith rather than by content and sight.

### **Ministry Ethos at Houston Chinese Church**

A sense of doing permeates the DNA of HCC, where spiritual health is measured in how much one does, how many meetings one attends on any given Sunday afternoon. People are tired, the leadership included. One pastor recently remarked in a staff meeting, "Our church is a doing church; we do a bunch of things; we are not a being church. We

get projects done, but we don't take time to be a disciple of Christ." The ethos of doing and spirituality measured by busyness has led to exhaustion for many. However, doing is still easier than slowing down and being, so despite the busyness and exhaustion, people are still involved in doing. For many years, the doing has sustained the church and kept the members accomplishing things for the Lord. Mission and vision were tied to evangelism and church planting, with results that could be counted and measured, goals to be achieved.

### Ministry Centered on Church Planting

The doing ethos, combined with rapid growth in the Chinese population in Houston, has enabled HCC to plant three Chinese churches in the greater Houston area in a span of fifteen years. With many Chinese settling in the southeastern part of the city in a suburb called Clear Lake, the church planted Clear Lake Chinese Church (hereafter, CLCC) in the early 1980s. Having just celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, the church has around three hundred in weekly attendance, one of the smaller sister churches. As the city began expanding outward, with Chinatown relocating from the downtown area to a four-mile strip on Bellaire Boulevard west of the city in the 1980s, the western and southwestern suburbs began developing rapidly. The Chinese bought new homes in these suburbs and filled the new school district with their children. The church planted West Houston Chinese Church (hereafter, WHCC) in 1991 in the western suburbs, a church that has since planted two more churches further west and north of Houston. With the southwestern suburb of Sugar Land growing, the church planted Fort Bend Community Church (hereafter, FBCC) in 1997, a church that began its first Sunday worship with

four-hundred members commissioned from HCC. HCC also helped establish Chinese churches in other Texas cities, including College Station (home of Texas A&M University), Port Lavaca and Corpus Christi in southern Texas, and Lubbock in northern Texas (home of Texas Tech University). HCC also started a mission church in Kazakhstan, Central Asia. The weekly attendance of HCC, CLCC, WHCC, and FBCC together is over three thousand.

After four hundred members left to plant Fort Bend Community Church, the next phase for HCC was to rebuild from within, especially as many older and more mature believers went with the new church. During this time many new immigrants were arriving in Houston from China, finding their way to HCC for Chinese fellowship, and eventually becoming believers after years of atheism due to the Cultural Revolution. New staff was added over the next several years. While the church needed to rebuild, the senior pastor also desired that believers strengthen their inner lives, taking care that their spirituality would not be measured by doing. However with a DNA of busyness, doing is easier than being. With no more church-planting goals for a few years, people began feeling listless and visionless, the church functioning in maintenance mode. Gone were the cutting-edge ministries of the past.

With land available, combined with a low cost of living as well as ample educational and occupational opportunities, soon another suburb appeared on the map. Pearland is a bedroom community about fifteen miles directly south of downtown Houston. With affordable new homes, many Chinese immigrants began moving out of their apartments in the city and buying new homes in Pearland. With more and more

Chinese relocating to Pearland, HCC began a fellowship group there to reach these young families.

Given HCC's successful history in church planting, this Pearland fellowship group also desired that the church would plant a daughter church in the area. However the demographics has changed from more established believers to newer believers from China who did not have any church background, thus more time was needed for discipling and equipping. Eventually in 2011, HCC planted a Pearland Campus with several core families. However, the established church plants of 1981, 1991, and 1997 are possibly a thing of the past as the Pearland Campus seems to have different and unanticipated congregational challenges, including being without a campus pastor since its inception.

#### Ministries Centered on Activities and Programs

With diversity being the most notable characteristic of the Chinese immigrant church,<sup>12</sup> HCC desires to reach as many Chinese as it possibly can. Three language services are available to reach the Mandarin, Cantonese, and English-speaking populations. Given the church's evangelistic fervor that more Chinese would come to know Christ, they try to be all things to all people, diversity turning to a smorgasbord of programs and activities to meet different needs. To help identify its mission and direct its energies, HCC has five core ministries of worship, teaching, caring, serving, and outreach. In addition to helping people think in these categories, this has also unfortunately translated into more doing: doing worship, doing teaching, doing caring, serving more,

---

<sup>12</sup> Yang, "Chinese Christian Transnationalism," 131.

reaching out more. Of these five, the two that seem to hold higher importance are worship and teaching, and for worship, it is specifically the preaching in the worship service. For many years, when people looked on the church's website for information on the children and youth ministries, they had to click on the link for "teaching," since the church was about teaching children and youth.

What started out as a good intention to reach out to all with the gospel of Jesus Christ has led to HCC being unable to focus on a clear mission and vision that crystallizes the church's calling in Houston. The result is an exhaustive offering of activities and programs: first-generation ministries, second-generation ministries, worship services in Mandarin, Cantonese, and English, children's ministries, youth ministries, a weekday learning center for children eighteen-months to five years old, an annual Health Day attracting over two hundred uninsured first-generation Chinese without access to regular health care, the annual church picnic and ping-pong tournament, Chinese New Year celebrations, various fellowship retreats, the annual two-day Christmas pageant, church cleaning days, compassion projects, Good News Clubs in a local elementary school, various concerts, weekly church luncheon, worship nights, Christian education training, evangelism classes, and seminars in domestic violence, homosexuality, and single-parenting. All this is in addition to people needed to staff the weekly ministries, such as children's and youth teachers, worship leaders, ushers and greeters, small group leaders, translators, and many others. At times the announcement section in the bulletin and during the worship services take up an inordinate amount of space and time, almost taking away from the purpose of gathering together in worship. While many of these are

good things, at times they may resemble a community service center, catering to its members, rather than equipping for discipleship.

From all this doing, members are busy and occupied, with an “active spirituality” that leaves them no time to be still and reflect. Spirituality is measured by how much one is actively involved in service, how much they are “doing” for the Lord, rather than “being” before the Lord. Some have adapted the ministry philosophy that meetings are equated with spirituality, whether it is more meetings or longer meetings. The commandment to keep the Sabbath is often ignored, perhaps seen as just a suggestion for those who tire easily. It has been briefly discussed that no meetings should be held on Communion Sundays, but keeping one Sunday a month “meetingless” has been impossible to do. Perhaps Michael Frost diagnosed the situation best when he states that “Christians have become used to the idea that their faith is primarily about attending meetings—worship meetings . . . prayer meetings, and so on.”<sup>13</sup> In a church that thrives on doing, unfortunately the doing has not necessarily translated into transformation: “The evangelical church has not been suffering from a lack of effort; but our regimens of sanctification may be too programmatic, activist and fast. We engage in considerable religious activity with uncertain levels of transformation.”<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006), 277.

<sup>14</sup> Bruce Demarest, “Spiritual Formation: Fleeting Fad or Return to Roots?” *Denver Seminary Magazine*, Summer 2006, 9.

## Houston Chinese Church at Present

The sense of doing and providing services has led to a busyness and exhaustion,<sup>15</sup> so much so that it has caused the leadership to re-evaluate the church's mission statement about making disciples and what that entails. The focus of this paper aims to see discipleship re-envisioned and placed within the broader context of spiritual formation, so that believers would intentionally live in ways that would allow God to form them into greater Christlikeness, and as they practice certain disciplines toward that purpose, would embody grace and rest in place of busyness.

### Busyness and Exhaustion

Many leaders are tired and exhausted. Some feel that in order to combat this exhaustion, better communication is needed in the form of meetings, so that with better communication and caring for one another in place, people will work smarter and be more efficient with their time. But with the exhaustion already in place, people do not know how to stop and take care of themselves, nor is the pastoral staff encouraging and equipping for self-care and a Sabbath way of life. Each department is working hard to generate momentum to justify its existence, and this is compounded by the Asian themes of hard work and needing to "save face" by having an activity-filled department that meets multiple needs of the church congregation. But instead of bringing leaders closer to

---

<sup>15</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry* ([Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008], 117-19), states that this bondage of busyness describes the lives of many Christians around the world, affecting pastors, church leaders, and believers alike. Many identify busyness and overload as major distractions from God, and the church "often leads people into a way of life that is becoming more and more layered with Christian busyness," leaving people exhausted.

God, the Asian sense of duty and responsibility has set in and many are carrying out their departmental responsibility with more duty than delight.

For many, the focus on doing has become more important than being. Service to Christ has squeezed out devotion in Christ, with programs and productivity having priority over communing with Jesus. The last several years the church has been in a maintenance mode, lacking depth and insight with no priority on reflection, nor cultivating a life and ministry that points to the easy yoke. In the rush to get things done, basic love and care for one another as a church family are overlooked, not realizing that hurry is part of one's pride to perform well, appear important, and mask a sense of fear and failure. It is hardly a life that is "putting on" Christ.<sup>16</sup> The spiritual writer Evelyn Underhill sums up the challenge of busyness and what is most needed for believers: "We mostly spend those lives conjugating three verbs: to want, to have, and to do . . . we are kept in perpetual unrest; being, not wanting, having and doing, is the essence of a spiritual life."<sup>17</sup>

### Leadership: Re-Envisioning Discipleship

After a five-year plan from 2003 to 2008 to grow the church with more staff and programs, the leadership began to see a disconnect between church programming and disciple-making, and set out to re-align itself. The result was a three-year plan called "Connecting." The first year's pulpit ministry and programming would help people connect with God, the second year to connect with each other, and the third year to

---

<sup>16</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus' Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006), 29.

<sup>17</sup> Evelyn Underhill, *The Spiritual Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1937), 20.

connect with the local church. In addition to the new three-year ministry plan, three pastoral staff members were given the task to look at the discipleship ministry of the church. The leadership realized that in the midst of all the doing, the programs and activities, along with plans to plant another church, people were getting busier and busier doing more and more, but disciples were not being made. The mission and vision statement of HCC for the last several years has been “to make God-loving and compassionate disciples of Jesus Christ among all nations.” However, it has been easier for the leadership to focus on programs and activities, increasing attendance and membership, rather than making disciples. Quantitative measurement in membership is easier than the qualitative measurement of making disciples. As Dallas Willard has said, the Church has been guilty of the “Great Omission from the Great Commission.”<sup>18</sup>

The challenge becomes even greater when many non-believers are finding their way to the church because it meets their felt needs for all things Chinese: being with Chinese people, speaking the Chinese language, eating Chinese food, having Chinese school for their children. Because many could be attending for years before they trust in Christ, when they do, discipleship can be assumed. Church membership has increased when they are baptized, but the numbers of disciples may not have increased as quickly. Despite this realization, discipleship is still focused on content and programs. Since Jesus’ Great Commission makes it clear that discipleship is the command, the focus is on discipleship alone, rather than seeing discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. Yet discipleship is being overlooked with new believers and mature believers

---

<sup>18</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, xii. Willard explains that despite the word “disciple” used 269 times in the New Testament while the word “Christian” is only used three times, the Church has focused its energies toward making Christians and church members than disciples.

are hungry for something more than another Bible study or potluck fellowship dinner. People want to encounter and experience God, not just learn more of him. When they experience God's work of grace and transformation in their lives, they will desire to follow and obey his teachings.

#### The Challenge: A Discipleship within the Context of Spiritual Formation

With the senior pastor retiring at the end of 2014, the congregation is in the middle of a transition. With the future unknown and many ministry-related discussions occurring, the time is ripe for change to happen. However, even in the transition, instead of pausing and praying, listening and discerning, life continues at a blur with meetings, activities, and programs. With so many good things to do in the name of making disciples for Christ, the list is endless. Yet the good work can prevent the great work to be done, the work that God has truly called HCC to do and be in Houston. Instead of being all things to all people, a vending machine for people to come in and choose their favorite snack on Sundays, a paradigm change needs to happen to live with rest and an ability to discern the Spirit's leading and movement. Busyness has ceased to work; doing for God has not changed lives. Nor has the content of discipleship, which includes preaching and teaching, Bible studies and prayer meetings, been sufficient to transform believers into greater Christlikeness. Discipleship now must be re-envisioned within the broader context of spiritual formation.

#### Christian Formation through Grace and Margins

The congregation believes the church needs a strong visionary leader in the future senior pastor to provide direction with the many activities. However, the greater need is a

time out from the busyness to be formed into greater Christlikeness and equipped as human “beings” so that the members of the congregation can be the hands and feet of Christ in their homes and work places. Margins are needed so people can have that space and time to slow down, pause, and be still before the Lord. Grace is also needed, a grace that moves beyond a passivity in salvation, that one is saved by grace alone, to include “God acting in our life to accomplish what we cannot do on our own effort . . . grace is not opposed to effort (in actions) but to earning (an attitude).<sup>19</sup>

Both margins and grace are unfamiliar concepts at HCC, yet sorely needed. With the transition in leadership, the opportunity is present to re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation practices, moving from intellectual faith to an experienced grace-filled faith, the time is ripe to introduce several margin-making practices into the lives of believers at HCC. With the focus on content and convictions, grace as a theological construct is understood more intellectually but less experientially. Because Chinese Christians in the United States are here because of educational achievement, grace is easier understood than received and given. Receiving grace from God requires humility, dependence, desperation, death to pride and self-sufficiency, and the means God uses to give his people grace is through worship, Scripture meditation, and praying in dependence.<sup>20</sup>

Traditionally, discipleship at HCC is heavier on content and competency, less on character and a way of being with God. Re-envisioning discipleship within the broader

---

<sup>19</sup> Dallas Willard, “Living a Transformed Life Adequate to Our Calling,” <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119> (accessed September 19, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence J. Crabb, *The Pressure's Off: There's a New Way to Live* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2002), 160-61.

context of spiritual formation includes cultivating a way of being and arranging life with space for God to work. When God's people attend to and be with him, he will form Christ in their lives (Galatians 4:19). "Discipleship" is a term that has suffered from overuse and has come to be associated with programs and activities, content and skills that the follower of Jesus is supposed to know and do, but less about character and one's inner being. However, because it is a more familiar term than spiritual formation, this paper desires to continue using the term, but will re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. Spiritual formation is a relatively foreign term to many at HCC, perhaps because it is not as clear cut as programs and activities, classes and content, nor is it easily measureable as a Sunday school quarter or the number of small groups.

While "making disciples" is part of the church's mission statement, what the church is really about making is Christians and members. This is in spite of the fact that the New Testament makes little mention of both as compared to the plethora of references to Jesus' disciples and Jesus' calling people to be his disciples and the lifestyle of following him in discipleship as a lifelong learner of his teachings and putting them into obedience and practice. Busyness has become a façade for spirituality, with the presence of Sunday afternoon meetings, both in numbers and length, becoming a measurement of spirituality. With the busyness and activities, the longing for more, the longing to go deeper, the longing for the Father himself, is masked, as members have no time to be still, to be silent, to be alone, to think and reflect and know God and receive his unconditional love and grace. This requires teaching and practice as a reminder of the

need to create space and arrange life for transformation to take place, which is God's mysterious work.<sup>21</sup>

It is easier to be busy for God than to be with God, as busyness is also more measurable than being. Being is slow work; it is heart work and not always results-oriented. Yet it is this being before God and being with God that this project seeks to address, providing members a different way of living and being that is characterized by the rest in Matthew 11:28-30 instead of frenetic activity. Trevor Hudson states that "we are called to being before we are called to doing. Jesus invites his disciples to be with him in community and then calls them into their ministry tasks. Communion precedes commissioning."<sup>22</sup> If not checked regularly, the sense of exhaustion will permeate one's soul and such busyness in ministry will lead to burnout, causing one to repress rather than attend to God, driven by performance and achievement.<sup>23</sup> Re-envisioning discipleship at HCC must begin with the leadership and a revolution in the interior life, not focused on visible success or people's expectations, and a reformation in the church culture must occur where virtue and humility mean more than achievements and accomplishments.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ruth Haley Barton, *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 12.

<sup>22</sup> Trevor Hudson, *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 87.

<sup>23</sup> Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 38.

PART TWO  
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

## CHAPTER 3

### A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

While many resources were used in the course of this project, several resources served to guide the direction and nature of the project. This chapter will highlight nine such resources and evaluate them in light of the project thesis. They all contribute to the theme of busyness in present-day church ministry and show the importance of creating space for God through suggested margin-making practices as a means of grace. The books in this literature review highlight the role of margins in re-envisioning discipleship, the necessity of margin in the life of church leaders, and margins as a means of grace in the discipleship journey.

***Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Resources to Overloaded Lives* by Richard A. Swenson**

“Exponential,” “limits,” “thresholds,” and “overload” are words Swenson uses to describe this unprecedented age, an age that is both qualitatively and quantitatively different than any other age in history.<sup>1</sup> The thesis of Swenson’s book is that margin, even if some are able to thrive without it, is essential for one’s well-being. He defines

---

<sup>1</sup> Swenson, *Margin*, 60.

margin as “the space between our load and our limits. It is the amount allowed behind that which is needed. It is something held in reserve for contingencies or unanticipated situations. Margin is the gap between rest and exhaustion, the space between breathing freely and suffocating.”<sup>2</sup> He writes as a medical doctor sharing his expertise on the ill-effects of stress and overload on one’s physical and emotional health, and also as a Christian, showing how such busyness and overload affects one’s spiritual health as well.

Swenson begins his book by describing the landscape of “marginless” living, characterized by fatigue, hurry, anxiety, and exhaustion. It is universal, not limited to a particular socio-economic group or educational level, nor does it spare those with a deep spiritual faith.<sup>3</sup> The rest of the book is divided into three sections: the problem, the prescription, and the prognosis. The problem is pain stemming from living stressed and overloaded lives. His prescription is creating margin in emotional energy, physical energy, time, and finances. The prognosis from creating margin is health. While Swenson does not include a specific section on creating spiritual margin, he incorporates the spiritual in the four sections and gives spiritual prescriptions within each category.

In giving examples on creating spiritual margin, Swenson encourages his readers to “prune the activity branches”<sup>4</sup> for “the purpose of being available to God,” as “margin exists for the needs of the kingdom, for the service of one another, for the building of community.”<sup>5</sup> This is in direct contrast to what is happening today, both in the world and

---

<sup>2</sup> Swenson, *Margin*, 69.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-15.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

in the church. In describing contemporary life as one of “progress” and “pandemonium,” Swenson has also inadvertently described the church.<sup>6</sup> Progress has also created pandemonium in the institutional and local church, as busyness of epidemic proportions are now the norm, even in church service, the vocabulary described as one of “efficiency,” “maximizing resources,” “achieving goals” while “running a church,” and “directing programs,” even an all-important “food services” program for church members’ Sunday lunch. He states that the “absence of margin is linked to the march of progress and progress by nature differentiates.”<sup>7</sup> His statement can also describe the family of God and the body of Christ, now differentiated into church departments and silo-building ministries, with growth being measured by progress: bigger and better and faster.

Swenson’s book contributes to this topic in several ways. First, his title provides the metaphor for this project, the margin that is necessary in life is the same margin that is necessary with God. Space must be created with God, and the spiritual life must be intentionally arranged so that growth and formation can happen. Second, in giving prescriptions on creating margin, one such prescription is developing “counter-habits.”<sup>8</sup> This is helpful as later chapters seek to show how the “counter-habits” of being with God through a different way of reading Scripture, praying, and spiritual reflection can help counteract the busyness, along with the sense of mastery, control, and programming that has gone into doing church.

---

<sup>6</sup> Swenson, *Margin*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

While Swenson's book sets the premise for this topic, showing how progress and busyness has squeeze out any form of recognizable margin in the lives of many, the limitations of his book is due to breadth at the expense of depth. Because he does not explicitly devote a section to spiritual margin, he does not couch the necessity of such margin as part of Christian formation and discipleship, and how followers of Jesus are formed by such practices and disciplines. He inspires the need for margin, but does not give in depth examples of how this is done: "The marginless lifestyle and its resultant chronic time pressure are particularly devastating to our relationships: to self, to family, to others, to God."<sup>9</sup> Everyone needs personal time, family time, sharing time, and most of all, God time, a time where God will wait rather than push for his agenda, where "efficient" prayers cannot be done, where Psalm 46:10 is first and foremost, not speed,<sup>10</sup> as such margins are "to be made available for the purposes of His kingdom."<sup>11</sup>

### ***Satisfy Your Soul* by Bruce Demarest**

Bruce Demarest is committed to historic Christianity in its evangelical expression, and after many years of loving God with the mind, and even the body, whether it was through studying Bible and theology as a student or his teaching ministry as a seminary professor or as a missionary in Africa, he was challenged to love God with his heart. Longings were awakened that he never knew he had, deep places in his heart were being watered for the first time, and he became a student again, this time of spiritual formation

---

<sup>9</sup> Swenson, *Margin*, 119.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

and Christian practices that helped him dwell deeply with God.<sup>12</sup> Through this, he discovered that his primary role as professor and church elder was not to “give a good teaching” as he once thought and did for many years, but to “lead others into the presence of God.”<sup>13</sup> As he began to experience Christ in these new ways, he discovered that even his work was being transformed: “It was no longer enough to teach students *about* God, I wanted to help them open up and experience the touch and reality of God in their lives.”<sup>14</sup>

After sharing parts of his story and journey, Demarest’s ten chapters cover the different pieces that make up the whole of Christian spirituality and formation. However, it is the chapters on spiritual hunger and knowing God intimately through his word and prayer that speak to this paper. No longer can spiritual growth be assumed through knowledge of the Scriptures or church attendance or praying for others. In addition to the Bible, prayer, missions, and evangelism, Demarest seeks to balance these with the ministry of spiritual formation, calling it a “form of discipleship we are rediscovering today.”<sup>15</sup> Through the spiritual practices and disciplines, one’s inner being is nurtured and nourished, one’s soul is satisfied, and one’s character formed into the likeness of Christ.

Demarest also writes about the busyness that characterizes life today, whether it is being “overworked for God” or having “forfeited God in the busyness of life’s activities—even church work,” as many are leaving the church after being actively

---

<sup>12</sup> Bruce Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 26-28.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

involved in church programs because they are starving on the inside.<sup>16</sup> Hyperactivity withers the soul, and many Christians are trapped by the “performance syndrome,” measuring growth and worth through accomplishments for God. This thinking drives them to do more and more, ignoring the character quality of becoming like Christ. Service to God and others is important, but must be balanced with rest and refreshment in God.<sup>17</sup> When Christ’s presence is missing in a Christian’s life, it becomes easier to perform for God than to “learn how to be aware and work along with him,” being caught up in the doing and sacrificing the relating.<sup>18</sup> The Christian life is about relationship, not the frenetic activity or the badge of busyness that is proudly worn. Connecting with God cannot happen in busyness, only through quietness and prayer. God is found in the person of Christ, not in the maze of programs, and only as the interior life is rested and refreshed can one truly serve him.<sup>19</sup>

Demarest contributes to this paper in several ways. First, he is an evangelical who has spent many years teaching and loving God with the mind. His journey in these spiritual formation practices gives voice to and models for many believers who are searching and seeking and hungering for more with God. Christians can identify with his lifelong journey with God, only to fall in love with him forty years later in a story filled with hope and redemption that joy, delight, and refreshment with God are possible. Second, he diagnoses the problem of busyness that plagues many believers today, calling

---

<sup>16</sup> Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* , 36, 49.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 54-55.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 94-95.

it “a demon of our times,” with a competitive and performance-driven culture that has also permeated the church.<sup>20</sup> Lastly, his chapters on the spiritual disciplines of contemplative prayer and meditating on Scripture in a way that feeds the soul, these are two of the three margin-making, spiritual formation practices of this paper.

### ***A Testament of Devotion by Thomas A. Kelly***

This one hundred page treatise written by Thomas Kelly in 1941 still has some pointed words to say for today’s church members and ministers. As a Quaker, Kelly’s vocabulary differs slightly from evangelicals, but his devotion to God is the same. The life he describes in *A Testament of Devotion*, a life of busyness and distraction, such is the life of his readers today. The summary of his argument comes toward the latter portion of the book as these five essays take the reader to this point. He asks the questions, “Do we really want to live life every moment in God’s presence?” “Do we want to live this life from a divine center?” and “How much do we really want this?”<sup>21</sup> Kelly’s thesis is that believers must not want such a life enough because they fill their lives with “absurdly crowded calendars and appointments,”<sup>22</sup> panting and gasping feverishly, spending much time in planning and brainstorming and strategizing, then breathing a prayer to God to reinforce wills for strength to execute these visions and plans for the church.<sup>23</sup> As active and hurrying church workers, obstinately rational and unable to be

---

<sup>20</sup> Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul* , 94.

<sup>21</sup> Thomas A. Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1941), 95.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 69.

still and hear the promptings of the divine,<sup>24</sup> people are pre-occupied to do something for God rather than asking him to do something through them,<sup>25</sup> having too many irons in the fire and getting distracted by “a thousand and one good things, pulled and hauled breathlessly along by an overburdened program of good committees and good undertaking.”<sup>26</sup> In describing the unwholesomeness of such a fevered life, Kelly somehow described the life at HCC perfectly: the busyness and the distractions, the meetings and the desire to be all things to all people through programs, doing more and more for God rather than spending time being with God.

Kelly desires that believers live out of a divine center and devotion to God, instead of living with a frantic fidelity, weary and breathless, seeing life slip away with little taste of peace and joy, postponing times of deep silences because this week is just too full.<sup>27</sup> Rather than waiting until next week, Kelly encourages the readers to begin now, with a holy listening and obedience, a posture of alertness to God and seeing this God-intoxicated life as an abiding pattern for one’s life, a serious and concrete program of life.<sup>28</sup> Such a program requires the cultivation of an inner life, which Americans and Chinese in America are not skilled at, preferring outward distractions to an inner integration.<sup>29</sup> Such life does not take a lot of time nor does it complicate one’s program,

---

<sup>24</sup> Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion* , 72.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

but in essence is living life in God's presence through whispered words of prayer, adoration, and praise, thereby cultivating a silence of spirit that goes everywhere, and when joined with a half hour of quiet reading (*lectio divina*) that honors God as the center, such practices together and when done regularly help believers remodel their lives and live integrated and devoted lives hidden with Christ rather than be fearfully busy doing things for God and under-developed in devotion to God, cultivating a life so hidden with Christ and with no hurry demonstrated.<sup>30</sup>

Kelly contributes to the project's topic in many ways, especially his description of HCC in all its busyness and doing for God. Life can be simplified through obedience to God, going deeper by continuous short prayers throughout the day in the midst of the work and activities, and laying hold of the grace available when preoccupied and forgetting God again. Kelly's vocabulary is different from modern-day evangelicals, but his message is the same for the church: that the greatest work needed for God's people is to create space for God and with God in their lives, to be still and know him, to listen and hear his voice, and to cease from the striving and just be with him.<sup>31</sup> Against all the ways of doing ministry that defines the church today, Kelly's words provide a necessary reminder to the important things. While Kelly describes the frenetic church life and need to dwell in God's presence continually in prayer and holy reading, he does not give in depth instruction, but seems to assume knowing how to do it is a given. He gives less instruction on reflection than he does on prayer and reading, and while he does not

---

<sup>30</sup> Kelly, *A Testament of Devotion*, 97-98.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 72..

mention margins per say, he does write about the need to be still from all the busyness, programs, and appointments.

***In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* by Henri Nouwen**

Henri Nouwen wastes no time and moves directly to the heart of Christian leadership for the twenty-first century. The Christian leader, in order to prevent burnout and spiritual death, must stop from the ceaseless doing that pervades the culture, even the Christian culture, and take time to engage in three disciplines: contemplative prayer, confession and forgiveness, and theological reflection. Otherwise, the temptation to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful will overtake the Christian leader and lead to spiritual death. Nouwen's thesis comes from his own experience, having achieved and accomplished much in his career, then realizing that he was praying poorly and that his life of busyness and success was not only putting his soul in danger but bringing him on the verge of burnout and spiritual death.<sup>32</sup> After some soul searching, Nouwen was willing to give up his resume and reputation to find himself and return to his calling as a priest, this time to pastor the Daybreak community in Toronto. The questions that he asked himself during this time helped him see busyness for what it is, a doing spirituality that feeds one's need and temptation to be relevant, spectacular, and powerful. Nouwen began wondering if his achievement and accomplishments, that as he grew older through the years, if all this brought him closer to Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Since it did not, he knew he needed to leave the comfort of his world to live with the least of these. While the temptation to be

---

<sup>32</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 20.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

relevant afflicts everyone, it is extremely dangerous for believers who fall prey to the “erroneous thinking that productivity is the basis of our ministry, something that consequently distorts even our sense of identity.”<sup>34</sup>

In order to combat these temptations, leadership and Christian living must move from being relevant to being a people engaged in contemplative prayer, from being spectacular to living a life of confession and forgiveness, and from being powerful to engaging in theological reflection. Nouwen is guided by Jesus’ temptation account in Matthew 4:1-11 and Peter’s call and commission in John 21:15-19. While the terminology differs, this project seeks to implement Nouwen’s practices, specifically his practice of contemplative prayer and theological reflection. The questions that he asked can be modified and asked of HCC as well: “Does doing more and more at HCC bring me closer to Jesus?” And “Am I more and more in love with Jesus?” The disciplines of contemplative prayer and theological reflection help believers to pause and listen to God.

Unfortunately it is easy for Christian leaders to be caught up in the urgent, in the latest news, the burning issues, and with no time to reflect and pray. They are caught up in making superficial moral statements rather than speaking out of what they heard from God. Contemplative prayer reminds Christian leaders that their call is to dwell in God’s presence first, listen to his voice, and taste his goodness before serving others out of that overflow.<sup>35</sup> The discipline of theological reflection helps the busy Christian leader to discern God in the work being done and if God is not in it, to see where he is going and

---

<sup>34</sup> Wil Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen and Soul Care: A Ministry of Integration* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008), Kindle Electronic Edition: Chapter 4, Location 813-821.

<sup>35</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 43.

follow him. Such reflection takes time and space to discern and discover as “the loud, boisterous noises of the world make us deaf to the soft, gentle, and loving voice of God,” not intellectual training, but a “deep spiritual formation involving the whole person—body, mind, and heart.”<sup>36</sup>

One of Nouwen’s greater contributions to this paper is who he is.<sup>37</sup> It is easy for Chinese Christians to admire and look up to Nouwen for his academic achievements and faculty positions. At the same time, the self-doubt, insecurities, and even a deep sense of shame that surrounds his being and brings him desperately to Jesus Christ, that seems to describe a lot of Chinese as well, although many would be slower to admit it. But it is because of who Nouwen is in his nakedness before God that grace is available and received. When one truly knows that God’s love is unconditional and unlimited, it is then that he or she can experience his grace without the need to perform, get results, achieve goals, strategize, and manipulate.

While Nouwen covers a lot in his short book, he does not go into detail on how to pray contemplatively or do theological reflection. The “how to” of these practices is assumed as if readers just need a reminder. For leaders who are learning to slow down, finally ready to lay aside moral platitudes and become a little more mystical in practice,<sup>38</sup> they may need a little more direction on how to engage in contemplative prayer and

---

<sup>36</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 89-90.

<sup>37</sup> Hernandez describes Nouwen as one who “ministered to others in a soul-deep capacity that distinguishes him as one of the most effective spiritual care providers of all time (*Henri Nouwen and Soul Care*, Location 904).

<sup>38</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 47.

theological reflection. Fortunately, many other books and resources are available to help such a leader do that, and Nouwen can be savored for his thoughts and reflections.

### ***The Contemplative Pastor by Eugene Peterson***

Eugene Peterson writes *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* to encourage church pastors to rethink who they are and what they do by asking, “How can I persuade a person to live by faith and not by works if I have to juggle my schedule to make everything fit into place?”<sup>39</sup> These words by Peterson written over twenty years ago have not gone out of date, just as the struggles of busy pastors have not gone out of date either. At the time Peterson was writing as a pastor to pastors and church leaders about the vocation and calling of pastoral ministry. Peterson’s thesis is that while pastoral ministry in this day and age can be unfriendly to one’s calling and vocation, it does not have to be, and he gives ways and examples, modeling how things can be different. Even if one has succumbed to busyness and activity, whether out of vanity or laziness, Peterson tells pastors that part of pastoring includes being “unbusy.” And while that may seem a foreign thought to many, he quickly reminds them that if they are not busy, they can pray, preach, and listen.<sup>40</sup>

Peterson actually uses three adjectives to describe the noun “pastor,” a noun that used to be able to stand on its own, but now needs adjectives to refine who the pastor is: unbusy, subversive, and apocalyptic. The rest of the book Peterson illustrates and explains what the unbusy, subversive, and apocalyptic pastor does on Sundays, now that

---

<sup>39</sup> Eugene Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction* (Carol Stream, IL: Word Publishing, 1989), 29.

<sup>40</sup> See Peterson’s chapter on “The Unbusy Pastor,” in *The Contemplative Pastor*, 25-31.

he or she is freed from the need to feel significant, meet expectations, and engage in conspicuous activity. Instead of filling every moment with activity, the pastor can now engage in an unhurried leisure,<sup>41</sup> the kind of pace required to listen: to God, to others, to oneself. Listening and attending does not and cannot happen when busy, in the midst of a crowded schedule, while running to the next meeting.

In order to get ample listening time, Peterson prescribes margins, and he uses the appointment calendar as a tool to get unbusy, the means to get the time, space, and leisure needed to pray, preach, and listen.<sup>42</sup> Because society worships the appointment book and the schedule, if pastors can schedule such time onto their calendars, becoming an unbusy pastor is possible. The question then becomes whether or not one desires to be an unbusy pastor or prefers the busyness and activity. This question of motivation Peterson does not raise nor answer.

Peterson's contribution to the project lies in his description of the ministerial landscape: the busyness in ministry and how it is easier to avoid God's mystery and people's messes (including one's own) by devising programs to manage both, setting goals and working on strategies to accomplish and achieve. By choosing such behavior, there is no room for God's amazing grace to work, not to mention an overlooking of one's sin to manipulate and exploit.<sup>43</sup> Instead of the above, Peterson reminds pastors that their primary work is not communication in their teaching and preaching, but communion

---

<sup>41</sup> Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 31.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

with God.<sup>44</sup> Only when the pastor has taken that unhurried leisure to foster communion with God can he or she be adequately attentive to him and others, joining God's story and seeing that the Holy Spirit has already been "beforehand" with his people.<sup>45</sup>

While Peterson notes the necessity of margins for church leaders, especially pastors, he does not go into the how this is done as much, except to say that it is the appointment calendar that is the tool to unbusy oneself, providing the means to enable busy pastors to find the time and leisure required to pray, preach, and listen, and showing how that once time has been made for these three disciplines, all the other menial and miscellaneous items get accomplished without anxiety and resentment.<sup>46</sup>

### ***The Sense of the Call by Marva Dawn***

It is far easier for God's servants to get entangled in a busyness that leads to discouragement and ministry drop out than to live out the call to serve faithfully and courageously. A theology of God grounded in his kingdom enables his servants to do just that, as Dawn's thesis is: "The sense of our call is that God's kingdom reclaims us, revitalizes us, and renews us and thus reigns through us before others, on behalf of others, sometimes in spite of others, and always with others."<sup>47</sup> In order to be reclaimed, revitalized, renewed, and reigned through, it is essential that God's servant lives out a

---

<sup>44</sup> Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 55.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32.

<sup>47</sup> Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 13.

Sabbath way of life characterized by four movements of resting, ceasing, feasting, and embracing, also the four sections of the book.

In order for rest to occur, a stop must occur, especially a stop in efforts to please God through service and in efforts to save the world, both stops being very difficult for professional church workers and servants. Dawn quotes a confession by Howard Baker, “Primarily, I had lost my soul to one of the chief rivals of devotion to Christ—that is, service for Him.”<sup>48</sup> Within the section on “resting,” Dawn’s thoughts on prayer as a way to rest in grace, busyness, and pride are the most applicable and make the biggest contribution to the topic of this paper. Dawn exhorts church workers to learn to “rest in the grace of that partnership with God,” being freed to cease to work and remembering that one’s worth is not found in incessant labor and church-related accomplishments, and in order to do that, it requires one to “learn ever more deeply God’s cherishing,” trusting his timing and revelation, and “the only way to stop our chronic need to work in our own way and with our sense of hurry is to *stop*, to cease, to spend time immersed in God’s enfolding devotion to us and in the triune provision of whatever we need in order to do the work God really wants us to do in God’s manner and cadence.”<sup>49</sup>

Dawn defines prayer, one of the margin-making practices in this paper, as “learning to rest in grace.”<sup>50</sup> She recounts the struggles of many church leaders and servants of God who struggle with prayerlessness and the accompanying guilt, but rather than bemoaning the guilt, Dawn wants readers to see prayer as grace, initiated by God

---

<sup>48</sup> Howard Baker, *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 34, quoted in Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 47.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

first, and responded to by his people, not something that servants need to conjure up. In pointing to the solution to prayerlessness, Dawn prefaces the solution to prayerlessness by saying “if we lack prayerfulness, then the solution is not to hammer ourselves with guilt that we are so bad at it, but to engage in practices that help us know God,” keeping tools nearby, such as prayer books, prayers of the saints, hymnals, that remind God’s people that grace is received best by “watching it descend from God rather than focusing on our reception of it.”<sup>51</sup> Dawn also desires to widen the concept of prayer from intercession for others, hands folded, making requests of God, to basking in that prayerful life of delighting in God and in his love.<sup>52</sup>

In addition to prayer, Dawn also speaks of the need to meditate on the Scriptures over studying it. Creating space to do this will help Christian workers be “freed from busyness,” the compulsion to accumulate and accomplish, to do more and achieve more, “grabbed by this demand to produce” even in kingdom work.<sup>53</sup> Rather than studying God’s word or seeing it as an action item to check off, Dawn quotes Bonhoeffer, who writes in *Life Together* about the need to take time and meditate on Scripture: “Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because the grace of God is found in this service, we should train ourselves to set apart a regular hour for it, as we do for every other service we perform . . .” and such contemplation is also the best way to “kindle and stroke our prayers.”<sup>54</sup> Pastors and church leaders have

---

<sup>51</sup> Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 79.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-93.

been trained to take the text apart, reading for information rather than formation, at times even reading with “too much haste, just to ‘do’ our disciplines.”<sup>55</sup>

God’s image in his people is squelched through busyness, and this image, according to Dawn, can only be recovered through the presence of God, spending time with him, and putting aside the “doings and driftings.”<sup>56</sup> Service and prayer can be seen as a spiral, the two halves complementing each other and enabling true rest when both are grounded in God’s grace, as seen through God’s presence in the midst of service in the life and example of Brother Lawrence.<sup>57</sup> These two sections on prayer and Scripture as an antidote to church busyness are the main contributions of Dawn’s book, as she writes to church leaders and those who serve the Lord through church activities and programs, ministries and oversight. She desires that followers of Jesus Christ slow down and bask in his presence so that they can become disciples once again rather than busy church workers.

### ***TrueFaced* by Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch**

The first words on the back cover of *TrueFaced* are these: “The day of self-righteous, religious performing for cheap applause is coming to an end.”<sup>58</sup> The three authors begin their book by stating that the modus operandi and motivation for the

---

<sup>54</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, trans. John W. Doberstein (New York: Harper & Row, 1954), 87, quoted in Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 95.

<sup>55</sup> Dawn, *The Sense of the Call*, 96.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>58</sup> Bill Thrall, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch, *TrueFaced: Trust God and Others with Who You Really Are*, Experience ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004).

average believer in the church today is living to please God. When people live to please God as their motivation, which sounds like a good and biblical motivation, all their effort is spent on pleasing God behaviorally, doing the right things and sinning less. The other less-traveled option is living to trust God. When trust is the motivation, people will live out who God says they are, standing together with God and working on sin together.

When one's primary motivation is trusting God, living a life that pleases God is the result, a natural by-product of trusting God.<sup>59</sup> When one's primary motivation is pleasing God, he or she will fail over and over again.

Many churches today are filled with Christians who say they are trusting God, but in actuality, are living trying to please God, thereby living out a reality the authors call "the great disconnect," saying one thing and doing another.<sup>60</sup> There will come a time that living to please God is not enough anymore, and if one wants to grow and mature as a believer, to look more like Jesus Christ, he or she must begin to trust God instead of being motivated to please him. When the first step of trust is taken, grace works to resolve sin issues and transform people into greater Christlikeness.<sup>61</sup> Living to please God sounds good, but once that becomes the motivation, the doing begins, and it becomes harder and harder to step off the treadmill, as many earnest HCC leaders are finding out. Somehow it starts off with pure motives, and somewhere along the way something got twisted around. Instead of seeking God it has become about serving God.

---

<sup>59</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and Lynch, *TrueFaced*, 44.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

The authors then show that grace is demonstrated through three gifts: love, repentance, and forgiveness. Love helps remove masks, meets and fulfills the needs God has given to his people, and helps resolve sin issues. Repentance depends on the act of redemption where one is released from a debt or liberated by a payment.<sup>62</sup> The grace to experience true repentance from trusting God provides real power over sin and enables believers to be healed and thereby live changed and transformed lives. Forgiveness frees and produces results beyond what one can ask or imagine. Living in the room of grace enables believers to live into Christlike maturity and live out God's dreams for them.<sup>63</sup> The authors end by saying, "We are all performers. One question remains: Will you perform to gain the acceptance and pleasure of your audience—and always feel that you have failed? Or will you perform out of a heart of trusting delight, knowing you have already pleased your Audience?"<sup>64</sup>

In a shame-based culture, grace is a foreign concept, even to those who have been following Christ for years. This book's theme of grace is its contribution to the topic, reminding believers at HCC of the need to experience grace in order to live out their dreams from the Lord. This experience and discovery of grace has an opportunity to be discovered through margins—spending time, creating space for God, pushing pause, slowing down, and even stopping before God. One must somehow become still and know that he is God.

---

<sup>62</sup> Thrall, McNicol, and Lynch, *TrueFaced*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

The book's limitation to the topic is that it does not mention margins and only mentions spiritual disciplines in passing. However, it covers a much needed topic and gives believers a big picture of what trusting in God looks like and the role grace plays in that. Margin-making practices are useless when done on one's own strength in an effort to please God. When done as an act of trusting God and allowing him to work, they are life-giving. This book lays the groundwork for the necessity of margins and the motivation for these practices in the life of the disciple of Jesus Christ.

### ***The Pressure's Off* by Larry Crabb**

Crabb's thesis in *The Pressure's Off* is to leave behind an old way of living that is full of pressure, ungrace, measured by performance and activity, how one looks in front of others, and live into a new way with the pressure off. It is a way of grace and freedom, more about who one is than what one does. In comparing the two ways of living, the old way is one of strategy and linearity—setting a goal and doing what it takes to achieve that goal, even goals in church ministry. The new way of living is characterized by intimacy with Christ, a way of relationship rather than rules. The old way is more natural and protective, and after living this way long enough, might seem the only way to live: a desire to pursue a better life of blessing from God, praying for that accordingly, following certain principles and formulas for such blessings to occur. If the blessings do not occur immediately, one must keep at it, pray harder, and hope that as Asians, face would be saved from failure. The new way of living is harder, not as natural, and definitely more risky: pursuing a better hope of being near to God, characterized by pleading for his

mercy, discovering his grace, and experiencing his rest, working from a law of liberty and freedom, a life where “the pressure’s off.”<sup>65</sup>

Instead of the old way of life, Crabb proposes a new way of living that depends on the Holy Spirit, taken from Romans 7:6, and the “Immanuel Agenda” is the result: believers live according to God’s agenda rather than their own, submitting to his plans and purposes, rather than serving and being busy as a “strategy” for the Christian life and making life work. Crabb confronts the sin in human nature, and Asian culture, to turn service into a performance, a performance that is then measured by numbers, such as attendance, which then in turn creates more pressure to perform and conform to the set standards. Many Christians are on this treadmill and Crabb writes to show a better way of living—a way of grace, a way to live with the pressure off. The old way of living according to the law of linearity highlights how Chinese Christians live and after many years as church members, see busyness and service as part of the “strategy” of the good life with Jesus Christ, doing what needs to be done, yet doing out of duty rather than relational delight, where humility is a technique.<sup>66</sup> Instead of this old way living, Crabb offers a way of grace and rest through encountering God, a way that requires genuine humility and death to pride and self-sufficiency, but with transformation as the result.<sup>67</sup>

The two ways of living require a choice from believers: to choose the old way or the new.

---

<sup>65</sup> Crabb, *The Pressure’s Off*, 37.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-61.

Choosing the new way still requires more effort, despite ceasing to live a life of busyness, performance, and pressure.<sup>68</sup>

### ***Reaching Out by Henri Nouwen***

In *Reaching Out*, Nouwen describes three movements of the spiritual life, the three movements very similar to the three practices in re-envisioning discipleship of this paper. His three movements of the spiritual life and discipleship journey consist of the move from loneliness to solitude, from hostility to hospitality, and from illusion to prayer. These movements also describe the gamut of one's relationships: to oneself, to others, and to God. Nouwen's thesis in his book is that often times Christians, being part of a society that values development and achievement, progress and success, then bring this posture to the spiritual life as well, and begin measuring their spiritual lives through the lens of progress and success, achievement and accomplishments.<sup>69</sup> But the spiritual life cannot be succumbed to such metrics, and the world of measurements must be left behind when talking about this life.<sup>70</sup> Instead of a life of measurements, Nouwen desires that his readers would engage and incorporate the practices of solitude, hospitality, and prayer as part of the vision for their lives, and even their mode of existence.<sup>71</sup>

Nouwen describes the landscape of busyness and its contrariness to the spiritual life, the preoccupation that describes the posture to living, finding busyness as a status

---

<sup>68</sup> Crabb, *The Pressure's Off*, 173. This echoes the words of Dallas Willard who says that grace is not opposed to effort, but is opposed to earning.

<sup>69</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (New York: DoubleDay, 1975), 17.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

symbol, and desiring distractions so as to not confront the silence and stillness.<sup>72</sup> While all three movements help re-envision discipleship at HCC within the broader context of spiritual formation and moving away from discipleship as a program, it is the third movement that Nouwen highlights that undergirds the first two, and makes the biggest contribution to the topic at hand. Busyness re-enforces the illusion that one is all-important, filling the person with self-significance, and unfortunately church and kingdom work are not exempt. The illusion of immortality and the idolatry of one's dreams, even the dreams one has worked his or her whole life for, a dream of a good career, a dream of life in the United States (realized through the dream of a good education and scholarships) must be confronted as illusions and idolatry first, before one can then begin to move into prayer.<sup>73</sup> The prayer he highlights is the Jesus Prayer as one way to honor Paul's exhortation in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to "pray constantly."<sup>74</sup>

In talking about prayer, Nouwen mentions Luke 10:42 as the one thing needed, with prayer being one of three rules for the Christian life: "a contemplative reading of the word of God, a silent listening to the voice of God, and a trusting obedience to a spiritual guide. Without the Bible, without silent time and without someone to direct us, finding our own way to God is very hard and practically impossible."<sup>75</sup> These are the three margin-making practices that make up the thesis of this paper, and contemplative prayer is specifically creating space to listen to God, rather than the usual intercessory prayer

---

<sup>72</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 73-75.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 120-21.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

meetings that have been the bedrock of church life at HCC and where attendance at prayer meetings is one way to measure spirituality. But the list of petitionary prayers in these meetings can be a form of busyness and preoccupation with self, hardly a life of margins. The prayer of the heart also enables present-day Christians to be with God in a fast-paced world, and its regular practice empowers believers to be in the world but not of it, nor “drowning in its stormy (busy) waters.”<sup>76</sup>

In contrasting the doing and being in his thesis, Nouwen also highlights that prayer is the very being of the Christian community, not one of many things the community does,<sup>77</sup> and follows by saying that often times the community is “so busy” with its programs and projects that prayer is no longer primary. The result is that the community is reduced to “a club with a common cause but no common vocation.”<sup>78</sup> While Nouwen’s greatest contribution is to the area of prayer, he does mention the practices of *lectio divina* and the examen in broad strokes, with all three practices reminding Christians that the spiritual life is characterized by a posture of listening and attending to God.

---

<sup>76</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 146.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

## CHAPTER 4

### THEOLOGY OF THE CHURCH

Chapter 4 continues the theological reflection portion of the paper by articulating a theology of the church. Several major tenets of evangelical ecclesiology will be outlined, including the centrality of Scripture and its proclamation and teaching in the life of the believer, as well as the primacy of intercessory and petitionary prayer as a means for communicating with God. While both of these tenets remain central in evangelical ecclesiology, they can unintentionally pave the way for making content and performance-based disciples, their lives characterized by Bible studies, Sunday school classes, and prayer meetings. The second section will evaluate the strengths and weakness of these themes in evangelical ecclesiology in light of re-envisioning discipleship. And finally, the last section will consider an alternative ecclesiological model, specifically from the contemplative tradition, to inform one way of re-envisioning discipleship at HCC.

#### **The Free Church and Evangelical Tradition**

In his book on comparative ecclesiology, author Veli-Matti Karkkainen introduces several ecclesiologies that have made their mark throughout the history of

Christendom. Among these, the newer Free Church ecclesiology is the tradition which HCC belongs to, though it may not be very familiar with its Radical Reformation heritage.<sup>1</sup> Most would know that HCC stands in the Protestant tradition, and within that, the evangelical tradition, along with the main tenets of that tradition, but as to its place in history and within the Free Church tradition, that may be less clear. The Free Church as described by Karkkainen is a new congregational model of church that is a product of the Radical Reformation and characterized by an unmediated access to God, being a believers' church, the priesthood of all believers, and marked by a focus on evangelism and missions.<sup>2</sup>

Karkkainen traces the origins of the Free Church back to the Radical Reformation, a reformation that occurred after the Protestant Reformation separated itself from Roman Catholicism. These more radical Reformers felt the Magisterial Reformers did not go far enough and instead compromised with the State church.<sup>3</sup> Scripture continued to be the supreme authority, along with the *sola Scriptura* of the mainline Reformation, however in stressing an unmediated access to God, those in the Radical Reformation also claimed

---

<sup>1</sup> Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 2002), 61. Part of the difficulty and challenge in writing this chapter has been trying to find HCC's place in the bigger picture of Western church tradition. In encounter other churches and their members, some can easily describe themselves by saying "we are Methodists" or "as Presbyterians, we..." For HCC, the church identifies itself with its Chinese-ness more than any ecclesiological tradition or theology of the church. For better or for worse, it is the Chinese tradition that makes HCC, HCC, with ecclesiology almost secondary, just as long as its ecclesiology remains in the bounds of evangelical Christianity, the historical considerations and greater church history and tradition are ancillary/tertiary to the day to day doing of church.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 62-67. However, it is also worthy to note that Karkkainen admits that Free Churches have not always explained or explicated their theological foundations for ministry even if in their practice they have fulfilled Protestant principles, such as centrality of Scripture, priesthood of all believers, missions, and evangelism.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

that through the Holy Spirit, believers could read Scripture with understanding.<sup>4</sup> Everyone could read and interpret the Bible for themselves, apart from attending mass or a church service to hear Scripture read and expounded upon. The Free Church is also characterized by a believers' church, the hallmark being baptism for believers only, those who have made a profession of faith, and have joined the church as a member voluntarily.<sup>5</sup> As members, they participate in the life of the church, partake of the Lord's Supper, and submit themselves to church discipline. Another distinctive noted by Karkkainen is the priesthood of all believers. Each believer can minister with the gifts given by God for that purpose. All have unmediated access to God and all can participate in the ministry of the church; gone is the special ministry reserved for ordained clergy alone. While Free Churches have ordained clergy, ordination is no longer a sacrament, but a confirmation of God's call.<sup>6</sup> Lastly, the mark and purpose of the Free Church is evangelism and missions. While the Reformers stressed the marks of the church being preaching of the Word and administration of the sacraments, along with church discipline, the Free Church adds missions and evangelism as a mark and ultimate purpose of the church, to carry God's cause out into the world.<sup>7</sup>

Within the Free Church as a product of the Radical Reformation lies a newer movement that has adapted and contextualized the major tenets of the Reformation. Church historian Mark Noll credits John and Charles Wesley in the eighteenth century,

---

<sup>4</sup> Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 62.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 65

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67.

along with fellow Anglican George Whitefield, with “transforming the religion of the Reformation into modern Protestant evangelicalism.”<sup>8</sup> The adjustments they made to the basic message of the Reformation decisively shaped Christianity in Europe, America, and around the world where evangelicals have taken the gospel. In the two hundred years since the Reformation, the doctrine of God’s grace had grown stale and its relevance was not made to the working class. John and Charles Wesley affirmed and preserved the central tenets of the Reformation: salvation was by grace alone, though faith alone, as communicated from the authority of Scripture alone.<sup>9</sup> Through their organizational skills in adapting the ideas and methods of others, the Wesleys were able to apply these doctrines with renewed vigor to the masses and help create “modern evangelicalism out of the legacy of Reformation Protestantism.”<sup>10</sup> During this time, pietists within Lutheranism and the spirit of revivalism on the American frontier all contributed to this evangelical renewal within Protestantism.<sup>11</sup>

According to Robert Webber, evangelicalism as a more formal movement in the United States began in the twentieth century after World War II and can be defined biblically, theologically, historically, and culturally.<sup>12</sup> Biblically, the word comes from the Greek *euangelion*, the good news of Jesus and the salvation he brings. Theological tenets that define evangelicalism include Scripture as the authoritative Word of God

---

<sup>8</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 223-34.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 229.

<sup>12</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of a New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002), 14.

along with the early creeds as doctrinal affirmations of the church. The term is used historically to refer to all the movements that have attempted to bring gospel renewal to the church, whether it be the Protestant Reformation or the Great Awakenings in American history. Lastly, modern evangelicalism can be defined by the Enlightenment emphasis on reason and the empirical method such that faith can be explained, reasoned, proclaimed, defended, and propositional truth attained.<sup>13</sup> According to David Fitch, evangelicalism had its origins in the modernist-fundamentalist controversies in the 1920s, with many Christians breaking away from the mainline churches to start Bible churches that believed the whole inerrant Bible.<sup>14</sup>

Within these broad definitions that give the boundaries to evangelicalism, specific tenets include a high propositional view of Scripture described theologically as inerrancy, conversion to a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ and that this salvation is through his substitutionary atonement on the cross for sin,<sup>15</sup> and an evangelistic and missionary mandate to proclaim the gospel to the nations.<sup>16</sup> In addition to these is an ethical element demonstrated through holy living, a sense of discipline marked by an internal sense of personal conduct.<sup>17</sup> Due to the diversity of American Christianity, evangelical Christianity while holding to common foundations such as the above, may differ in the weight given to these various tenets in their specific churches

---

<sup>13</sup> Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 14-15.

<sup>14</sup> David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 130.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>16</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 225.

<sup>17</sup> Karkkainen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 67; see also Noll, *Turning Points*, 242.

and congregations, and being a newer tradition, does not have a complete theology of the church despite the fact that many churches are already living out their “churchliness.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Strengths and Weaknesses of the Free Church Evangelical Tradition**

Each stream of Christianity has its strengths and weaknesses, and the Free Church evangelical tradition is not exempt. Each tradition’s ecclesiological strengths keep their local churches grounded in ministry, however focusing on strengths alone may prove short-sighted and cause churches to lose focus and grow complacent. By looking at a tradition’s weaknesses a church can look at different ways to disciple its people and help them grow into greater Christlikeness. This section will look at the strengths and weaknesses of the evangelical tradition, thereby laying the groundwork for the final section of looking at alternative ecclesiological models to help re-envision discipleship at HCC.

#### **Strengths in the Free Church Evangelical Tradition**

Foster in his chapter on the evangelical tradition lists four strengths: the call to conversion, the mandate to disciple the nations, a commitment to biblical fidelity, and an emphasis on sound doctrine and beliefs.<sup>19</sup> The evangelistic fervor from the revivals and crusades has continued in evangelical churches with its call to believe in Jesus Christ and invitation to follow him based on a clear theology of salvation: salvation is found in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone. By trusting in Christ, that his death paid the penalty of one’s sin, salvation is given and eternal life secured.

---

<sup>18</sup> Karkkainen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 15-16.

<sup>19</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 225-28.

The mandate to disciple the nations is given in Matthew 28:19-20 with the promise that Christ will be with his disciples even to the end of the age. The gospels are filled with stories of Jesus calling people to follow him, to learn from him, and to be his disciples. The theme of discipleship and making disciples is a stated value and belief in many churches with many of the ministries focused on making disciples through their teaching ministries, whether through preaching or Sunday school, Bible studies, personal devotions, or Scripture memory. The focus has been on content, with discipleship being more about knowing and doing rather than on character and being.

The priorities of evangelism and discipleship stem from another strength of the evangelical tradition, its commitment to biblical fidelity and its emphasis on sound doctrine. By their high view of Scripture and holding to the doctrine of inerrancy, evangelicals have a standard of evaluating truth from error, and should error be involved, a way to correct it. Should people doubt Christ's life and work on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, evangelicals know just the passages to show the historical work of Christ. Biblical theology, the progress of revelation from the Old Testament to the New, point to the good news of Jesus Christ, and systematic theology unpacks all this in categories to help people study and learn correct doctrine.

Because of its commitment to Scripture and doctrine, the church's preaching and teaching ministries are a priority. Expository preaching<sup>20</sup> and Sunday school ministries and mid-week Bible studies help people know God's word, with emphasis placed on knowledge and right beliefs. Strategies and programs are thought through and developed

---

<sup>20</sup> While Fitch describes how evangelicals have "given away" preaching of the Word, many evangelicals have held onto preaching and expository preaching as a strength (*The Great Giveaway*, 139).

so that God's people in a local church have a way to move from here to there in their accumulation of Bible knowledge, such that as people know more, they would then be able to share the good news, teach, and disciple others in this body of biblical knowledge.

### Weaknesses in the Free Church Evangelical Tradition

A tradition's strength can also become its weakness and this is true for the evangelical tradition as well. The primacy of *sola Scriptura* and the proclamation of the good news as expounded by Scripture delivered through propositional truth can give way to a more cerebral religion, an intellectual religion characterized by mental assent to correct doctrine, and succeeding in keeping God at arm's length and lacking life change.<sup>21</sup> The nature of preaching, with the congregation sitting for a length of time has given way to a passivity and consumerism in the church. Scripture is studied as more information to master, and prayer can also become an activity of the mind, an intellectual exercise reduced to pleading and negotiating with God. He becomes someone to master through the intellect rather than someone to be with, and prayer meetings become another scheduled activity to check off on the list. Mastering God is filling one's mind with God and new ideas of God, but the heart can remain far from him, hearing interesting prayers but having no experience of God's presence.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of doctrine and Scripture has been a strength and trademark of evangelicalism, especially in the period after World War II and in the conservative-to-fundamental evangelicalism that emerged. However, this evangelicalism has come to

---

<sup>21</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 51; Willard, *Spirit of the Disciplines*, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 58.

mean evangelism, a proclamation of the gospel of salvation with the intent to win converts to Christ.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, evangelicals have settled for Scripture and the good news as content and information to master and share, rather than for life transformation. Elsewhere Willard mentions that evangelicals have treated Scripture as their only sacrament, that spiritual growth could happen through teaching and preaching alone, that one could be saved and transformed by hearing these truths, and discipleship being tied to evangelism and soul-winning.<sup>24</sup> Foster also described one of the perils of evangelical tradition as its too limited view of salvation in Christ, whether the sole issue in one's life is about getting into heaven or an individualistic salvation that neglects the community, institutional life, and social responsibility.<sup>25</sup> By focusing on the call for commitment to Christ, a strength of the evangelical tradition and seen through their clarification of what it means to trust Christ and his death on the cross for sin, this weakness emerges. If left unchecked, it can become a gospel of sin management, whether focusing on the atonement as the whole story or a social gospel without much redemptive substance.<sup>26</sup> Salvation that is limited to forgiveness of sin leads to what is accomplished by Christ's death and the meaning of the atonement rather than the new life that is accomplished by his resurrection.<sup>27</sup>

---

<sup>23</sup> Dallas Willard, "Discipleship," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=134> (accessed September 17, 2012).

<sup>24</sup> Dallas Willard, "Spiritual Formation: What It Is and How It Is Done," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58> (accessed September 18, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 230.

<sup>26</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 41-54.

<sup>27</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 33-37.

Related to a limited view of salvation is a limited view of the meaning of grace. One *sola* of the Reformation is “by grace alone,” but over time that has been narrowly understood and applied to salvation and the forgiveness of sins, that one is saved by grace alone and not through any merit of one’s own. According to Demarest, the evangelical church “has a tendency to limit grace to a single transaction—Christ’s priceless payment for our sins with his blood so that we may be saved. As a group, we spend much of our energy cooperating with this first work of grace, focusing on evangelism, missions, and getting initial conversions. Beyond that, we spend tremendous energy to educate believers in their knowledge of the Bible.”<sup>28</sup> Willard unpacks this evangelical strength that has turned into a weakness by broadening the definition of grace. Grace is not applied to justification alone but to sanctification and discipleship, so much so that if Christ did not die, his people would still need grace to live.<sup>29</sup> Grace is a theological term that needs to be recovered in order to form healthy disciples. In addition to its work in salvation, grace is also the action of God bringing to pass good things which is neither deserved, nor something one can accomplish on one’s own, being “opposed to earning, not effort.”<sup>30</sup> Somehow good preaching and teaching has been divorced from any effort to be conformed to Christ, so much so that many Christians may have trusted in Christ for salvation but are not living changed and transformed lives as his disciples. Wesley calls

---

<sup>28</sup> Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> Dallas Willard, “Spirituality & Ministry” (GM720 class notes, Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, CA, June 9, 2008).

<sup>30</sup> Willard, “Living a Transformed Life Adequate to our Calling.”

such practices that help conform one to Christ the “means of grace,” these disciplines of faith and practice are life-giving, not just for the forgiveness of sin.<sup>31</sup>

The focus on evangelism and missions in the evangelical tradition has also shaped its prayer life to a certain extent. Instead of conversing with God inwardly, it has more of an outward focus, perhaps even holding God at arm’s length, listing requests in a petitionary or intercessory manner for him to answer, even if the requests are for an unreached people group or an unbelieving neighbor to know Jesus Christ. Prayer and Bible study have been “held up as *the* activities that will make one spiritually rich,” without properly understanding how life as a whole can be changed through these disciplines, so they have become burdensome and “unsuccessful” in conforming one into Christlikeness.<sup>32</sup>

These major tenets of evangelicalism are focused more on doing and less on being, so much so that one can be a successful Christian minister on the outside, accomplishing the work of ministry, with the inner character only assumed. Since the interior work is less measurable, it is often overlooked for the outward, even by ministers themselves, and often times with community support.<sup>33</sup> Should it come to light that one is not walking the talk or something is lacking internally, as long as it is not a moral failure but perhaps

---

<sup>31</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 146.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), 4.

along the lines of pride or anger, this might be overlooked for ministry's sake<sup>34</sup> as the person is getting things done at church and the numbers look good.

The evangelical strengths of Scripture, evangelism, and missions have inadvertently cultivated a doing mentality that has permeated the church, that all can be done without having any transformation on one's own life. The constant state of activity can foster a lack of reflection and discernment and awareness of what is going on inside in one's interior life. With the focus on these three strengths, as long as one is engaged in them, they are a disciple of Jesus. Discipleship then is about doing the above, being taught the truth, and then teaching others about the good news. With people hungry for more, discipleship must be re-envisioned within the broader context of spiritual formation. Looking at other ecclesiologies can help broaden the evangelical definition of discipleship.

### **An Alternative Ecclesiological Model in Re-envisioning Discipleship**

Over and against doing more and more for God, whether more Bible study or mission trips to proclaim the good news, as important as these practices are, an alternative model to balance this doing comes from the contemplative tradition and its focus on being before God. From this tradition, a corrective can be offered, along with a different way of doing church: "The body of Christ is a way of life lived and practiced, not a set of programs and activities volunteered for."<sup>35</sup> Spiritual practices in the contemplative tradition, what Richard Foster calls the prayer-filled life, can help busy

---

<sup>34</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> Fitch, *The Great Giveaway*, 42.

Christians slow down and experience the presence of God.<sup>36</sup> While it is not a comprehensive ecclesiological model, as an older and tested tradition in the stream of Christianity it can offer a corrective to the word-centered life of evangelical Christianity. It is a life characterized by intimacy with God, a deepening love that “feels more like a gift than an achievement,”<sup>37</sup> something to be received and enjoyed rather than performed and accomplished.

The definition of *contemplative* comes from *templum*, a temple to observe and reflect in a divine atmosphere,<sup>38</sup> thus requiring time and space to ponder and reflect, and for Christians, to ponder and reflect on the things of God. To be a contemplative does not mean one is quiet or withdrawn, or desires to live the rest of one’s life in a monastery. One can be a contemplative and a mechanic or medical doctor. Foster gives several descriptions of this tradition, defining it by a “beautiful of soul,” love, peace, delight, emptiness, fire, wisdom, and transformation. Through intimacy with God, the believer’s love for God grows deeper over time, a life orientation described by peace and quiet rest that wins over the chatter and clatter and distractions, a delight in God characterized by pleasure and playfulness. At the same time, there is also a sense of thirst and emptiness, a yearning that grows the soul, a fire and flaming passion for God, thus leading into a

---

<sup>36</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>38</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 112

deeper life with the Spirit embodied by a wisdom that can only come from God, with the result that the whole person is gradually transformed into the likeness of Jesus Christ.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to the descriptive words of this tradition, Foster also gives four major strengths of the contemplative stream. The most fundamental contribution is the reminder of one's "first love" with God, the love that often gets left behind as the years add up. It is foundational to being followers of Jesus Christ and doing life with God. While a simple message, the work of maintaining this love is hard and requires constantly arranging life to fall in love with God over and over again. The second strength highlights what it means to love God with one's heart, thus showing the insufficiency of loving God with one's mind alone, that cerebral and intellectual formulation of faith is not enough. Third is its emphasis on prayer as the primary and essential thing, not just a good or important thing of the Christian life. Prayer in this tradition is not just intercessory and petitionary prayer, but is characterized by silence and its unceasing nature. Lastly, the strength of this tradition is its emphasis on solitude to grow in the grace and knowledge of God.<sup>40</sup>

The solitude necessary in the contemplative life is not to further cultivate the individualism already so prevalent in Western culture nor increase anti-social behavior from the community. The solitude frees one from behaving compulsively, being so busy going along with the "musts" and "oughts" and "shoulds" that one has no time to reflect and be and rest in God.<sup>41</sup> In *The Way of the Heart*, Nouwen looks at contemplative spirituality to form the spiritual life of today's ministers through the practices of solitude,

---

<sup>39</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 49-51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 51-53.

<sup>41</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 10.

silence, and prayer. He writes that these practices and overall spirituality from the Desert Fathers in the fourth and fifth centuries “can offer us a very important perspective on our life as ministers living at the end of the twentieth century” and their practices “form the basis of my reflections about the spiritual life of the minister in our day.”<sup>42</sup>

Instead of being a community of faith, the body of Christ, the family of God, the church has become a “dangerous network of domination and manipulation” where one can get easily entangled by the seductive powers offered, such as a busy schedule filled with meetings to conduct, people to visit, appointments to keep, services to lead, plans and projects to complete, people to motivate and entertain, and money to raise.<sup>43</sup> The practices of solitude, silence, and prayer help one to slow down, reflect, and rest in God, so that ministry can be done out of who one is before God rather than compulsively. Space must be created for God, and time must be spent with God in order for formation into Christlikeness to occur. For Demarest, contemplating on the triune God “is a healthy biblical practice that makes the soul robust in its connection to God. . . . Living contemplatively is not a luxury. It is the habit of living in the presence of God, and it provides the solid foundation for the whole of Christian life and service.”<sup>44</sup>

A practical application of this tradition for pastoral ministry can be seen in Peterson’s *The Contemplative Pastor*. In this book he begins by redefining the word and work of “pastor.” The culture has somehow measured a pastor’s effectiveness by his or her busyness, and so the first redefinition Peterson does is attach the adjective “unbusy”

---

<sup>42</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 3.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>44</sup> Demarest, *Satisfy Your Soul*, 158.

before the noun “pastor.” The reason for the busyness is vanity and laziness. Vanity to appear important and significant, and laziness because it is easier to stay busy than it is to set the agenda for pastoral ministry. As a busy pastor, Peterson cannot with integrity lead people to quiet places if he is in perpetual motion, nor can he persuade them to live by faith when he is living by works and juggling his schedule to make everything fit.<sup>45</sup> Instead of a life and ministry of busyness, the pastor can pray, preach, and listen, the proper work of pastoral ministry. Prayer is a deepening conversation, not merely one-way communication on the run, but a disciplined and a deliberate time set aside for God that cannot be done in busyness. Many pastors have resorted to delivering sermons, but Peterson’s preaching requires time for an immersion in Scripture, not merely sermon preparation. As for pastoral listening, that requires a holy leisure and cannot be squeezed into a busy schedule. In order to pray, preach, and listen, Peterson counsels pastors to be unbusy, to release the compulsion to do and count and compile the statistics.<sup>46</sup>

Solitude and silence are practiced in contemplative spirituality for the purpose of prayer. In many evangelical circles, prayer is usually seen as talking to God, a one-way communication of listing requests and supplications, part of one’s duty as a disciple to petition and intercede for one another. Most pastors say that prayer is very important and ministry cannot be done without it, but the actual time spent in prayer is very little and the first thing to be skipped in a busy schedule. For many in church ministry it is easy to “act and respond to needs not out of having been induced by God’s prompting but by

---

<sup>45</sup> Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor*, 27-29.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 29-31.

their ambition and compulsion to make something happen.”<sup>47</sup> Contemplative prayer helps ministers and believers alike to learn and listen to God for “the wisdom and courage to address whatever issues presents itself to them.”<sup>48</sup> Prayer in desert spirituality is the center of ministry and the prayer of the heart is one way to help disciples of Jesus to fulfill the imperative in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray unceasingly.

The primacy of love is one of the strengths of the contemplative tradition. Esther de Waal, a writer on Benedictine spirituality, states that this love toward God is expressed by prayer, that which “sustains every other activity . . . is at the same time root and fruit, foundation and fulfillment.”<sup>49</sup> In addition to the prayer meetings that evangelicals do well, yet at the same time can be compartmentalized as one activity of the spiritual life done on Wednesday evenings, contemplative tradition with their times of formal prayer and structured prayer, also stress times when things in everyday life are occasions for short prayer. People and situations are offered to God, nothing elaborate, but can be a simple prayer, such as “thanks be to God,” and thus a way to re-focus attention on God at specific moments and throughout the day. This would be in addition to prayer before meals, but the same thought is behind this when sitting in traffic, waiting to check out at the supermarket, and turning on the stove. All these are occasions to pay attention to God and see Christ in all things. While seemingly complicated as prescribed by Benedict, it is

---

<sup>47</sup> Hernandez, *Henri Nouwen and Soul Care*, Location 830.

<sup>48</sup> Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 45

<sup>49</sup> Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984, 2001), 145.

demanding but not out of reach, as such constant recalling and attention to God requires practice.<sup>50</sup>

St. Benedict desired a continual prayer that occurs all the time as an expression of one's attentiveness to God. As such, God can be found in all circumstances, in all people, and in all things of daily life, engaging one's whole being and not just one's mind. Because this posture of prayer is done throughout the day, prayer and attending prayer meetings is no longer a competition with other activities, and growth in prayer does not require withdrawal from other activities. It is a way of being while working, that as one works, one prays, as one works, one seeks God.<sup>51</sup> All this is done by God's grace and not something self-initiated. As one seeks God by being available and attentive to him, God is also seeking his people. Such a life of prayer as described by Benedictine spirituality is "the natural outcome of a life dedicated to grace."<sup>52</sup> Contemplative spirituality is a way of life that points to grace, not as something unearned or used exclusively as a salvific term, but is a way of life that is initiated by God and enables one to respond to him. God's grace does not substitute for one's activity, but is the means that enables one to act and respond to God.<sup>53</sup>

In addition to the primacy of prayer, contemplative spirituality with its posture on observing and reflecting on the things of God, highlights this paying attention to God as he has revealed himself in Scripture through a way of reading called *lectio divina*. It is a

---

<sup>50</sup> de Waal, *Seeking God*, 151-52.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

way of reading that submits to the biblical revelation as God chooses to do so in each person and then living it out in the specific context of one's life. In addition to the contributions of Benedict to contemplative spirituality, the Ignatian prayer of examen is also another way to discern God in one's life, the regular practice of which will enable one to see God at work in many different ways. Many other practices exist in the contemplative tradition, these practices available as a means of grace to help believers encounter and experience God in communion with him, rather than only doing for him. These practices require time and space, and cannot be done on the run. It is a way of life that submits to God first and foremost.

The busyness experienced by many Christians in the twenty-first century and among the pastoral staff HCC perhaps began innocently and well-intentionally enough, to work hard and be good stewards of the position from God. Over the years, the doing has taken priority over the being, and it has turned into job performance rather than pastoral ministry. Benedict in his Rule structured specific hours for work, kept in proportion by prayer and study, these times necessary to ensure that work does not become the priority, "an idol dominating everything else," as the work, even work done for Christ, can be done with self in mind, a source of self-fulfillment and way to puff oneself up.<sup>54</sup> Prayer and study are safeguards from such busyness and performance, and when safeguarded by structured times to attend and seek God, God can accomplish more than what one can ask or imagine. The results belong to God, where they should belong in the first place.

---

<sup>54</sup> de Waal, *Seeking God*, 108.

In addition, in a world that divides this from that, it is easy for believers to compartmentalize their lives, including pastors and church leaders. For lay leaders, work can be divided between their weekday jobs and Sunday service. Prayer meetings are on Wednesday nights, Bible studies are on Monday evenings. For contemplative spirituality, all of life is integrated and holistic with no demarcation between the secular and the sacred; work is prayer and prayer is work, the body and mind in one being.<sup>55</sup> A prayer-filled life with God's presence can only complement a word-centered life, both essential in being a disciple of Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>55</sup> de Waal, *Seeking God*, 87.

## CHAPTER 5

### THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE AND PRAYER IN RE-ENVISIONING DISCIPLESHIP

The protest of the Protestant Reformation brought a corrective in the church with their *solas*: *sola scriptura*, *sola christus*, *sola fidas*, *sola gratia*. The Radical Reformation pushed the boundaries in church organization further than the magisterial Reformation church, wanting a total separation of church and state. The Free Church added to this, and with the later evangelicalism, formed its own tradition with strengths built on Scripture, both in its teaching and proclamation, the priesthood of believers in regards to prayer, priority on missions, evangelism, and conversion. Unfortunately, the purpose and motivation behind these strengths have at times gotten lost in the doing and execution. It becomes part of one's weekly "to do" list, the weekly prayer meeting something to check off and the weekly Bible study part of the scheduled routine. Rather than a means to an end, they have become the end and could be done without reflecting on the why or the purpose, giving way to the pragmatic, "we are supposed to do this" or "we have always done this as long as I can remember."

Chapter 5 seeks to reflect on the importance of Scripture and prayer in discipleship, but not as they have been viewed in evangelicalism. Things have become routine, the routine has turned into a rut, and the spiritual life has become stale and busy. Busyness and urgency do not leave time to reflect on why the church does what it does, its purpose, motivation, and passion. The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of the Word and the priesthood of all believers, themes from Scripture itself and the corrective of the Reformation. The first part will show that despite these pillars of the Christian faith, the doing aspect of discipleship has overshadowed the being aspect. Doing in the Scripture category includes mastering the Bible in Bible studies, getting through the Bible through various Bible reading plans, doing daily devotions or quiet times. For prayer, the doing includes attending prayer meetings, which mainly consists of engaging in petitionary and intercessory prayer. The next section will give scriptural examples from the Old and New Testaments to stress discipleship as a way of being with God alongside of doing for God. The third part will expound on the themes of Word and prayer in the contemplative tradition and how these disciplines can help re-envision discipleship at HCC. Finally, historical examples through the lives of Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach will show that discipleship is both being and doing.

### **Doing Discipleship versus Being a Disciple**

Scripture is replete with verses and passages that balance being and doing, resting and being still before God with doing and working unto the Lord. Faith is both a noun and a verb, “belief” as mental assent must be balanced with “believe” as a verb, something that one does. Discipleship describes a disciple of Jesus Christ, one who is a

follower of Jesus Christ. But a disciple is also a learner, someone who learns and continues to learn, not a master of anything by any means. Unfortunately, HCC has gotten away from the being aspect of discipleship and has been caught up in the doing, all rationalized as doing for the Lord, a sanctification that has been unintentionally worked out through busyness and performance.

With its origins as a student fellowship, the members have been studying all their lives, all through elementary and junior high in order to test into the best high schools. Throughout junior high and high school, they also enrolled in after school and weekend “cram schools” in hopes of doing better on their college entrance exams. Getting into graduate school in the United States requires more exams, and in order to graduate with their PhDs, students need to pass their comprehensives and oral defenses. The Chinese know how to study, and the second generation is not much different as these ABCs are getting into good colleges and graduate schools. They have been studying and doing all their lives, and this ethos is also brought into the church.

Beginning with Martin Luther and the other reformers, the Reformation began a movement of the *solas*—in Christ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone, in the Scripture alone. Another item that the reformers highlighted was the priesthood of all believers, that the church and the Pope and the priests were not necessary for the people to approach God, that they could approach God directly. This is most frequently expressed through the prayer life of believers, as they approach God directly on their own behalf, as well as a “priest” interceding on behalf of others. The centrality of Scripture and the priesthood of all believers are two characteristics of the Protestant Reformation that HCC has taken to heart.

Over the years, the ethos of achievement in the Chinese culture combined with the evangelical themes of the gospel, mission, and evangelism, the sense of doing and mastery is so ingrained toward measurement, accomplishment, and results. New ideas can be seen as another program to institute to help the church succeed in another ministry project. James Houston, a retired professor of Spiritual Theology and one of the founders of Regent College, was asked in an interview about the “doing” aspect of spiritual formation, that followers of Christ have a tendency to “do” something in order to make spiritual formation happen faster. He responds:

Well, I think the vocabulary is wrong, because it’s all part of living in a technological society. And so processes, procedures, programs are all, in a sense, technical devices or technical mindsay for fixing things. So we want to fix things quickly. But the very nature of integrity is that we have a speed that is appropriate to what we are doing. The speed of gaining information is very fast, but the speed of godliness is very slow. Or the speed of making a friend is very slow in comparison with other forms. So we lose integrity when we use the wrong mindset or the wrong speed at which we’re operating. My problem is that I can think faster than I can speak, I speak faster than I can act, I’ve got more acts than I’ve got character for . . . so maintaining integrity is acting appropriately.<sup>1</sup>

Discipleship does require doing and effort is involved, but the fruit is evident in one’s being and attitudes, such as love and joy, rather than measured by external behavior and managed by more programs and membership. The desire and purpose of this final project is to help the believers at HCC to re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation so that these formational practices can help them create space to experience God’s grace, enabling them to truly *be with* Jesus Christ.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sandy Widstrom, “The Haunting Challenge of Spiritual Formation: An Interview with Dr. James Houston,” in *Denver Seminary Magazine*, Summer 2006, 6.

## Centrality of Scripture through Preaching and Teaching

With the centrality of Scripture restored during the Reformation, HCC has put a high priority on the Word, and rightly so as a Protestant, evangelical, Bible-believing church. However, one peril of the evangelical tradition is a possible tendency toward bibliolatry from the desire to uphold a high view Scripture.<sup>2</sup> Willard, in an article on discipleship, has described evangelicalism during the last fifty years as being defined by correct beliefs alone, so that being a Christian meant coming to “saving” faith in Christ alone.<sup>3</sup> Just as justification was focused on a profession of correct beliefs, so sanctification meant continued growth in doctrine, and a disciple is one who learns more about these Christian doctrines.

The centrality of Scripture as seen in correct beliefs is manifested through the church’s preaching and teaching ministries. Of the five core ministries at HCC, two focus on preaching and teaching, while the other three on other aspects of “doing” discipleship. The core ministry of teaching encompasses all the Sunday school ministries, including the youth and children’s classes. While worship is much broader than preaching, often times the singing and Scripture reading are done in a way as to point to the sermon. While preaching the Word is an essential part of a Bible-believing evangelical church, the way it is highlighted gives it almost a magical quality to it, as if by just showing up and sitting in the pews, life transformation will happen because correct doctrines are communicated.

---

<sup>2</sup> Foster, *Streams of Living Water*, 230-31.

<sup>3</sup> Willard, “Discipleship.”

This thinking occurs also with the teaching ministry, that if people would attend Sunday school and be filled with correct doctrine and good content on how to live, then transformation will occur due to those seventy-five minutes in a classroom setting. Because the teaching and preaching of God's word are essentials for evangelicals, much effort and prodding is put forth on the importance of attendance in both worship and Sunday school classes. For many years the children's ministries, instead of a ministry to and for children, was subsumed under the teaching ministry of HCC, so that if someone wanted to know more about the children's ministries from the church website, one had to click on the "teaching" link to find programs for the children.

In addition to the Sunday school ministry, where learning the Bible and Christian living occurs in a classroom setting, small groups and the larger fellowship groups also devote much of their time to studying the Bible. It may be one leader doing most of the talking, or it could be a discussion format, but the intent is one of studying and mastery of a certain passage. While the Bible is of utmost importance, however with a focus on content and with character formation only assumed, many years of Bible study can leave one's heart hungry for the things of God.

### **Personal Devotions as Bible Mastery**

God has revealed himself through Scripture so that if one desires to know God and spends time with him, it must be done by reading his word. With the invention of the printing press and gifted Bible translators, evangelicals today have the luxury of reading their own Bibles in their own languages. Because of the importance of Scripture in evangelicalism, much value was placed on ensuring that each believer is spending time

daily in God's word. The plethora of Bible reading plans and daily devotional tools highlight this importance, along with accountability questions that ask, "Have you done your quiet time today?" These have stemmed out of good intentions that believers grow in their knowledge of God, but over time, such knowledge has shown no behavioral difference between evangelicals who engage in daily devotions and those who do not.<sup>4</sup>

Just as unfortunate is that these practices have become ends in themselves rather than a means to an end, the means of becoming more like Jesus Christ. As ends in themselves, these daily quiet times are items to check off on the daily list, and if one is too busy to do them, they become a guilt-inducing mechanism. One has not been equipped to practice the presence of God everywhere, to see that all of life belongs to God; instead, life is compartmentalized between the sacred and the secular. The evangelical strength of personal devotionals and Bible mastery segues nicely with the Chinese bent toward study, and studying God can be done cerebrally and intellectually, without realizing the danger inherent in mastering something without being mastered by it. This works for fields in academia or research and development, but this mindset has unfortunately entered the Church as well, that one can even attempt a mastery of God without being mastered by him.

For many years the Bible reading plans put out by the Navigator's *Discipleship Journal* was recommended to encourage people to read through the Bible in one year. In recent years, one Sunday school class offered regularly is "The Bible in 90 Days" to

---

<sup>4</sup> Willard, "Discipleship."

increase the intensity. Willard does make a case for intensity in Scripture reading,<sup>5</sup> and those who read through the Bible in ninety days would most definitely be impacted by such intensity. While “Bible in 90 Days” provides a great overview of the Bible, not to mention a measureable feeling of accomplishment when completed, it is easy to get caught up in the content and lose sight that the purpose of reading Scripture is to cultivate one’s relationship with God through Christ. Yet keeping to the plan is easier than cultivating that relationship or measuring one’s growth in Christlikeness, both of which require more than ninety days. To capitalize on the excitement of the ninety-day experience at the expense of character growth, it is easy to fall prey to mastering the Bible rather than be mastered by the Bible, discipleship again as content-based doing. For growth and transformation to occur, reading for depth is needed, that is, depth through a way of reading that slowly meditates on Scripture. This way of reading needs to be planned for and scheduled in one’s day, and needed on a regular basis, much longer than ninety days. However, this type of reading is rarely promoted or taught at church.

With the Sunday school classes and Bible reading plans, the assumption is if one does them, he or she will automatically grow. Growth can be measured and checked off by Sunday school attendance and daily Bible reading plan. Willard states that for Christlikeness to occur, more information is not needed nor are the right answers. The disciple probably already possesses all the needed information, but needs to consistently believe in his or her “whole being the information they already have as a result of their

---

<sup>5</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 355-56.

initial confidence in Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> This will require a differently way of living and being to re-train one’s life with Christ.

### **The Priesthood of All Believers and Prayer**

The priesthood of all believers is a foundational tenet of Protestantism, and one of the most distinctive doctrines in the Free Church, with their “insistence on the right and gifting of each believer for ministry as equal partners.”<sup>7</sup> Believers can read God’s word for themselves, pray directly to God without a mediator, and participate in church ministry. As a result of this direct and unmediated access to God, along with the motto that every member is a minister, the ministry of prayer is a ministry of service one does as a believer. Foster rightly locates petitionary and intercessory prayer, as important as they are, with prayers of transformation and intimacy. Ministry, including prayer ministry, must flow out of abundance, not out of spiritual bankruptcy.<sup>8</sup> Intercessory prayer is priestly ministry, and believers have this priestly privilege to go before God on behalf of others.<sup>9</sup>

What began as a privilege based on a doctrinal tenet of Protestantism and the Free Church ecclesiology has over the years turned into the only form of prayer one does as a believer. Accountability questions may include, “How’s your prayer life?” meaning, “Are you praying for yourself and others?” and spirituality is measured by attendance at prayer

---

<sup>6</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 318.

<sup>7</sup> Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 65.

<sup>8</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart’s True Home* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 168.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

meetings. Small groups and the larger fellowship groups at HCC can spend a good portion of their allotted gathering times in Bible study then exchanging prayer requests and spending time in intercessory prayer. While accountability in prayer life is needed, as is attendance at prayer meetings, both can occur without inner transformation into greater Christlikeness or increased intimacy with him.

With prayer being reduced to petitionary and intercessory prayer, it is reduced to doing and less being with God and hearing him speak to his people. People are tired of doing, despite the fact that such doing sustained them for many years at HCC, whether it was prayer meetings or planting churches. In recent years the church-wide prayer meetings occur on a quarterly basis, with perhaps thirty or forty people in attendance. For many busy deacons and elders, it has become another thing to do, another thing to attend, and another thing to check-off on the list, and quite a few do not come at all.

### **Scriptural Examples of Being with God**

Scripture is replete with examples and stories of God's people spending time being with him, not just doing for him. Somehow believers at HCC have forgotten that a relationship with Jesus Christ takes time to cultivate, and that cultivation is a slow process, not always something to be done and checked off. Many examples are given in Scripture of people spending time with God to nourish their souls, including the Son of God. If God the Son needed time alone with the Father, surely God's children, finite and weak, would need that as well, but somehow at HCC, the thinking is that people can be exempt from the needed time of rest and refreshment. Doing for God is preferred to being with God.

Passages from the Old and New Testaments will be studied more closely in this next section to demonstrate that followers of God and disciples of Jesus Christ should be characterized by a posture of rest and refreshment, rather than activity and busyness. The passages from the Psalms and Isaiah show that God has intended a different way of living for his people, a way of stillness, quietness, and rest, as these are exterior demonstrations of an inner trust in God's sovereignty. The New Testament passages from the Gospels show Jesus taking time to be with the Father, and how he invites his weary children to come to him and find rest for their souls. The last passage in Luke shows how easy it is to be busy serving and forget the priority of being with Jesus, with Jesus praising Mary for her choice.

#### Psalm 23:1-3

While this whole psalm sums up life with God as part of kingdom living, this paper will focus on the first three verses that describe an attitude toward God resulting in margins and rest. Written by David, a shepherd by birth and later chosen to be king, the opening verse demonstrates his recognition that God is the ultimate shepherd. Because Yahweh is the shepherd, his sheep lack nothing; his provision is not only sufficient, but also abundant. This abundant life is pictured for the hearer and readers in descriptive statements, introduced in a verb form showing a causative effect: here God causes the psalmist to lie down, causes him to be led, causes his soul to be restored, and causes him to be guided on the correct paths.<sup>10</sup> The abundant life with God is one where he provides

---

<sup>10</sup> Gerald H. Wilson, *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms, Volume 1* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 432-33. See footnote 5 for an explanation on the imperfect tense of the verbs occurring here in the causative stem and thus demonstrating the shepherd's range of authority and influence over his flock.

everything as shepherd and the sheep lack nothing, including a life where rest is not lacking, life is not lacking, and guidance is not lacking.<sup>11</sup>

With the image of shepherd and sheep together depicting a life of trust and dependence, being led on “paths of righteousness” is a way that “fulfills God’s expectations for his followers.”<sup>12</sup> This way of life includes rest and refreshment, trust and dependence, because as disciples and followers of Jesus Christ, such a life is lived for his name’s sake. God acts in ways that expresses who he is and his character toward his people. Following Jesus as his disciple, such a life bears him a good reputation, that his yoke is truly easy and his burden light. To be disciples characterized by busyness, hurriedness, self-sufficiency, and Messiah-complexes can hardly point to a God of grace and rest.

Concerning this psalm in re-envisioning discipleship, Willard states that “the mind of the disciple should have it prominently displayed with, to always foster the joy and peace of the kingdom as well as to orient all of his or her actions within it,” and that positive engagement with it “will bring kingdom order into our entire personality.”<sup>13</sup> Such mindfulness on Yahweh’s dependence and care will counter the disciple’s self-sufficiency, busyness, and performance mentality, and replace it with rest and refreshment in the midst of the circumstances of daily life.

---

<sup>11</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 208-10.

<sup>12</sup> Wilson, *Psalms*, 433.

<sup>13</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 362.

## Psalm 46:10

The psalmist begins this psalm by stating his radical trust in God. God is described as a refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble, both showing that he is a stronghold whom one can flee to as well as the source of inner strength to face calamities.<sup>14</sup> This opening stanza (v. 1-3) highlights the fact that no matter what happens, God alone is refuge and his refuge is enough. The second stanza (v. 4-6) points to God's defense of his city, both physical Jerusalem and spiritual Jerusalem, where heaven is the final dwelling place for God's people.<sup>15</sup> His is the ultimate defense and security. The repeated refrain in verses 7 and 11 remind the hearers and readers of God's name Yahweh, and that he is almighty, being Yahweh Sabaoth. He is always with his people and is their fortress.

In between these refrains in verses 8-9, the psalm describes God's work, and as the conqueror and victorious God, he can make the wars cease and impose peace as only he can do. This is not a negotiated peace, but a peace imposed on a conquered party, with broken bows, shattered spears, and burned shields. One cannot fight any longer and must now cease all warring. With such peace executed, the message is one of surrender, laying down of weapons, and acknowledging that God is the only victorious God.<sup>16</sup> It is a stopping and a ceasing so that God can be acknowledged as God.

---

<sup>14</sup> James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalm 42-106* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 389.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 389-90.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

Interestingly enough, this psalm also has three *selahs* to remind the hearer and reader to pause, whether a pause in the music or a pause for contemplation.<sup>17</sup> While contextually Psalm 46:10 may not be a proof-text for a contemplative life, the *selahs* are a good reminder to pause nonetheless and acknowledge God as God. In a life of busyness and activity, one cannot stop and surrender to God often enough, as “frenetically functional activists find it extremely difficult to be still, and know God as God.”<sup>18</sup> It is only in the stopping, surrendering, and acknowledging that true rest is finally possible.

#### Isaiah 28:11-12 and Isaiah 30:15

In their respective commentaries on the Book of Isaiah, Motyer and Oswalt title their sections of these chapters of Isaiah similarly, using themes of faith and trust: Motyer contrasts human faithlessness with God’s faithfulness,<sup>19</sup> while Oswalt through lessons in trust show the folly of trusting in other nations instead of God.<sup>20</sup> Isaiah 28-33 is characterized by several “woe” pronouncements against God’s people, because they refused to depend on God and filled themselves on wine instead. This abuse to their bodies with alcohol (Isaiah 28:1-4, 7-8) is a symptom of their deeper problem of pride and unwillingness to surrender to God, and in their drunkenness rejecting God’s invitation and the easy way of faith: “This is the resting place, let the weary rest” and

---

<sup>17</sup> Boice, *Psalms*, 389; Wilson, *Psalms*, 128.

<sup>18</sup> M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1985, 2000), 27.

<sup>19</sup> J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 6.

<sup>20</sup> John N. Oswalt, *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 65.

“this is the place of repose” (Isaiah 28:11-12).<sup>21</sup> Because it is God’s invitation and way of life, Isaiah as God’s prophet emphasizes this rest to the people, especially the leaders of their “duty of example and ministry, the example of entering the *resting-place* themselves and encouraging others to do the same” in the midst of pressures and self-reliance.<sup>22</sup> This rest and repose that God offers and invites his people to enter into is described in Isaiah 30:15 as a returning, rest, quietness, and trust, all these providing salvation and strength. God speaks to Ephraim and Judah, tells both to trust in him, not in wine or other nations, and in this case, Egypt.

With a refusal to listen to God and receive his invitation, death comes. But before that happens, Isaiah offers again this way of God. It is characterized by a repentance and returning back to God, involving action on the part of God’s people, and in that action, quietness and trust result, this absence of frenzy and anxiety.<sup>23</sup> Taking matters into their own hands, doing what they thought was right and best, forming alliances with Egypt instead of living by faith, choosing alliances over reliance on God, such is not the “easy yoke” God had in mind for his people. While HCC may not be characterized by drunkenness or alliances with other churches instead of God, this ethos of busyness and activity is one modern way of relying on self instead of God. God’s invitation to return and rest is rejected, along with the enjoyment of quietness and trust that embodies life together with him. Just as God through Isaiah called the nation’s leaders to exemplify entering God’s resting place and repose of the soul, so he is issuing that same call to

---

<sup>21</sup> Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 318-19.

<sup>22</sup> Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 232.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 249.

church leaders today. It is easier to trust in activity and busyness, self-reliance on getting things done, but that is not the way of God. His way, returning and rest, quietness and trust, actually provides deliverance from the frenzy and gives strength for the life he desires.

#### Matthew 11:28-30

In between the second and third teaching discourses of Matthew's gospel lies a section that details opposition to the Messiah and in the middle of this opposition and confrontation lies Jesus' invitation to his followers: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30). This is Jesus' invitation, only found in Matthew's gospel, to his disciples, a way of life in God's kingdom characterized by rest as contrasted to a "figurative bondage of unprofitable labor under an inadequate understanding of God's law."<sup>24</sup> Wilkins defines "weary" to describe those who are exhausted from the journey they are on or the work they are doing, and "burdened" for those being weighed down with loads too heavy for them.<sup>25</sup>

Jesus' invitation to come after him as his disciple includes an invitation to rest, and while such an invitation demands all of one's life, it is an easy yoke.<sup>26</sup> The yoke of

---

<sup>24</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1997), 222.

<sup>25</sup> Michael J. Wilkins, *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004), 422.

discipleship comes with rest in one's soul, a freedom from the burden and weariness of doing and performing Christianity. It results from a steadfast commitment to Jesus Christ, not the church, not from serving out of duty or obligation, but from intimacy in relationship to him. This intimacy that characterizes discipleship, even in the midst of many complications and complexities of life, is done through "simply walking with Jesus in the real world and having him teach us moment by moment how to live life his way."<sup>27</sup> Instead of being weighed down and burdened with a yoke of busyness, the practices of this paper help believers prepare and live into this moment by moment way of life with God, enjoying a kingdom rest that is available in the present.

Mark 1:35, Mark 6:46, and Mark 6:31

As Mark's gospel begins, Jesus is busy. As soon as he is baptized, he is sent into the desert and tempted for forty days (Mark 1:9-13). He then proclaims the good news and calls the first disciples to follow him (Mark 1:14-20), and begins a ministry of teaching with authority, casting out demons, and healing the sick (Mark 1:21-34). It was a successful ministry, as multitudes in Capernaum were taught, many were healed of their sickness and disease, and many others had demons driven out of them. Instead of celebrating and basking in his success, Jesus got up very early the next morning and went to a solitary place to pray (Mark 1:35). The Greek *proseuketoeto* "was praying" is in the imperfect tense, possibly connoting durative action, that Jesus' posture was that of being

---

<sup>26</sup> The "yoke" describes the wooden frame that two oxen shared when pulling heavy loads, an image used metaphorically here to describe the heavy load of keeping law to the point of legalism (Wilkins, *Matthew*, 423)

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 425.

in continuous prayer.<sup>28</sup> This motif is repeated in Mark 6:46, after another busy day of ministering to the crowds, teaching them many things, and feeding thousands of people. After he fed them, he dismissed them, and went up on a mountainside to pray, taking time to pray alone and commune with God. In both instances Jesus withdrew to a solitary place, the retreat being a needed repose after the “threat inherent in irresponsible excitement” from the people, the extended solitude and prayer time essential in order to find strength to refuse the acclaim of the multitude, fill popular expectations people had of him, and affirm his obedience to his Father.<sup>29</sup>

The two accounts above of Jesus withdrawing from the busyness of ministry to pray are reinforced with his directive to the disciples in Mark 6:31. Here the disciples just finished ministering through preaching, casting out demons, and healing the sick (Mark 6:12-13). They gathered around Jesus, reporting to him all they had done and taught. The disciples probably thought their need was to give Jesus a ministry report, with rest being the last thing on their minds in the midst of ministry, excitement, and busyness. Jesus knew their real need and said to them: “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31). This withdrawal and rest in a wilderness place is not just a well-deserved rest after hard labor, but a rest characterized by necessary time in God’s presence,<sup>30</sup> perhaps especially needed after the busyness of ministry. The noise of

---

<sup>28</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989), 69.

<sup>29</sup> William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 235.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

ministry and clamor of the people required an extended time of rest and prayer, a concern that Jesus made known to his disciples.

#### Luke 10:38-42

Much is communicated about the priority of being with Jesus over doing for Jesus in this passage unique to Luke's gospel. In Jesus' visit to two sisters, each have their own way of following him, their ways being contrasted with the word "but" (*de*): Mary took time to sit "at the Lord's feet listening to what he said" while Martha "was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made" (Luke 10:39-40). Feeling justified by her service (*diakonia*) to Jesus, who as a traveler is in need of hospitality and Martha desires to fulfill this need in serving her Lord, she asks Jesus a question, phrased using the Greek word *ou*, expecting a response in the affirmative from him. He refuses to endorse her complaint and explains to her that Mary has chosen the one thing (*henos*), "what is better" (Luke 10:42).

According to I. Howard Marshall, Martha's being "distracted, busy, and overburdened" by her service, and as a result becomes "anxious and unduly concerned" is an expression of a worldly attitude that depicts unbelief over the things of God.<sup>31</sup> Serving is good and an essential part of discipleship, but when service becomes more about performing and a measurement of spirituality, choosing busyness to hide from God, then time to stop and sit is needed. Discipleship requires both service and reflection, but this combination becomes imbalanced when service is done at the cost of being still before

---

<sup>31</sup> I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 452. He defines the passive form of *perispaomai* as "to be pulled, dragged away," and thus "to become distracted, busy, overburdened."

God, or if service becomes a way of assessing others and what they are doing, which seems to be Jesus' point with Martha.<sup>32</sup> At times work may need to be suspended in order to be with Jesus; and when working, to see the work as one's service to him without playing the comparison game and looking at others. It is easy to get caught up in doing, to measure spirituality by doing, to look at others, and to forget that one's service represents his or her own expression of active love to God, and instead, turning it into something all must do and sacrificing the "one thing needed."

### **Scripture and Prayer in the Contemplative Tradition**

If the passages above can be taken together to show one theme of Scripture, it is that time and space are needed in order to grow and be formed by God. Life must be paused in all its busyness and distractions, with priority given and space made for time with God. Otherwise, formation and transformation will not happen. Life must be arranged for growth into Christlikeness to occur. While the strengths of the evangelical tradition is its word-centered life in the gospel and the priesthood of all believers in areas of Scripture reading and learning, along with the ministry of prayer and access to God, it can turn into a sense of works-righteousness rather than food for a life-giving relationship with God. With scriptural encouragement and reminders that rest and refreshment are found in being with God rather than doing for God, combined with the evangelical high view of Scripture, a re-envisioning of discipleship can occur. The strengths of Scripture and prayer, when done in a posture of attentiveness and being still, become a means to

---

<sup>32</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 305-06.

growing with God rather than the ends. Instead of an action item on a daily checklist or reading for information alone, these practices can help the disciple of Jesus Christ to dwell deeply with him.

The strength of the contemplative tradition is an open posture to God, paying attention to the ways he is revealing himself in Scripture, in the lives of others, and in the lives of each believer, and as he chooses to reveal himself, one can respond with openness and surrender. While many in the contemplative tradition choose to do their responding in the space of a monastery or convent, plenty more live their lives in the world. They bring this posture of openness and attentiveness to God in their homes, work places, and conversations. The time and relationship cultivated with God colors everything the disciple is and does, so that in being formed and transformed by the Holy Spirit, he or she is also transforming the world. The next section will look at the lives to two individuals who modeled such living.

### **Re-envisioning Discipleship: Historical Examples of Being and Doing**

Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach lived busy lives, one in a monastery kitchen and the other as a missionary in the Philippines. In their own context, they learned a way of life that created space for God and when such spaciousness is part of life, no matter what they do, they were able to see and attend to God. Brother Lawrence and Frank Laubach were chosen here to show that being with God as a disciple is possible in the busyness and business of life, in the hopes that through their examples, God's people at HCC would see that the practices required in cultivating the life of a growing and serious disciple is possible in the midst of the dishes, diapers, and daily life.

## Brother Lawrence: Stillness in Action

It is much easier to do for Christ than dwell with Christ, that dailyness of living out the theological truth of being *en Christo*. Church members are used to doing for Christ, and less familiar with being still before him. It is only when filled with Christ and ministering out of that overflow can true delight occur and lives touched by God's love flowing through his people onto others. However, serving and ministering is not enough as one also has to do the underlying work to give off the aroma of Christ, which can only come from having spent time with him. This being in the presence of Christ is essential, so that when opportunities come to meet and talk with people, they can see something life-giving.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection (1611-1691) was a lay discalced Carmelite monk in France, entering the order at midlife after retiring from the army due to an injury. He was assigned the humble duty as a kitchen aid spending his days cooking and cleaning. It was during this "common business" that he developed his rule of spirituality and work, now captured in his *Practicing the Presence of God*. This book is important because it shows how contemplative living is possible in the midst of work, even manual labor, and changes not the work but the underlying perspective on the work: "that our sanctification did not depend upon *changing* our works, but in doing that for God's sake which we commonly do for our own. That it was lamentable to see how many people mistook the means for the end, addicting themselves to certain works, which they performed very imperfectly, by reason of their human or selfish regards."<sup>33</sup> The busyness

---

<sup>33</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Uhrichsville, OH, Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2004), 26.

that is part of church life at HCC has become endemic, working for the Lord rather than working in the Lord.

In the activity of kitchen duty, as Brother Lawrence peeled potatoes and turned the cake on the frying pan for love of God, his interior life focused on God despite the busyness of his exterior life. He practiced unceasing prayer, practiced God's presence in his life through an ongoing dialogue and listening to God. Exteriorly, he was hardly still in the kitchen, and yet, he could be still interiorly and know that God is God. It was through this "common business" of peeling potatoes that he developed a delightful and continual conversation with God, and as a result, could live in a continual sense of God's presence. Yet it was something that needed to be practiced, and time in the kitchen gave him plenty of time to practice: "That in order to form a habit of conversing with God continually, and referring all we do to Him, we must first apply to Him with some diligence; but that after a little care we should find His love inwardly excite us to it without any difficulty."<sup>34</sup> Brother Lawrence also found out that practicing God's presence is done through grace, and when grace is involved, is the easy way of living: "That in the beginning of the spiritual life we ought to be faithful in doing our duty and denying ourselves; but after that, unspeakable pleasure followed. That in difficulties we need only have recourse to Jesus Christ, and beg His grace; with that everything became easy."<sup>35</sup>

Through practicing God's presence, Brother Lawrence was able to live his life with ample margins, demonstrated by never rushing around in hurry and haste, knowing that he was working for the love of God, without any view toward performance,

---

<sup>34</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God*, 16.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

accomplishment, or pleasing others. Life was not compartmentalized for him, as he lived an integrated life, able to go about the day with purpose, because “the time of business does not with me differ from the time of prayer; and in the noise and clatter of my kitchen, while several persons are at the same time calling for different things, I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the blessed sacrament.”<sup>36</sup> He was able to live with interior stillness anywhere, praying unceasing and short contemplative prayers, with a sense of awareness of God. He had an interior life that resulted from practice in being with God, so that when busyness overwhelmed the soul, he was able pause, remember God, be “reunited” with him, whether through an offered prayer or words of affection, “My God, I am all yours; do what You will with me,”<sup>37</sup> and then continue on in the work at hand. This practice imbues all activity with God’s presence, that one can still be active for God, but not with that life-spinning busyness which only succeeds in wearying the soul. The practice of contemplative prayer helps remind church leaders that their vocation is to be with God: “Let all our employment be to *know* God; the more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him.”<sup>38</sup> Over the years and in the course of ministerial duty, it has been easier to spend time studying him, knowing more of him, but less time knowing him. The historical example of Brother Lawrence is a timely reminder for evangelicals that prioritize the Word and prayer, that an increased awareness of God through contemplative prayer gives roots to the work of missions, evangelism, and ministry being done.

---

<sup>36</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 30.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Brother Lawrence, *The Practice of the Presence of God* (Barbour Publishing), 91.

## Frank Laubach: Intentional Doing and Being

Re-envisioning discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation, living out a contemplative posture in the midst of the demands and pressures of daily life can be seen through the example of Frank Laubach. He was an American missionary in the Philippines on the island of Mindanao. He was well-trained from Princeton and eager to help the local people there. In his eagerness to do so, he became discouraged when he was challenged by learning the local language and his inability to appreciate their Islamic religion, with the peoples' indifference furthering alienating him. On January 20, 1930, Laubach wrote this letter to his father: "Although I have been a minister and a missionary for fifteen years, I have not lived the entire day of every day in a minute-by-minute effort to follow the will of God. Two years ago a profound dissatisfaction led me to begin trying to line up my actions with the will of God about every fifteen minutes or every half hour . . . But this year I have started out trying to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, "What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this minute?" It is clear that this is exactly what Jesus was doing all day every day. But it is not what His followers have been doing in very large numbers."<sup>39</sup> This experiment of living minute-by-minute in a surrendered life with God transformed him and helped him eventually teach 60 million to read as the people began to see and treat him differently, and as obstacles melted away, he became a friend in their eyes.<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Frank C. Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic: Excerpts from Letters Written to His Father* (Colorado Springs: Purposeful Designs Publications, 2007), 3-4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

As busy as he was teaching the locals to read, along with spending time getting to know his Muslim friends, he knew that the only hope for the people he was trying to reach is for himself to be more like Christ. And to be more like Christ required a concrete expression of one's time: "We shall not become like Christ until we give Him more time . . . He chose them, the Bible says, that they might be with Him, 168 hours a week! All who have tried that kind of abiding for a month know the power of it—it is like being born again from center to circumference. It absolutely changes every person who does it."<sup>41</sup> The two practices to be like Christ that Laubach suggests in his *Game with Minutes* is to have a study hour with Christ in the Gospels and to make him an "inseparable chum," calling him to mind one second of every minute, practicing this until it becomes a habit, resulting in "while these two practices take all our time, yet they do not take it away from any good enterprise. They take Christ into that enterprise and make it more resultful. They also keep a man's religion steady."<sup>42</sup>

For those who have been bogged down with busyness and are weary from doing more and more for God, such a "game" will make one alive with God once again, helping one become a friend with Jesus, with things undertaken getting done better and more smoothly. This is not a strategy or formula to get from God, but a way to pursue God and enjoy his results of work done well, living with joy and contentment that can only come from practicing his presence; and because the mind is flooded with God, it becomes easy to tell others about Christ.<sup>43</sup> Evangelism and Christian service are no longer chores but

---

<sup>41</sup> Laubach, *Letters by a Modern Mystic*, 88.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-89.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 112-14.

delightful work done with care rather than carelessly, as an expression of love to God, with margins left over. Laubach shows that unceasing prayer is possible in the midst of busyness, that a life of both doing and being can be a reality.

PART THREE  
STRATEGY

## CHAPTER 6

### MARGIN-MAKING SPIRITUAL FORMATION EXERCISES

From the theological investigation in Part Two, the confluence of the Free Church and evangelical traditions, combined with the characteristics of an ethnic church, all coalesces at HCC. The strengths of the Free Church and evangelical streams, such as the word-centered life, the importance of doctrine in the lives of believers, and the priority of evangelism and conversion, along with the strengths of the Chinese culture, such as diligence in studying and hard work in Christian service, have allowed HCC to play an important role in the lives of many believers in Houston. At the same time, the elevation and priority of Bible study, Sunday school classes, and pulpit preaching have enabled the believers to love God with their mind, but at the same time, have left many hungry for something more.

Chapter 5 showed that elements of the contemplative tradition could provide a corrective of sorts to the evangelical, word-centered tradition, and the focus on being in God's presence as a corrective to the doing, studying, and diligence that the Chinese culture has contributed. The busyness that was addressed in Part One of this paper will now be addressed in Part Three, as a re-envisioned ministry of discipleship that desires to

integrate a robust spirituality stemming from the strengths of the contemplative tradition. This “preferred future” at HCC will build on the strength of one’s love for God, but now also expressed in being with him, delighting in him, in addition to loving him with one’s mind and expressed in doing by one’s hands. Three margin-making practices will help believers at HCC to create space for God, as these disciplines will build upon the priority of Scripture and prayer, but expressed in a way that enables God to work in and through them to form and transform his people into greater Christlikeness.

The contextual challenge stemming from busyness and being a doing church has resulted in a lot of quantitative activities but less qualitative growth, the kind of growth where disciples of Jesus Christ begin to think, believe, and live differently. Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 seek to create a new ministry initiative, a preferred future that emerged from the theological reflections. This chapter will begin with an overview of several goals of the suggested margin-making practices in re-envisioning discipleship, goals that include an underlying foundation of spiritual formation rather than another “to do” list for disciples to check off. A proposed strategy will be given to help the congregation cultivate margins in their lives through three spiritual formation practices. An initial target population and training will conclude this chapter.

### **Goals for Integrating Margin-Making Practices in Discipleship**

While the evangelical tradition does a superb job of highlighting the need and importance of conversion, that one must repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, as his substitutionary death on the cross paid the penalty of death for sin, and by trusting in Christ, one receives new life from God. In soteriology, this is called

justification, and it occurs by grace alone, though faith alone, in Christ alone. Once conversion occurs, the new believer is told to read the Bible, preferably daily, pray to God, be part of the local church, and witness to other not yet Christians. How that is done is less clear than the clarity of conversion. Soon the “to do” list becomes just that, and the church is filled with more converts and members, but not necessarily with disciples of Jesus Christ.

### Knowledge of Margins as a Means of God’s Grace for Discipleship

The cognitive goal in this new ministry initiative is to relearn and reprogram some old thinking on Christian growth and discipleship, including the nature of grace, the role of margins and creating space for God, and re-envisioning discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. Perhaps due to its importance on conversion and the fact that such act is by God’s grace alone, the definition of grace has become associated with justification and less with sanctification. Yet Peter’s last verse in his second epistle exhorts believers to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18), seemingly implies that grace plays a role in Christian growth, in addition to the knowledge that Chinese evangelicals do so well, and even excel, in. Foster defines grace as “the reality of God’s action in human lives,”<sup>1</sup> a much broader definition than its role in justification, so much so that Willard argues that even if Christ did not die, Christians would still need grace to live.<sup>2</sup> Justification by God’s grace is something evangelicals understand, but at times forget that sanctification is by God’s grace as well, not

---

<sup>1</sup> Richard J. Foster, *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 184.

<sup>2</sup> Willard, “Spirituality and Ministry.”

something to be earned, but something to be received when effort is put forth in growth and formation. Believers are saved by God's grace alone, the basis being God's acceptance of his children, not because they are deserving of his grace. Despite being saved by grace, it does not mean that at the moment of need one will receive the strength and insight in their being to act in ways appropriate for a follower of Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> Because grace is broader than its involvement in justification, it is possible to use grace as Wesley uses it in his term "means of grace" to describe the various activities engaged in to allow God's action in human lives.<sup>4</sup>

Living with margins is a means of grace in that the grace needed for living and looking like Christ is received when space and time are made and given for God to dwell. When life is packed to the maximum, there is hardly room for God to work and dwell with his people—no space, no room, and no time. The three margin-making practices for HCC are a "means of grace" in that if people were to participate in them, progressive growth in kingdom living would occur, as these practices are the mechanisms "which put people in touch with the dynamic power of God's grace," the agent of change in the lives of believers, and the activities of devotion engaged in will enable that grace to become effective in peoples' lives.<sup>5</sup>

A well-known quote by J.I. Packer states that the church is a mile wide and an inch deep. The plethora of good activities and programs has given way to a pervasive

---

<sup>3</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 4.

<sup>4</sup> D. Michael Henderson, *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting* (Nappanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997), 134-35.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

busyness at the cost of dwelling deeply with God. Believers at HCC need to see and experience the cost that busyness is having on their spiritual lives before understanding the need for margin-making spiritual formation practices. As it was stated earlier, “The greatest threat to devotion to Christ is service for Christ.”<sup>6</sup> Service for Christ is getting in the way of one’s devotion to Christ, but as long as one is serving and being busy for God, it can almost count as one’s expressed devotion to Christ. Doing is also self-rewarding, as the feeling of accomplishment and words of praise for the visible work achieved can be quite intoxicating. Unless one realizes that doing is getting in the way of being with God, one might not be motivated to change. This paper is for those who are tired of being “human doings” and desire a way to live a life of rest that Matthew 11:28-30 speaks about. Creating space for God, creating margins in one’s life is a suggested way toward that rest.

Believers will need to understand the role of margins in one’s life with God. Like a spiritual discipline, margins are something within one’s effort to create so that God can accomplish what one cannot accomplish by direct effort alone.<sup>7</sup> Margins are described as the white space on the edges of a piece of paper where no text resides. If the words are flushed from the left edge to the right, from the top to the very bottom, no margin would exist on that sheet of paper. Some people live without such margins, adding so much to their schedules and lives, that no time or space is given for rest and refreshment, God and

---

<sup>6</sup> See Sanders, “January 18” in *My Utmost for His Highest*, and also quoted by Willard, *The Great Omission*, 130.

<sup>7</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 200.

good health.<sup>8</sup> One can intentionally slow down, rearrange schedules and calendars to incorporate more white space and margins for God to work. Margins are the means by which God participates and works in the lives of believers, but they require effort to be created. An experiential component is involved as well, which will be explained later, but includes more than just cutting out activities.

Lastly is the understanding that re-envisioning discipleship at HCC will be done within the broader context of spiritual formation and it is this formation that is inherent in the mandate in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples. Before one can make disciples by going, baptizing, and teaching, one must be a disciple of Jesus Christ first. Only when one is a disciple, can he or she make disciples as God enables. This effort and participation required by believers in their growth is done through specified margin-making spiritual formation practices. Such understanding of the above components make up the cognitive goals for this re-envisioned ministry proposal.

#### Value of Margins in Spiritual Formation and Re-envisioning Discipleship

Spiritual formation is a slow process, going against the “instants” of our day and age—microwave popcorn, instant oatmeal, instant coffee, instant rice. Spiritual formation does not work instantly, but is a lifelong process. Such formation does not occur on the run, but requires lots of time and ample space given to such growth and processing. Discipleship is no longer a program and spiritual formation can never be a program or tied to a curriculum, but a way of life that has a posture of openness and yielding to God

---

<sup>8</sup> James Bryan Smith on the soul training exercise of “margin,” in *The Good and Beautiful God: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 128.

and his work. Having margins is crucial to the work spiritual formation requires, as does a new way of looking at discipleship, which must be set within the broader context of spiritual formation.

It is only through margins, having enough time at the beginning and end of the day, having energy to reflect and encounter God, taking time to listen, learn, and discern what he is saying and what he is doing that formation into Christlikeness can occur. Scripture reading on the run, along with petitionary prayers for the day ahead, will not help the believer be transformed to look like Christ. While Scripture reading plans and petitionary prayers are important, they are not enough for a robust spirituality as “reliance upon them alone explains the now-common failure of committed Christians to rise much above a certain level of decency.”<sup>9</sup> The modality of “stop, look, and listen” or Scripture, prayer, and reflection, all require time and space, in essence, margins. As a physician, Swenson was seeing the wreckage of “marginless” living in patient after patient, and also in his own life, before finally making some costly changes that included more margins.

To help believers begin to value margins in their lives, to intentionally create space and unhurried time before God, the busyness they are engaged in will need to be pointed out and seen as detrimental to their lives spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally. For other believers it might have to come to that point where they realize something needs to be done differently. However they come to this point, Willard’s general pattern for personal transformation and spiritual formation will be used to help them see and choose a different way. Willard’s pattern is described using the acronym “VIM,” which stands for vision, intention, and means, a three-step pattern for inward

---

<sup>9</sup> Willard, *The Great Omission*, 76.

transformation.<sup>10</sup> Against the busyness of life, even under the rubric of doing the Lord's work, believers at HCC must somehow recognize the need for and desire to live an inwardly transformed life through having envisioned it and then intending it, with the means for that being margin-making practices. The affective goal is a willingness and openness to being a disciple of Jesus that is not defined by doing and keeping busy, but by a sense of being and resting that permeates all of life.

### Experiencing Margins as a Disciple of Jesus Christ

Throughout the book *Margin*, Swenson gives compelling reasons for the need and necessity of margins in one's life for one's health, and suggests many ways to achieve these margins in various areas for optimal living in this day and age. From a spiritual formation and discipleship perspective, margins are necessary because they allow believers and followers of Jesus the time and space to be still, to listen to God, and to reflect on what he has been doing in their lives. It is nearly impossible to do all this in the hustle and bustle, the "muchness" and the "manyness," the din and commotion, with life being too noisy and too fast, too many toys that prevent slowing down and being still.

It is one thing to understand the need for margins, another to value margins, and yet another to experience such margins in life. The disciplines are not things to be thought about or read about. Instead, they must be done, and done with the body involved, undertaken with one's total being, bringing one's whole self into cooperation with God and his order.<sup>11</sup> A discipline, as defined by Willard, is "any activity within our power that

---

<sup>10</sup> Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 86.

<sup>11</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 153.

we engage in to enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort.”<sup>12</sup> They cannot remain an intellectual exercise or on the peripheral of one’s life, but must be entered into and experienced in order to “find the incredible power they have to change one’s world and character.”<sup>13</sup> Margins need to be experienced firsthand, not as a strategy of behavior modification, but an interior way of life that is characterized by rest.<sup>14</sup>

Even the best and most hardy of believers will tire and experience the beginnings of burnout. Many leaders at HCC live lives of bodily busyness, yet often the busyness is contrary to a life of cooperation with God, as much service is done on one’s own strength rather than a reliance on God. The results are harried lives with Sundays marked by busyness and exhaustion. Because of the weariness that permeates their being, they need space and permission to experience the needed margins and the rest Jesus offers and describes in Matthew 11:28-30. Since formal monastic life is out of the question for most believers at HCC, through these margin-making spiritual formation practices the monk’s freedom and serenity can be available today through similar means.<sup>15</sup> The new ministry initiative will give people a place to come and be with God, to engage their body, mind, soul, and spirit. Through this experience, they will glimpse what it is like to live with a serenity and freedom from busyness, and a life that is marked by a leisure of spirit, even in the midst of modern-day living.<sup>16</sup>

---

<sup>12</sup> Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 353.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 355.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 315.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro in “Introduction,” *The Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Meisel, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 10.

Through all this, there must be an interaction and engagement of the cognitive, affective, and behavioral goals, as none can be isolated from the other. Together they will help believers at HCC to re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. Such formation into Christlikeness is accomplished through engagement in various spiritual disciplines and practices. These are not outward performances of certain actions, but they are to be approached with a posture and attitude of opening oneself to God and his agenda.

### **Strategy Content in Cultivating Margins**

In *Reaching Out*, Nouwen shares from the Trappist monks their life of discipline which enables them to experience the deep rhythm of contemplative spirituality. This rhythm includes a contemplative reading of God's word, and a silence that leads to prayer as intimacy with God, not something to be done as part of one's vocation but is one's own most personal vocation.<sup>17</sup> The strength of evangelicalism is to study and analyze God's word, which has given way to the habit of subjecting everything read to analysis and discussion. Against such study, contemplative reading allows the words to penetrate the hidden corners of the heart. And in the silence and solitude, as the words penetrate, one can hear God and respond as he guides. Contemplative reading prepares one toward the prayer of the heart. The Jesus Prayer is such a prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me," and such a prayer can guide the modern-day Christian in an intimate relationship with God and a lifeline in the stormy waters of busyness and distractions.<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 135.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 146-47.

Spiritual disciplines, like the two mentioned by Nouwen, are activities done as a means of grace that God uses to bring believers to grow more into the likeness of Jesus and enable them to live into more “effective cooperation with Christ and his kingdom.”<sup>19</sup> For this paper, the three disciplines to help believers pause and listen are *lectio divina*, contemplative prayer, and the prayer of examen. When believers engage in unhurried time to be still and pray, not rushing through Scripture reading, and spending time being aware and discerning God’s movements, God’s work of grace enables them to live lives of rest with ample margins, even in the midst of activities and service to God.

These practices are life-giving in re-envisioning discipleship at HCC and any disciple who engages in these practices regularly will begin to live the unhurried life where space is created for God to work. It is life-giving and not a strategy for manipulating God, righteousness by works, or a self-serving way to earn one’s sanctification. It is a way of life that lets God set the agenda. Instead of a posture of asking for this and that in intercessory prayer, time is given to contemplative prayer, focusing the heart and mind and body on a phrase or two, taking time to live into that prayer, and letting God breathe his life into his children. Instead of studying the Bible in an attempt to master the material, the time spent in “sacred reading” of the text will allow the text to master the reader. Instead of telling God this and that, God does the telling. When his people take time to be aware and see what he is doing, they will sense his movement and story unfold in their lives. The three spiritual formational practices will be looked at more closely in the following section, including the resources used.

---

<sup>19</sup> Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 156.

## The Margin-Making Practice of Contemplative Prayer

Evangelicals and believers at HCC are most familiar with petitionary and intercessory prayer. The contemplative tradition offers a prayer life characterized by being and listening: prayer entered by composure, experienced as communion, expressed as conversation, a praying with the heart in addition to praying with the lips.<sup>20</sup> Many Christians have come to see prayer as initiating communication with God, usually in the form of requests, petitions, and supplications for various things, many of them good things, even spiritual things, using scriptural support that God wants his people to come and ask (Luke 11:5-13; Philippians 4:6-7). This, plus the fact that the Chinese are willing to work hard, even at prayer, the heavy work of intercessory prayer has not fazed them, and for many, has become the only way of praying they know how to do.

The practice of contemplative prayer, as it is described in this paper, complements the work of petitionary and intercessory prayer, adding a sense of rest, play, and joy to the discipline.<sup>21</sup> Building on the strong foundation of intercessory prayer that believers at HCC are well-versed in, contemplative prayer will help them slow down, build margins in their lives, and stop the constant drive to do and accomplish for God. They will learn to be still, listen, and spend time being with God in the “one thing needed” (Luke 10:42).

It will move them from communication, even if it has been one-way communication for

---

<sup>20</sup> Bruce Demarest, “Spiritual Formation: Fleeting Fad or Return to Roots?,” 10.

<sup>21</sup> Adele Calhoun, “Contemplative Prayer,” in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 212. Many evangelicals have been practicing contemplative prayer and have also written about it. Their works were used as references for this paper, including Richard Peace, *Meditative Prayer: Entering God’s Presence* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 15-24; Richard Foster, “Unceasing Prayer,” *Prayer*, 119-29; Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 2005), 33-55; Ruth Haley Barton, “Prayer: Deeping Our Intimacy with God” in *Sacred Rhythms*, 62-77; Bruce Demarest, “The Power of Contemplation,” *Satisfy Your Soul*, 157-86. Introductory instructions for breath prayer and the Jesus Prayer are found in Appendix B.

many years, to communion with God. Instead of living fragmented lives between family, work, and church (sometimes in that order), practicing the presence of God through various breath prayers, including the Jesus Prayer, will help speak “peace to the chaos” of panting through “an endless series of activities with scattered minds and noisy hearts,” leaving one feeling “strained, hurried, breathless.”<sup>22</sup> Contemplative prayer, both the being still and praying a few words slowly, along with “breathing” such prayers throughout the day in the midst of distractions and interruptions, busyness and activities, things will cease in their all-consuming importance and one may find an increase in focus and centeredness, as “more and more we find ourselves going through the stresses and strains of daily activity with an ease and serenity and amaze even us . . . especially us.”<sup>23</sup>

One form of contemplative prayer is the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.”<sup>24</sup> This prayer is one way for believers to obey the command to “pray continually” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) and “continue steadfastly in prayer” (Romans 12:12), “always praying” (Luke 18:1). Nouwen calls this the prayer of the heart in that it is a prayer of rest that enables one to dwell with God and provides a corrective to mind-oriented Christians.<sup>25</sup> It is a prayer that penetrates the intellectualizing practices and defies the limits of relating with God through interesting words, instead transforming one’s whole being into Christ. Eyes are open, truth is embraced, and one is seen as a

---

<sup>22</sup> Foster, “Unceasing Prayer” in *Prayer*, 121.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>24</sup> Several versions of this prayer exist. Peace also gives other examples of breath prayer in his study guide (*Meditative Prayer*, 20).

<sup>25</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 59.

sinner in need of God's mercy, as nothing can be hidden from God and all must be surrendered to God,<sup>26</sup> thus unmasking the illusions modern ministers have about themselves and ministry. Once these illusions are faced and one's limits embraced, true rest is possible. The words of the Jesus Prayer and other phrases in Scripture help believers to renounce "language that manipulates God," reducing "God to my control," depersonalizing him to "an idea or a force or a feeling," or using prayer to "make something happen."<sup>27</sup>

For Nouwen, this prayer of the heart not only helps one to pray without ceasing, but can also guide "the present-day Christian searching for his own personal way to intimate relationship to God. More than ever we feel like wandering strangers in a fast-changing world. But we do not want to escape this world. Instead, we want to be fully part of it without drowning in its stormy waters."<sup>28</sup> To help believers slow down and stop drowning in busyness, contemplative prayer will cultivate an inner stillness. As they practice and experience the presence of God of their lives this way, they will find rest in the midst of their church work, hear God's heart for them, be better able to discern God's leading for them, and serve out of delight rather than duty. Through a regular practice of contemplative prayer, whether through breath prayers or the Jesus Prayer, believers at HCC will begin to re-envision discipleship from doing to being, and experience that relationship with God through Jesus Christ is a means of grace. As this prayer is woven

---

<sup>26</sup> Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 61.

<sup>27</sup> Eugene H. Peterson, *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 266-67.

<sup>28</sup> Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 146.

into the fabric of life,<sup>29</sup> over time one is formed into Christ, and slowly the messiah complexes, functional atheism, and unconscious attempts of sanctification by works will be unmasked for what they are.

### The Margin-Making Practice of *Lectio Divina*

It is easy to approach life with a pragmatic and functional focus and the Chinese do so in the area of education. School and studies are done for degree attainment and good jobs, leading to good income and work-related prestige. A love for learning, wisdom, and character, all can be secondary to the hopes a good education can provide. Becoming Christians, this functional approach is brought to Bible reading as well, now seen as a technique to master and control God. Even after many years of studying the Bible, it is possible to have taken in a lot of information, and still lack in character and ethical behavior. Reading and studying are done to master, interpret, problem solve, control, and use the material for other purposes, even teaching, that does not include one's own formation and transformation. Often the goal is quantity over quality in the reading, with a desire to consume as much information in the least amount of time. The perspective is also linear as the text may be manipulated in order to be presented in a logical and orderly fashion, whether in three points or an in depth outline. Listening to the sermon becomes an exercise in taking notes and study for mastery rather than entering into a live experience with the living and holy God, meeting him and letting him speak. The head is separated from the heart, and the head wins because it is easier to put things in the head than change the heart.

---

<sup>29</sup> Peterson, *Tell It Slant*, 207.

Mulholland in *Shaped by the Word* shows the importance of being mastered by God's word in addition to the evangelical practice of mastering God's word through study. Believers in general, and perhaps Chinese believers in particular, are especially prone to approaching Scripture through the educational lens of reading for information, rather than taking time to read for formation and transformation. Sunday school classes are focused on learning God's word, the daily quiet times are to master God's word (whether in a year or ninety days), with the focus being on content over application. While perhaps reading Scripture for formation, *lectio divina* can also be seen through the same functional eyes, a technique, a strategy, a way to manipulate God,<sup>30</sup> thus frequent reminders and practice are needed that this is time for formation rather than information. Such formational reading is a combination of "doing" and "being" and when done with the proper posture, God uses it as a means of grace when the priority is on listening to him speak through Scripture.

Creating the time and space to be formed by God's word through the "holy reading" practice of *lectio divina* allows the Holy Spirit to have his way in the lives of believers, enabling them to come to God in a posture of openness and listening, desiring to hear and let him have his way. This requires a posture of surrender and submission, giving up the desire to control and master the material, letting the Spirit form the words of Scripture in his people. Instead of reading for breadth, it is reading for depth, a reading that allows time to yield to God and whatever he is saying. The practice of *lectio divina* originated with St. Benedict as he composed a way of life for the monks, culminating in his *Rule*

---

<sup>30</sup> Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word*, 89.

that regulated a daily pattern of work and prayer, an extended time with God through Scripture reading where the content of the passage turned into prayer.<sup>31</sup> For Benedict and his monks, several hours of each day were given over to chewing the text. Later in the twelfth century, another monk named Guigo II approached *lectio* as a four-part movement: reading/listening, meditating, praying, and contemplating.<sup>32</sup> It is this way of reading and approaching Scripture that will help believers at HCC to re-envision discipleship as just not another Bible study but a way of listening to God and paying attention to him. The work of formation is given to God for him to do, rather than something to be checked off and mastered.<sup>33</sup>

#### The Margin-Making Practice of the Prayer of Examen

The prayer of examen<sup>34</sup> is a way to assess “one’s life before God on a regular basis,”<sup>35</sup> a practice that helps one in attending to what could be missed in the midst of duties and busyness.<sup>36</sup> It was developed by Ignatius in the sixteenth century, who urged all the members in his Society of Jesus to practice the examen daily, even when it seemed

---

<sup>31</sup> Meisel, *The Rule of St. Benedict*, 29; see also Richard Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998), 11.

<sup>32</sup> Peace, *Contemplative Bible Reading*, 12-13. The Latin terms for these four parts are *lectio*, *meditatio*, *oratio*, and *contemplatio*.

<sup>33</sup> Introductory instructions for practicing *lectio divina* are given in Appendix C.

<sup>34</sup> The prayer of examen can include the examen of consciousness and the examen of conscience. The former is a way to increase one’s self-awareness in order to respond appropriately to God, while the latter has more of an element of confession with a penitential purpose (Marjorie Thompson, “Self-Examination, Confession, and Awareness” in *Soul Feast*, 89-106). This paper will focus only on the examen of consciousness as a daily margin-making practice.

<sup>35</sup> Peace, *Meditative Prayer*, 55.

<sup>36</sup> Calhoun, “Examen,” in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 53.

impossible to engage in other forms of prayer due to the busyness of travel, ministry, and work: “Ignatius saw the examen as the cornerstone of spiritual life to the extent that when the Jesuits at the Council of Trent asked if they could skip their prayer exercises because they had no time, Ignatius told them to skip anything but the examen.”<sup>37</sup> Thompson echoes Ignatius’ words with her statement: “Perhaps no other practice enables us to see so clearly where God’s grace is present in the daily round of routine tasks and relationships, or to see how we are responding to that grace.”<sup>38</sup>

This discipline encourages believers to remember, be grateful, and discern God’s presence over the course of some specified time, whether the last twenty-four hours or the last week. Yet the purpose is not remembering for the sake of practicing good memory but to produce within believers the “priceless grace of self-knowledge,” both the penchant for evil and desire for good, and in this full offering of oneself to God, can his acceptance and love sustain us.<sup>39</sup> It is taking time to review the day or week regularly that believers at HCC will hopefully see that such self-knowledge and self-awareness will help them reflect on the reason for their busyness, compulsion to do for God, discern any steps that God may have for them, and realize any sense of “earning” that the doing may bring. Through seeing God, discerning his presence in their lives, and being grateful, believers will begin to bask in his grace, acceptance, and love, realizing that while earning has no place in sanctification, effort is still required. The examen is a “means of

---

<sup>37</sup> Peace, *Meditative Prayer*, 55; See also Dennis Linn, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn, *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995).

<sup>38</sup> Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 103.

<sup>39</sup> Foster, *Prayer*, 30-31.

grace” for believers because it helps them see where God’s grace has been present with them throughout the day as well notice where his grace was ignored.

The prayer of examen comes in many forms and several will be incorporated in this project at different times. Many questions can be asked to help the reflection, awareness, and discernment process, including: “For what moment today am I most grateful?” and “For what moment today am I least grateful?”<sup>40</sup> “How was God present with me today” and “How did I respond or not respond?”<sup>41</sup> These questions asked of oneself through a daily review of the day will by God’s grace allow believers to grow in self-awareness and self-knowledge for the purpose of greater humility, compassion, truthfulness,<sup>42</sup> with the result of living true-faced before God. By taking time to engage in this practice, noticing and attending to God will naturally increase one’s margins because life is being lived intentionally. No longer caught between busyness and hurry, another way of living is now possible.<sup>43</sup>

In a tradition that spans many hundreds of years, the contemplative tradition’s posture and practices in Scripture and prayer can help evangelical believers to re-envision their discipleship journey with Jesus. While there are many spiritual disciplines to consider, this paper will consider three to help believers create space and greater margins in their busy lives so as to help them experience rest in God, with the hope that evangelical rushing will be replaced with contemplative resting. The three practices that

---

<sup>40</sup> Calhoun, “Examen,” in *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 53. See also the examen questions in Linn, *Sleeping with Bread*.

<sup>41</sup> Barton, *Sacred Rhythms*, 95.

<sup>42</sup> Thompson, *Soul Feast*, 105.

<sup>43</sup> Introductory instructions for the prayer of examen are given in Appendix D.

this section covers include the inter-related practices of prayer and Scripture: a way of reading Scripture prayerfully though *lectio divina*, praying contemplatively and communing with God, and the prayer of examen for reflection and discernment.<sup>44</sup>

### Resources on Margin-Making Practices

The margin-making practices will take their material from Richard Peace's two study guides: *Meditative Prayer* and *Contemplative Bible Reading* for their practicality, but also heavily influenced by the works of many other writers who have incorporated these practices in their writings although in various ways and with slight differences at times in terminology and categories. In addition to the material by Peace, thoughts and writings from Richard Foster, Henri Nouwen, Dallas Willard, Eugene Peterson, Marva Dawn, James Bryan Smith, Ruth Haley Barton, Robert Mulholland, Marjorie Thompson, Adele Calhoun, and Matthew Linn will be weaved together to demonstrate the importance of spiritual formation disciplines and margin-making practices in the life of the believer as a growing disciple of Jesus Christ. Willard, Foster, and Peterson give the theological background to its importance, while others like Barton and Smith give some practical ways margins can be created and made, with Peace and Calhoun giving guidance on the practice of these exercises.

The authors span from Catholic to evangelical writers, the practices are part of the Catholic contemplative tradition, which twenty-first century evangelicals have finally

---

<sup>44</sup>Steve Macchia says that "instead of pursuing multiple disciplines (of which there are dozens of options to consider), the recipe for vitality included three basic ingredients: time and space set apart to receive the gift of God's word, the joy of prayerful communion with the Trinity, and the gratitude of the heart that emerges from personal reflection on life. Scripture, prayer, reflection. A healthy dose of each and my soul is deeply satisfied and renewed." See his article at [http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/documents/articles\\_soul\\_care\\_for\\_leaders.pdf](http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/documents/articles_soul_care_for_leaders.pdf) (accessed April 23, 2012).

seen their importance for a well-lived life, and also as a way of life, not merely a strategy to achieve a well-lived and well-nourished life. Twenty-first century living mitigates against soul care and evangelicals are now realizing the importance of caring for one's soul in the spiritual life and finding ways to cultivate this self-care and nourishment to live a Sabbath way of life and rest that honors God with its integrity. To help believers at HCC to create space for God, the above resources will be used, especially the margin-making practices of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen.<sup>45</sup> They will be formatted as part of a new ministry initiative and first introduced as a pilot project. Other resources will be added, including songs and other prayers to give participants time and space to respond to God.

### **Church Leadership and Target Population**

HCC attempts to do many things and succeeds in that. Many ministries exist in the English-speaking congregation, different ministries existing in the Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking congregations, with children's and youth ministries being church-wide and accessed by all language congregations. Inherent in all this is a sense of compartmentalization rather than a cohesiveness that permeates the church. Many are used to the busyness and perhaps even enjoy the options available to them. Others are tired and burned out. It is to this population that this paper seeks to encourage and minister to.

In any new ministry initiative, the ideal is for the church leadership to be on board. If that is not possible, they at least need to be aware of them. The first stage of this

---

<sup>45</sup> In addition to Peace's materials on the prayer of examen, awareness and discernment questions will be taken from Linn, *Sleeping with Bread*, and Crabb, *The Pressure's Off*.

ministry initiative consists of two parts, first introducing the practices to the pastoral staff and then to the church council, the decision-making body composed of elders and deacons. In bringing this new ministry to the leaders, they as church leaders will experience first-hand what margin-making practices are. Given the busyness of their schedules, this introduction will be brought to them, whether in lieu of a staff meeting or council meeting, where leaders would already be gathered at an appointed time. The second stage consists of a pilot project to introduce these practices to interested congregation members. Instead of bringing them to the people, they will have to make an effort to come and participate at a time outside their fellowship group and Sunday gatherings.

#### Church Leadership at Houston Chinese Church

Because of HCC's original desire to attract the Chinese in the Houston area, and as these Chinese students and young professionals began having children, staffing at the church has been compartmentalized by departments: the Chinese congregation, the English congregation, the youth, the children, the Chinese-speaking young adults, the English-speaking young families. Over the years, the nature of the pastoral staff at HCC could be territorial and silo-like, each department almost functioning independently, with its own staff, each department busy doing the ministry that best represents that department. However, in order for a church-wide initiative in learning these margin-making practices, it must begin with the church leadership.

Peterson in *Working the Angles* puts forth "three angles" of ministry that pastors are apt to neglect for the more visible "lines" as seen in a triangle. Yet it is the angles

that matter most to God, even if not always to his people. These angles and practices are Scripture, prayer, and spiritual direction.<sup>46</sup> Many on the church leadership are guilty of modeling a busy life, caught up in serving God as a justified expression of their devotion to God and often times this is urgently prioritized above being with God, hardly the Sabbath way of life that Dawn writes about for ministry leaders. In order for the congregation to see a Sabbath way a life, it must begin with and be modeled by the leaders. The current church leadership is comprised of the pastoral staff and the church council, made up of the deacons and elders, about twenty-five in all. These margin-making practices will help the pastors and leaders at HCC to reclaim their calling before God. With time and space created to listen to God in prayer and Scripture through these less seen practices, they can then minister with grace in the visible areas of preaching, teaching, and administration.

#### Interested Congregation Members

Interested congregation members will be the target population in the pilot program as part of the new ministry initiative. It is voluntary instead of the mandatory sessions for the pastoral staff and church council as those are held during scheduled meeting times. Those interested in participating in the pilot program will need to make the effort and arrange their schedules accordingly to come on a Saturday morning. Their interest may be due to many reasons, from experiencing the beginnings of ministry burnout to needing a way to practice self-care, from weariness after years of church work and activities to realizing that content-based Sunday school classes and Bible Studies are

---

<sup>46</sup> Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 4-5.

not feeding their soul as before, to perhaps needing a place away from home to be still before God. The pilot program will run for an initial three-month period, providing a time and space for people to get away from their schedules and activities, cease from busyness and doing, learn and implement these margin-making spiritual formation practices in their lives, so that they can experience these “means of grace” God uses to help his people find rest for their souls.

## CHAPTER 7

### IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF MARGIN-MAKING PRACTICES

The pilot project was implemented in 2009 and continues as a new ministry initiative at HCC in 2013. While the numbers are not big, and perhaps never will be, the fact that these church leaders in their forties, fifties, and sixties continue coming for this type of rest and refreshment may give a glimpse to where they might be spiritually, that they are craving time and space to be still before God in the busyness of doing ministry. Chapter Seven describes this pilot project in detail, along with the timeline, leadership development, resources, and plan of assessment. The final section will report on the results of this project.

#### **Pilot Project Summary: Margin-Making Practices with Interested Members**

The pilot program will occur in three stages, the first two with the church leadership, with the final stage, named Breakfast with Jesus, for all interested from the entire congregation. The first stage of this new ministry initiative will be with the pastoral staff during the first half of 2009 in an experiential format, and secondly, introduced to the church council during that summer. Breakfast with Jesus will begin in October 2009

and continue through November and December, for a total trial period of three months. Breakfast with Jesus will be on the first Saturday of these months, from 9:00-10:30 a.m. at HCC, meeting in the youth center. The margin-making practices of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen will structure the ninety minutes together. Three songs will transition these sections, with time of silence and reflection given as well to help with the processing. The short prayers, Scripture passages, and examen questions will be adapted according to the overall theme of the time together.

### **Timeline**

Resources were developed prior to implementing the stages of the pilot project. The required readings from Willard's "Spirituality and Ministry" class taken during June 2008 provided the underlying framework for discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation. The spiritual disciplines provide a way to create space for God, something within one's effort to do so that God can accomplish what one cannot do. The resources for these disciplines and margin-making practices came from several authors and sources, including Willard, Mulholland, Nouwen, and Foster, along with the study guides and material by Peace. His *Contemplative Bible Reading* provides the material for *lectio divina* practices and his *Meditative Prayer* supplies the content for centering prayer and the prayer of examen.

In addition to the material for the three margin-making practices, other material will complement each session and used accordingly. Worship through singing will transition from one practice to another during the time together. Songs will be chosen according to the theme of each session, with the lyrics accessed through the CCLI's

SongSelect website.<sup>1</sup> At each session the participants will be given a booklet (an eight-page booklet for the pastoral staff and a twelve-page booklet for the longer sessions with the church council and interested congregation) to guide their reflection time with God. The content includes Bible verses, quotes, songs, space for journaling and writing their prayers, and any notes they want to take. Plenty of margins and white space will be given for participants to physically see the importance of margins in one's life.

In addition to the printed materials used, verbal instructions will be given as needed to explain the spiritual practices at the beginning of each session and depending on the participants: contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen, as well as any prayer to open or close each section, along with a blessing and exhortation to end the time together. Stage one and two of the pilot project will be done in English only, while the initial three months of Breakfast with Jesus will be in both English and Mandarin. The material will be translated into Chinese, with another staff member facilitating the time with interested Chinese-speaking congregation members.

#### Pilot Project with the Pastoral Staff—Spring 2009

For many years, during the first Wednesday of every month, the pastoral staff gathers together for a monthly prayer and fasting time, interceding for the needs of the church and the congregation, and praying in a “popcorn” fashion. While these monthly prayer and fasting times could be described as part of one's job description, there is freedom to miss if one has scheduled a lunch meeting or has some other appointment. Generally participation is good among the staff for this intercessory prayer time. This

---

<sup>1</sup> HCC subscribes to Christian Copyright Licensing International's (CCLI) SongSelect services.

format is the perhaps prototypical of the evangelical prayer meeting, with people gathering together to pray, taking turns to pray aloud, and listing and laying requests before God.

Since the importance of pastoral leadership in any new ministry initiative cannot be overlooked or overstated, and desiring that pastors be aware of this pilot project as well as experience margins in their lives, in lieu of two monthly prayer and fasting times, during March and April 2009, these margin-making practices will be introduced, explained, and practiced by the staff. Not only will this allow the staff to create margins in their own work day, but also practice other forms of prayer in addition to intercessory prayer. Contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen will be part of the hour together. The senior pastor usually sends out an email reminder for these monthly prayer times, so he will mention this “mini-retreat” in his reminder emails for March and April.

#### Pilot Project with the Church Council—Summer 2009

The church council meets on the second Saturday of every month at 9:30 a.m. The council is made of up all active deacons and elders, along with the pastoral staff and church administrator, about twenty-five people total. The elders are mature believers and most have been longtime members of HCC, several having served as elders for many years. Deacons are mature believers with oversight over a ministry department at HCC (worship, adult education, youth ministries, children’s ministries, local outreach, global outreach, family ministries), usually exercising their administrative gifts. Most of the

elders, deacons, and pastoral staff are used to the doing ethos of HCC and this project desires that they experience what it means to be still before God.

The monthly church council meeting is another “doing” meeting, with a full agenda prepared of items for discussion and items that will be voted on, emailed in advance with many attachments for people to read ahead of time. It is, in short, a church business meeting. In the past, meetings were opened and closed in prayer, usually one person praying on behalf of all. The council chair for the last three years desires that more time be spent in prayer, so she has instituted a time of prayer partnering. Each meeting begins with ten to fifteen minutes of prayer time, in small groups of three or four people, again praying in an intercessory format for one another and for the needs of the church. While more praying has been done at the council meeting, again it is the familiar way of doing prayer that Chinese evangelicals are used to. It is hoped that this pilot project can be introduced to this leadership body as they are the “elected” church leaders by setting aside one two-hour council meeting for these margin-making practices to be introduced and experienced in the lives of these busy church leaders.

#### Pilot Project with Interested Congregation Members—Fall 2009

The third and final stage of this pilot project will be the official pilot project called Breakfast with Jesus, the title taken from John 21:12 when Jesus invited the disciples by saying, “Come and have breakfast.” Flyers and bulletin announcements will be in the weekly church bulletin in September 2009. It will explain the nature of these margin-making practices as a way to care for one’s soul along with the importance of creating space and making time for God to engage in these practices so that God can do

the work of forming his people into greater Christlikeness. The first session will be scheduled for the first Saturday in October 2009, from 9:00-10:30 a.m. at HCC. The pilot project will have an initial three-month run, through December 2009. The English-speaking session will meet in the youth center while the Chinese-speaking session will be in Room 111.

This pilot program will be invitational in nature, that interested church members are invited to come and spend time with God, rather than a church-wide initiative to bring and introduce these practices to all the current small groups and fellowship groups at the church, as essential as these practices may be. These groups, both in the Chinese and English congregations, already meet weekly for a time of Bible study, along with sharing prayer requests and spending time in prayer. Both the fellowship and small group ministry, along with the English and Chinese ministries, are outside the bounds of my work at the church. While spiritual formation is essential for all disciples, as is the need for believers to create space for God in the midst of their busyness, not everyone may be ready to engage in such practices, nor does it seem appropriate to require or mandate that all small groups or fellowship groups must participate. As a result, the pilot project will be a separate initiative to interested congregation members rather than attempting to introduce it to ongoing groups.

I will facilitate the sessions in English, along with putting together the materials. They will be translated into Chinese by a translator the church uses on occasion. One of the Mandarin-speaking pastoral staff, having audited Willard's "Spirituality and Ministry" course in June 2009, will facilitate the sessions in Chinese. With two staff receiving the same foundational framework, Breakfast with Jesus can serve as a pilot program to both

the English-speaking and Chinese-speaking congregations at HCC, providing a church-wide new ministry initiative.

#### Project Evaluation and Fine-Tuning—Winter 2010

After the three month preliminary pilot project run, the two facilitators of Breakfast with Jesus will talk with various participants and get verbal feedback from the sessions as well as their personal thoughts on such a ministry initiative in general. The feedback will be shared with the pastoral staff in a weekly staff meeting as part of the evaluation process. While the feedback from the participants is important, the senior pastor feels that even if the numbers are not big, having such a ministry that helps people create space for God should be part of church ministry regardless. It is a real need of people even if the felt need may not be there yet. After this initial evaluation, Breakfast with Jesus will proceed accordingly.

#### **Leadership Development and Training**

As an evangelical church, discipleship at HCC has consisted of content-based programs and classes. This project desires to build on the strength of that form of discipleship, but to re-envision it within the broader context of spiritual formation. The sanctification process is spiritual formation, this lifelong process that God initiates to make his people look like Christ. Yet intentionality and effort is required on the part of the disciple in his or her spiritual formation. The training and equipping component is essential as people have to know not only how the process works, but also how to arrange life so that formation occurs, and then how to equip others in these practices.

Those serving in the Chinese congregation may also need to contextualize the material for Chinese-speakers and listeners. With the basic framework in place through the readings by Foster, Willard, and Peterson, along with Willard's "Spirituality and Ministry" class, it is hoped that these spiritual formation practices will be introduced to fellow staff members as a way to pause from the busyness and exhaustion in the lives of ministry staff and leaders. Representing the English congregation, I will work with a Chinese staff member who serves the Chinese-speaking congregation, both the Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking congregations, and has caught the vision of discipleship within the context of spiritual formation. While not in Fuller's Doctor of Ministry program, she audited Willard's "Spirituality and Ministry" class in 2009. With two people on board, both the English and Chinese congregations begin with the same framework for the pilot project.

The prepared materials will also include a facilitator's guide so the co-facilitator will be able to lead the Breakfast with Jesus time with the Chinese congregation. The facilitator's guide will be in English, but the colleague is able to read in English and translate into Chinese on the spot. The two facilitators will also meet before each session to go through the exercises in the prepared materials. Both the facilitator's guide and meeting beforehand will help standardize the time together. Songs in English may not translate into Chinese, so the Chinese facilitator will pick other songs to fit the flow of the session.

For phase one and two of the pilot project with the pastoral staff and church council, I will facilitate the sessions. They are introductory sessions to share how discipleship fits the broader context of spiritual formation and in the busyness of ministry,

one must create space for God. Otherwise, the busyness will be destructive to one's soul. It is hoped that as people see the need and experience rest, even momentarily, they will desire to be part of this ministry.

### **Resources**

The English session of Breakfast with Jesus will meet in the youth center, while the Chinese session will be in Room 111. Both rooms have their own air-conditioning unit and are spacious enough to move the chairs around as needed. Both rooms are also carpeted should any in the congregation prefer to sit on the floor. A small table in the back by the door will lay out the materials needed so that when participants walk in, they will know to pick up a pen and booklet. Bottled water and a simple granola bar will also be provided, but the participants know that it is a spiritual breakfast with Jesus, and not to expect bacon, eggs, and pancakes. During the two Sundays prior to the Saturday morning Breakfast with Jesus, an announcement will be in the church bulletin as an invitation and reminder to members.

The booklet that will be prepared for each bi-monthly session is twelve pages in length, consisting of three sheets of paper, with the guided materials composed in a booklet format and printed double-sided, folded, and stapled. The material includes a cover picture inviting participants to spend time with Jesus, either pictures of an empty park bench or a table set for two. Verses and quotations will be printed through the booklet, along with three songs that will be sung with guitar accompaniment throughout the ninety minutes together. A contemplative prayer will open the time together after

introductory remarks, the words of the prayer connected to the Scripture meditation later or the reflection exercises or even the words of one of the songs.

### **Evaluation and Assessment Plan**

While the pilot project will have an initial three-month run, spiritual formation is a lifelong process and these margin-making practices will require longer than three months to acquire, thus it is hoped that the new ministry initiative will surpass the initial run. Since the senior pastor believes that the local church should help people create space for God, the intention is for this ministry to continue. However, after three months, the two facilitators will solicit feedback from various participants in the Chinese and English congregations and bring to the pastoral staff for review. This is more for reporting purposes and to see how Breakfast with Jesus may be fine-tuned as it moves forward. After a longer period of time, hopefully at the one-year mark, a more formal evaluation will be given to regular participants for feedback and improvement. The tool used for this evaluation is a survey in the form of a questionnaire. A total of nine questions will be asked of the participants. Some questions will be boxes to check, other questions will ask for feedback of their experience with Breakfast with Jesus.

The questionnaire to be used to assess the new ministry initiative will be created using Google Forms. It will be sent to regular participants of Breakfast with Jesus through email, with the survey questions embedded in the email, but the link will also be shared should there be problems with the email or if they prefer to fill out through another link. As they respond electronically, their answers will be automatically recorded and organized in a Google spreadsheet. Responses are not linked to any email

identification, but are given a timestamp with the date and time the survey was filled out. This is the only identification given from the respondents.

### **Presentation and Analysis of Results**

While the timeline laid out the ideal plan for implementation of the pilot project and the new ministry initiative, some deviations from the plan occurred along the way. Extra time was taken to complete this final project, allowing for a longer length of time for this new ministry initiative to take root before the survey was given to participants. The presentation of the results is given below, along with an analysis on goal attainment for this project.

#### **Report on Results**

With permission from the senior pastor, the two sessions with the pastoral staff occurred in March and April 2009. In lieu of the monthly prayer and fasting that the staff does together, that session was given to introducing these margin-making practices to the staff members. Each session lasted one hour, with the time spent on contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen. An eight-page handout was given to each staff member to guide the time together. Both sessions saw one-hundred percent participation from the staff. Before each section, time was spent giving introductory verbal instructions about the exercises to be engaged in. In between each section, time was given to respond through singing. With a mix of younger and older staff, some more Western, others more Asian, these exercises resonated with maybe a third to half of that year's staff members. Most seemed to appreciate the time for stillness and contemplation in the midst of a busy

schedule. However, it is one thing to engage in them as part of one's job versus to see them as essential in life and faith formation.

The session with the church council did not happen until 2010. In lieu of July's meeting time, the two hours were allotted for these margin-making practices with the deacons, elders, and pastoral staff. They were notified in advance that July would not be a regular business meeting, but a time to introduce these spiritual formation practices to help church leaders slow down and be with God. The turnout was probably about seventy-five percent of the council members, though it is hard to say whether absences were due to not having a regular meeting or summer plans. Like the age and culture mix of the pastoral staff, the council mix is similar. Some enjoyed the time to pause and meditate. Others probably preferred to have the usual church business meeting.

The two sessions with the pastoral staff and the one session with the church council were intended to introduce to busy church leaders margin-making practices to help them slow down and learn to be before God. Many have spent a lifetime doing for God and learning to be with him was a challenge. Because these sessions were in lieu of regular meeting times, the attendance was pretty good. Due to the forced nature of engaging in these spiritual formation practices by these two groups, the third phase of the pilot project desired to be more invitational.

This third phase consisted of a new ministry initiative called Breakfast with Jesus. This began in October 2009, with sessions in both English and Chinese. That first Saturday close to twenty-five people attended, about fifteen for the Chinese session and ten for the English session. The feedback was positive, though several said they came expecting a physical breakfast. For the November and December sessions, the numbers

were pretty similar in the Chinese session and with about eight people in the English session. During these three sessions, especially as sessions two and three contained new faces, before engaging in each of the margin-making practices short introductions to the practice were given. While the attendance was never high, several people attended consistently and said they appreciated the time of rest and refreshment from their busy lives.

After the December gathering, the pastoral staff briefly evaluated these three months, taking into account verbal feedback gathered from several of the participants, especially those who came more than once. The senior pastor felt that having such a ministry should be part of the local church regardless of the numbers. Rather than a monthly gathering, it was decided that Breakfast with Jesus would move to a bi-monthly format, held on the first Saturday of the even months. Since February 2010, Breakfast with Jesus has been a regular ministry on the church calendar. Even when other groups and departments schedule more popular activities on these days, Breakfast with Jesus still occurs, even if only a handful of people show up. Because it must be intentional on the part of the participant, those who attend are invested in their formation. This is evident through their creating space for God and attending to him.

Attendance from the Chinese congregation began to wane midway through 2011, with no one coming for a couple of the sessions. Given the time and cost associated with translating the content from English to Chinese, it was decided that beginning in 2012, Breakfast with Jesus would be offered in English only. Since the time did not require much talking or sharing, the Chinese congregation could participate without the pressure of having to speak in English as most can understand English just fine. Since February

2012, attendance has been pretty steady, between twelve to seventeen participants. A couple of attendees are from the Chinese congregation, but most belong to the English congregation.

In September 2012, just before the third anniversary of Breakfast with Jesus, an assessment instrument in the form of a survey was emailed to regular participants of Breakfast with Jesus. A sample of this survey can be found in Appendix A. Fourteen adults were emailed the survey. Thirteen surveys were returned. Ten of the respondents filled out the survey that was embedded in their emails, while one printed out the survey and filled it out by hand. Two others copied and pasted the survey into an email, filled it out, and emailed it back. The evaluation form consisted of nine questions. Of the nine questions, five are closed-ended questions, with their answers given below. Since the categories for the answers are different for every question, the responses will be given in a narrative format instead of a table or chart.

Question One: Per your best recall, how many Breakfasts with Jesus have you participated in since October 2009 (19 sessions total)? Seven came more than ten times, with four attending 6-9 times, and two present for 2-5 times.

Question Two: Did your participation in Breakfast with Jesus help you slow down, be still before God, find rest, and experience his refreshment? Eleven answered “very much,” with two respondents experiencing “some” stillness and rest.

Question Six: Have you practiced these disciplines of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer of examen on your own as a result of participating in Breakfast with Jesus? Eleven respondents have practiced these at home, while two have not.

Question Seven: Historically, some of these practices have a group sharing component (small groups of three or four) to provide mutual encouragement and discernment. Is this something you would like to see as part of the ninety-minute Breakfast with Jesus? Five were willing to try, with eight preferring not to have this group time.

Question Eight: Breakfast with Jesus occurs every other month, so six times a year. Any thoughts concerning its frequency? Twelve people thought the present frequency was “just right,” while one person desired to have it “more often.”

The above five questions were concerned with gathering raw data as feedback from the new ministry initiative. The other four of the nine questions asked participants to explain their answers, inviting them to share what they have learned through these margin-making practices. A summary of their responses is integrated into the analysis of the results in the next section.

### Analysis of the Results

Because the third phase of the pilot project was invitational in its nature rather than required, the attendance varied. However, there were those who intentionally arranged their schedules to be present every other month. These happened to be church leaders heavily involved in service and already lead busy lives. They also happened to be in their forties, fifties, and sixties. Except for the three middle-school girls brought by their parents for a few of the sessions, all have college degrees, with many having graduate degrees. Somehow for these mature believers and church leaders, they are

hungering for something more besides the busyness of doing church through teaching and praying meetings. They also need a way to slow down and learn to be still with God.

The first question desired to know how many times they have participated in Breakfast with Jesus, per their best recall. It was more just for raw data purposes, as well as an easier question to get them started. The second question asked their experience of the time together, if they were able slow down, find rest, and experience God's refreshment. It is hoped that if Breakfast with Jesus succeeded in this area, then participants would naturally have more margins in the lives from having slowed down and rested in God.

All respondents checked that Breakfast with Jesus helped them slowed down at least some (two checked "some," while eleven checked "very much"), so the third question followed up by asking them to share how Breakfast with Jesus helped them slow down and experience rest. One respondent who has attended over half the times realized that just being present will slow one's pace down. Others echoed by saying "going to church for this very purpose and taking the allotted 1.5 hours was very helpful," that "the quietness and calmness of the atmosphere helped to connect with God again," and "with a busy schedule involving work, family, and service to God, this time allowed me not to think of the daily obligations . . . to remind me of what's really important in my life; to be honest, I don't do enough of this on my own; I need a daily breakfast with Jesus."

Another comment began by saying that Breakfast with Jesus has been a wonderful blessing in being able to slow down and savor the Word, that the prayer in the beginning "is helpful to clear my mind to focus with a reverent and needy attitude as I come before him, the songs encourage me to express my heart, and I love the time of Scripture

meditation, the slow reading and rereading of the familiar passages while placing myself in the scenes with God helps to make the Word come alive personally for me. I also appreciate the time to respond in writing following this and have saved all my booklets and fondly revisit them occasionally.”

The spiritual disciplines must be experienced for themselves, not something to be studied in a Sunday school class. The participants in Breakfast with Jesus had to show up at least once to experience these practices first hand, as many probably have never read Scripture meditatively through *lectio divina* or prayed contemplatively or spent extended time in listening, discerning, and being aware of God’s work in their lives through a prayer of examen. Once they came and experienced these for themselves, they realized the importance of these margin-making spiritual practices in their lives, began to arrange their schedules accordingly, and intended to be present every other month.

Of the three margin-making disciplines practiced during the Breakfast with Jesus sessions, the fourth question asked which ones they have found most helpful to their spiritual formation. The answers ranged, as some really enjoyed the extended time in *lectio divina*, others with contemplative prayer, and still others with the prayer of examen. For the examen exercise, they were given guided reflections to do on their own and they could go anywhere inside or outside the church building for this time with God. This question was asked out of curiosity as to which practice, if any, would somehow resonate more with the believers at HCC. It seems they all were significant in their own way.

The fifth question desired to know what participants learned when they intentionally created space and spent uninterrupted time to be with Jesus. All shared things they learned, from realizing that all this is a lifetime learning experience, that if

one wants to know God, one must make time for God, no shortcuts to it. One respondent shared one thing that stood out in most of the sessions, “the recognition that Jesus is Lord, Christian living is not so much as what I can do for the Lord, but to wait before him and see what he wants me to do, and to let him use me in whatever way he wants; this brings freedom and great relief in the present go go world.” One thing learned by another participant: “It is interesting to note that while we meet every other month, every Breakfast with Jesus brings out different thoughts and issues in my life that were not there before. Perhaps that is how God wants to deal with us, a bit at a time.” Taking time out to spend with Jesus, one writes, “I think through Breakfast with Jesus it really helped me understand the vastness of God’s glory and mercy. Just being with God in a quiet moment every other month really has made me understand just how great he is and how different my life would be without him.” This question by far had the longest answers and the most sharing from the participants.

Question Six asked if participants practiced these margin-making practices of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and the prayer of examen at home. This question was asked in hopes that participants would begin feeding themselves through these practices, rather than relying on the bi-monthly Breakfast with Jesus. This question was also asked to help me evaluate how to guide future sessions, and to see if more time and encouragement would need to be allotted toward helping people integrate these disciplines in their lives. Eleven out of thirteen answered in the affirmative that they have begun practicing these disciplines on their own.

Question Seven was asked concerning the group component of *lectio divina* so that participants could share and process with one another, as well as speak words of

encouragement and discernment as the Holy Spirit prompts. About one-third of the respondents were open to this, with two-thirds less so. With Breakfast with Jesus still being an open and invitational format, the creating of groups would need to be further thought through should this occur. With almost all the attendees already a member of a small group or a larger fellowship group where they share and pray together, this could be a reason why several were more resistant to this. Having only ninety minutes together, a group component would require extending the time. Further consideration is needed in the future on this point.

The eighth question desired to know if the participants wanted to meet with greater frequency, or given the busyness of their lives, the bi-monthly format was presently sufficient. Most liked the bi-monthly format, with only one response desiring it more frequently. After almost three years, perhaps the participants have gotten into this bi-monthly routine of creating space for God, and it seems to work so far. Since this new ministry initiative is now a continuing ministry at HCC, the last question asked their feedback in how Breakfast with Jesus could be improved. Comments on this included having music in the background to meeting with greater frequency to having a more visually appealing room for meeting. Several took this time to express their gratitude in having this space and time to be with God. Two comments worth sharing include these: “I wish more of us will see our need to spend uninterrupted time with God,” and “Everything was good and substantial; the time alone is very helpful and needed in our hectic schedules.”

From this analysis, it seems that those who have caught the re-envisioning of discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation have begun to see how

crucial these margin-making spiritual practices are for their spiritual growth. Space and time must be intentionally created for God so that he can do the work of formation and transformation. This is work that only God can do in the lives of his people. However, effort must be made by his people if they intend to follow him, and that effort includes being available and present, being still, listening and paying attention to him. For those who have arranged their schedules, even ninety minutes every other month, have found that the uninterrupted time spent with God helped them pause from their busy lives and be still before God. By being with God instead of doing for God, they have found rest for their souls through the easy yoke of Jesus (Matthew 11:28).

While I believe that a discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation is for everyone, it cannot be forced on anyone. One must come to the realization that “this” is needed for his or her own spiritual growth. Given that spiritual formation is slow work and hidden work, and done over the course of a lifetime, the number of people involved in such work may be low. It is easier to rally members to come out one Saturday morning a year to clean the church or to serve meals to the homeless. The doing nature of cleaning and serving may give a sense of accomplishment and measurement that being still does not, at least, does not in immediate terms. It seems that for many people, this realization that God desires our being with him as much as he desires our doing for him (if not more), may only come later in life after they are exhausted from all the doing and are not seeing the spiritual growth desired despite many years of walking with God. Hopefully then they might be hungry to be with him and motivated to dwell in his presence.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A project that began out a personal need to slow down from the “muchness” and “manyness” of ministry, along with a desire and passion to see busy believers like David, Elizabeth, and others experience God’s rest and refreshment in the midst of ministry, eventually uncovered people’s real needs to spend uninterrupted time being with God. The foundations and framework learned through classes and assignments in Fuller Seminary’s Doctor of Ministry program provided the basis for a new ministry initiative at HCC. The last three years of Breakfast with Jesus provided a space and place for people to be with God and experience his rest (Matthew 11:28-30). While the numbers have never been big, and despite going to an English-only session this past year, those who are hungering for more with Jesus are participating and experiencing God in new and life-giving ways.

Interestingly enough, the comments shared on the survey were very similar in many ways, so much so it was difficult to even venture a guess who might have written what. Based on the comments gathered, even from only the thirteen surveys, those who have made the effort to arrange their schedules and intentionally spend time with Jesus have experienced being fed in ways that have touched their very beings. While prayer meetings, quiet times, and worship services are important and have their rightful place, over the years, they have become part of doing Christianity. It is easy to participate in these on a regular basis with the mind still churning and busy. Not to say that such things could not happen during Breakfast with Jesus, but the spiritual disciplines of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer of examen have helped slow people down

so that their minds could rest and focus on God. When this happened, many were reminded of his love for them and his grace that sustains them, accompanied by a desire to live this out rather than return to doing more and faster.

For many evangelicals, drawn to God because of his love for them and as expressed through the work of Jesus Christ on the cross as a substitutionary atonement, discipleship has become a response to the above and expressed in doing for God. The desire of this project was to help tired believers re-envision discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation and to introduce several formational practices from the older contemplative tradition in Christianity that can be a means of grace for them in their journey with God. Several people commented in the survey that when they had time to be still and focus on God, his grace was experienced through these practices.

The busyness of ministry and life, whether for full-time church staff or for church leaders such as elders and deacons, small group leaders and Sunday school teachers, can quickly lead to exhaustion and burnout. Learning and teaching in the Christian life has been about Bible content, and less about the nature of Christian formation and growth. When doing becomes the measurement of spirituality, the behind-the-scenes, slow interior work of growth, sanctification, and formation is no longer a priority. Having a curriculum for Christlikeness and an intentional plan for spiritual formation has not been taught to many believers. Effort is made to sound like earning, which has led to a doing and performance-based Christianity. Breakfast with Jesus wanted to help believers understand that effort and earning are not the same, and that if one desires to look more like Jesus, effort will need to be made. Nothing needs to be earned. Grace is broadened to encompass how God does the work of transformation in his people, not just the

forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. Having regular breakfasts with Jesus over the last three years has helped remind me of these truths as well as provide encouragement for the Christian journey.

Another insight gained is that when one becomes a “human doing” in ministry, it is easy to get caught up in the doing and make it about oneself. God can become secondary to getting things done. The sense of urgency that drives ministry week after week can make it seem like the church is filled with functional agnostics. Being used by God in this ministry initiative helped me realize once again and experience anew that the results are up to God. At most one can “set the table” at these breakfasts, but the feeding and nourishing are God’s work. To sit at the breakfast table with God’s people and watch him work is an honor and privilege like no longer. It was also a delight to see ministry leaders make the effort, as busy as they already are, to schedule time with God and catch the vision how these spiritual formation practices can help them dwell with God. Knowing that people were practicing these disciplines at home and on their own because one breakfast every two months is not enough was like sitting in a front row seat watching God at work. They are creating margins in their interior lives so that God has space to work, form, and transform. Over time, as disciples who see discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation, they will look more and more like Jesus.

Next steps in this new ministry initiative may include looking at different ways to reach the different groups in the church. While Breakfast with Jesus is now done in English only, the Chinese staff member and co-laborer in this ministry has introduced these practices to various Chinese fellowship groups, along with her Sunday school classes and teaching ministries overseas. Conversation has started about introducing these

practices to an English fellowship group as well. Those who have been drawn to these practices, whether by personality or by a felt need of busyness and exhaustion, seem to be older believers, older in age as well as in years of following Jesus Christ. Even then, many may not be ready to put in the effort needed.

For those who have been partaking of this breakfast for three years, another form of contemplative prayer that can be practiced is centering prayer. Centering prayer is a form of and movement within the broader tradition of contemplative prayer, a way of praying that consents and surrenders to God's presence and action within using a sacred word to express that intention. When thoughts come, the sacred word renews again the intention to surrender to God.<sup>1</sup> While nothing may seem to be happening during centering prayer, this prayer over time develops a sensitivity to the things of God, and one may begin to "find the awareness of God's presence arising at times in ordinary activity."<sup>2</sup> Never having practiced contemplative prayer before, it seemed less intimidating to begin with the Jesus Prayer and other breath prayers, being given the words to pray over. A discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation is just beginning, and hopefully this continued ministry will bring more opportunities to experiment with different spiritual formation practices and exercises.

Thankfully the senior pastor is not about numbers and is fully supportive of this ministry. Current plans are to continue Breakfast with Jesus, and future plans can include equipping others to "set the table" for such times with God. Recently the senior pastor's wife facilitated a similar breakfast for a group of women she meets regularly with outside

---

<sup>1</sup> Thomas Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel* (New York: Continuum, 2009), 20-22.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

of HCC. For those who desire to know more background on these disciplines and practices, perhaps several teaching sessions could be done, with time set aside to experiment and experience these practices firsthand.

This project and new ministry initiative show that re-envisioning discipleship within the broader context of spiritual formation is essential. Discipleship can no longer be just content-based or only about programs and activities. Discipleship is first and foremost about being with God, spending uninterrupted time with him to allow him the space needed to form his people. To be constantly involved in doing, serving, and staying busy does not allow God to do the work of transformation. While effort is needed in one's growth, the growth and formation is the work of God alone. The initiative to work and act belongs to God, yet disciples of Jesus must intend to be with him, learn from him, and rest in him. In the teaching ministries and fellowship ministries, future workshops and events can include more retreats and groups for the purposes of mutual formation in Christ. Instead of having small groups that focus on Bible studies and intercessory prayer as the only form of group life, future ministries can include times for centering prayer, along with group *lectio* and group spiritual direction as one way to be the body of Christ to one another.

APPENDIX A

EVALUATION:  
MARGIN-MAKING PRACTICES DURING BREAKFAST WITH JESUS

1. Per your best recall, how many Breakfasts with Jesus have you participated in since October 2009? (19 total sessions)

\_\_\_\_\_ Once  
\_\_\_\_\_ 2-5 times  
\_\_\_\_\_ 6-9 times  
\_\_\_\_\_ 10+ times

2. Did your participation in Breakfast with Jesus help you slow down, be still before God, find rest, and experience his refreshment?

\_\_\_\_\_ Very much  
\_\_\_\_\_ Some  
\_\_\_\_\_ No effect

3. If you checked “very much” or “some” to the above question, please share how you were able to slow down, find rest, and experience refreshment.

4. Of these formational margin-making practices, please describe those which you’ve found most helpful for your growth and how. They include: contemplative/breath prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer of examen.

5. The work of spiritual transformation belongs to God alone. However, effort to create space for God, to arrange one’s schedule in order to hear God is given to us to do (nothing is earned, but effort needed nonetheless). In making such an effort to be present and attentive before God, what have you learned about God, about yourself? Please share any highlights or things learned, if any.

6. Have you practiced these disciplines of contemplative prayer, *lectio divina*, and prayer of examen on your own as a result of participating in Breakfast with Jesus?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

7. Historically, some of these practices have a group sharing component (small groups of three or four) that provide mutual encouragement and discernment. Is this something you would like to see as part of the ninety-minute Breakfast with Jesus?

\_\_\_\_\_ Yes

\_\_\_\_\_ No

8. Breakfast with Jesus occurs every other month, so six times a year. Any thoughts concerning its frequency?

\_\_\_\_\_ Just right

\_\_\_\_\_ More often

\_\_\_\_\_ Less often

9. Is there any way we can improve the time together on any given session? Please explain.

## APPENDIX B

### AN INTRODUCTION TO CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER: BREATH PRAYER AND THE JESUS PRAYER<sup>1</sup>

When we begin to pray it is often difficult to focus our thoughts. Our minds wander to other things; we feel pressure to “get on with our tasks;” we grow anxious or cautious or hesitant or even fearful. Getting started may be the biggest impediment to prayer.

A good way to move beyond such distractions is to use centering prayer.<sup>2</sup> In this form of prayer, we repeat over and over a few words or phrases, timing these to our breathing. For example, the most famous of such prayers is the Jesus Prayer: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy.” As you inhale, pray, “Lord Jesus Christ.” As you exhale pray, “Have mercy.” If you keep this up for a few minutes you will find that you are focusing on God and the process of prayer.

While you are praying the Jesus Prayer, open yourself to God. Let go of all other distractions. Ask God to be present, to deal with the distractions, and to give you the prayers you are to pray. Yes, you can pray on several levels simultaneously, repeating a centering prayer while offering other prayers to God.

You may find it helpful to imagine yourself in a place that is holy or special to you: in a garden, a room, or a chapel. For a time, when I was working on the passage in John 4 where Jesus has a conversation with the Samaritan woman, I found it helpful to picture myself actually in the spring of living water about which Jesus speaks (John 4:13-14)—immersed in the living-giving water of the Holy Spirit.

One more comment. Some people are nervous about the idea of repetitive prayer, fearing that this might lead to a “magical” view of prayer in which prayer becomes a kind of mindless mantra. In fact, centering prayer is far from this. It is not mindless. Rather, it helps us focus our minds on God. Nor is it mechanical, as if we catch God’s attention through repetition. In fact, centering prayer grounds us in the reality of who God is. Finally, centering prayer is not to be regarded as an end in itself. It is the entrance into other forms and styles of prayer.

Examples of breath prayers:<sup>3</sup>

- Breathe in “Abba,” breathe out “I belong to you.”
- Breathe in “Lord,” breathe out, “here I am.”
- Breathe in “Holy One,” breathe out “keep me true.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Taken from Peace, *Meditative Prayer*, 19-20.

<sup>2</sup> While Peace uses the term “centering prayer,” this paper uses the broader terminology of contemplative prayer, which includes breath prayer and the Jesus Prayer. Centering Prayer is a form of and movement within contemplative prayer, a way of consenting and surrendering to God’s presence and action within through the use of a sacred word to express that consent and surrender to him (see Keating, *Open Mind, Open Heart*, 20-21).

<sup>3</sup> Calhoun, “Breath Prayer,” *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 206.

## APPENDIX C

### AN INTRODUCTION TO *LECTIO DIVINA*: ACCEPTING THE EMBRACE OF GOD

By Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Process of *Lectio Divina***

A very ancient art, practiced at one time by all Christians, is the technique known as *lectio divina*—a slow, contemplative praying of the scripture which enables the Bible, the Word of God, to become a means of union with God. This ancient practice has been kept alive in the Christian treasures of Benedictine monastics and oblates. Together with the Liturgy and daily manual labor, time set aside in a special way for *lectio divina* enables us to discover in our daily life an underlying spiritual rhythm. Within this rhythm we discover an increasing ability to offer more of ourselves and our relationships to the Father, and to accept the embrace that God is continuously extending to us in the person of his Son Jesus Christ.

#### ***Lectio*—Reading/Listening**

The art of *lectio divina* begins with cultivating the ability to listen deeply, to hear “with the ears of our hearts” as St. Benedict encourages us in the Prologue to the Rule. When we read the Scriptures we should try to imitate the prophet Elijah. We should allow ourselves to become women and men who are able to listen for the still, small voice of God (1 Kings 19:12); the “faint murmuring sound” which is God’s word for us, God’s voice touching our hearts. This gentle listening is an “atunement” to the presence of God in that special part of God’s creation which is the Scriptures.

The cry of the prophets to ancient Israel was the joy-filled command to “Listen!” “Sh’ma Israel: Hear, O Israel!” In *lectio divina* we, too, heed that command and turn to the Scriptures, knowing that we must “hear”—listen—to the voice of God, which often speaks very softly. In order to hear someone speaking softly we must learn to be silent. We must learn to love silence. If we are constantly speaking or if we are surrounded with noise, we cannot hear gentle sounds. The practice of *lectio divina*, therefore, requires that we first quiet down to hear God’s word for us. This is the first step of *lectio divina*, appropriately called *lectio*—reading.

The reading or listening which is the first step in *lectio divina* is very different from the speed reading which modern Christians apply to newspapers, books, and even to the Bible. *Lectio* is reverential reading; listening both in a spirit of silence and of awe. We are listening for the still, small voice of God that will speak to us personally—not loudly, but intimately. In *lectio*, we read slowly, attentively, gently listening to hear a word or phrase that is God’s word for us this day.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fr. Luke Dysinger, O.S.B., “Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*,” <http://valyermo.com> (accessed January 2, 2013).

### ***Meditatio*—Meditation**

Once we have found a word or a passage in the Scriptures which speaks to us in a personal way, we must take it in and “ruminate” on it. The image of the ruminant animal quietly chewing its cud was used in antiquity as a symbol of the Christian pondering the Word of God. Christians have always seen an icon of *lectio divina* in the Blessed Virgin Mary “pondering in her heart” what she saw and heard of Christ (Luke 2:19). For us today these images are a reminder that we must take in the word—that is, memorize it—and while gently repeating it to ourselves, allow it to interact with our thoughts, our hopes, our memories, our desires. This is the second step or stage in *lectio divina*—*meditatio*. Through *meditatio* we allow God’s word to become his word for us, a word that touches us and affects us at our deepest levels.

### ***Oratio*—Prayer**

The third step in *lectio divina* is *oratio*—prayer: prayer understood both as dialog with God, that is, as loving conversation with the One who has invited us into His embrace; and as consecration, prayer as the priestly offering to God of parts of ourselves that we have not previously believed God wants. In this consecration-prayer we allow the word that we have taken in and on which we are pondering to touch and change our deepest selves. Just as a priest consecrates the elements of bread and wine at Eucharist, God invites us in *lectio divina* to hold up our most difficult and pain-filled experiences to Him, and to gently recite over them the healing word or phrase he has given us in our *lectio* and *meditatio*. In this *oratio*, this consecration-prayer, we allow our real selves to be touched and changed by the word of God.

### ***Contemplatio*—Contemplation**

Finally, we simply rest in the presence of the One who has used His word as a means of inviting us to accept His transforming embrace. No one who has ever been in love needs to be reminded that there are moments in loving relationships when words are unnecessary. It is the same in our relationship with God. Wordless, quiet rest in the presence of the One Who loves us has a name in the Christian tradition—*contemplatio*, contemplation. Once again we practice silence, letting go of our own words; this time simply enjoying the experience of being in the presence of God.

## APPENDIX D

### AN INTRODUCTION TO THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN: “RUMMAGING FOR GOD: PRAYING BACKWARDS THROUGH YOUR DAY” By Dennis Hamm, SJ<sup>1</sup>

About 20 years ago, at breakfast and during the few hours that followed, I had a small revelation. This happened while I was living in a small community of five Jesuits, all graduate students in New Haven, Connecticut. I was alone in the kitchen, with my cereal and the *New York Times*, when another Jesuit came in and said: “I had the weirdest dream just before I woke up. It was a liturgical dream. The lector had just read the first reading and proceeded to announce, ‘The responsorial refrain today is, *If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.*’ Whereupon the entire congregation soberly repeated, ‘*If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.*’” We both thought this enormously funny. At first, I wasn’t sure just *why* this was so humorous. After all, almost everyone would assent to the courageous truth of the maxim, “If at first...” It has to be a cross-cultural truism (“Keep on truckin’!”). Why, then, would these words sound so incongruous in a liturgy?

A little later in the day, I stumbled onto a clue. Another, similar phrase popped into my mind: “If today you hear his voice, harden not your hearts” (Psalm 95). It struck me that that sentence has exactly the same rhythm and the same syntax as: “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.” Both begin with an *if* clause and end in an imperative. Both have seven beats. Maybe that was one of the unconscious sources of the humor.

The try-try-again statement *sounds* like the harden-not-your-hearts refrain, yet what a contrast! The latter is clearly biblical, a paraphrase of a verse from a psalm, one frequently used as a responsorial refrain at the Eucharist. The former, you know instinctively, is probably not in the Bible, not even in Proverbs. It is true enough, as far as it goes, but it does not go far enough. There is nothing of faith in it, no sense of God. The sentiment of the line from Psalm 95, however, expresses a conviction central to Hebrew and Christian faith, that we live a life in dialogue with God. The contrast between those two seven-beat lines has, ever since, been for me a paradigm illustrating that truth.

Yet how do we hear the voice of God? Our Christian tradition has at least four answers to that question. First, along with the faithful of most religions, we perceive the divine in what God has made, creation itself (that insight sits at the heart of Christian moral thinking). Second, we hear God’s voice in the Scriptures, which we even *call* “the word of God.” Third, we hear God in the authoritative teaching of the church, the living tradition of our believing community. Finally, we hear God by attending to our experience, and interpreting it in the light of all those other ways of hearing the divine voice—the structures of creation, the Bible, the living tradition of the community.

The phrase, “If *today* you hear his voice,” implies that the divine voice must somehow be accessible in our daily experience, for we are creatures who live one day at a time. If God wants to communicate with us, it has to happen in the course of a 24-hour

---

<sup>1</sup> Dennis Hamm, S.J. “Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards through Your Day,” <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/rummaging-for-god-praying-backward-through-your-day> (accessed January 2, 2013).

day, for we live in no other time. And how do we go about this kind of listening? Long tradition has provided a helpful tool, which we call the “examination of consciousness” today. “Rummaging for God” is an expression that suggests going through a drawer full of stuff, feeling around, looking for something that you are sure must be in there somewhere. I think that image catches some of the feel of what is classically known in church language as the prayer of “examen.”

The *examen*, or examination, of conscience is an ancient practice in the church. In fact, even before Christianity, the Pythagoreans and the Stoics promoted a version of the practice. It is what most of us Catholics were taught to do to prepare for confession. In that form, the *examen* was a matter of examining one’s life in terms of the Ten Commandments to see how daily behavior stacked up against those divine criteria. St. Ignatius includes it as one of the exercises in his manual *The Spiritual Exercises*.

It is still a salutary thing to do but wears thin as a lifelong, daily practice. It is hard to motivate yourself to keep searching your experience for how you sinned. In recent decades, spiritual writers have worked with the implication that *conscience* in Romance languages like French (*conscience*) and Spanish (*conciencia*) means more than our English word *conscience*, in the sense of moral awareness and judgment; it also means “consciousness.”

Now prayer that deals with the full contents of your *consciousness* lets you cast your net much more broadly than prayer that limits itself to the contents of conscience, or moral awareness. A number of people—most famously, George Aschenbrenner, SJ, in an article in *Review for Religious* (1971)—have developed this idea in profoundly practical ways. Recently, the Institute of Jesuit Sources in St. Louis published a fascinating reflection by Joseph Tetlow, SJ, called *The Most Postmodern Prayer: American Jesuit Identity and the Examen of Conscience, 1920-1990*.

What I am proposing here is a way of doing the examen that works for me. It puts a special emphasis on feelings, for reasons that I hope will become apparent. First, I describe the format. Second, I invite you to spend a few minutes actually doing it. Third, I describe some of the consequences that I have discovered to flow from this kind of prayer.

### **A Method: Five Steps**

1. *Pray for light.* Since we are not simply daydreaming or reminiscing but rather looking for some sense of how the Spirit of God is leading us, it only makes sense to pray for some illumination. The goal is not simply memory but graced understanding. That’s a gift from God devoutly to be begged. “Lord, help me understand this blooming, buzzing confusion.”

2. *Review the day in thanksgiving.* Note how different this is from looking immediately for your sins. Nobody likes to poke around in the memory bank to uncover smallness, weakness, lack of generosity. But everybody likes beautiful gifts, and that is precisely what the past 24 hours contain—gifts of existence, work, relationships, food, challenges. Gratitude is the foundation of our whole relationship with God. So use whatever cues help you to walk through the day from the moment of awakening—even the dreams you

recall upon awakening. Walk through the past 24 hours, from hour to hour, from place to place, task to task, person to person, thanking the Lord for every gift you encounter.

3. *Review the feelings that surface in the replay of the day.* Our feelings, positive and negative, the painful and the pleasing, are clear signals of where the action was during the day. Simply pay attention to any and all of those feelings as they surface, the whole range: delight, boredom, fear, anticipation, resentment, anger, peace, contentment, impatience, desire, hope, regret, shame, uncertainty, compassion, disgust, gratitude, pride, rage, doubt, confidence, admiration, shyness—whatever was there. Some of us may be hesitant to focus on feelings in this over-psychologized age, but I believe that these feelings are the liveliest index to what is happening in our lives. This leads us to the fourth moment:

4. *Choose one of those feelings (positive or negative) and pray from it.* That is, choose the remembered feeling that most caught your attention. The feeling is a sign that something important was going on. Now simply express spontaneously the prayer that surfaces as you attend to the source of the feeling—praise, petition, contrition, cry for help or healing, whatever.

5. *Look toward tomorrow.* Using your appointment calendar if that helps, face your immediate future. What feelings surface as you look at the tasks, meetings, and appointments that face you? Fear? Delighted anticipation? Self-doubt? Temptation to procrastinate? Zestful planning? Regret? Weakness? Whatever it is, turn it into prayer—for help, for healing, whatever comes spontaneously. To round off the examen, say the Lord's Prayer.

A mnemonic for recalling the five points: LT3F (light, thanks, feelings, focus, future).

### **Do It**

Take a few minutes to pray through the past 24 hours, and toward the next 24 hours, with that five-point format.

### **Consequences**

Here are some of the consequences flowing from this kind of prayer:

1. *There is always something to pray about.* For a person who does this kind of prayer at least once a day, there is never the question: What should I talk to God about? Until you die, you always have a past 24 hours, and you always have some feelings about what's next.

2. *The gratitude moment is worthwhile in itself.* "Dedicate yourselves to gratitude," Paul tells the Colossians. Even if we drift off into slumber after reviewing the gifts of the day, we have praised the Lord.

3. *We learn to face the Lord where we are, as we are.* There is no other way to be present to God, of course, but we often fool ourselves into thinking that we have to “put on our best face” before we address our God.

4. *We learn to respect our feelings.* Feelings count. They are morally neutral until we make some choice about acting upon or dealing with them. But if we don’t attend to them, we miss what they have to tell us about the quality of our lives.

5. *Praying from feelings, we are liberated from them.* An unattended emotion can dominate and manipulate us. Attending to and praying from and about the persons and situations that give rise to the emotions helps us to cease being unwitting slaves of our emotions.

6. *We actually find something to bring to confession.* That is, we stumble across our sins without making them the primary focus.

7. *We can experience an inner healing.* People have found that praying about (as opposed to fretting about or denying) feelings leads to a healing of mental life. We probably get a head start on our dreamwork when we do this.

8. *This kind of prayer helps us get over our Deism.* Deism is belief in a sort of “clock-maker” God, a God who does indeed exist but does not have much, if anything, to do with his people’s ongoing life. The God we have come to know through our Jewish and Christian experience is more present than we usually think.

9. *Praying this way is an antidote to the spiritual disease of Pelagianism.* Pelagianism was the heresy that approached life with God as a do-it-yourself project (“If at first you don’t succeed...”), whereas a true theology of grace and freedom sees life as response to God’s love (“If today you hear God’s voice...”).

A final thought. How can anyone dare to say that paying attention to felt experience is a listening to the voice of God? On the face of it, it does sound like a dangerous presumption. But, notice, I am not equating memory with the voice of God. I am saying that, if we are to listen for the God who creates and sustains us, we need to take seriously and prayerfully the meeting between the creatures we are and all else that God holds lovingly in existence. That “interface” is the felt experience of my day. It deserves prayerful attention. It is a big part of how we know and respond to God.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Baker, Howard. *Soul Keeping: Ancient Paths of Spiritual Direction*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998. Quoted in Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Sacred Rhythms: Arranging Our Lives for Spiritual Transformation*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008.
- Bergman, Justin. "A U.S. Degree at Any Cost," *Time*, 20 August 2012, 47-48.
- Bock, Darrell L. Bock, *The NIV Application Commentary: Luke*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996.
- Boice, James Montgomery. *Psalms, Volume 1: Psalms 1-41*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Psalms, Volume 2: Psalms 42-106*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *Life Together*. New York: Harper & Row, 1954. Quoted in Marva J. Dawn, *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.
- Brady, Marilyn Dell. *The Asian Texans*. College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004.
- Brother Lawrence. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. New Kensington, PA: Whitaker House, 1982.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2004.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices that Transform Us*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Chambers, Oswald. *My Utmost for His Highest*. Updated edition, edited by James Reimann. Grand Rapids: Discovery House Publishers, 1992, 1995.

- Chang, Iris. *The Chinese in America: A Narrative History*. New York: Viking Penguin, 2003.
- Crabb, Lawrence J. *The Pressure's Off: There's a New Way to Live*. Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2002.
- Dawn, Marva J. *The Sense of the Call: A Sabbath Way of Life for Those Who Serve God, the Church, and the World*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.
- de Waal, Esther. *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict*. Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1984, 2001.
- Demarest, Bruce. *Satisfy Your Soul: Restoring the Heart of Christian Spirituality*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Spiritual Formation: Fleeting Fad or Return to Roots?" *Denver Seminary Magazine*, Summer 2006, 9-11.
- Fitch, David E. *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church from Big Business, Parachurch Organizations, Psychotherapy, Consumer Capitalism, and Other Modern Maladies*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005.
- Foster, Richard J. *Life with God: Reading the Bible for Spiritual Transformation*. New York: HarperOne, 2008.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Streams of Living Water: Celebrating the Great Traditions of Christian Faith*. New York: HarperOne, 1998.
- Frost, Michael. *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006.
- Guelich, Robert A. *Mark 1-8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989.
- Henderson, D. Michael. *A Model for Making Disciples: John Wesley's Class Meeting*. Napanee, IN: Francis Asbury Press, 1997.
- Hernandez, Wil. *Henri Nouwen and Soul Care: A Ministry of Integration*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008. Kindle Electronic Edition.

- Highsmith, Carol H, and Ted Landphair. *Houston: Deep in the Heart*. Houston: Houston International Protocol Alliance, 2000.
- Hudson, Trevor. *Discovering Our Spiritual Identity: Practices for God's Beloved*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010.
- Karkkainen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- Keating, Thomas. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York: Continuum, 2009.
- Keener, Craig S. *Matthew*. The IVP New Testament Commentary Series. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997.
- Kelly, Thomas R. *A Testament of Devotion*. New York: HarperOne, 1992.
- Lane, William L. *The Gospel of Mark*. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974.
- Laubach, Frank C. *Letters by a Modern Mystic: Excerpts from Letters Written to His Father*. Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications, 2007.
- Linn, Dennis, Sheila Fabricant Linn, and Matthew Linn. *Sleeping with Bread: Holding What Gives You Life*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1995.
- Marshall, I. Howard. *The Gospel of Luke*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978.
- McComb, David G. *Texas: A Modern History*. rev. ed. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010.
- Meisel, Anthony C. Meisel and M.L. del Mastro. *The Rule of St. Benedict*. New York: Doubleday, 1975.
- Motyer, J. Alec. *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1993.
- Mulholland, Jr., M. Robert. *Shaped By the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation*, rev. ed. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 1985, 2000.
- Noll, Mark A. *Turning Points: Decisive Moments in the History of Christianity*, 2d ed. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000.

Nouwen, Henri J.M. *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1975.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Way of the Heart*. New York: Ballantine Books, 1981.

Oswalt, John N. *The NIV Application Commentary: Isaiah*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003.

Peace, Richard. *Contemplative Bible Reading: Experiencing God through Scripture*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Meditative Prayer: Entering God's Presence*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1998.

Peterson, Eugene H. *The Contemplative Pastor: Returning to the Art of Spiritual Direction*. Carol Stream: Christianity Today, 1989.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

\_\_\_\_\_. *The Jesus Way: A Conversation on the Ways that Jesus is the Way*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Tell It Slant: A Conversation on the Language of Jesus in His Stories and Prayers*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.

\_\_\_\_\_. *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987.

Smith, James Bryan. *The Good and Beautiful Life: Falling in Love with the God Jesus Knows*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2009.

Swenson, Richard A. *Margin: Restoring Emotional, Physical, Financial, and Time Reserves to Overloaded Lives*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.

Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995, 2005.

Thrall, Bill, Bruce McNicol, and John Lynch. *True Faced: Trust God and Others with Who You Really Are*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2004.

- Underhill, Evelyn. *The Spiritual Life*. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1937.
- Wainerdi, Richard E. "From the President." *Texas Medical Center News*, 1 May 2012, 3.
- Webber, Robert E. *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2002.
- Widstrom, Sandy. "The Haunting Challenge of Spiritual Formation: An Interview with Dr. James Houston." *Denver Seminary Magazine*. Summer 2006.
- Wilkins, Michael J. *The NIV Application Commentary: Matthew*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004.
- Willard, Dallas. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2006.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1988.
- Wilson, Gerald H. *The NIV Application Commentary: Psalms, Volume 1*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002.
- Yang, Fenggang. "Chinese Christian Transnationalism: Diverse Networks of a Houston Church." In *Religion Across Borders: Transnational Immigrant Networks*, ed. Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet Saltzman Chafetz. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2002.

#### Websites

- "Bellaire High School." [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellaire\\_High\\_School\\_\(Bellaire,\\_Texas\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bellaire_High_School_(Bellaire,_Texas)) (accessed September 5, 2011).
- Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of Labor. "Economic News Release: Employment Situation Summary." <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empisit.nr0.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Employment status of the civilian population by race, sex, and age." <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empisit.t02.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011).

- \_\_\_\_\_. "Employment status of the civilian population 25 years and over by educational attainment." <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/empsit.t04.htm> (accessed September 22, 2011).
- Chen, Edward C.M., and Fred R. Von Der Mehden. "History of Houston's Chinatown." [http://www.chinatownconnection.com/houston\\_chinatown\\_history.htm](http://www.chinatownconnection.com/houston_chinatown_history.htm) (accessed September 3, 2011).
- Dysinger, Fr. Luke. "Accepting the Embrace of God: The Ancient Art of *Lectio Divina*." <http://valyermo.com> (accessed January 2, 2013).
- Greater Houston Partnership. "Unemployment Rate." <http://www.houston.org/pdf/research/10CW001.pdf> (accessed September 22, 2011).
- Hamm, Dennis. "Rummaging for God: Praying Backwards through Your Day," <http://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-examen/rummaging-for-god-praying-backward-through-your-day> (accessed January 2, 2013).
- Hannah, John Tweed. "Houston Cotton Exchange and Board of Trade." *Handbook of Texas Online*. <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/drh01> (accessed September 3, 2011).
- Macchia, Steve. "Soul Care for Leaders." [http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/documents/articles\\_soul\\_care\\_for\\_leaders.pdf](http://www.leadershiptransformations.org/documents/articles_soul_care_for_leaders.pdf) (accessed April 23, 2012).
- Money*. "Best Places to Live: Compare Cities." [http://apps.money.cnn.com/bestplaces\\_2011/compare\\_tool\\_2011.jsp?id=PL4835000,&view=a](http://apps.money.cnn.com/bestplaces_2011/compare_tool_2011.jsp?id=PL4835000,&view=a) (accessed September 22, 2011).
- Ryan, Camille L. Ryan and Julie Siebens. "Educational Attainment in the United States: 2009." <http://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/p20-566.pdf> (accessed September 15, 2012).
- Willard, Dallas. "Discipleship." <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=134> (accessed September 17, 2012).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Living a Transformed Life Adequate to Our Calling." <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=119> (accessed September 19, 2012).
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Spiritual Formation: What It Is and How It Is Done," <http://www.dwillard.org/articles/artview.asp?artID=58> (accessed September 18, 2012).

Unpublished Materials

Hernandez, Willy. "Partial Content Evaluation." Fuller Seminary, Doctor of Ministry  
Doctoral Project. Pasadena, CA, March 1, 2012.

Willard, Dallas. "Spirituality and Ministry." Fuller Seminary, Doctor of Ministry Class  
GM720. Pasadena, CA, June 9, 2008.