

Ministry Focus Paper Approval Sheet

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NURTURING SPIRITUALLY AUTHENTIC PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

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NURTURING SPIRITUALLY AUTHENTIC PASTORAL LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Nurturing Spiritually Authentic Pastoral Leadership

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The purpose of this doctoral project is to foster spiritual authenticity in the personal lives of pastors by seeking God through discipleship to Jesus using spiritual practices over an eight-week experience, which will lead to fruitful ministry within the local church. Pastoral ministry can easily be reduced to the accomplishing of tasks. Since pastors are often evaluated on these tasks, the danger within pastoral ministry is focusing entirely on what pastors do without any concern for who pastors are. As leaders of faith communities, pastors should be personally pursuing a deep relationship with God through disciplined use of spiritual practices. The hope is to stir desire within pastors to pursue this authentic relationship and present these spiritual practices as the avenue through which this relationship is cultivated. The temptation is that what is presented here is received as simply another thing to do. The intent is not to make pastors feel guilty or present these practices as mandates that would reduce them to law and legalism. The intent is to provide an invitation into a way of being with God that is fruitful and vibrant. Ministry then naturally flows from this relationship.

Part One will present a local church as one example of many where authentic spiritual leadership is needed. Part Two will establish the need for authenticity in pastoral leadership, an understanding of spiritual practices, how these practices have been used within the Reformed tradition and throughout history of the Church. Lessons from Jesus and Paul will point toward the purpose of this project in establishing a healthy balance between a contemplative life and active engagement in ministry. Part Three will propose an eight-week spiritually formative experience for pastors using a variety of spiritual practices. Desired outcomes and evaluative tools will be discussed.

Content Reader: Tom Schwanda, PhD

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PART ONE
MINISTRY CONTEXT

INTRODUCTION

The end of learning ultimately asks the question, “So What?” This project will unpack my answer to that question as I am concluding my work within the Doctor of Ministry program at Fuller Theological Seminary. In the pages that follow, I will reflect on the context, theological analysis, and practices relating to this doctoral project that seeks to nurture spiritually authentic pastoral leadership.

There is a huge need for spiritual leadership within the Church today. Throughout my studies, I have been prompted by the Holy Spirit to seek growth as a spiritual leader within the Church. I believe that growing as a spiritual leader is central to healthy ministry and my ability to participate in what God is doing within the church I serve. I desire to continually grow as a follower of Jesus Christ as I serve as a pastor, mentor, and guide in this journey. Keith Anderson and Randy Reese write, “It is a desire for more, a ‘more’ that is impossible to define or explicate; it is a longing to know the richness of ‘the deeper life’ or ‘mature faith’ or ‘spiritual power.’”¹ This deeper life in Jesus Christ is the path that I am on and I deeply desire to point others in this direction. Anderson and Reese continue, “As we challenge students to follow Jesus, we dare say, ‘Imitate me as I seek to imitate Jesus; follow me as I seek to faithfully follow him.’ And we dare such temerity because others before us have dared such boldness in our own lives.”² My journey over the past several years has truly been a blessing to my family, those I serve and myself. My deepened perspective and understanding of my calling as a spiritual

¹ Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), Kindle edition, loc. 99-100.

² Ibid., Kindle edition, loc. 95-96.

leader and how I am able to remain healthy and helpful within it has been a lived experience made possible by seeking God through discipleship to Jesus using spiritual practices that lead into fruitful ministry.

Pastors are continually mentoring. People are looking to me for guidance in how to live all of the time. Walter Wright discusses the continual reality of pastoral ministry: “Every word you speak, every action you take, every decision you make teaches something about what is important. And you are being watched.”³ This can be a little intimidating. Additionally, since I am a pastor in a local church, I am in a position of authority, and people take this authority seriously. This reality requires that I be a certain type of person. Part of my job description is being an ethical, healthy, different type of person, one who is authentic in relationship with God. Inherent in what I do is who I am. While this may sound stressful, I actually find it liberating that my ministry is more about who I am than what I do. Brian Williams affirms this reality that pastoral ministry is not just the accomplishing of tasks, but becoming a pastor when he writes, “As most pastors know—or as most come to find out one way or another—it is one matter to—do what a pastor does—and quite another to become a pastor.”⁴

It can be easy and tempting to “fake it” as a pastor, simply to do the things that people within the Church expect you to do. This type of hypocrisy within pastoral leadership is common today. I personally do not want any part of this. When I began my DMin studies, I had already been in pastoral ministry for about ten years and realized that

³ Walter C. Wright, *Mentoring* (Bucks, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 125.

⁴ Brian A. Williams, *The Potter's Rib* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2005), 18.

with some education, experience, and giftedness, it was tempting to reduce ministry to the accomplishing of tasks.

Through the online course, “Exploring the Contours of Ministry,” I was reminded that my primary role as a ministry leader quite simply, was to be led by God. As Henri Nouwen writes, “I am also getting in touch with the mystery that leadership, for a large part, means to be led.”⁵ As a ministry leader, I am not inviting people to come and follow me, but to come and follow Jesus Christ. There is no way I can guide others in that path if I am not being led by Jesus Christ. I cannot seek to be a pastor or a spiritual guide, without first being in a relationship with God that is real and interactive. Nouwen points toward the need for spiritual authenticity within pastoral leadership when he writes, “For Christian leadership to be truly fruitful in the future, a movement from the moral to the mystical is required.”⁶ While I desire God to use me to bear fruit, it all begins by being in Him. Nouwen continues, “The question is not: How many people take you seriously? How much are you going to accomplish? Can you show some results? But: Are you in love with Jesus—do you know the incarnate God?”⁷

I am to pursue a relationship with Jesus Christ and then allow ministry to flow from that relationship. I can see the temptation within ministry to seek to make something happen on my own, relying on my own strength and power, but then who would be getting the praise? The temptation is that ministry may be easier this way, but ultimately it does not give life. If everything I do as a ministry leader flows from a vibrant

⁵ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1989), 75.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

relationship with Jesus Christ, then God gets all the praise. Nouwen agrees, “The Christian leader of the future is called to be completely irrelevant and to stand in this world with nothing to offer but his or her own vulnerable self.”⁸ It is freeing to enter into ministry in this way. It is not all up to me. God will work and He chooses to do His work through me and even in spite of me. As I surrender completely to Him, offering nothing of my own to ministry, the words of 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 become true in my life: “‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weakness—For when I am weak, then I am strong.”⁹

My first intensive class was “Growing Churches in the Postmodern Matrix” with Eddie Gibbs. Through this class, I was looking for some guidance in how to lead Unity Reformed in healthy growth. Out of my experience, I realized that what I needed was not a growth strategy or more ideas about what to do, but rather a clear vision of my personal need for continual formation as a spiritual leader. As a pastor, I am not a CEO or administrator, but rather a sanctified, holy person of God. If I am called to shepherd God’s flock within the local church, I realized that I needed to continually cultivate a thriving relationship with God, which would allow ministry to flow from and through this relationship. This search for authentic spirituality is in line with Michael Frost’s description of exiles: “Exiles know that their daily lives—are opportunities to serve God.

⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁹ All Scripture citation, unless otherwise stated, comes from *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Bible Publishers, 1984).

Their spirituality is based not on distinctly religious activities—but rather on the ability to recognize God’s grace in every sphere of human existence.”¹⁰ As a spiritual leader, I need to be growing in my ability to recognize and see God’s grace in all circumstances if I am going to be able to guide others to do the same.

The path to health and growth in the Church today is not through programs and planning. Frost continues to give helpful guidance: “In the west, the mainstream church is too focused on motivating its members to embrace the technicalities of shipbuilding without ever having first inspired them with a yearning to sail the high seas.”¹¹ The motivation to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ must come from a true and real spirituality, if not, the activities of the church are reduced to drudgery rather than passion-filled opportunities to honor and glorify God. I need to be growing in my “yearning to sail the high seas” if I am to invite others to do the same.

My next two classes within the DMin program were in line with balancing both the “being” and the “doing” of ministry. “Action and Contemplation” with Richard Rohr and “Spirituality and Ministry” with Dallas Willard pointed me in the right direction. Rohr bluntly and honestly says, “In the world of religion, non dual seers are the only experts. Sinners, saints, lovers, and poets, and all those who have swum in the ocean of mercy can hold contrary evidence together because they have allowed God to first of all do it in them—over and over again.”¹² I have been seeking to allow God to do this work

¹⁰ Michael Frost, *Exiles: Living Missionally in a Post-Christian Culture* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006), 68.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹² Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2009), 83.

within me. Within this class, Rohr spoke of the need to get the “seer” right; then a person will be able to see the right things. Through continued use of spiritual practices, I believe God has been opening my eyes to “see” His Kingdom more fully. As I think back on the past few years, I feel like the disciples who reflected on their time with Jesus on the way to Emmaus. They did not recognize Jesus, but He was with them. Jesus explained Scripture to them, and then when He broke bread, “their eyes were opened and they recognized Him—They asked each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while He talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?’” (Lk 24:31-32). My eyes are opening to being able to recognize God everywhere. Scripture is opening, even more, to me. I find God’s Word to be deeper and more beautiful. As I think back on all God has been doing in my life these past years, I am deeply grateful for this experience and spiritual formation.

On the first day in Dallas Willard’s class, we were asked, “What do you want?” and, “What (or who) are you becoming?” As I prayerfully considered those questions, in answer to the first question, I wanted more of Jesus in my life. I wanted my life to be fully surrendered to Him. I long for authenticity in my relationship with Jesus. I desire a relationship with Him that is real and interactive. I want my connection with Jesus to be more than belief in Him; I desire to know Him. I long for my life and ministry to be powerful and genuine, flowing from a vibrant relationship with God. I want to clearly see the reality of God’s Kingdom as it actually exists. This longing for spirituality comes from the fact that I am spiritual, not just physical. As Willard said, I am an “unceasing

spiritual being with an eternal destiny in God's great universe."¹³ I want to live into this reality now. In answer to the second question, I believe I have been in a process of becoming this kind of person for many years, but the work certainly is not finished. This formative work has continued as I have been exposed to teaching and readings throughout my DMin studies. Whatever degrees I may hold do not really matter in terms of sharing the reality of who I am in Christ. Authority and credibility in ministry come from a life lived in the Spirit and the spiritual disciplines give guidance in this path. Experiencing, practicing, and committing to certain spiritual disciplines have had the effect of shaping me into the person I desire to be. Step-by-step, I am becoming the person I want to be.

As I am in a position of spiritual leadership within the Church; I feel I need to pay close attention to Jesus' criticism of the Pharisees, as I do not want to be guilty of the same things. He had some harsh words for religious leaders. In Matthew 23:25-26 Jesus says, "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence—First clean the inside of the cup and dish, and then the outside also will be clean." For anyone involved in pastoral ministry, it can be tempting to play the part and simply seek to present ourselves to others in the way we think they want to see us. Anyone involved in pastoral ministry should not want any part of this. Our longing should be for authenticity in our relationship with God in our lives and ministry. The spiritual disciplines work

¹³ Dallas Willard, "Spirituality and Ministry," lecture at Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, June 2011.

inwardly to transform lives. For me, an ongoing practice of disciplines has been keeping the inside of my “cup” clean and is thereby having an effect on the “outside.”

Richard Foster points toward the need for pastoral leadership to have an authentic relationship with God. On his own, Foster honestly acknowledges that he has no power to help people: “People were starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give them.”¹⁴ Without a spiritual connection, I have nothing to offer others within the church within my role as a spiritual leader. The spiritual disciplines, which lead to a fuller awareness of God, must be a part of my life if I am going to serve in this capacity. He goes on to explain that we need to “be taught how to meditate, to worship, to think.”¹⁵ Foster’s teaching has gone a long way in teaching me more of these practices. I long for a deeper, more intimate and real connection with God in my life and it is encouraging when Foster identified that this very longing is a “primary requirement”¹⁶ in growth. One needs to want it, desire it, and choose to go after it as he writes, “The inner reality of the spiritual world is available to all who are willing to search for it.”¹⁷ My personal desire continues to grow and strengthen as I continually seek God’s Kingdom. The more I lean into and live into this reality, the more resolved I am in following Jesus, whatever the cost. I am not alone in this experience. Brother Lawrence affirms this journey of growth, “The more one knows Him, the more one desires to know Him. And as knowledge is commonly the measure of love, the deeper and more extensive our knowledge shall be,

¹⁴ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), Kindle EBook: Introduction, Location 155.

¹⁵ Ibid., Loc. 281.

¹⁶ Ibid., Loc. 299.

¹⁷ Ibid., Loc. 582.

the greater will be our love; and if our love of God were great we should love Him equally in pains and pleasures.”¹⁸

I feel that I have been formed and renewed in my journey. Williams shares what is required for ministry to be healthy and fruitful: “On this journey, however, the traveler must learn—and learn early—to attend not only to knowing and doing, but also to their being—due diligence to our personal and spiritual formation (enable us) to endure and flourish as pastors.”¹⁹ As I have been disciplined in times of solitude and silence, worship and study, I feel increasingly free and comfortable as a pastor. Tasks still need to be done, but not in my own strength.

Being a spiritual leader means being attentive to the Holy Spirit’s presence and prompting. Within the class, “Spiritual Leadership through Mentoring,” we discussed how the Holy Spirit is always the most important person in the room. The Holy Spirit is infinitely more important and He is here. He is always present and my awareness of this reality is both growing and comforting. I am in the room, but the Holy Spirit is working through me. Tony Horsfall unpacks the importance of this reality: “Spiritual mentoring is a triadic relationship between mentor, mentee and the Holy Spirit, where the mentoree can discover, through the already present action of God, intimacy with God, ultimate identity as a child of God and a unique voice for kingdom responsibility.”²⁰ I have the great privilege and opportunity to be the one through whom the Holy Spirit is working.

¹⁸ Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God* (New York: Bantam, Double Day Dell, 1996), Kindle EBook: 15th Letter, Location 420.

¹⁹ Williams, *The Potter’s Rib*, 19.

²⁰ Tony Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth* (Abingdon, UK: The Bible Reading Fellowship, 2008), 17.

As I am changed and formed by the Holy Spirit, people will come into contact with an example of how this life is to be lived in constant communion and awareness of the presence of God. Again, this cannot be faked and is the only way for me to remain healthy and helpful to others as a pastor. Williams clearly articulates, “Pastors can hardly call others to the way of holiness and sanctification without first having walked that way themselves.”²¹ As I am honestly pursuing God, I am able to invite other people into the same journey.

Jean Stairs explains both what people want and need from their pastors: “For several decades now, studies have shown that the laity seek, above all other qualities, spiritual leadership in their ministry personnel and church leadership. They want persons who have learned more than facts and who have mastered more than technique.”²² Stairs explains that people within the Church “seek caring persons who are centered in God and open to hearing God’s voice in the midst of the people. The laity want authentic, trustworthy, and credible pastoral caregivers.”²³ She says, “The single most important credential for anyone offering spiritual guidance or facilitating spiritual growth is ‘to have taken the inner way himself or herself and still be on it.’”²⁴ It is my desire and intent to pursue this path in a way that is real and genuine. Stairs connects this path of spiritual authenticity to congregational care when she writes, “Allowing others to see that we are

²¹ Williams, *The Potter’s Rib*, 28.

²² Jean Stairs, *Listening for the Soul* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), Kindle EBook: Location 2296.

²³ *Ibid.*, Loc. 2304-5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, Loc. 2360.

open to new spiritual practices and experiences, and that we are able to learn and grow from them, is itself a pastoral action infused with care for the soul.”²⁵

I have realized that I am not alone in my recent discoveries. Tony Horsfall’s story is much like my own. Horsfall’s journey has been very helpful to me. He shares:

God began to create in me a desire for intimacy with him. It came about in two ways. First, I began to see how many Christian workers like myself ended up burnt out, and it frightened me—I began to think that there must be a better way to live the Christian life than the way I was experiencing. Second, God brought across my path people and books that spoke about a more contemplative approach to living—This took me well beyond my comfort zone, and I began to explore outside my evangelical and charismatic world—I meet many people who are on a similar journey, and it seems to reflect a particular work of the Holy Spirit—There is definitely a growing hunger for a more vital relationship with God among those who have been actively serving him for many years. It is as if we are waking up to the fact that the Christian life is not just about doing things for God but also about knowing him deeply and intimately.²⁶

I also desire a deeper intimacy with God. I have seen how some of my friends from seminary are no longer serving within the Church. They would not call it “burn out,” but as I have listened to them, they are tired and say they simply want to do something else. From my perspective, once they became tired and exhausted from the demands of ministry, it was time to quit. I do not desire that for myself; there must be a better way. As a Reformed Church pastor, taking a class from a Franciscan Hermit, Richard Rohr, was certainly out of my comfort zone. However, I discovered a playful wonder as I grew in awareness of the presence of God in every moment. Throughout my DMin studies, I encountered many people who are on a similar journey. Through regular use of spiritual

²⁵ Ibid., Loc. 2380.

²⁶ Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth*, 82.

disciplines, people can seek God in this moment and continually live in His presence. As they do, their lives and ministries flow out of this deep knowing.

This brings me back to a humble confidence that I am one through whom the Holy Spirit is working. I seek to be continually aware of this reality and find it freeing, especially as I interact with people. The Holy Spirit is present and active. I can rest in His work through me. None are fit for ministry, but by the grace of God are made competent through the Holy Spirit to achieve the purposes of God. The reality of people always looking to me as a spiritual leader, an example, and a mentor is not frightening or oppressive, but rather joyful and winsome: “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have” (1 Pt 3:15).

It is my conviction that this doctoral project addresses a very real and common challenge within the Church today. The purpose of this doctoral project is to foster spiritual authenticity in the personal lives of a group of pastors who I am in relationship within Muskegon, MI by seeking God through discipleship to Jesus using spiritual practices over an eight-week experience, which will lead to fruitful ministry within the local church.

Pastoral ministry in the American church can easily be reduced to the accomplishing of tasks. Since pastors are often evaluated on these tasks, the danger within pastoral ministry is focusing entirely on what pastors do without any concern about who pastors are. If pastors are leaders of communities of faith, it is my conviction that they should be personally pursuing a deep relationship with God. I have experienced

this temptation within ministry and am committed to a pursuit of God through disciplined use of spiritual practices, which have healthy effects in my life and the Church.

The purpose of this project is to stir desire within pastors to personally pursue God through the use of spiritual practices. The temptation is that what is presented here is received as simply another thing to do. The intent is not to make pastors feel guilty or present these practices as mandates, which would reduce them to law and legalism. The intent is to provide an invitation into a way of being with God that is fruitful and vibrant, ministry then naturally flows out of an interactive relationship with God.

Part One will describe Unity Reformed Church in Muskegon, MI as an example of where fruitful ministry happens from authentic spiritual leadership. Attention will be given to the history of Unity and the disbursement of its members throughout Muskegon. Discussion about the economy and intergenerational identity of Unity points toward the need for authentic spiritual leadership from the pastor.

Part Two will engage the relevant biblical and theological resources, which will be the foundation for this project. A literature review will establish the need for authenticity in pastoral leadership, an understanding of spiritual practices, and a realization of what happens within ministry from a pursuit of God using these practices. While demand of programming and various actions from a pastor of any local church are high, the most important activity for any pastor is to be committed to spiritual practices, which foster a vibrant relationship with God. Drawing from 2,000 years of Church history and the biblical examples of Jesus and Paul, the need for a balance between a

contemplative life and active engagement in ministry is required for healthy pastoral leadership.

Part Three will propose an eight-week spiritually formative experience for pastors using a variety of spiritual practices. It is my intention to implement this project with a group of pastors in the next six months. The goal is for pastors to grow in their awareness of the continual presence and action of God. A discussion of my journey will serve as an invitation to other pastors into a similar experience. Attention will be given to the timeline, leadership development, resources, and assessment of this project.

CHAPTER 1

COMMUNITY AND CHURCH CONTEXT

In 2003, I became the pastor of Unity Reformed Church in Norton Shores, MI. Unity's denominational affiliation is with the Reformed Church in America. Nearly 100 years ago, Unity began in 1917 and enjoyed health and growth for many years. At that time, it was centrally located within Muskegon. Unity was a community church where many attendees lived in the neighborhood and walked to services. This neighborhood setting provided intimacy and community. Over the years, there was a slow transition in the community surrounding the church. Some people moved to outlying areas around Muskegon. As this happened, there was an increase in African Americans living around the church. After failed efforts to reach out to those living around the church, Unity's leadership felt led to join efforts with another church on the south end of town in 1991.

Pine Grove Reformed Church was a smaller struggling congregation in Norton Shores (the village on the south side of Muskegon). After years of seeking to reach their community, the leadership from Pine Grove also felt led to join with another church. In 1991, Unity and Pine Grove merged under the name Unity Reformed Church. They built

a new sanctuary on the site of Pine Grove, moved the organ from Unity's sanctuary into the new building, and added classroom and office space. Pine Grove's sanctuary was turned into a multi-purpose space. In this merger, Pine Grove experienced an increase in numbers and resources, and Unity was now in a more suburban environment. Since the merger, many local churches have closed and some members of these congregations have come to Unity. Unity has recently experienced White-flight, closures, and struggles to survive. While joining forces has provided some stability in numbers, the collective history of Unity has had many challenges, which have not provided healthy models of ministry going forward.

A rather significant consequence of Unity's history is that it is no longer a community church where people live close to each other. Those who attend Unity are widely dispersed throughout Muskegon. The merger in 1991 gathered two faith communities into one location, but subsequent closures also have in-folded many people from throughout the greater Muskegon region including North Muskegon and Fruitport. The natural intimacy that happens by living near each other is easily lost as Unity has become a destination to drive to rather than the hub of the community.

Over the past decade, Unity has learned to be one church and is seeking to be the church God has called them to be. Throughout this time, there has been a ready and open acknowledgement of how difficult church can be. The wounds of closure, struggle, and disagreement over past decisions are present. Yet, there is health, hope, and openness for what God will do in the future.

Regional Statistics

The economy within Muskegon County presents many challenges for those who call this area home. The per capita income is \$20,613, which is about three-quarters of the amount in Michigan (\$26,613) and about two-thirds of the amount in the U.S. (\$28,889).¹ There are 20.3 percent of persons living below the poverty line within Muskegon County, higher than both Michigan (16.2 percent) and United States averages (15.5 percent).² It seems that the economic challenges this region places increase stress on families in their effort to make ends meet while limiting their time for other pursuits such as involvement in church activities.

The County Health Rankings and Roadmaps ranked Muskegon County as the sixty-seventh unhealthiest county among eighty-two counties within Michigan. The study examined more than two dozen areas related to health, cultural, and socioeconomic factors such as low-income levels, low educational achievement, and a large number of children living in poverty.³ A similar report gives additional contributing factors, “Socioeconomic factors of concern for the county included food security, violent crime, high school graduation rates and the number of children living in single-parent households—14 percent of the county’s population earned low-income wages and did not

¹ Census Reporter, “Muskegon County, MI” CensusReporter.com, <http://censusreporter.org/profiles/05000US26121-muskegon-county-mi/> (accessed June 25, 2017).

² Ibid.

³ MLive News, “County Health Rankings,” MLiveNews.com, http://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/index.ssf/2014/03/county_health_rankings_wellnes.html (accessed May 25, 2014).

live close to a grocery store compared to 6 percent of residents statewide.”⁴ Taking a closer look at the results of the county health rankings, Muskegon has significantly higher percentages in many other areas compared to the state averages. These include: poor or fair health, adult smoking, adult obesity, excessive drinking, sexually transmitted diseases, teen births, children in poverty, and limited access to healthy foods.⁵

Muskegon County still has not fully recovered from the recession, which began in 2008 from the housing market crash. The area lost 5,000 jobs during the recession and only regained 3,100 since. The total employment index is significantly less than state and national averages.⁶ The housing market has remained flat and there is little evidence that wages are increasing.⁷ Seemingly, many young professionals do not remain in town after college. Even though they may prefer to live where they grew up, they are unable to find employment in Muskegon, and are forced to leave the area. Research backs up this observation. It is hard for Muskegon to attract young professionals because they cannot find employment. People with degrees tend to move for their job while people with high school educations tend not to move.⁸

⁴ MLive News, “Muskegon County Lands in 69th,” MLiveNews.com, http://www.mlive.com/news/muskegon/index.ssf/2013/03/muskegon_county_lands_in_69th.html (accessed May 25, 2014).

⁵ County Health Rankings and Roadmarks, “Muskegon County Snapshot,” <http://www.countyhealthrankings.org/app/michigan/2013/rankings/muskegon/county/outcomes/overall/snapshot> (accessed May 25, 2014).

⁶ UpJohn.org, “Muskegon,” UpJohn.org, http://www.upjohn.org/sites/default/files/reg_presentations/muskegon%20final%20presentation%20for%20Jan%2030%202015_v2.pdf, 23 (accessed June 28, 2015).

⁷ Ibid., 20-21.

⁸ Ibid., 37-39.

Another statistic, which directly affects the ministry of Unity within Muskegon County, is the changes in religious affiliation. Between the years of 2000 to 2010: Evangelical Protestants have decreased in number from 19,430 to 18,063, Mainline Protestants have decreased from 18,521 to 14,051, Catholics have decreased from 19,950 to 13,687, and “none” have increased from 97,086 to 120,259. The “none” category represents nearly 70 percent of the population of Muskegon County.⁹

Over the past ten years, Unity has experienced a decrease in worship attendance from 225 to 175 per Sunday. Over this time, I have participated in nearly 100 funerals, of which, most were seniors of our congregation who were involved and active in the life of Unity. Combining the loss of so many people from the Greatest Generation, with the challenge of retaining college graduates as they leave town to pursue career opportunities, provides some insight into the decrease in attendance. Acknowledging these losses while celebrating people who have joined Unity over the past decade provides some explanation to the current worship attendance.

There are many challenges facing the Church within Muskegon County. It could be easy to become discouraged by statistics. Muskegon County is not alone; there are national trends regarding denominational churches, postmodern thought, and economic challenges. Eddie Gibbs articulates this challenge: “Denominations continue to experience . . . unrelenting decline.”¹⁰ David Olson expounds on this national trend and

⁹ City-Data.com, “Norton Shores,” City-Data.com, <http://www.city-data.com/city/Norton-Shores-Michigan.html> (accessed June 25, 2017).

¹⁰ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Morph: How Megatrends are Reshaping Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009), 11.

adds that, “The Reformed family declined in 48 states.”¹¹ In response to this reality Olson states, “Authentic spiritual pastoral leadership is one of the greatest challenges in the church today.”¹² The purpose of this project is to foster the type of authentic spiritual leadership that the Church needs, while fully acknowledging the challenges before the Church today. David Fitch also points to the intent behind this doctoral project as what the Church needs from its leadership when he writes, “In the midst of modernity’s demise . . . the opportunity exists for evangelicals to reinvigorate practices for the faithful training and formation of ordained pastors as faithful servants of Christ and as participants in communal life, not mere leaders of corporate success.”¹³ As many of the challenges within Muskegon are similar to those facing the Church as a whole within the US, perhaps this project provides much needed guidance to pastoral leadership.

The Need for Authentic Spiritual Leadership

Tim Keel addresses why authentic spiritual leadership is needed within the Church today. He states, “If hypocrisy is the cardinal sin in a postmodern context, then authenticity is the cardinal virtue.”¹⁴ Understanding the decreased numbers of people involved in Christian churches and the increase of the “nones” within Muskegon, Anderson rightfully indicates, “Without a doubt there is a craving for spirituality in our

¹¹ David T. Olson, *The American Church in Crisis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 101.

¹² *Ibid.*, 139.

¹³ David E. Fitch, *The Great Giveaway: Reclaiming the Mission of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2005), 73.

¹⁴ Tim Keel, *Intuitive Leadership: Embracing a Paradigm of Narrative, Metaphor & Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), 117.

culture that finds little fulfillment in the more traditional churches.”¹⁵ Since this is the case, should not pastoral leadership within denominational churches seek to share the spiritual connection that our society craves? It is my conviction that pastors can authentically point to this reality as it is lived out in their lives. There is a huge longing for spirituality within society to which the Church has the key. Humans are spiritual beings created to be in relationship with Spirit, and pastors can point to this reality through their lived experience.

Realizing the challenges facing the Church within today’s current cultural climate could easily be discouraging. Many people within the Church long for the time when the Church was respected and had influence, a time when events were predictable and known. The world is changing so quickly and unpredictably that there is no way to predict what may happen in the future. Gibbs gives an appropriate illustration of what this feels like: “Targets move after you have fired the arrow, new targets pop up in unexpected places, and we are trying to take aim from a lurching platform.”¹⁶ In this kind of environment, people, churches, pastors—everybody—longs for stability and an assurance that everything is going to be ok.

Within today’s current cultural context, change will constantly, randomly, and unpredictably happen. People will not see it coming and will struggle in adapting to a new reality on the other side. Alan Roxburgh addresses what this feels like:

¹⁵ Ray S. Anderson, *An Emergent Theology for Emerging Churches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 60.

¹⁶ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 65.

“Discontinuous change literally feels like the sky is falling.”¹⁷ Humanity must learn coping strategies to survive profound cultural changes. The events surrounding 9/11 are a good example of discontinuous change within society. North American culture was forever changed in a day. This was much like what the Israelites endured when Jerusalem was conquered in 587 BC and the Israelites were taken into exile. Roxburgh explains their reality, “The people had no framework to understand, accept, or receive the catastrophic event—it was the loss and ending of a world—resulting in complete disorientation and chaos. They couldn’t recreate the past.”¹⁸ As the Church is now living in a post-Christendom, post-modern world, it feels like it is in a completely different world. What worked in the past is no longer effective. The place the Church once held within society is gone. Many church people long for the days of the past, but those days are gone . . . forever. This is a new world and Roxburgh says there is no going back, “The reality is postmodernism is not a fad—you live in a postmodern world—there’s no point in pretending you’re not or wishing that things would go back to the way they were thirty years ago. You can’t.”¹⁹

Being a pastor within this cultural context may be frustrating or intimidating. The reality of discontinuous change and the chaos and unpredictability of current reality is unsettling. Gibbs agrees, “Leadership is always challenging, but it has become even more

¹⁷ Alan J. Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publishing, 2005), 29.

¹⁸ Ibid., 73-74.

¹⁹ Ibid., 38.

so in the current climate of discontinuous and unpredictable change.”²⁰ However, understanding and embracing this idea of discontinuous change provides both perspective and freedom in leading churches within this context. Usually the older folk within the Church long for the past and this longing is understandable. Pastoral leadership being aware of discontinuous change allows a deeper perspective on what is happening. Pastors do not need to resent this longing for times gone by, but rather have compassion for people and their desires for the Church. The older generation has already been through so much change in their lives, they can hardly handle any more change within the Church.

Discontinuous change is freeing because it actually gives an explanation as to why things are the way they are. Olson explains, “Retreating to the safe world of the past seems enticing. Unfortunately, it does not matter which world we want to live in, we can only live in the world that exists today.”²¹ People are free to engage what God has in store for them now, today. This is both unsettling and exciting at the same time. The Church has a wonderful opportunity to truly trust God’s leadership today and tomorrow. This is an exhilarating journey. Spiritually authentic pastoral leadership is centrally important for the Church within this context. Only with eyes of faith opened and attentive to God’s movement can pastoral leadership offer any assistance in this context. This is freeing. The future of the Church does not rest on the shoulders of pastors, but being attentive to God’s next steps. The fluidity of ministry continually dependent on the movement and power of God working through Christ’s followers should be comforting

²⁰ Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next: Changing Leaders in a Changing Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 90.

²¹ Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 171.

and encouraging as Gibbs instructs: “Because leaders cannot order, explain or control the inferno (referring to discontinuous change), they need to relax.”²² This project’s intent is to allow pastors to rest into who they are in relationship to God. The suggested spiritual practices point in this direction, which leads into healthy ministry. Keel also affirms this path to fruitful ministry: “Ministry is always the by-product of something else. What? The pursuit of God.”²³ He gives an example of how this works, “Trees that are healthy simply produce fruit. They don’t try to make it happen, and they can’t stop it when it does. Fruit comes when everything else in the environment functions as it should.”²⁴

The realities of postmodernism and discontinuous change may sound discouraging, however, it is helpful to internalize Jim Belcher’s observation that “there is no Golden Time to return to—there is no return to the pristine church, no true historic form, it never existed.”²⁵ The Church, throughout the past 2,000 years, has never been perfect because it has always been made up of Christians. It has consistently faced various challenges. The Church’s influence on society should not come from being an institutional force, but from being the Body of Christ that God desires it to be. Alan Hirsch explains that it is actually a hidden blessing that the Church is no longer an institutional force in society, “Now, in the postmodern period, the whole deal has shifted;

²² Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, 63.

²³ Keel, *Intuitive Leadership*, 220.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Jim Belcher, *Deep Church: A Third Way Beyond Emerging and Traditional* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 136.

we are now back on genuinely missional ground.”²⁶ Similar to the church of the first century before Constantine declared Christianity to be the state religion of Rome, the Church is to be a movement of Jesus followers passionately loving God and others as they seek to point others toward Jesus.

Unfortunately, people both inside and outside the Church often view it as a dispenser of religious goods and services where the purpose is to cater to their particular needs and desires. Eugene Peterson sees this: “North American religion is basically a consumer religion. Americans see God as a product that will help them to live well, or to live better. Having seen that, they do what consumers do, shop for the best deal.”²⁷ The challenge before the Church today is to live into what it was originally commissioned to do. This plays out differently in any given church based on the individuals gathered in that location. Kurt Fredrickson shares how this happens within any local church, “The church truly is only real and visible, made up of people in real places. This is where we are called to serve and to proclaim and live out good news—The church is mystery and messy. The church is wonderful and frustrating! And this is where we serve. We believe the gospel and live it out, and the world becomes a different place.”²⁸

Peterson addresses the passions of most pastors, “God and passion were the essentials for living. God was the reality with whom we most had to do. A passionate response was the only adequate response—That is why I was a pastor—to live in the

²⁶ Alan Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways: Reactivating the Missional Church* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2006), 62.

²⁷ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 35.

²⁸ Kurt Fredrickson, “Church as Community,” lecture at “Exploring the Contours of Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

presence of God, to live with passion—and to gather others into the presence of God, introducing them into the possibilities of a passionate life.”²⁹ While living in a way that embodies this passionate life, pastors have the opportunity to powerfully affect the churches they serve. While this is the hope for the Church, it must be realized that this is often not the reality of most local churches, however, pastors must refuse to give up on the local church. Roxburgh provides helpful insight:

We are not prepared to write congregations off. We realize that some have declined and dwindled to the extent that the greatest gift they can give to the Kingdom is to close and offer their assets to others to journey forward. . . . Nevertheless, if God’s Spirit is among the people of God, wherever they are (including in congregations), then these are the places where it is possible to incarnate a missional life.³⁰

Peterson provides assurance and confidence that the Spirit is indeed working among all local churches, “Wherever two or three are gathered together in Jesus’ name, our Lord the Spirit is there. The Spirit is the Creator Spirit. In every congregation (I insist on the every) creation is in motion. Something new is coming into existence, finding form in these bodies and minds.”³¹ Any local church can live into a vibrant interactive relationship with God, passionate about loving, honoring, and serving God together.

While this vision for the Church is encouraging, Hirsch’s appraisal of where healthy ministries in the Church originate may be frustrating. He writes, “All great missionary movements begin at the fringes of the church, among the poor and the

²⁹ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 45.

³⁰ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 19.

³¹ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 164.

marginalized, and seldom, if ever, at the center.”³² Unity Reformed is nowhere close to the “fringe” of ministries within the Church. Even though Unity is not on the “fringe,” Hirsh’s warning can be applied to this project. As the intent of this project is to lead into healthy ministry, Roxburgh gives helpful guidance: “This is how effective, lasting missional transformation starts to happen—It is done by initiating all manner of experiments around the edges where people are given permission to try out what they are learning—The beauty of such experiments is that, like the wind of the Spirit in our sails, there is no telling where they’ll take a congregation.”³³ Roxburgh shows how healthy, innovative, “fringe” type ministries can happen within a denominational church or any church by allowing people, specifically pastors, to experiment. With this view of fringe ministries bringing health to the whole, pastors can commit to spiritual practices that foster authentic relationship with God, which has a healthy impact on that congregation.

The urgency of spiritually surrendered leaders within the Church in America is pressing. Fredrickson shares, “The church in North America must change in order to become effective and relevant again. That change begins in the hearts of pastoral leaders.”³⁴ This surrender of a pastor’s heart to God happens as they spend time with God through disciplined use of spiritual practices. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s thoughtful and loving explanation behind spiritual disciplines is refreshing. Central to a pastor’s tasks for ministry is prayer, meditation, and Scripture reading. Bonhoeffer writes, “Since meditation on the Scriptures, prayer, and intercession are a service we owe and because

³² Hirsch, *The Forgotten Ways*, 30.

³³ Roxburgh and Romanuk, *The Missional Leader*, 101.

³⁴ Kurt Fredrickson, “Confessions of a Suburban Church Pastor,” lecture at “Exploring the Contours of Ministry,” Fuller Theological Seminary, 2009.

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. This is not ‘legalism;’ it is orderliness and fidelity.”³⁵ Spiritual disciplines are not legalism, but provide “orderliness” to disciple’s lives into which God can then speak. If pastors do not allow time in their lives to be with God, the “noise” of everything that clamors for their attention easily drowns out the voice of God.

The Church needs spiritually authentic pastoral leadership to be able to see what God is doing. The ability to see God at work only comes as one is attuned to the movements and actions of God. Peterson calls out the task of pastors to see and listen to God’s work, “So many eyes, glazed by television, don’t see the God stories being enacted right before them, sometimes in their own homes. It is my task, I have decided, to see, to listen.”³⁶ Rather than tuning into television, pastors must be tuned into the movement of the Spirit. Reggie McNeal also points toward this need within pastoral leadership, “Christian leaders who stay online with Jesus are shaped by the heart of God. However, those who go offline miss the information shared along the network channel.”³⁷ As pastors are “online” with Jesus, they are better able to “see” what God is doing.

Peterson provides helpful guidance in “seeing” God’s work within the Church. In Mark 16:6-7 it is written, “He has risen—he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him, as he told you.” As Peterson enters any kind of pastoral visit or meeting, he

³⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1954), 87.

³⁶ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 64.

³⁷ Reggie McNeal, *A Work of the Heart: Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 65.

modifies this verse: “In a hospital room or a family room, I will see him there. He is going before me.” Peterson shares, “When I arrive and enter the room I am not so much wondering what I am going to do or say that will be pastoral as I am alert and observant for what the risen Christ has been doing or saying that is making a gospel story out of this life.”³⁸ The promise that Jesus is going before his followers in ministry is both encouraging and humbling. Christians are promised that they will see Him if they will train their eyes to see Him working. The spiritual disciplines provide this training in opening eyes to seek God’s continual work. McNeal agrees, “Missional spiritual leaders see God actively at work in the world. They understand that he is on a mission himself, redeeming people to himself.”³⁹

³⁸ Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 127-128.

³⁹ McNeal, *A Work of the Heart*, 91.

PART TWO
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The primary purpose of this project is to nurture spiritual authenticity from pastoral leadership in the local church. While demands of programming and various actions from a pastor of any local church are quite high, the most important activity for any pastor is to be committed to spiritual practices, which foster a healthy and vibrant relationship with God. From this relationship and awareness of the continual presence of God, ministry will naturally flow. Many resources have been formative to this end in my life. A few will be evaluated within this chapter as they relate to the thesis.

***Creative Ministry* by Henry J. M. Nouwen**

Throughout this book, Nouwen calls for authenticity in pastoral leadership. He argues that there is more to ministry than the pastor possessing capabilities. He states the thesis for the book within the introduction, “A Christian minister will never be able to be a minister if it is not his own most personal faith and insight into life that forms the core of his pastoral work. So, ministry and spirituality never can be separated. Ministry is—a

way of life.”¹ He directly addresses five specific roles of pastoral ministry: teaching, preaching, pastoral care, organizing, and celebrating. In all of them, giftedness and capabilities are required of the pastor, but beyond tasks and responsibilities, creative ministry is a way of life. Healthy ministry cannot primarily depend on the capabilities of the minister, but must “be founded on the deep-rooted spiritual life of the minister himself as it develops out of his constant care for those he works with.”²

In his conclusion, Nouwen identifies the lack of spiritually authentic pastoral leaders in the Church today. He writes, “It is painful to realize that very few ministers are able to offer the rich mystical tradition of Christianity as a source of rebirth for the generation searching for new life in the midst of the debris of a faltering civilization.”³ Since the current cultural context is longing for “spirituality,” pastors have the privilege and opportunity of creatively inviting others’ to join them in this journey. This project seeks to address this need.

Nouwen asks a question concerning who is able to live into the type of creative ministry his book describes: “What kind of man is it who can help take away those obstacles that prevent the Word of God from falling on fertile ground?”⁴ Nouwen answers his own question a few pages later: “A preacher who wants to be a real leader is the man who is able to put the full range of his life-experiences—his experiences in prayer, in conversation and in his lonely hours—at the disposal of those who ask him to

¹ Henri Nouwen, *Creative Ministry* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Publishing Group, Inc., 1971), Introduction.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 117.

⁴ Ibid., 25.

be their preacher.”⁵ Basically the call here is for authenticity within ministry. As pastors seek to live their lives within God’s Kingdom, including all of the struggles and joys, their lives and experiences are not meant primarily for themselves, but for those they serve as pastor. Nouwen argues, “A preacher is a man who is willing to give his life for his people.”⁶ Ministry “calls for Christians who are willing to develop their sensitivity to God’s presence in their own lives, as well as in the lives of others, and to offer their experiences as a way of recognition and liberation to their fellow men.”⁷ This is the only way to pursue ministry with honesty and integrity. A pastor living into the reality that he is a spiritual being in relationship with God and that relationship is to be shared and made available to other people is the path to fruitful ministry. Any other model for ministry is a façade. Nothing else satisfies or fulfills the pastor or those they serve.

Nouwen discusses how a balance between a healthy affirmation of giftedness and a humble realization of a pastor’s own inadequacy can be difficult to maintain when he writes, “So the identity of the pastor—is born from the intangible tension between self-affirmation and self-denial, self-fulfillment and self-emptying, self-realization and self-sacrifice.”⁸ While challenging to maintain, this is where health and vitality may enter in a pastor’s ministry. Spiritual disciplines lead into and allow this healthy balance to be fostered in the life of a pastor.

⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁸ Ibid., 52.

If there is a limitation of this resource in light of the ministry challenge of this project, it may be that Nouwen does not unpack the means by which a pastor arrives at both spiritual maturity and authenticity. Spiritual disciplines as the means of “getting there” will be discussed in other literature resources.

***The Leadership Ellipse: Shaping how we Lead by who we Are* by Robert A. Fryling**

Throughout his book, Fryling expounds on his idea of an ellipse “which looks like an elongated circle, (and) is defined by two distinctly different focal points—one point is not inferior to the other, and both are needed if there is to be an ellipse.”⁹ He argues, “Christian leaders today need to embrace and embody both spiritual focal points of our internal relationship with God and our external relationship with others.”¹⁰ To be healthy in ministry, these two focal points need to be in balance and both are critically important. One does not exist without the other. Fryling writes, “You can’t be a Christian activist without being contemplative; you can’t be a Christian contemplative without being an activist.”¹¹ He articulates a tension that is common within pastoral leadership, “As a leader I have sometimes felt forced or have chosen to live in a dichotomized world that segments my internal spiritual life from my external life of leadership.”¹²

Fryling summarizes his argument, which aligns with the purpose of this project, when he writes, “Authentic spirituality means that we are living with a harmony of our

⁹ Robert A. Fryling, *The Leadership Ellipse* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010), Kindle EBook: Loc. 116-117.

¹⁰ Ibid., Loc. 127-8.

¹¹ Ibid., Loc. 66.

¹² Ibid., Loc. 97.

inner and outer lives that together are in harmony with God and his purposes in us and in the world.”¹³ He clearly connects this type of authentic spirituality with healthy and fruitful ministry, “There is a strong connection between being with God and the ability to do things and be a gift for others.”¹⁴ Ministry flows from a vibrant, interactive relationship with God. Therefore, a pastor’s honest spiritual life is not for his own benefit, but for the benefit of others. Fryling affirms the purpose of this pursuit: “There are those who seek knowledge in order to edify others: that is love.”¹⁵

The focal points Fryling discusses fall in line with Jesus’ instruction to love God with all of one’s heart, soul, mind and strength and to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Mt 22:37-39). A desire to love God intimately enables one to love others in that same manner. Dwelling in God’s presence leads into the ability and desire to love others, which is God’s desire. So, there is a connection between these two focal points. The only way to truly be a gift to others is to be in a strong, vibrant relationship with God. The ability to care for and love people the way Jesus is talking about only comes through a strong connection with God. Fryling points out that what happens within a relationship with God shapes how people interact with others, “So belonging to God cannot be a point of pride or superiority. Rather it needs to be a relationship of gratitude and humility. Then our interior world can better shape our outside, organizational world.”¹⁶

¹³ Ibid., Loc. 139-140.

¹⁴ Ibid., Loc. 754-755.

¹⁵ Ibid., Loc. 538.

¹⁶ Ibid., Loc. 1225-6.

Fryling’s work directly applies to the overall emphasis of this project when he points out the rediscovery of spiritual disciplines: “Currently Christians from various denominational backgrounds are rediscovering spiritual disciplines.”¹⁷ As these disciplines are rediscovered and applied within the lives of pastoral leadership, there are natural, spiritually healthy results that cannot be manipulated or self-manufactured. Fryling shares his own experience with regularly practicing spiritual disciplines in his own life and the corresponding results from these disciplines. He acknowledges that “immediate tangible changes” were difficult to identify as the demands of work, family, and life in general continued on.¹⁸ However, there was a very significant change: “What did change, though, was an awareness that the seeds of spiritual life that had been planted in me were beginning to germinate and grow. I was experiencing a life of greater relational harmony with God, with myself and with others. I was growing in the practice of contentment.”¹⁹ This contentment has very practical and direct effects on interactions with other people and even how Christians view themselves. He continues, “When I get too combative with others or discouraged with myself, it is almost always an indication that my soul is not quiet or content.”²⁰

Quite often, a pastor’s inability to quiet his soul before God, comes from the pace and busyness of pastoral ministry. It is common for pastors to wrongly boast in their busyness. Fryling articulates this problem as he quotes from Eugene Peterson: “The word

¹⁷ Ibid., Loc. 809.

¹⁸ Ibid., Loc. 172-174.

¹⁹ Ibid., Loc. 175-176.

²⁰ Ibid., Loc. 336-337.

‘busy’ is the symptom not of commitment but of betrayal.”²¹ Fryling shares Dallas Willard’s answer to the question of what is needed to be spiritually healthy. Willard answered, “You must ruthlessly eliminate hurry from your life.”²²

Within pastoral ministry, tasks need to be accomplished and work needs to be done and there will be times when pastors work hard, but they are never to be hurried in any of it. As pastors are regularly practicing spiritual disciplines, they become increasingly aware that God is to be enjoyed in everything. When they work, work. When they play, play. All is to be enjoyed in the presence of God. When this is lived, there is no need for “hurry.” What “hurry” does is rob the experience of God in this moment.

If one rushes toward the future, he is missing what is happening right now. Only through the type of balance that Fryling is talking about is this possible. Times of solitude and silence draw people near to God where they are aware of His presence. This moves them to action within His presence, which leads back into times of contemplation. One focal point leads into the other. In the middle of busy schedules and family responsibilities, to intentionally be disciplined in spending quiet and peaceful times with God enables any pastor to live a less “hurried” life. Fryling explains this reality: “We genuinely want to slow down and be with people, but our pace of life does not allow it. ‘You’re so busy’ or ‘I’m really busy right now’ are statements that describe our realities, but they also have become a badge of honor.”²³

²¹ Ibid., Loc. 315-316.

²² Ibid., Loc. 318.

²³ Ibid., Loc. 920.

If there is a limitation from Fryling in light of this project, it may come as he addresses the challenge of how to go about being a spiritually authentic leader without seeking to be manipulative. Fryling shares a point that may be discouraging for the intent of this project. Even as pastors commit to this journey, communicating what is real in one's life is difficult. Since God knows one's heart and other people do not, there is a challenge in sharing this journey in a healthy way. Equipped with information about spiritual disciplines and informed about peoples' longing for authentic spiritual leadership, the danger is presenting oneself in a way that pastors know people want so see them. He writes, "I readily admit that I don't know how to fully express such spiritual authenticity in my leadership. I want to be genuine but I am also aware of the temptation to be vulnerable so that the vulnerability itself becomes manipulative in how I want people to see me."²⁴ As pastors are aware that people are seeking authentic spiritual leadership, there is a temptation to present oneself in a way that appears real, but is actually false. Being equipped with knowledge of the spiritual disciplines and how one grows in relationship with God through them is different than actually pursuing God through the regular practice of the disciplines personally. The hope of this project is to direct pastoral leadership away from this type of hypocrisy so that the path to authentic spiritual leadership is obvious, desirable, and doable. Fryling concludes, "Unfortunately, one of the most common perceptions and accusations about Christians in general is our hypocrisy and self-righteousness. We tell people and even want to legislate for people

²⁴ Ibid., Loc. 437-439.

how to live right, but don't live right ourselves."²⁵ This project seeks to remedy this problem.

Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life by John Calvin

Calvin's main point throughout this brief and succinct work is to provide direction to Christians in how to live this life with the proper perspective on who they are in relationship with God. There are five divisions within the *Booklet*. Each seeks to make one of the following points: Christians are to pursue holiness as they seek to make spiritual progress within their lives; denial of oneself frees him from longing for things of this world so that he would desire God's will; the challenges a Christian faces as he bears his cross to follow Jesus have many healthy formative results; living this life with eternity with God in full view provides perspective on the passing nature of this world; one's present life is intended to help him on his journey toward a heavenly kingdom as he acknowledges the gifts of this life as coming from God which leads to gratefulness.

Calvin makes a very powerful contribution to the overall direction of this project when he writes, "The gospel is not a doctrine of the tongue, but of life. It cannot be grasped by reason and memory only, but it is fully understood when it possesses the whole soul and penetrates to the inner recesses of the heart."²⁶ Within the Reformed tradition, Calvin is an authoritative and respected voice. He clearly articulates the need for an authentically lived life. He teaches that how one lives his lives in relationship with

²⁵ Ibid., Loc. 1219-1220.

²⁶ John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the True Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1952), 20-21.

God matters. A person cannot understand, or live into, the Gospel through mental assent alone to the teachings of Jesus.

Agreeing with Jesus is clearly not enough. Talking about Jesus is also not enough. Only through an authentic, full pursuit of God can the Gospel be fully understood. Within the Reformed tradition, it has been my experience that we like to defend our truths and articulate correct theology. What we are able to grasp with our minds or articulate with our tongues is simply not how we arrive at a full understanding of the Gospel. Calvin's voice is obviously highly regarded within the Reformed tradition, which is why his clear teaching on this topic is central to the theme of this project. He acknowledges that knowledge is needed to get one started in his relationship with God, but that is just the beginning. Calvin instructs, "We must assign first place to the knowledge of our religion, for that is the beginning of our salvation. But our religion will be unprofitable if it does not change our heart, pervade our manners, and transform us into new creatures."²⁷ A follower of Jesus needs to hear and be aware of the invitation to follow, but that is just the beginning, not the end of the Gospel message. As a spiritual leader within a community of faith, a pastor certainly must pursue this path, which leads to a full understanding of the Gospel. This is the only way for a pastor to be an authentic spiritual leader. Simply put, how a pastor lives matters.

Calvin discusses that the main point and purpose of one's life is to pursue and live into his holiness in Christ, which is a gift from Him.²⁸ He explains what his aim should

²⁷ Ibid., 21.

²⁸ Ibid., 17.

be: “Perfection must be the final mark at which we aim, and the goal for which we strive—let us steadily exert ourselves to reach a higher degree of holiness.”²⁹ He is talking about putting effort into how one seeks to become more like Christ as he lives into his holiness in Him. Spiritual progress is necessary if one is genuinely seeking to follow Christ. Calvin acknowledges that while Christians are aiming at perfection, none are perfect, but that does not mean they should not have a lofty goal.³⁰

Calvin also addresses some of the healthy results this project is seeking to cultivate when he writes, “Real self-denial makes us calm and patient.” He goes on to explain how when one surrenders himself completely to God, his desires for things of this world lessen as his longing for God increases. The point of this project is to seek God while no one is looking which causes health within the life of the pastor, and by extension, whatever ministry in which he may be involved. Calvin shares the winsome fruitfulness that comes from this authentic pursuit of God when he shares, “When a man knows that in all these matters God is his guide. The magistrate will then carry out his office with greater willingness. The father of a family will then perform his duties with more courage. And everyone in his respective sphere of life will show more patience, and will overcome the difficulties, care, miseries, and anxieties in his path.”³¹ Certainly, these healthy results would be true of a pastor as well.

A possible limitation of this resource in light of the ministry challenge of this project comes in connecting how Calvin stresses the importance of an active Christian’s

²⁹ Ibid., 22-23.

³⁰ Ibid., 21-22.

³¹ Ibid., 94.

life with the spiritual disciplines. He discusses self-denial, cross bearing, and hopefulness for the next world as guides for how believers should live their lives. Perhaps the connection is obvious, but it is helpful to indicate that these points are included within various spiritual disciplines. One denies herself when she serves others. She bears her cross as she lives through the challenges of life with the perspective that comes from disciplines such as worship, study, and Sabbath observance. Disciplines of silence and solitude draw her attention to her eternal relationship with God. So, while not directly connected within this resource, spiritual disciplines are the means of pursuing what Calvin is discussing.

***The Spirit of the Disciplines* by Dallas Willard**

The point of Willard's book is providing direction in human transformation through doing the things that Jesus did. He expounds, "Full participation in the life of God's Kingdom and in the vivid companionship of Christ comes to us only through appropriate exercise in the disciplines for life in the spirit."³² By actually following Jesus and doing what He did, one's life can be transformed both now and eternally. Willard is pointing beyond belief in Jesus and His teachings toward experience and action in relationship with Him now. This journey has powerful effects; "And what is the result? A new overall quality of human existence with corresponding new powers."³³ The spiritual disciplines mold and shape people to engage the Kingdom of God now and also prepare them for what is to come. Jesus' invitation is to follow him and become like him, seeking

³² Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines* (New York: Harper Collins, 1988), 26.

³³ *Ibid.*, 67.

to do the very things he did. When we “come to (him)—and learn from (him)—(we) find rest for (our) souls” (Mt 11:28-29). The spiritual disciplines seek to teach how to do this as disciples choose to obey Jesus in doing the things he did. Willard summarizes the main argument of his book as he writes, “The secret of the easy yoke is simple, actually. It is the intelligent, informed, unyielding resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life, not just in the moment of specific choice or action—(which) leads to a life with Jesus.”³⁴

Willard’s contribution to the topic of this project is clear. Regular use of spiritual disciplines draws one into an interactive and authentic relationship with God, which has powerful effects on his life and the impact his life may have within God’s Kingdom. He describes how this works: “The Bible also informs us that there are certain practices – solitude, prayer, fasting, celebration, and so forth – we can undertake, in cooperation with grace, to raise the level of our lives toward godliness.”³⁵ Since Scripture so clearly lays out how one matures in godliness, Willard poses a very direct and honest question to anyone who would assume leadership within the Church: “At this point in history, every leader among those who identify with Christ as Lord must ask himself or herself—‘How can I justify not giving myself to those practices until I am a spiritual powerhouse, the angels of God evidently ascending and descending upon me in my place?’”³⁶ The obvious answer is that there is no rational justification for failing to pursue God through regular, disciplined spiritual practices which lead into a life and witness that is powerful and fruit filled.

³⁴ Ibid., 10.

³⁵ Ibid., 69.

³⁶ Ibid., 246.

As will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3, Willard contributes to the topic of this project as he discusses monastic or ascetic practices and how Protestantism largely revolted against such practices as an overreaction to monasticism. He writes, “Protestantism made the mistake of simply rejecting the disciplines as essential to the new life in Christ. As a result, then, it has never been able to develop a coherent view of our part in salvation that would do justice either to the obvious directives of the New Testament for the disciple of Christ or to the facts of human psychology.”³⁷ Jesus’ invitation included more than intellectually agreeing with his teachings. A primary tenant of the Reformation was that humanity is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Agreeing with this truth and accepting Jesus into one’s life became the primary focus. This caused a pursuit of actually following Jesus by doing the things he did to become less important. As long as one believed and thought the correct thoughts regarding Jesus, then this belief was considered adequate. If the practices that actually train Christians to become like Jesus are marginalized, then they no longer have a path to become like Jesus. This seems obvious, but was nevertheless a result of Protestantism’s rejection of monastic practices.

Willard is also helpful as he addresses a need for balance between engagement and disengagement when he writes, “The disciplines of abstinence must be counterbalanced and supplemented by disciplines of engagement. Abstinence and engagement are the outbreathing and inbreathing of our spiritual lives, and we require

³⁷ Ibid., 147-148.

disciplines for both movements.”³⁸ Pastors are quite often very involved with disciplines of engagement while disciplines of abstinence are ignored because of ministry demands. As will soon be discussed, Peterson also strongly makes this point. If pastors are to be healthy in ministry, both are needed.

Willard unpacks some of the results that emerge from regular use of spiritual practices. Within a discussion of vigil combined with prayer, he points out that “such an activity implants in us, in the embodied personality that is the carrier of our abilities (and disabilities) a readiness and an ability to interact with God and our surroundings in a way not directly under our control.”³⁹ A result of spiritual practices is interaction with God in a real and spiritually attuned way, which humans do not have the capacity to manufacture. Willard states the capabilities of a spiritually disciplined individual when he explains, “The mark of disciplined persons is that they are able to do what needs to be done when it needs to be done.”⁴⁰ The premise of this doctoral project is built upon Willard’s observation. As a pastor is honestly seeking God through the use of spiritual disciplines, that pastor will be ready in the moment to act and respond in a way that is healthy and fruitful. A final word from Willard depicts the desired fruit this project is hoping to produce:

When through spiritual disciplines I become able heartily to bless those who curse me, pray without ceasing, to be at peace when not given credit for good deeds I’ve done, or to master the evil that comes my way, it is because my disciplinary activities have inwardly poised me for more and more interaction with the powers

³⁸ Ibid., 175.

³⁹ Ibid., 151.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

of the living God and his Kingdom. Such is the potential we tap into when we use the disciplines.⁴¹

A limitation in regard to this resource comes not from Willard, but from the suggested time frame of this project. Eight weeks is hopefully long enough to allow new habits and rhythms to take root, but everyone is on a lifelong journey. Willard provides perspective over one's entire lives: "The approach to wholeness is for humankind a process of great length and difficulty that engages all our own powers to their fullest extent over a long course of experience. But we don't like to hear this."⁴² The intent of this project is to propose a timeframe that is long enough to allow the desired results to begin to be seen while being short enough for pastors to agree to committing to it. As they begin to change, they will desire to continue on this path.

***Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity* by Eugene H. Peterson**

Peterson uses an image of a triangle, and most importantly the three angles contained therein, to describe what is most important within pastoral ministry. Usually the lines within a triangle are most obvious and he equates them to preaching, teaching, and administration. The angles are "prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction—Working the angles is what gives shape and integrity to the daily work of pastors and priests. If we get the angles right it is a simple matter to draw in the lines. But if we are careless with or

⁴¹ Ibid., 157.

⁴² Ibid., 70.

dismiss the angles, no matter how long or straight we draw the lines we will not have a triangle, a pastoral ministry.”⁴³

While these practices are centrally important to pastoral ministry, Peterson’s main argument is that these practices are often neglected because nobody is demanding them of pastors, and many pastors conduct their ministries to the approval of their congregations without being diligent or skilled in them.⁴⁴ He writes, “Great crowds of people have entered into a grand conspiracy to eliminate prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction from our lives—They do their best to fill our schedules with meetings and appointments so that there is time for neither solitude nor leisure to be before God, to ponder Scripture, to be unhurried with another person.”⁴⁵ Peterson argues that, “Without these practices there can be no developing substance in pastoral work. Without an adequate ‘ascetic’ the best of talents and best of intentions cannot prevent a thinning out into a life that becomes mostly impersonation.”⁴⁶ Peterson is talking about how common, and dangerously easy, it is for pastors to fake it within the Church today. The devil has been deceiving pastors into a lifeless life all in the name of service to the Church.

Staying busy by doing things for people is causing many pastors to miss the main point of what they are called to do. The devil is certainly seeking to keep pastors distracted from a real relationship with God. Pastors are under attack from the spiritual enemy. They need to understand clearly that they are in spiritual warfare. If the Church is

⁴³ Eugene H. Peterson, *Working the Angles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 5.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

the target of the devil's attacks, then the pastor's heart is the bull's eye. A pastor's heart must be kept protected from the attacks of the evil one and this protection comes from finding rest in God and in God alone. A spiritual leader within a community of faith must be growing spiritually by continually loving God with his whole heart.

Peterson continues his contribution to the topic for this project by saying, "The inner action of prayer takes precedence over the outer action of proclamation. The implication of this for pastoral work is plain: it begins in prayer. Anything creative, anything powerful, anything biblical—originates in prayer."⁴⁷ More than a balance in action and contemplation, Peterson is placing prayer and contemplation rightfully before action in ministry. Anything helpful comes out of a real, lived relationship with God. Anything less is counterfeit. Peterson also discusses how challenging it is to strike the correct balance between action and contemplation:

We need a strategy that takes into account the daily dilemma of living between these two sets of demands that seem to cancel each other out—The first set of demands is that we respond with compassionate attentiveness to the demands of the people around us—the lives of people hang by a thread on some of these demands and require discerning intelligence. The second set of demands is that we respond with reverent prayer to the demand of God for our attention—It means entering realms of spirit where wonder and adoration have space to develop, where play and delight have time to flourish.⁴⁸

This doctoral project intends to point pastors toward a healthy and fruitful balance between these two demands, which leads into a life lived in close communion with God. A desired outcome of this project would be growth in contentment and joy by continually living in the presence of God so that one's life might follow in the footsteps of Paul who

⁴⁷ Ibid., 40.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 65.

wrote, “I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil 4:12-13). Whatever challenges await in ministry, “Only a life committed to spiritual adventure, personal integrity, honest and alert searching prayer is adequate for the task—Thus, our primary task is to be a pilgrim. Our best preparation for the work of spiritual direction is an honest life.”⁴⁹ Peterson is describing the authenticity this doctoral project seeks to foster in the lives of pastors.

A limitation of this resource comes as Peterson addresses the difficulty of this journey when he writes, “The fact is nobody has an aptitude for it. It is hard work. It is unglamorous work—for the most part none of this is very exciting—‘Working the angles’ is what we do when nobody is watching. It is repetitive and often boring.”⁵⁰ The hope of this project is that the time spent alone with God would be pleasant, not drudgery. Since humans are spiritual beings created to be in relationship with Spirit, the time and opportunities one has to be alone with God are precious.

***The Naked Now* by Richard Rohr**

The main idea throughout Rohr’s book is that God is to be experienced in the present moment. Christianity is not just a belief system with which one agrees or disagrees, but knowledge that one is made for more. Each person is a spiritual being created and intended to be in an experiential relationship with God who is Spirit. Learning to experience God in the present moment is what Rohr calls the “Naked Now.”

⁴⁹ Ibid., 184.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 17-18.

He has clear instruction for spiritual leaders within the Church: “It’s just that you can lead people only as far as you yourself have gone—it’s clear that many clergy have never enjoyed the third heaven themselves, and they cannot teach what they do not know. Theological training without spiritual experience is deadly.”⁵¹ For Rohr, the “third heaven” is an experienced reality of the presence of God in the present moment. It is the argument of this project that people experience God through spiritual disciplines and through that experience comes a deep knowing and awareness of the presence of God every moment of their lives.

One of Rohr’s contributions to the topic of this project comes as a corrective to a common belief within the Reformed tradition. They tend to think that experience of God is entirely in one’s head. They pride themselves on solid theology, but the problem is that they think they have everything figured out. The attempt of finite, limited people seeking to explain or understand the infinite and limitless is limiting. People from the Reformed tradition can learn from the larger Church by getting out of their heads, and experiencing the continual presence of God. Becoming increasingly aware of God in everything, including the present moment, is the move toward a contemplative experience which is difficult to contradict. This is not just an idea with which one can agree or disagree; it is participatory, which is more compelling. Rohr instructs that the Church has been “telling people what to know more than how to know, telling people what to see more than how

⁵¹ Richard Rohr, *The Naked Now*, 30.

to see.”⁵² When the teaching of the Church is reduced to a belief system, something one intellectually agrees with or not, people are literally missing the experience of a lifetime.

Rohr contends that within the Church, if one claims to be following Jesus, then there must be more to following Him than agreeing with a belief system. Ultimately people will become frustrated with this as the primary and only message of the Church because it does not give voice to the deeper longings of a spiritual reality. More than assent to a belief system, the Christian life is a dynamic and continual interaction with the Divine. People are made in the image of God and the Spirit is already within them. Rohr teaches, “True spirituality—is a search for divine union now.”⁵³ This is the current reality which is most often, simply unrecognized. People need to cultivate their “third eye” to truly see this reality.⁵⁴ This new way of seeing and perceiving is the only way to find true understanding.⁵⁵ This must be experienced, not just believed. Rohr contends that contemplation is this turn toward experiencing God in this moment. When one experiences God now and sees this reality to be true, he is never the same. Rohr provides further direction, “Don’t try to ‘believe’ in the Holy Spirit as one doctrine among others. Instead, practice drawing from this deep well within you, and then you will naturally believe. Put the horse first, and it will draw the cart.”⁵⁶ Since God is omnipresent, Rohr is seeking to instruct how to become increasingly aware of this immediate reality. He

⁵² Ibid., 33.

⁵³ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 28.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 132.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 21.

teaches, “Immediate, unmediated contact with the moment is the clearest path to divine union; naked, undefended, and non dual presence has the best chance of encountering the Real Presence.”⁵⁷

The thrust of this project is advancing intimacy with God, which will have results in ministry. Rohr argues, “In the world of religion, non dual seers are the only experts. Sinners, saints, lovers, and poets, and all those who have swum in the ocean of mercy can hold contrary evidence together because they have allowed God to first of all do it in them—over and over again.”⁵⁸ The ability to see God presently moving and acting in one’s life and in the world certainly would allow any pastor to point towards the Reality he is able to see to be true.

A possible limitation of this resource in light of the ministry challenge of this project would be people from the author’s tradition to dismiss Rohr’s teaching because he is outside of the Reformed circle. This would be an unfortunate conclusion since Rohr’s message has been clearly articulated within the Reformed tradition through the Puritans’ use of spiritual practices, which will be discussed in Chapter 3. Seemingly, Christians of any denomination should learn from other sects within the Church and remember a rich, shared, as well as denominationally specific history.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 105.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 83.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGY OF THE NEW MINISTRY INITIATIVE

This chapter is intended to inform Christians to think correctly about God and themselves, which supports the need for this project. The Puritans help reclaim spiritual practices within the Reformed tradition. An honest and vast account of the challenge of maintaining a healthy balance between action and contemplation throughout the history of the Church will ground the need for this project. Lessons from Jesus and Paul will point toward the importance of retreating into prayerful times with God and the effects those moments have on pastors and their ministries. This will lead into a discussion concerning the centrality of getting this balance between action and contemplation correct which leads into the type of authentic spiritual leadership that every church needs.

This project is seeking to address the great need for authentic spiritual leaders within the Church today. Several years ago, there was a discussion within my pastor's group about how pastors are viewed differently within contexts than leaders from other religions. There was agreement that leaders within Islam, Judaism, or even tribal religions, were viewed primarily as holy people. This is often not the case for pastors in America. Pastors in North America are viewed as CEOs, administrators, or charismatic

speakers. Even though this is the reality within the Church today, this does not mean that pastors should not seek to be holy people. While people want pastors to speak well, lead well, and run efficient meetings, what they actually need from their pastors is authentic spiritual leadership. Rather than catering to the expectations of people, pastors must focus on who they are in relationship to God. If a pastor is not actively seeking to be a holy person, they have nothing to offer the people they serve within the church. This is the path of sanctification, which is both being and becoming holy. More than anything else a pastor does, the pursuit of God by doing the things Jesus did, must be the most important thing pastors do. Only then will any pastor be able to be the kind of person through whom the Holy Spirit may work. What a pastor does, then naturally flows out of who they are.

As a spiritual leader within a community of faith, pastors can only lead people where they have gone. They simply cannot lead others to a place they have not been. It is the hope of this project that pastors would desire to grow and deepen in their awareness and experience of God. Authentic spiritual leadership is what the Church needs. McNeal provides some perspective for current pastoral leadership: “God’s call is always relevant to the times. He is not in the business of recruiting leaders to serve the past. He anticipates the need and then calls and equips leaders for each era.”¹ The current era requires authentic spiritual leadership from its pastors.

This project is seeking to establish spiritual practices as the means to an authentic relationship with God where a pastor’s awareness of the movement and actions of God are increasing. Cynthia Bourgeault teaches that, “Contemplation—is simply seeing from—the level of our spiritual awareness—It is this consciousness itself that is the

¹ McNeal, *A Work of the Heart*, 100.

attained state of contemplation, and it is neither infused nor acquired, because it was never absent, only unrecognized.”² The result this project seeks to produce is an awareness of the continual presence of God.

A common problem with the Church today is that people think they can already see. Rohr explains the challenge: “If we are to believe Jesus, nothing is more dangerous than people who presume they already see. God can most easily be lost by being thought found.”³ When the message of Jesus has been reduced to intellectual assent, people within the Church think they are found when in fact they have not yet heard or seen the full message of Jesus.

It is commonly believed within the Church today that the message of Jesus means simply getting into heaven upon death. This limited understanding of Jesus’ salvation message has no connection with the life one has to live right now, and therefore has no connection with character transformation. This limited understanding of the Gospel message then allows people to sit, idly by, until they die. Certainly Jesus’ invitation was not into a life of complacency. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ is much more than this. Followers of Jesus are invited to live their lives within God’s Kingdom right now, not after they die. This misunderstanding of the Gospel is commonly held by many people within my ministry context. Within the Reformed tradition, we believe the correct things about Jesus and we accept them to be true. The result of this belief and profession is inactivity and emptiness. If everything is about what will happen in the future, then

² Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Lanham, MD: Cowley Publications, 2004), 77.

³ Richard Rohr, *Everything Belongs: The Gift of Contemplative Prayer* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1999), 31.

little attention is given to what God is doing today. If one only need believe the correct things, then there is no need for God's power or involvement in one's immediate life. If she does not even say she believes God desires something of her in this life, then she certainly will not pursue His help to live this life in surrender to Him.

What I have experienced within my tradition is that people will seek to obey God and His instructions within Scripture out of gratitude for not having to go to hell. If their sins are forgiven, then they should be thankful for this forgiveness. This should then motivate people to live a life of obedience out of gratitude for this deliverance. The idea that the spiritual disciplines help people be holy and become more like Christ is not central in how one responds to this limited gospel. People are generally against the idea that they need to go through anything difficult. Many people are "firmly prejudiced against disciplinary activities as a part of the religious life—'mortification' – self denial, the disciplining of one's natural impulses – happens to be a central teaching of the New Testament is conveniently ignored."⁴ People can focus on belief and grace, which leaves little room for the practice of disciplines or an effort to strive toward holiness. This response of gratitude is generally one's own doing. There is little understanding of the power of God moving within one's life.

In *The Imitation of Christ*, Thomas a'Kempis provides a corrective by focusing attention on the life of Christ and how one is to follow Him. This instruction from a'Kempis was practical and direct and focused on denial of self and a willingness to suffer one's cross as he follows his example, Jesus. He teaches a strong emphasis on holy living. The pursuit of holiness is a central teaching within Scripture that seems to be

⁴ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 133.

ignored within the Church today. Disciples are called to be holy (1 Cor 1:2; Rom 12:1). The message of Jesus has been reduced to a belief system rather than an invitation to follow Him, live like Him, and become like Him. A'Kempis writes, "At the Day of Judgment it will be demanded of us, not what we have read, but what we have done; not how well we have spoken, but how holy we have lived."⁵ This living is a constant denial of self and a devotion to God. He continues, "We ought to daily renew our vows, and to kindle our hearts to zeal, as if each day were the first day of our conversion."⁶ A'Kempis repeats Jesus' instruction for constant surrender and provides detailed instruction in how to do this. The path of following Jesus is more than intellectual ascent, and a'Kempis provides a great corrective to the current misunderstanding of the Gospel within the Church today.

Within this misunderstanding of the Gospel, what one chooses to do or not do does not really matter because ultimately one is going to Heaven anyway. This "gospel then becomes a 'gospel of sin management.' Transformation of life and character is not part of the redemptive message. Moment-to-moment human reality in its depths is not the arena of faith and eternal living."⁷ People are stuck in belief. The real tragedy here is that people think they understand and have responded to the Gospel when, in fact, they have never really heard it. They are inoculated to a fuller understanding of the Good News because they think they have it. Willard continues, "Those in the wider world who reject

⁵ Thomas a' Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ* (Digireads.com Publishing, 2009), Kindle EBook: Chapter 3, Loc. 200.

⁶ Ibid., Chapter 19, Loc. 498.

⁷ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Kindle EBook: Chapter 2, Loc. 945.

those gospels will believe that what they have rejected is the gospel of Jesus Christ himself – when, in fact, they haven't yet heard it.”⁸

The Gospel is more than intellectual assent to the teachings of Jesus. One is invited to put confidence in Jesus for everything and live with Him as His disciple now in His Kingdom. Pastors certainly can and should be living into this immediate and eternal reality in order to point others in the correct direction. With eyes of faith fully open, one is invited to participate in God's Kingdom today and every day. This is the full and abundant life Jesus came to provide (Jn 10:10). This full understanding of the Gospel involves and includes forgiveness, heaven, liberation, and so much more. Willard teaches, “If we attend to what he (Jesus) actually said, it becomes clear that his gospel concerned only the new accessibility of the kingdom to humanity through himself.”⁹ This understanding of the Gospel allows one to see her life, both now and forever, within the context of God's Kingdom. Her life has meaning and purpose and influence on others as she participates with God in what He is already doing. Her eyes of faith are opened and how she sees people changes.

People, made in the image of God, are spiritual beings. Since this is the case, pastors become increasingly aware that people are eternal spiritual beings and, they have a responsibility to them so they may become aware of the reality of their own existence and how their life can be lived in the presence of God. C.S. Lewis explains, “There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal—It is immortals whom we joke

⁸ Ibid., Chapter 2, Loc. 1270.

⁹ Ibid., Chapter 1, Loc. 687.

with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit.”¹⁰ Becoming increasingly aware of the spiritual eternal reality of everyone certainly effects how someone interacts with people. Lewis continues, “Your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses.”¹¹ People are precious and valuable and pastors are uniquely positioned to help others become aware of their own reality and what is available to them within God’s Kingdom as they are authentically living within this Kingdom. The most loving thing pastors can do for those they serve is to live their lives confidently within God’s Kingdom and then point others to this knowledge and reality. God desires that people seek Him (Mt 6:33). When they do, they are promised that God will be found. This is the point of the spiritual disciplines. They are an effort to seek God and His Kingdom.

In following Jesus, people learn to live their lives as He would lead them. This makes human transformation part of journey. As has been established in Chapter 2, the spiritual disciplines this project suggests are the means by which God transforms, which is the process of sanctification. This is a move beyond belief in Jesus and a move toward experience and action. The spiritual disciplines mold and shape someone to engage with God now and prepare her for what God may do in the future. Rohr states that if he is going to continue in ministry with integrity, then, “I have to really know what I know, really believe what I believe, and my life has to be more experiential and intimate than mere repetition of formulas and doctrines.”¹² The purpose of this project is to embrace the full invitation of Jesus to become like Him by entering into an authentic relationship

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: Simon & Schuster/HarperCollins, 1949), Kindle EBook, Loc. 451.

¹¹ Ibid., Loc. 456.

¹² Richard Rohr, *Contemplation in Action* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2006), 17.

with Him where one is changing, increasingly becoming like Him which is the path of sanctification. This is both being and becoming holy.

Not just pastors, but many people from the Reformed tradition need to get beyond a destructive need to rationally understand everything. Coming from the Reformed tradition, many think they can already see, but are blind to the fullness of Jesus' ministry. They really cannot process much of Jesus' ministry if they have to rationally understand it first. The miracle accounts are really not understandable. They are beyond what a rational mind can process. If one can accept the miracles of Jesus as true and real, it is not a large step to embrace what God may want to do in his life that could be beyond his understanding such as experiencing His peace in an ongoing fashion (Phil 4:7). As this awareness of God increases through the use of spiritual practices, it is helpful to acknowledge doubts within this journey.

As has been established for many people coming from the Reformed Tradition, we are so much "in our heads" that experience is considered suspect. It is generally believed that experience cannot be trusted. There is a tendency to rely on what one knows and can explain and defend. The journey this project proposes is pointing toward an experience with God, which cannot be controlled nor defined. Also, any given person's experience might be different and one does not experience something until they experience it. One can talk about experience and explain what happened, but until it happens to him, it is not real. Even when it does happen, he doubts it. He may ask, "Was that what I thought it was, or was it something else?" Brueggemann reflects on this reality: "As I reflect on ministry—I know in the hidden places that the real restraints are

not in my understanding or in the receptivity of other people. Rather, the restraints come from my own unsureness about this perception.”¹³ Brueggeman goes on to discuss how he is unsure and uncertain about how God will act. While acknowledging this unknown, this project humbly and confidently points pastors, and those who may participate in their ministry, toward a real and authentic experience with God.

Spiritual Practices within Puritanism

In the previous chapter, it was established that ascetic, spiritual practices have not been prioritized or regularly practiced within Protestant churches today. Out of skepticism or ignorance, what has been a treasure within the Church needs to be remembered and reclaimed. Richard Baxter clearly teaches that these spiritual practices are needed within healthy pastoral leadership. Baxter addressed the same challenge in the 1600s this project seeks to address. He continually taught that pastors need to nurture a real and vibrant relationship with God if they are to have any healthy effect on others. He writes, “See that the work of saving grace be thoroughly wrought in your own souls. Take heed to yourselves, lest you be void of that saving grace of God which you offer to others—lest, while you proclaim to the world the necessity of a Saviour, your own hearts should neglect him, and you should miss of an interest in him and his saving benefits.”¹⁴ Baxter is addressing the authentic relationship with God this project is seeking to address. He continues, “Take heed, therefore, to yourselves first, that you be that which you

¹³ Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1978), 118.

¹⁴ Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (East Peoria, IL: Versa Press, Inc., 2012), 53.

persuade your hearers to be, and believe that which you persuade them to believe, and heartily entertain that Saviour whom you offer to them.”¹⁵

Baxter, being a Puritan, solidly places the need for authentic spiritual leadership within the Reformed tradition. As he saw this problem and sought to foster authentic spiritual leadership, the same challenge continues today and his words are powerfully applicable: “They (meaning pastors) may preach a Saviour whom they know, and may feel what they speak, and may commend the riches of the gospel from their own experience.”¹⁶ Baxter explains that if pastors do not directly and intimately know God then they “worship an unknown God, and preach an unknown Christ, pray through an unknown Spirit, recommend a state of holiness and communion with God, and a glory and a happiness which are all unknown, and like to be unknown to them for ever.”¹⁷

Baxter instructs that when pastors have an authentic relationship with God, it will positively effect those they seek to care for. He writes, “They will likely feel when you have been much with God: that which is most on your hearts, is like to be most in their ears—Above all, be much in secret prayer and meditation.”¹⁸ Baxter also asks the question this project directly seeks to address, “Now, if the work of the Lord be not soundly done upon your own hearts, how can you expect that he will bless your labours

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ Ibid., 56.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 61-62.

for effecting it in others?”¹⁹ Baxter’s teaching points toward the need for authentic spiritual leadership within the Reformed tradition.

Tom Schwanda also roots the need for spiritual practices within the Reformed tradition by reclaiming the teaching of Isaac Ambrose, who was a Puritan living in the 1600s. Schwanda writes, “There are those within the Protestant tradition who are apologetic or even embarrassed when discussing the topic of spirituality. Due to historical amnesia, many contemporary Evangelical and Reformed Christians are unaware of the richness of their spiritual roots.”²⁰ He discusses how this richness can be reclaimed by using spiritual practices that have been trusted throughout the history of the Church: “Ambrose, like Christians for hundreds of years before him, sought to prepare and cultivate his heart through the use of spiritual disciplines, or duties, as he preferred to call them—Ambrose recognizes from studying his own heart that the intentional choices that he makes to engage them reaps rich dividends in his relationship with God.”²¹ As these practices are enacted, the result this project seeks to foster within the lives of pastors is able to happen. Schwanda agrees: “Being a physician of the soul requires the blending of contemplation and action. The contemplative attitude provides the sensitivity and the ability to observe God’s presence within the life of another person—this critical marriage between contemplation and action has had a long and venerated history

¹⁹ Ibid., 80.

²⁰ Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 12.

²¹ Ibid., 82.

throughout Christian spirituality.”²² This chapter will seek to unpack this venerated history.

Schwanda is helping pastors reclaim spiritual practices by accurately connecting them within the Reformed tradition of Puritanism. Ambrose sought to live into his own teaching which led him into healthy and sustained ministry. Even when ministry was difficult, “Rather than becoming bitter and attacking those who opposed him, Ambrose was cheered by the sweetness of God and lifted his heart in contemplative gratitude towards God—he discovered an inner freedom that encouraged him to continue in ministry.”²³ This balance between action and contemplation also produced the same results in Ambrose’s life that this project seeks to nurture in the lives of pastors. A dramatically increased awareness of the presence of God is possible through consistent use of spiritual practices.²⁴ Schwanda helps connect the main purpose of this project to the Reformed tradition when he writes, “There are promising signs that more Reformed and Evangelical theologians are embracing a contemplative piety today—this retrieval is a necessity so that Reformed and Evangelical Christians can be reconnected with the fullness of their own roots and tradition.”²⁵ Schwanda has established through the study of Ambrose, that the spiritual practices this project seeks to employ are solidly rooted within the Reformed tradition and need to be reclaimed.

²² Ibid., 100.

²³ Ibid., 114.

²⁴ Ibid., 187, 196.

²⁵ Ibid., 230-231.

Church History: An Historical Challenge

Looking beyond both Protestantism and the Reformed Tradition to the last 2,000 years of Church history reveals that the problem this project addresses has been an historic challenge within the Church. This need for balance between action and contemplation has been true throughout the history of the Church. Church history has proven this healthy balance has been challenging to maintain.

Until the fourth century, followers of Jesus, the Christ, sought to live their lives patterned from Jesus' example. As the Church came under Roman leadership, some followers of Jesus escaped to the deserts of Egypt and Syria to practice what they understood to be a more faithful following of Jesus. Bourgeault explains, "Their teaching and practices furnish the curriculum of Christianity's first and in some ways still most influential school of inner awakening."²⁶ Their main attempt was to pray without ceasing and they sought to do that through the "practice of attention."²⁷ Quite simply, "when you're working, work; when you're praying, pray—learning to confine the mind within the present moment without allowing it to wander. Attention is certainly the foundational skill of all meditation, and it is clearly the foundation of desert spirituality."²⁸ This project is seeking to return to Christianity's early roots. Within today's church culture, meditative practices are perceived as New Age at best or anti-Christian at worst. It is significantly helpful to see that these practices do not belong primarily to other religions. These practices are centrally important in one's growth in Christ. Jesus led by his own

²⁶ Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, 61.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 62.

example and his early followers did the same. Therefore, pastors are not entering into a foreign land of bizarre mystical experience; rather, this is a return to deep roots, following the One who is the way, the truth, and the life.

As Fryling helped to establish in the previous chapter, a healthy balance between contemplation and action is critically important for spiritually authentic pastoral leadership. Augustine addressed this same issue. Throughout his own ministry, he sought to balance the active and contemplative life. The tension between the two is something with which he struggled. Edward Smither explains, “Augustine’s monastic and ecclesiastical roles became intertwined to the point that his burden for the ministry and ‘active life’ took precedent over the ‘contemplative life’ of the monastery. He would wrestle with this tension for the duration of his ministry as a bishop-monk.”²⁹ A bishop is one who is actively involved in ministry with people. A monk is one who is cloistered off in a monastery in contemplation. For Augustine, a balance between the two was necessary. One should not be chosen over the other; both are needed. Smither, continues, “Augustine culminated his monastic itinerary by effectively clericalizing the monk and monasticizing the cleric.”³⁰ Augustine’s challenge is the same challenge this project seeks to address. It is amazing that new things are rarely new; they are, in fact, old and forgotten. The struggle to find balance in ministry today between a deep contemplative life and an active life of service has been a struggle for centuries. This reality should give pastors a little perspective on their own journey. This is an historic challenge for pastoral leadership. The hope of this project is that pastors within the Church today would

²⁹ Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008), 148.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 155.

increasingly become “monasticized.” In order for this to happen, there must be openness to monastic and ascetic practices as both normal and needed within an authentic relationship with Jesus Christ. When much of Protestantism dismissed the contemplative aspects of ministry, there was not much to offset the drive to “do” ministry. Reclaiming a healthy balance between action and contemplation is necessary for healthy and fruitful pastoral leadership.

Gregory Nazianzen also struggled with this tension between action and contemplation. He writes, “I chose a middle way between [a life that was] unfettered and one that was integrated, one that combined the contemplation of the former with the service of the later.”³¹ As Gregory struggled with this common ministry challenge, he found a helpful example in Athanasius: “Gregory explains that Athanasius was the perfect model of the contemplative priest. He combined the active life of ministry with the contemplative life of the ascetic.”³² Gregory viewed Athanasius as a successful and saintly bishop “because (he) found the proper balance between the active and contemplative life.”³³ Apparently, striking the proper balance is not easy. Augustine trained people to balance both action and contemplation and Gregory had to intentionally choose a middle way. This indicates the challenge in finding the right balance between the two. Again, pastors today are not alone in this journey. It is helpful to realize that this need to be near to God in order to be a healthy and helpful pastor has been present throughout the history of the Church.

³¹ George E. Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 64.

³² *Ibid.*, 62.

³³ *Ibid.*, 63.

This is not a recent struggle for clergy seeking to be relevant today. Nazianzen also wrote, “One must be cleansed before cleansing others; wise to make others wise; enlightened to give light; near to God to lead others; sanctified to sanctify; possessing the hands of leadership to lead; instructed to give instruction.”³⁴ Bonaventure would later agree: “Someone who accepts responsibility for making others good should have already learned the self-discipline necessary for goodness, so that his Christian virtue has become habitual through constant practice.”³⁵ Simply put, a pastor must be following Jesus closely doing the things He did, in order to help others do the same.

Pope Gregory I also grappled with this balance between action and contemplation for healthy pastoral leaders as he believed, “(the) ideal spiritual father balanced the contemplation of the isolated ascetic and the action of the well-trained administrator— Thus his “active contemplative” was not only a more effective leader but a better Christian than either the recluse or the administrator.”³⁶ What is both affirming and fascinating is the fact that Pope Gregory’s advice reflects the purpose of this project. Pastoral leadership in the Church today must cultivate a deep, contemplative life and relationship with God. Continually drawing from this deep well enables pastors to enter into active ministry with perspective, wisdom, and authority simply because their journey is real and authentic.

This balance between an active and contemplative life has always been needed within the Church in order for healthy ministry to occur. In *The Potter’s Rib*, Williams

³⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁵ Bonaventure, *The Character of a Christian Leader* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Books, 1978), 4.

³⁶ Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church*, 134-5.

shares Augustine's path for gaining wisdom: "Augustine declared that to obtain wisdom he desired to know that which he did not know: 'God and the soul,' nothing else. 'I love nothing but God and the soul, and I know neither.'"³⁷ The path to wisdom, according to Augustine, was a knowledge of God and of human creatures. Calvin would later agree with Augustine adding, "Nearly all the wisdom we possess—consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves."³⁸ He also insists that, "No one 'achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God's face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself'"³⁹ So, Calvin is continuing to emphasize the importance of contemplation. Only through a deep experience with God does one have a correct view of herself and God. Her actions, within life and ministry, would then naturally flow from the knowledge of this wisdom.

Within the book, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians*, James Lawson articulates an impressive continuity between the spiritual experiences of many influential Christian leaders throughout the history of the Church. From scriptural characters through the early church to present day, there is a "wonderful harmony in the experiences related."⁴⁰ Regardless of denomination, country, or language, faithful followers of Jesus Christ over the past 2,000 years have had a very similar experience. People are spiritual beings seeking to be in relationship with God. The language they use to describe this reality may be different, but Lawson argues that experience with God is basically the

³⁷ Williams, *The Potter's Rib*, 46.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ James G. Lawson, *Deeper Experiences of Famous Christians* (Memphis: Glad Tidings Publishing Company, 2010), 2.

same. Within one book, there is “overwhelming evidence in favor of the fact that such a deep Christian experience may really be attained.”⁴¹ The overarching evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit throughout history is powerful and moving. Pastors seeking to connect with God in a way that is real and authentic are part of this same work and movement of the Holy Spirit throughout the history of the Church.

As pastors enjoy this same experience and relationship with God, they are able to invite others into this reality. They can also have the same experience. Willard explains, “The inner reality of the spiritual world is available to all who are willing to search for it. Often I have discovered that those who so freely debunk the spiritual world have never taken ten minutes to investigate whether or not such a world really exists.”⁴² The spiritual world does exist and the hope of this project is that pastors would know and experience this reality firsthand through the use of spiritual practices which bring this deeper and fuller awareness.

Brother Lawrence is a great example of continually living in the awareness of the presence of God. He writes, “In order to form a habit of conversing with God continually—we must at 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.”⁴³ It is the preferred future of this project that as pastors enter into these practices, their experience would be similar. The longer these spiritual disciplines are practiced, the easier they become. These disciplines can bring a healthy rhythm. This may take some time, but

⁴¹ Ibid., 3.

⁴² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Loc. 582.

⁴³ Brother Lawrence, *Practice of the Presence of God*, 2nd Conversation, Loc. 48.

once pointed in the right direction, rest can be found within the disciplines. Brother Lawrence also said that his most usual method for remaining in the presence of God was simple attention.⁴⁴ Seeking to always be aware of the fact that there is no better place to be than in the presence of God helps bring continual awareness of His presence.

On being able to be continually aware of the presence of God, Willard seeks to teach people how they can “live confidently in a personal walk that is complemented by an ongoing conversational relationship with God.”⁴⁵ His instruction is that people are made for this and an interactive relationship with God is normal, not abnormal. Scripture always “presents the relationship between God and the believer as more like a friendship.”⁴⁶ Friends speak to each other. If they did not, the friendship would suffer or not even be a friendship at all. Willard demystifies the ability of every believer to hear God. This is not for the spiritual elite; everyone is made to be in interactive relationship. People either do not expect it to happen or will not listen.⁴⁷ As pastors become more deeply aware of this continual eternal friendship with God, they are able to lead into this reality. As they do, they need to hear the simplicity of Willard’s definition of being a disciple of Jesus. Within the Church, too often “discipleship” is made into something that is for the elite, older, mature people. It seems out of reach for most people. Choosing to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 2nd Letter, Loc. 215.

⁴⁵ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), Kindle EBook: Preface, Loc. 77.

⁴⁶ Ibid., Chapter 1, Loc. 184.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Chapter 4, Loc. 800.

follow Jesus makes one a disciple or student of Him.⁴⁸ Willard writes, “If I am Jesus’ disciple that means I am with him to learn from him how to be like him.”⁴⁹ This is not terribly complicated: “To make a mystery of it (being a disciple) is to misunderstand it.”⁵⁰

However, it is easy to understand how people can misunderstand going about devotion and discipleship to Jesus. Many of the wonderful and healthy movements within the Church over the past 2,000 years often led to legalism. This happens when well-intended instructions become legalistic rules to follow. This project is vulnerable to the same danger. Whether from Wesley’s instruction toward perfect love or Calvin’s toward holiness, when well-intended instructions become simply rules to follow, legalism is the result. This also happened within the monastic orders. If the instruction of this project in the use of spiritual practices becomes following the rules and instructions rather than living into an interactive relationship with God, the end result will be legalism.

This is why Jesus was always so upset with the Pharisees. They had reduced their experience with God down to a set of rules. If they followed the rules, they felt they were living the good life. Jesus continually pointed beyond the law, to the Giver of the law. It is about being in a relationship with God. A healthy and correct practice of the spiritual disciplines allows the means by which one seeks to live into this relationship. If there are rules to be followed, legalism will be the result.

⁴⁸ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Chapter 8, Loc. 5668.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, Chapter 8, Loc. 5267.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, Chapter 8, Loc. 5363.

While discipleship to Jesus should not be overly complicated, it is still a difficult and narrow path (Mt 7:14). Jesus never said life would be easy, but it would be full and abundant. Thomas a’Kempis agrees: “It is great skill to know how to live with Jesus, and to know how to hold Jesus is great wisdom.”⁵¹ Practicing the disciplines does take great skill, but they are the way to experience and enter into an authentic relationship with God. Ultimately, as one follows this narrow path, her desire is to live and be with God. A’Kempis writes, “Behold, God is mine, and all things are mine! What will I more, and what more happy thing can I desire?”⁵² As pastors learn the skills of following Jesus through the disciplines, pursuing a balance between action in ministry and contemplative practices with God, they realize anyone can do this. A deeper desire and longing for more of what is real quickens and encourages pastors to continue on this path.

This brief history lesson is intended to allow pastors to be a little gentler with themselves, as well as gain a larger picture of a common struggle. The current struggle is not new, nor is it unto this generation alone. It is a refreshing realization to understand this tension has been in play for ministry leaders for a very long time. This project points in a direction of learning the balance that is so needed within life and ministry. Pope Gregory I agrees as he taught, “The absence of contemplation made the pastoral life unbearable. For this reason, he insisted that clerics maintain a healthy contemplative life.”⁵³ If pastors are feeling any level of “burn out” within their ministry, then they need to hear Pope Gregory I’s warning as well as the purpose of this project. Since there is

⁵¹ a’Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, Chapter 8, Loc. 989.

⁵² Ibid., Chapter 34, Loc. 2117.

⁵³ Demacopoulos, *Five Models of Spiritual Direction in the Early Church*, 146.

such an emphasis on the tasks a pastor does, it is easy to become consumed with the actions of ministry. Without nurturing an inner relationship with God, ministry soon becomes lifeless and “unbearable.” That is why Pope Gregory I instructed spiritual fathers to “strike a balance between action and contemplation.”⁵⁴

Scriptural Examples: Jesus and Paul

Certainly the best example of someone who lived into this balance between action and contemplation was Jesus himself. If his followers desire this same balance, then they should do what he did. Unfortunately, “it seems that we Christians have been worshipping Jesus’ journey instead of doing his journey.”⁵⁵ Jesus’ followers need to seek to live as he lived. Jesus sets the example in how to get this balance between action and contemplation correct. If a disciple is seeking to follow him, then he certainly should pattern his lives after Him. Following Jesus means more than just agreeing with His teaching. It involves doing what He did in the manner and rhythm in which He did them. Simply agreeing with Jesus is not enough. To follow Him into healthy and fruitful ministry within His Church, pastors can live into an authentic and genuine relationship with God as they spend time alone with God, as Jesus did.

Mark 1:35 says, “Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.” The application for this passage to the purpose of this project is obvious. Simply, Jesus spent time alone in prayer. What needs to be noted is what happens immediately before and after this

⁵⁴ Ibid., 160.

⁵⁵ Rohr, *Everything Belongs*, 20.

moment of silence and solitude. Prior to this passage, Jesus was healing many people. After this passage, Simon interrupted Jesus and explains that many people are looking for Him. This is a perfect example of how the demands, needs, and expectations of people can easily become overwhelming. People also have high demands of pastors and their time. It is centrally important that pastors discipline themselves to have time alone with God. Jesus retreated from people to spend time alone with God.

A similar pattern is recorded in Mark 6:30-32: “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, ‘Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.’ So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.” Immediately before this passage, Jesus had sent them out in ministry and they returned excited about sharing what had happened. The passage communicates there were so many people around that they could not even eat. After a time of very active engagement in ministry, Jesus, gives them the direct instruction to retreat into solitary rest. Again, the application to the purpose of this project is direct. Even in times when ministry is exciting and many people are actively engaged, there is still the need, as Jesus Himself directs, to retreat to spend time alone with God.

This pattern is seen again on the day Jesus feeds the five thousand. That night, Jesus sends His disciples off in a boat and, “After leaving them, he went up on a mountainside to pray” (Mk 6:46). Later that same night, He would walk on water out to His disciples, rescuing them from the winds and miraculously displaying His power. In

between these two miraculous moments in ministry, the discipline and desire of Jesus to spend time in prayer can be seen.

There are many other passages that record Jesus retreating into prayerful solitude. In Luke 5:16, we are told, “Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.” Immediately before and after this passage, Jesus healed people. It is important to note that retreating into solitude was a regular practice for Jesus. Luke 6:12 says, “One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to prayer, and spent the night praying to God.” This passage points, not only to the discipline of time alone with God, but also for extended times alone with God. Before Jesus began ministry, He spent forty days alone fasting in the desert (Mt 4:1-2) and prior to His arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus retreated with His disciples in prayer (Mt 26:36-46). These passages point toward Jesus’ example of a healthy balance between active ministry and prayerful times of solitude and silence.

Jesus certainly was a leader and His leadership was respected. He had an intrinsic authority. He was real, honest, and credible. As pastors seek to be authentic in their relationship with Jesus Christ and seek to serve Him within the church, they need to balance action and contemplation within ministry as Jesus did.

Paul writes that he learned the secret of being content regardless of his current circumstances. He had confidence that he could do “everything through him who gives (him) strength.” (Phil 4:12-13). A desired outcome of this project would be growth in the kind of joy and contentment Paul continually experienced. Paul writes this secret must be learned.

Paul's life and ministry was not always easy. Scripture communicates he worked hard, was beaten, imprisoned, flogged, lashed, stoned, exposed to death, shipwrecked, constantly on the move, in danger nearly everywhere, hungry, and thirsty (2 Cor 11:23-29). And yet, even while in prison, he calls others to, "Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" (Phil 4:4). Paul provides instruction in how to have this attitude a few verses later when he instructs others not to be "anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil 4:6-7).

Paul sought to live into his own words by living in a way this project seeks to foster within the lives of pastors. As he was constantly aware of the presence of God, immediate negative circumstances did not affect him negatively. As Paul sought to pray without ceasing, all of his actions in ministry and the consequences that followed did not change the bigger picture of who he was in Jesus Christ. It was times of prayerful silence and solitude that nurtured Paul into this experienced reality.

Paul provides others with instruction he also followed in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." The spiritual practices this project presents are an effort to nurture pastors into this continual journey. A life authentically lived in the presence of God, which leads into healthy ministry. Paul says this is God's will, which certainly solidifies the purpose of this project. As Paul lived into the authenticity this doctoral

project seeks to foster in the lives of pastors, his instructions into this type of life must be heard, learned, and followed.

Getting the Balance between Action and Contemplation Correct

It has been an historic challenge for leadership within the Church to strike the correct balance between active involvement in ministry and contemplative engagement with God. This project seeks to address the need for pastoral leadership to strike the correct balance between action and contemplation within ministry. Pastors must seek to intentionally choose a middle way. Without these choices, a healthy rhythm in ministry is impossible. The needs of everyone within a local church can easily consume a pastor's time and energy. If that happens, sooner or later, they will be running on their own strength and will ultimately dry up or burn out. These times of contemplation reorient pastoral leadership to what is really happening as they live into the activities of their lives. Stairs explains, "Sadly, too many congregants—miss that the whole joyful and painful adventure of laboring and living is itself an experience of God."⁵⁶

Pastors often miss the awareness of this reality when contemplation of God is absent. Stairs continues, "One of the primary ways we can cultivate a conscious awareness of God is through contemplation. Contemplation is both a lifestyle and a way of praying. Simply stated, contemplation is a way to listen carefully, incline our ears, and come to a deeper awareness of God."⁵⁷ Learning from the breadth of Church history should inform and encourage pastors to pursue this journey, which leads to a balanced

⁵⁶ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, Kindle EBook, Loc. 837.

⁵⁷ Ibid., Location 846-849.

and healthy life. Stairs discusses how this balance works and the effects, “A mature spirituality will demonstrate a natural flow between contemplation and compassionate service.”⁵⁸ When action and contemplation are balanced within the life of the pastor, not only are they healthy, but so is their ministry: “What I am suggesting is that pastoral care is neither credible nor complete without placing public practices alongside the more traditional personal spiritual practices of scriptural study, devotion, prayer, spiritual direction, and meditation.”⁵⁹

Horsfall also discusses the need for balance between action and contemplation. He explains that, “Behind spiritual mentoring is the belief that the inner life sustains the outer life.”⁶⁰ He uses a tree as an example. One can see a tree growing upward and producing fruit, but downward it is nourished by a healthy root system, which is out of sight. The bigger the tree is, the more extensive the roots. In the same way, the more involved pastors are in caring for others, the more they need to develop and nurture that which is unseen—their inner self.⁶¹ As pastors pay attention to God’s action within them, they are able to recognize that God is always present and active in the world. Horsfall continues, “There is no place where he is not. Every place can be a sacred place if we have eyes to see—this attentiveness to God’s presence, and our experience of that presence, is at the heart of spiritual direction.”⁶² As spiritual leaders, if pastors are to bear

⁵⁸ Ibid., Loc. 1054.

⁵⁹ Ibid., Loc. 2773.

⁶⁰ Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth*, 24.

⁶¹ Ibid., 23.

⁶² Ibid., 25.

any fruit or point someone toward an awareness of God, then they must be continually seeking God. Pastors must nurture their inner relationship with God. They must choose to strike a balance between action and contemplation. When addressing the topic of authentic spiritual direction, Willard articulates the intent of this project: “What we are seeing now is a remarkable resurgence of interest in this whole area, which can only be the work of God. It is the Holy Spirit, the true spiritual guide, who is calling the church back to one of its most ancient paths.”⁶³

Stairs is seeking to help leaders and pastors rediscover this need for balance between action and contemplation. She writes, “To achieve wholeness in life and to be centered in God, we must develop rhythms that foster deeper connectedness with God, self, neighbors, and the world. There ought to be rhythmic alternation between engagement and disengagement, solitude and community, work and play, withdrawal and involvement, holding of a self and handing over of our self to God and others in love.”⁶⁴ She is talking about a need for balance within ministry that has been needed throughout the history of Church and continues to be needed in any local church today. Finding healthy rhythms involves the discipline of prioritizing ones’ relationship with God and protecting space in her schedule to have times when she can be alone and quiet with God.

Williams also address how challenging it is for pastors to practice spiritual disciplines of disengagement because their schedules have become too full. He writes, “The shape of time is one of the most important disciplines for a pastor to develop. Many are so inundated with tasks and demands they have no time for the central pastoral tasks –

⁶³ Ibid., 34.

⁶⁴ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, Loc. 790-3.

prayer, study, preaching, and people.”⁶⁵ If the pursuit of God is the path to authentic spiritual leadership and most pastors today do not have time for this pursuit, what does that say about their leadership within the Church? To be healthy and vibrant in ministry, pastors need to take control of their calendars. This project suggests scheduling time for the spiritual practices to be alone with God without interruption. As these disciplines are practiced, it is the hope of this project that they will become easier to enter into and a priority where pastors will long to regularly return to this well and drink.

Williams acknowledges both the need for a balance between action and contemplation, and how hard it is to maintain: “Maintaining the health of our own souls before God while attending to the souls of others is not ever easy, but it is absolutely essential.”⁶⁶ Williams uses Catherine of Siena as an example of how important this balance is in order to gain wisdom within ministry. Even though she was young, she mediated tensions between France and Italy. He writes, “Catherine’s wise counsel in her letters is far out of proportion to her youth. This seems to have come in part from her strict routine of prayer and meditation – a routine that confirms that any ministry of service must be balanced by restful communion with God.”⁶⁷ Pastors need to seek to be wise to impart that wisdom to others. There is a wisdom that only comes from a genuine and honest relationship with God which calls pastors to a healthy balance between action and contemplation. Williams refers to this balance as it was experienced in the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: “Bonhoeffer knew that the active life of the community had to be

⁶⁵ Williams, *The Potter’s Rib*, 108.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 210.

balanced with intentional solitude by the individual. It was not a luxury; it would be indispensable to restoration and recreation in the midst of busy pastoral life.”⁶⁸

As pastors draw their attention back to God by seeking to be with Him, it is the hope of this project that they will long for times of silence and resting in His presence. Doing this, then opens their eyes to how God is present and active in all other areas of their life. This circle, or pattern, repeats itself over and over, drawing each individual deeper into a continuous experience of God. Perhaps this is the kind of life Paul was talking about when he wrote, “Be joyful always; pray continuously; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus”(1 Thes 5:16-18). God’s desire is for His children to fully live and experience every aspect of their lives. There can, and should be, joy and appreciation to God in and through all that life has for them. This type of living and praying draws people nearer to Paul’s instruction to “pray continuously.” As they do, each experience deepens the reality of the other, only pushing deeper into both action and contemplation.

What Every Church Needs – Spiritual Leadership that is Real

This intent of this chapter is to help people think correctly about God, what this means for the Church, and for those who would serve as pastors within the Church. As people are spiritual beings, they need authentic pastoral leadership to point them in the correct direction. Gibbs describes the current need: “Even though secularization has successfully dismantled Christendom, it has not destroyed the desire for the transcendent.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 247.

In recent decades, spirituality has reemerged as a potent societal force.”⁶⁹ Frost also describes the need within society for that which is real: “We fill our lives with ‘fake’ stuff—we use artificial sweeteners, artificial creamers, artificial butter, artificial soft drinks. It is a question of substituting the signs of the real for the real. Large numbers are tired of the hyper-real. They are collectively yearning for something richer and more authentic.”⁷⁰ This project is seeking to foster the spiritually authentic pastoral leadership for which people are longing.

Gibbs accurately describes the challenge within the Church today and how every Church needs authentic spiritual leadership for their health and growth. He discusses how, “being an evangelical superstar—undermines authentic spirituality by emphasizing public hype and image at the expense of substance—This results in spiritually shallow churches. Congregational members seldom rise above the level of their leaders.”⁷¹ Gibbs goes on to describe how the resources to be mined for authentic pastoral leadership are spiritual practices this project seeks to implement.⁷² Olson states directly what every church needs and the challenge this project seeks to address when he writes, “Authentic spiritual pastoral leadership is one of the great challenges in the church today.”⁷³ As pastors learn from Church history, seek a healthy balance in action and contemplation,

⁶⁹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, 49.

⁷⁰ Frost, *Exiles*, 83-91.

⁷¹ Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 121-122.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 132-145.

⁷³ Olson, *The American Church in Crisis*, 139.

follow the example of Jesus, learn from Paul, and simply put these spiritual practices in place, they will be pointed in a direction of healthy, fruitful, authentic ministry.

PART THREE

PRACTICE

CHAPTER 4

MINISTRY OUTCOMES

Resting solidly on the theological and historical realities unpacked in Part Two, the strategy proposed seeks to address the challenge in pastoral ministry addressed in Part One. The preferred future this project advocates is one in which pastors are growing in their ability to see God at work among them through the disciplined use of spiritual practices. After spending eight weeks faithfully exercising a few spiritual practices, it is the hope of this project that health and fruit would be evident within ministry. The timeline for this project is hopefully long enough for these disciplines to take root within the lives of those participating and short enough for them to commit to the journey. Once established, pastors would see and experience the health of these disciplines and then continue on their own. Pastors who are authentically and passionately pursuing a vibrant relationship with God leading to healthy ministry is the preferred future.

Desired Goals and Outcomes

Being able to see the reality of God's Kingdom now is critically important in understanding how to live into it in this lifetime and how to point others to the same.

Pastors need a deeper and fuller vision of the Kingdom of God if they are going to invite people to participate and enter into this Kingdom. As people follow Jesus and experience His Kingdom, a full abundant life is theirs. Willard teaches that the heavens are “always there with you no matter what, and—is precisely the atmosphere or air that surrounds your body.”¹ So, God is present continually. He is near all the time. The problem is unawareness of this reality.

Agnes Sanford tells a story about two little fish not knowing that they were surrounded by water. In the story, a frog tells them they cannot live without water and they are terrified. They share their concern with their mother, and she does not know anything about water either. They bring this concern to an otter who tells them, “Water, my dears? Why you live in water! That’s what you breathe!” Sanford goes on to explain, “We live in God. That’s what we breathe. And this is so whether we know it or not. But we can absorb either more or less of His life-force according to the receptivity of our spirits.”² God’s Kingdom is all around. In it “we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). God’s Kingdom is not coming, it is here and it is present to those who seek it. Jesus said, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (Mt 4:17). This Kingdom is at hand; it is here now. One enters into it by following Jesus. Willard instructs, “The ability to see and the practice of seeing God and God’s world comes through a process of seeking and growing in intimacy with him.”³ As pastors seek this intimacy with Jesus, knowledge and awareness of God’s Kingdom grows and is strengthened. The pastor is

¹ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Chapter 1, Loc. 725.

² Agnes Sanford, *The Healing Light* (New York: Ballantine/Random House, 1981), 61-62.

³ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Chapter 3, Loc. 1606.

then able to point to this reality. As they are able to communicate this reality, people within the churches they serve are able to put this knowledge into practice. Pastors, then, are no longer seeking to get people to do things, they see their task as sharing and communicating this knowledge of the Kingdom of God and people can choose to live and act within it. Whatever the context, whether preaching, teaching, or visiting, pastors are then living within this Kingdom of God. As they do, they can trust that people will then want to be a disciple of Jesus as well. They also may enter this current real Kingdom of God by following Jesus and doing the things He did.

Out of a life lived in the presence of God, comes an ability to point toward this reality because it has been experienced. As pastors seek to be continually aware of God's presence, they are able to bring this awareness into their interactions with others.

Bonaventure sought this continual awareness: "The head should remain internally aware of God's yoke—I keep the Lord always before me. My eyes are ever toward the Lord. Always and everywhere, a person should aim to live as if God were visibly present."⁴

God is present in the lives of all people. Stairs explains how this works: "Contemplation is more an attitude of open awareness—it is an unmediated awareness characterized by openness, a sense of relatedness, and awe and wonder—St. Bonaventure once described the contemplative experience as knowing through the 'third eye.'"⁵ As anyone can easily see someone before them, intentionally seeing where God is moving and working in their lives takes a little more effort. First and foremost, it takes a deliberate effort, on the pastor's part, to live the type of life this project intends. This is not an academic exercise.

⁴ Bonaventure, *The Character of a Christian Leader*, 68-69.

⁵ Stairs, *Listening for the Soul*, Loc. 1230-1249.

Stairs explains the main point of this project, “(I) want to do more than study spirituality. (I) want to practice the presence of God and build the rhythms of such practices into (my) daily life so that (my) pastoral care becomes grounded in an authentic sense of God’s presence and action.”⁶ The thrust of this project is to allow what Stairs is talking about, to happen in the lives of pastors.

When relationship with God is real and interactive, there comes an awareness of the presence of God that is needed to offer any real and helpful spiritual direction. Anderson and Reese explain, “Spiritual mentoring includes a process of listening to the life of another and then teaching people to open their eyes and see what is there—everywhere—teaching them to become detectives for the presence of divinity—Mentoring—is about listening – to the Holy Spirit and to the life of the other.”⁷ If pastors are living as if God is visibly present as Bonaventure describes, then they are able to see God moving and working as they listen attentively to those around them, encouraging them to see what is increasingly obvious. This idea of being a detective for the presence of God is not just a hopeful outcome of this project, but it is what will happen through pastors as they are in an authentic relationship with God. This implies the need for pastors to respond to a simple promise from Scripture, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you” (Jer 29:13-14). God desires to be found and pastors need to desire to seek Him. Through disciplined use of spiritual practices, seeing God continually present in their lives, the world, and in the life

⁶ Ibid., Location 276-7.

⁷ Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, Kindle EBook: Loc. 222-243.

of another becomes increasingly easy and natural. Through eyes of faith, God is everywhere active.

Elizabeth Liebert explains how this is essential in all decision making as she discusses discernment: “Entering into discernment, then, means becoming increasingly able to notice where God is at work in the world and in one’s own life, increasingly desirous of choosing the ‘more,’ and, God willing, increasingly generous with one’s own life in response.”⁸ The future this project proposes is not terribly complicated. In fact, once stated, it seems obvious. However, even though it is not complicated, it is not easy either. This is the problem and temptation pastors often fall into. The spiritual disciplines needed to be authentic spiritual leaders often are left unpracticed because pastors are too busy with the tasks of ministry. Liebert continues, “Discernment, then, is—seeking God in and through our decisions. And God wants to be found—It is a discriminating way of life, in which we come to notice with increasing ease and accuracy how our inner and outer actions affect our identity in God.”⁹ Only through intentional pursuit of God through spiritual practices is this possible. The intent of this project is that these disciplines are not perceived as mandates and legalism, but the path to what pastors actually truly desire, which is a ministry that is real, authentic, vibrant, and fruit filled. Ministry is then free and winsome while pastors seek to listen to people and care for them by pointing out where God is active in their lives. Pastors need to be present, be real, and pay attention.

⁸ Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), Kindle EBook: Lccc 85-87.

⁹ *Ibid.*, Loc. 683-89.

Michael Nichols discusses how this plays itself out *The Lost Art of Listening*: “To listen well, it’s necessary to let go of what’s on your mind long enough to hear what’s on the other person’s.”¹⁰ Without intentionally practicing spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, this type of openness to another is nearly impossible. Rather than listening to and responding or sharing what I am thinking, I am growing in this ability to simply receive the person and what God is doing in this moment. Nichols continues to discuss this thought: “To take an interest in someone else, we must suspend the interests of the self—Genuine listening means suspending memory, desire, and judgment—and, for a few moments at least, existing for the other person.”¹¹ This type of listening is difficult to do, but is a loving reception of both the person and the reality of God being present and working in the moment I am sharing with this person. It would seem that listening is easy, but it really is not. It actually is an act of love and is truly a gift to the other.

Nichols continues, “When you demonstrate a willingness to listen with a minimum of defensiveness, criticism, or impatience, you are giving the gift of understanding – and earning the right to have it reciprocated.”¹² Paul Tillich has said that the first duty of love is to listen.¹³ I desire to love those around me and I can express that love by truly listening to them because they are worth the effort. Nichols concludes, “The obligation to listen can be experienced as a burden, and we all sometimes feel it that way.

¹⁰ Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening* (New York: Guilford Press, 2009), Kindle EBook: Loc. 954-55.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Locs. 1388 and 1452.

¹² *Ibid.*, Loc. 2531.

¹³ Gary Sattler, “Mentoring for Spiritual Growth,” Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena CA, June, 2012.

But it is quite a different thing to be moved by a sense that the people in our lives are eminently worth listening to, a sense of their dignity and value.”¹⁴ Valuing people and truly listening to them is central toward fruitful ministry. Williams agrees: “Of all the virtues and practices we cultivate, this (listening) is the primary act of love that precedes and permeates everything else that happens. Why? Because it is only through the disciplined habit of listening that we begin to know another person – and knowing and being known is requisite for any formative friendship.”¹⁵

As pastors are continually being formed as spiritual leaders, they must appreciate both the simplicity and challenge of what is central to this task: “The central action of spirituality: to pay attention for the presence of God in everything.”¹⁶ Fryling agrees: “Although there are a multitude of things that can be done, the core orienting principle for me is the ‘practice of attentiveness.’”¹⁷ It seems that adults always make things more complicated than they need to be. To point out the simplicity of the spiritual life, Fryling discusses why Jesus may have used children as an example, “This characteristic of being in touch with the present tense may be the main reason Jesus uses children as a model for spirituality – that we must become like children in our engagement with our immediate experience to understand the kingdom of God.”¹⁸ This projects seeks to develop the type of awareness and enjoyment of God that Fryling is describing: “When we are aware of

¹⁴ Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, Loc. 5879-81.

¹⁵ Williams, *The Potter’s Rib*, 117.

¹⁶ Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, Location 402.

¹⁷ Fryling, *The Leadership Ellipse*, Loc. 1694.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, Loc. 1697-99.

the work of God in ordinary circumstances and people, we then pay closer attention to those people and to the promptings of God.”¹⁹ It is the hope of this project that pastors would be convicted that there is not anything greater in life and ministry than to lead people toward a deeper awareness of the presence of God in their lives. They are not alone in this calling: “For me, there is no greater joy or privilege than to promote the work of God in the life of another.”²⁰ To experience this interactive relationship with God day in and day out and to see the work of God in other peoples’ lives is the preferred future of this project. Through a commitment to this project, this step-by-step adventure has been my experience not only in my current ministry setting, but more importantly, within my life. Attention now turns to the specific spiritual practices that will be enacted during this eight-week experience which leads toward this type of fruitful ministry.

Content of Strategy – Spiritual Practices

Solitude and Silence

Solitude is being alone. Silence is simply eliminating noise, from both around and within a person. Willard gives some instruction: “In silence we close off our souls from ‘sounds,’ whether those sounds be noise, music, or words. Total silence is rare, and what we today call ‘quiet’ usually only amounts to a little less noise.”²¹ Nouwen also gives helpful instruction: “Silence is the way to make solitude a reality. The Desert Fathers

¹⁹ Ibid., Loc. 1701-3.

²⁰ Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth*, 19.

²¹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 163.

praised silence as the safest way to God.”²² These two practices go together as silence completes solitude. Pastors especially need to hear Nouwen’s instruction because their lives are usually filled with noise and words. Realizing this is a “safe way to God” is quite helpful. A pastor’s world is so filled and dominated by words; perhaps it is good and healthy to take a break from them. Nouwen continues, “The word is the instrument of the present world and silence is the mystery of the future world.”²³ It is from this future, mysterious world that ministry comes, so if a pastor’s words are to have any meaning, power, or effect, they must dwell in this silence.

Scripture calls people into this time alone with God as Psalm 46:10 instructs to “be still, and know that I am God.” As one has been alone with God, he comes out of the silence of being in the presence of God without losing the silence. He then moves, acts and serves with the awareness of the stillness of God within. In these quiet moments with God, he becomes increasingly aware that God is present in this moment. Rohr addresses the need for this awareness: “We cannot attain the presence of God because we’re already totally in the presence of God. What’s absent is awareness. Little do we realize that God is maintaining us in existence with every breath we take—We have nothing to attain or even learn.”²⁴ Tony Horsfall discusses how important this awareness is: “This moment is the most important moment I have, because it is the only moment I have. Therefore I should experience it to the full and be alive to God in the here and now. Too many people

²² Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 43.

²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

live their lives locked into their regrets of the past or awaiting their dreams for the future, while missing God in the present moment that envelops them.”²⁵

One cannot continually stay in solitude and silence, but once it has been experienced, it illumines everything else one does. It is for this reason that a healthy balance between active engagement in ministry and times of disengagement to be alone with God go hand-in-hand. Nouwen explains what happens as one comes out of times of solitude and silence: “It is a portable cell that we carry with us wherever we go.”²⁶ The blessings and assurances that happen in those still moments have a powerful effect on everything else one does which is the point of spiritual practices. Foster teaches, “God has ordained the disciplines of the spiritual life as the means by which we place ourselves where he can bless us.”²⁷

Fasting

As one craves for food, fasting teaches her to crave God more. Foster affirms this spiritual practice: “Fasting reminds us that we are sustained ‘by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God’ (Mt 4:4). Food does not sustain us; God sustains us.”²⁸ It is hard to argue with the reality that Americans love food. Cooking shows are increasingly popular and television shows like *The Biggest Loser*, points toward the truth that they often eat too much. The idea behind fasting is to refrain from food and enjoyable drinks, so that one may become aware of her dependence upon God. Many people turn to food

²⁵ Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth*, 59.

²⁶ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 65.

²⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Chapter 1, Loc. 388.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Chapter 4, Loc. 1104.

for comfort. It has been my experience that as I deny myself the comfort of food, it is easier to turn to the Comforter for comfort.

Fasting is a mild discomfort and teaches perspective on other discomforts within one's life. Enduring something uncomfortable gives greater endurance with other uncomfortable things. Ministry is challenging, people can be difficult, and what pastors would like to see happen does not always come about. Jesus never said following Him was going to be easy. Willard explains that, "Fasting is one of the more important ways of practicing that self-denial required of everyone who would follow Christ (Mt 16:24). In fasting, we learn how to suffer happily as we feast on God. And it is a good lesson, because in our lives we will suffer."²⁹ When suffering comes, fasting can teach how to endure discomfort, while remaining joyful. While dealing with discomfort, health and joy certainly can be present.

Lectio Divina

This spiritual practice is a creative way to study and be immersed within the Word of God seeking to internalize the Word of God into the core of one's being. Within this practice of sacred reading, one is seeking not only knowledge, but also enjoyment of God's Word. When one knows and experiences God's Truth, he is then able to work in terms of what is really there. Studying and internalizing the Word of God is designed to bring knowledge and awareness so that he is working from what he knows for sure are God's intentions and desires for him. When one knows something as it truly is, he is able to deal with reality successfully.

²⁹ Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 167.

It is easy for pastors to deceive themselves into thinking they have this discipline covered. Week in and week out, a pastor is studying God's Word to proclaim His Word. This rigorous routine and discipline is healthy and needed within any local church. However, part of any pastor's preparations to preach are always conditioned by what God may be saying to both the pastor and the church. Pastors need to dwell in the Word without an agenda, without seeking for what they need to say that week. The obvious temptation is that pastors only dwell within God's Word as they are working on sermon preparation. Pastors need to come into God's Word simply to be immersed in the reality of the Kingdom of God. From this immersion, pastors are then able to act in line with reality. Gibbs explains that *lectio divina* is "a simple exercise but one capable of jump starting a dead spiritual battery by cultivating the art of meditation—lost due to the noise, rush, distractions and soul neglect of modern living."³⁰

In this spiritual practice, one begins by relaxing into the presence of God and then reading a passage at least two times out loud. She engages her imagination and allows God to place her within the passage. She enters into the story as a character within the story. She may ask herself a few questions, "If I had been there, what would I have seen? How might my senses have reacted?" She allows others to interact with her. The encouragement here is to engage her imagination as she meditates on the passage. In these moments, she enters into the text and allows the text to ask some questions of her. The intent is to allow God to speak through the text into her life asking the Holy Spirit to draw attention to what is important that she may have missed before. She considers what is happening within the flow of the story. Finally, she waits and pays attention to what

³⁰ Gibbs, *ChurchNext*, 134.

God may be saying to her in this moment.³¹ The design and intent of this spiritual practice is to invite her into seeing more of what she had not seen or recognized before.

Prayer

Foster explains the centrality of prayer in a relationship with God: “Of all the Spiritual Disciplines prayer is the most central because it ushers us into perpetual communion with the Father—(prayer) brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing.”³² It is the intent of this project that pastors would have an authentic, interactive relationship with God. For this to happen, pastors need to learn to pray. Just as the disciples asked Jesus how to pray, pastors need to have the humility to ask the same question. Nouwen expresses a very real concern in prayer:

For many of us prayer means nothing more than speaking with God. And since it usually seems to be a quite one-sided affair, prayer simply means talking to God. This idea is enough to create great frustrations. If I present a problem, I expect a solution; if I formulate a question, I expect an answer; if I ask for guidance, I expect a response. And when it seems, increasingly, that I am talking into the dark, it is not so strange that I soon begin to suspect that my dialogue with God is in fact a monologue. Then I may begin to ask myself: To whom am I really speaking, God or myself?³³

If this has been anyone’s experience in prayer, he needs to be persistent in this spiritual practice. When he holds what he seeks to accomplish before God in prayer, he is working toward something together. He is not alone. Nouwen continues, “Prayer is standing in the presence of God with the mind in the heart—there God’s Spirit dwells and there the great

³¹ Ibid., 134.

³² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Chapter 3, Loc. 752.

³³ Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*, 72.

encounter takes place. There heart speaks to heart.”³⁴ Prayer is not a mental exercise. In prayer, one is intentionally making their heart, emotions, and passions known to God.

The encouragement for pastors within this eight-week project is to share short, one-line prayers throughout the day, whatever one is doing, whatever is happening, seeking to share a simple statement about that moment with God. This is an effort to pray without ceasing. It has been my experience that these prayers are a continuation of practicing times of solitude and silence. This type of continual prayer is an extension of solitude seeking to live life, not alone, but in relationship with God. What happens in those times of solitude and silence can extend out to the rest of life.

Thomas Merton gives some guidance in how this works: “The real purpose of prayer is the deepening of personal realization in love, the awareness of God—The real purpose of meditation—is the exploration and discovery of new dimensions in freedom, illumination and love, in deepening our awareness of our life in Christ.”³⁵ Becoming increasingly aware of one’s life in Christ then naturally moves her to action. Merton continues, “What we have been calling the ‘contemplative life’ is a life of awareness that one thing is necessary, that Jesus is alone necessary and that to live for him and in him is all sufficient—To live in him takes care of everything.”³⁶ In this awareness of who one is in Christ, one lives her life for him. A prayerful life leads to informed action.

James Finney explains the awareness that happens through these spiritual practices: “The mystic is simply one who sees things as they are; he sees all of life as

³⁴ Ibid., 76.

³⁵ Thomas Merton, *Contemplation in a World of Action* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1998), 160.

³⁶ Ibid., 252.

coming from God, sustained by God, and returning back to God.”³⁷ In this awareness, one realizes that he can experience God moment by moment: “God is everywhere and is therefore never in a particular place that is other than where we happen to be at each moment.”³⁸ Becoming increasingly aware of this truth and reality allows pastors to function, work, and serve in a way that is fruitful and healthy.

Awareness *Examen*

Elizabeth Liebert discusses a practice that is helpful in becoming increasingly aware of the presence of God. She writes, “The Awareness *Examen*—centers on noticing where God is active in one’s daily life. Over time, the fruits of the Awareness *Examen* include a deepened ability to notice, desire, and choose God in the everydayness of our lives.”³⁹ Horsfall further explains that “it involves thinking over the events of our day and replaying them in our minds rather like a video recording—with constant practice this simple discipline will become a means by which we can enhance our awareness of God’s presence day by day.”⁴⁰ At the end of each day, one simply takes a few minutes to reflect on the events of the day and specifically identify where he saw God at work. As this is practiced daily, pastors will be able to notice that which they did not notice in the moment. Over time, it has been my experience that I am more sensitive to what is continually happening so that I do not have to wait until the evening to see God at work around me.

³⁷ Ibid., 91. James Finley, *Merton’s Palace of Nowhere* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1978).

³⁸ Ibid., 127.

³⁹ Liebert, *The Way of Discernment*, Kindle EBook: Loc. 103-105.

⁴⁰ Horsfall, *Mentoring for Spiritual Growth*, 58-59.

Develop Desire

It is the hope of this project that pastors would have a growing desire to pursue the path this project describes primarily because it is really the only way to get to where they actually want to go. The preferred future this project is pointing towards is hopefully compelling enough that pastors could see what their life would be like within this reality. Holding on to this strong vision of spiritually authentic pastoral leaders, pastors are able to see a path forward in ministry that is greater, healthier, and fuller than their previous experience. Without a clear path forward into ministry that is abundant, fruitful, powerful, and winsome; then no one would intentionally choose to do anything different than previous behaviors. Simply, pastors would not want to change anything. The preferred future needs to be both compelling and desirable. When one realizes that she can be and become holy, have her eyes of faith opened to the continual actions and movements of God, and authentically live into a fruit-filled enjoyable ministry, continually molded and shaped by God increasingly becoming more and more like Jesus, she would choose the path that leads into that reality. Part of this reality includes the power of God moving and working through her life to produce the fruit He desires. It is critically important that pastors get the vision of what their lives and ministries may be like in this preferred future. Without a strong vision, there will be no motivation for change. No pastor would commit to a different path forward if the way they have been doing ministry is good enough from their perspective. The vision of this future must be big enough and desirable enough to be pursued.

As this preferred future is before them, pastors have a moment of decision: do they desire and intend to live into the journey this project proposes? There is a choice and a commitment that must be made. An eight-week timeframe is suggested within the confines of the project so that the end can be seen from the beginning. Pastors are already usually quite scheduled and asking them to commit to another thing is a challenge. Through these two months, it is the hope of this project that they will experience God in a way that is real and vibrant and these spiritual practices will be established as normal, desired habits.

In this journey, pastors will experience that these spiritual practices are the way that God shapes them. These spiritual practices are the means by which they go about fulfilling the preferred future this project advocates. If pastors want healthy, fruitful ministry, then these spiritual practices are the way to get there.

Foster faithfully summarized the spiritual disciplines in such a way that makes the practice of them approachable, not just for pastors, but for all Christians. Many of the disciplines are either misunderstood or not practiced at all and Foster breaks through it to bring these practices back into the lives of anyone and everyone within the Church. He writes, “God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings: people who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors.”⁴¹ This instruction is encouraging to pastors whose lives are already very full of good things. Family, ministry demands, and an already full life are not excuses to not utilize these spiritual practices.

⁴¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Chapter 1, Loc. 291.

Additionally, implied within Foster's teaching is that if everyone within the Church can and should be doing this, then certainly the pastor should set the example by doing the same, not because they have to, but because they want to. It is encouraging that the disciplines are specifically designed for a life that is full.

Pastors cannot cloister themselves off from the world and their lives as many of the monastic orders have done in the past. Nor can they separate from people as the desert fathers and mothers did. However, in the middle of family and ministry responsibilities, while so many other people are depending on them, they can follow Jesus and commit to spiritual practices that lead toward healthy ministry. The deliberate practice of the spiritual disciplines can have a formative and powerful effect on any pastor. The preferred future of this project is that pastors would see this path forward as desirable and choose it by doing what is suggested in this project.

Resources, Target Population, and Leadership

As the purpose of this project is directed at pastors within local churches, the initial target population is a small group of pastors with whom I am in relationship. Reading resources will be made available for this initial group. Those reading suggestions include: Nouwen's *The Way of the Heart*, Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*, and Fryling's *The Leadership Ellipse*. Additionally, a copy of this project will be provided so they are able to see and understand what is behind my request for their participation. Additional reading resources can be provided upon request. I will personally provide leadership by inviting them into this experience and share my story in the DMin program at Fuller.

CHAPTER 5

IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION

Pilot Project Summary

The pilot project is an eight-week experience where a small group of pastors will commit to regular use of a few spiritual practices with the intended goal of deepening their awareness of and experience with God. The content of these spiritual practices was discussed in the previous chapter. The hope of this project is that pastors would want to enter into this experience because they actually desire an authentic relationship with God. The suggestion at this point will simply be to commit to a rhythm of each day that will incorporate these spiritual practices. The plan of this project is that these practices will be incorporated into lives and ministries that are already filled with good things. As they are practiced, these disciplines can grow to become habits and rhythms that become a new normal within the lives of pastors. The suggestion is simply to do these things, trusting that they have been vetted, studied, and have been proven to lead into an authentic relationship with God.

The suggested use of these disciplines includes spending fifteen-to-twenty minutes silently entering into solitude each day. Perhaps early morning would be a good

time for this. In the afternoon, these pastors would enter into some time within God's Word using *lectio divina* as the format for this time. Before bed, they would utilize the awareness *examen* as an opportunity to reflect on their day. The suggestion for prayer is to share short, one-sentence prayers throughout the course of the day. It is not the intent of this project that others prayers within the life and work of the pastor would cease during these eight weeks, but rather seek to continually share moments with God. Fasting may be a new experience for some people, so the suggestion over these eight weeks is to experience four, twenty-four hour times of fasting. Once, every other week, they would choose a day to only drink water. A helpful suggestion would be to plan these days when they do not anticipate any planned meals with other people. There is no need to draw attention to times of fasting. They should not announce it to anyone else. The final suggestion within these eight weeks is to plan for a twenty-four hour extended time for solitude and silence.

The suggestion of this project is simply to do these things. Entering into these few spiritual practices realizing they are opportunities to disengage from much of the work and engagement of ministry will help nurture their relationship with God through proven spiritual practices. As they do, the path they are on follows in the example of Jesus and these pastors are actually becoming more like Him. All of ministry is simply continuing the work that Jesus did. Christians are to follow Him by doing what He did in the way in which He did it. As pastors follow Him, ministry comes from this interactive experience and relationship with Him. From this experience, these pastors will become aware of the reign of God within their lives and this world. It is not complicated to be Jesus' disciple;

one simply trusts Jesus in everything and follows Him doing the things He did in the way He did them. Anyone can do this. There is no special training or talent needed, just a decision and a willingness to learn from Jesus as one goes, trusting Him within the journey. This is how the first disciples entered into ministry. Even though I have a degree and am working on another one, my credibility for ministry comes from my relationship with Jesus. This is true for any pastor.

As these practices become a normal rhythm of one's day, she is paying constant attention to the guidance of the Spirit in life and ministry, which makes each day an adventure. Foster explains, "A prompting here or a drawing there, sometimes a bolting ahead or a lagging behind—the Holy Spirit, will guide us into all truth."¹ Foster's repeated emphasis that spiritual disciplines are things Christians do which lead into a deeper awareness of this daily adventure and being continually guided by the spirit is both refreshing and challenging.

This is the invitation, not only of this project, but more importantly, Jesus. His invitation is to follow Him and become like Him, seeking to do the very things He did. When his followers "come to (Him)—learn from (Him)—(we) find rest for (our) souls" (Mt 11:28-29). The desire is to find this rest in Him. The spiritual disciplines teach how to do this as one chooses to obey Jesus in doing the things He did. As referenced earlier, "The secret of the easy yoke is simple, actually. It is the intelligent, informed, unyielding

¹ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, Chapter 11, Loc. 2801.

resolve to live as Jesus lived in all aspects of his life, not just in the moment of specific choice or action.”² The spiritual disciplines lead into this life with Jesus.

Not all of the disciplines need to be practiced equally in everyone’s life. Willard teaches, “If it is easy for us to engage in a certain discipline, we probably don’t need to practice it. The disciplines we need to practice are precisely the ones we are not ‘good at’ and hence do not enjoy.”³ The spiritual disciplines are not laws, they are wisdom and the hope within this project is that pastors will experiment with them. The spiritual practices chosen for this project are specifically directed at the practices pastors may not be regularly practicing.

The implementation of this project directs pastors toward spiritually authentic leadership. While this project may not be filled with bullet points, it actually is very direct and specific in terms of what must happen in order for healthy ministry to flow from pastors and the churches they serve. Quite simply, the project directs pastors to be disciplined by Jesus. They journey in choosing and committing to being a student of Him; training to be like Him through these spiritual practices. In this journey, transformation can happen. A real, active, vibrant, interactive relationship with God can be nurtured, which leads toward a greater awareness of the work of God in and around.

As pastors grow in their relationship with God, they are being transformed to the point where they will repeatedly and easily do what Jesus did. Ministry then naturally, and perhaps indirectly, flows from these pastors. This project points toward ministry that is really a way of life. It is dynamic and always interactive with God and people.

² Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines*, 10.

³ *Ibid.*, 138.

As pastors are seeking an authentic relationship with God, when they encounter anyone, the challenge in this project is they could be a representation of Jesus to them. They would act as He would act in that moment. This is a tremendous responsibility and opportunity. It is also the beauty of this project. Rather than making ministry into an itemized list of things to do, this project allows pastors to be who they are within a vibrant relationship with God, living within and aware of God's Kingdom, which makes the path for both their spirituality and ministry an interactive journey.

As they live this life, ministry "oozes" from them. As this project is implemented within pastors' lives, it will be important to not announce this journey to anyone. The instruction here is to simply do these things. As soon as announcements are made, a level of inauthentic manipulation of making oneself look spiritual can easily creep in. Pride and hypocrisy could easily follow. They must simply be people in authentic relationship with God without telling anyone how authentic they are. What is happening is that they are being discipled by Jesus. They are seeking Him and His Kingdom, knowingly living within His reign. As their lives are lived within this reality, they can point others to this truth. Willard gives instruction on this point, "Jesus gives us urgent warnings about failing to actually do what he calls us to do—Doing and not just hearing and talking about it is how we know the reality of the kingdom and integrate our life into it."⁴ This is the point behind this project as it is implemented into the lives of pastors within their ministry contexts. The suggestion is to obey Jesus by doing what He did. These spiritual practices point in the correct direction by not simply agreeing with Jesus teaching, but doing what He did in the manner in which He did it. Willard continues, "We have heard

⁴ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Chapter 5, Loc. 2696.

him. For almost two millennia we have heard him, as already noted. But we have chosen to not do what he said.”⁵ As these pastors do these things, they become aware of God’s immediate and continual presence.

A main argument of this project is that pastors can only teach and point to this spiritual reality as they are living in this truth. In this journey, pastors can then genuinely talk and share about living within the Kingdom of God here and now, not some reality that only applies after death or some ideas that are only intellectual exercises. Willard writes, “What is most valuable for any human being, without regard to an afterlife, is to be part of this marvelous reality, God’s kingdom now. Eternity is now ongoing. I am now leading a life that will last forever.”⁶ If this reality is true within the life of the pastor, the invitation can authentically be made to others to experience and enter into the same reality. People need this more than they realize.

In order for this project to lead toward healthy and fruitful ministry, these spiritual practices need to become habits within the life of the pastor. It will be important for pastors at the beginning of these eight weeks to commit to this project, which will make these spiritual practices a part of their lives. With calendar in hand, times of solitude, silence, fasting, prayer, and meditation of God’s Word will need to be scheduled to become part of the rhythm of their lives and relationship with God.

As pastors seek to secure these disciplines as regular habits, encouragement must be given for them to be patient and gentle with themselves. It can be easy to become frustrated when they do not do what they have committed to do. The reminder here is that

⁵ Ibid., Chapter 5, Loc. 2746.

⁶ Ibid., Chapter 6, Loc. 4011.

these spiritual practices are for training. The pastor is being trained in how to live like Jesus. The effect of the spiritual disciplines is to enable people to do what needs to be done when and as it needs to be done. For this reason, pastors need to be encouraged to apply effort in their obedience to these practices which is enabling them to do what God desires to do in their lives which is a good definition of healthy and fruitful ministry. As this happens, they are being formed and shaped into the types of people and pastors they really want to be.

When giving guidance to pastors in how to implement avenues for spiritual growth within the Church, Willard provides insights this project has been seeking to provide, “It will usually be vital to just do certain things and not talk a lot about them – at least until sometime later.”⁷ This is the plan behind this project. Namely, authentically living within, and aware of, the reality of the Kingdom of God then gives pastors the experience and perspective to be able to witness to this reality. Willard continues to make this point: “Once again, we do not need to talk a lot about what we are doing. In time it will be obvious. And we certainly are never to be judgmental of Christians who are, honestly, not yet disciples.”⁸ It is the preferred future of this project that what is real within the life of the pastor would become obvious to others.

As pastors live into an authentic relationship with God, when they have an opportunity to share, counsel, and preach, this reality oozes from them. They can speak about the Kingdom of God and discipleship to Jesus with honesty and authenticity. Willard teaches, “We should speak, teach, and—if that is our place—preach the gospel of

⁷ Ibid., Chapter 9, Location 7041.

⁸ Ibid., Chapter 9, Location 7053.

the kingdom of the heavens in its fullness. Practically, that means—we focus on the Gospels and on teaching what Jesus himself taught in the manner he taught it.”⁹ Only as pastors live confidently within this Kingdom can they speak about it in its fullness. Only as pastors are following Jesus, being trained to become like Him, can they point to His teaching and example with any authority or power. Quite simply, pastors have to be a disciple of Jesus if they are to train other disciples. Pastors, as spiritual leaders, cannot lead someone where they have not already been. Since pastors are spiritual leaders within local churches, they must be growing and maturing in their relationship with God. As pastors are in this journey, it will have an effect on those around them. In the end, “we may not soon have bigger crowds around us—but we will soon have bigger Christians for sure. This is what I call ‘church growth for those who hate it.’”¹⁰ Willard’s description of bigger Christians around pastors is also a good explanation of the type of fruitful ministry this project intends to produce.

Timeline, Leadership, and Resources

This project has the fluidity to be applied at any time. What would need to happen before the eight weeks begin is an invitation for pastors to participate. I will provide instruction and direction throughout the pilot project’s implementation. This invitation would include a discussion of my journey within the DMin program at Fuller and an honest discussion about the need for spiritually authentic pastoral leadership within the Church. A copy of this project as well as Nouwen’s *The Way of the Heart*, Foster’s

⁹ Ibid., Chapter 9, Loc. 7049.

¹⁰ Ibid., Chapter 9, Loc. 7062

Celebration of Discipline, and Fryling's *The Leadership Ellipse* will be provided as educational and motivational resources before the eight weeks begin. For the twenty-four hour time of silence and solitude, I will personally make arrangements for each pastor on a day that works well for them at a local retreat center.¹¹ As mentioned earlier, the intent is that eight weeks is short enough for pastors to fully commit to the spiritual practices suggested within this project as well as long enough for the desired outcomes to begin to be realized.

Assessment Plan

As it has been instructed not to announce this project within the churches where each pastor serves in order to maintain the integrity of the pastors' authentic pursuit of God, an assessment of this experience will happen between each pastor and me. Admittedly, assessing spiritual growth is challenging because it is difficult to quantify. To help identify what happened within this project, the questions in Appendix 1 will be asked and answered before the eight weeks begin and again after the eight weeks. Any changes, growth, fruit in ministry, and awareness of God can be identified and discussed. Each question can be responded to on a sliding scale between: always, often, sometimes, rarely, and never.

Asking and answering these questions before and after the eight-week commitment will provide helpful feedback regarding whether this experience had been effective or not. What happened, where there were changes, growth or change and any significant differences in one's life and ministry, are all follow up questions that could be

¹¹ Maranatha Bible and Missionary Conference Center, Muskegon, MI.

discussed with each pastor. If a given pastor desires to keep his or her responses to these questions confidential, that would be fine. In that scenario I would still ask if they could share what they perceived to have happened. To help evaluate this project and discern increased health, growth and wholeness, Appendix 2 will be used at the end of the eight-week experience to interview each pastor essentially asking, “What happened?”

Assess Success

While this project has not yet been field-tested; if pastors desire growth in their relationship with God, these spiritual practices are an avenue for that to happen. Any local church needs spiritually authentic pastoral leadership, therefore the application for this project is significantly important to the Church. Personally, I have been living this journey and the desired “results” are happening within my life and ministry.

Earlier within this project, it was acknowledged that leaders within other religions were often viewed as “holy people,” while pastors within the Church are not. As pastors live into the path this project proposes, they will be seeking to be holy as Jesus is holy and therefore live into spiritually authentic pastoral leadership. As they do, the words of 1 Timothy 4:16 will become true within their lives: “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.” The intent of the project is in line with Paul’s instruction to “do” some things that lead toward health within ministry.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this doctoral project sought to solve a problem in ministry. As has been discussed, the problem is not a recent one nor is it limited to my personal experience. This project intends to foster spiritually authentic pastoral leadership by seeking God through discipleship to Jesus using spiritual practices over an eight-week experience which will lead to fruitful ministry within the local church.

At the time I began my studies in the DMin program at Fuller, I remember the phrase on Fuller's home page, which said, "Fire for your ministry, oxygen for your soul." Over the past years, God breathed life and oxygen into my soul through intentionally disciplined spiritual practices. I have been blessed, affirmed, and renewed as I have continually grown in my relationship with God and awareness of His continued activity through me and around me. Ministry is increasingly enjoyable, winsome, and fruit-filled as I have had opportunities to reflect and show God's glory through my life continually lived in His presence.

The direction for my studies was determined early in the program as Nouwen caught my attention during the class, "Contours of Ministry." At the time, I remember a desire within me to lead into healthy growth within the Church. Nouwen pointed toward what is at the core of Christian leadership, how pastors are sustained in ministry, and how to truly be effective as a Christian leader. He asks, "Are the leaders of the future truly men and women of God, people with an ardent desire to dwell in God's presence, to listen to God's voice, to look at God's beauty, to touch God's incarnate Word, and to

taste fully God's infinite goodness?"¹ His question points toward the main point of this project. In order to have a healthy and fruit-filled ministry, pastoral leadership must come from and out of a genuine, personal, authentic, vibrant relationship with God. Nouwen's question calls for spiritually authentic pastoral leadership.

Nouwen articulates the danger this project is seeking to avoid. A significant danger is that ministry can be reduced to the accomplishing of tasks. When this happens, the pastor is working with a wrong motivation for ministry. Nouwen calls the desire to be relevant a "temptation." In ministry, most pastors seek to be relevant, engaging, and current. Pastors are expected to "do" many things, but Nouwen points out that the danger comes when one seeks to prove God's power through relevant behaviors.² The temptation to be relevant in ministry is real. It is almost easier to do the "stuff" that is expected, than it is to "stand in this world with nothing to offer but (my) own vulnerable self."³ Putting ones' self out there like this is dangerous. If ministry is about the relevant stuff a pastor does, then when criticism comes, it is directed at the pastor's actions. If ministry is about who one is and simply being that vulnerable self to which Nouwen calls, then if, and when, criticism comes, it is directed at the pastor, not just what the pastor does. The easier path in ministry is to hide behind the stuff one is expected to do rather than expose who one truly is. Out of this fear of rejection, ministry becomes both ineffective and irrelevant because it is a job, not a holy vocation. It has been my argument throughout this project that pastors are to be authentic spiritual leaders. This is not possible if they

¹ Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus*, 43.

² *Ibid.*, 31.

³ *Ibid.*, 30.

are not pursuing and desiring to be holy. Pastors will not have much to offer if they live outside the presence of God.

Nouwen's words, both then and now, point toward the heart of this project. He asserts that the question pastors need to seriously consider in terms of Christian leadership is not what they are going to make happen, but rather, "Are you in love with Jesus . . . Do you know the incarnate God?"⁴ This returns to the question I raised in the introduction to this project, namely: how can anyone be a spiritual leader within the Church without personally and passionately pursuing an authentic spiritual relationship with God? Pastors need to know God and then ministry flows from this relationship.

I am reminded of the pattern of Moses' leadership with the people of Israel as an example in how this works. Before Moses would lead the people, he would spend time in God's presence. After his time with God, he would emerge, face aglow, and the people looked to him and trusted him for Godly leadership (Ex 34:29-35). Those in the Church need to see the leader's face aglow as well. If pastors allow their people to see them in a loving, interactive relationship with God where they are seeking to know Him and His heart, that leadership will be looked to, respected, and followed. This is the spiritual leadership to which God is calling pastors. Nouwen provides a reminder concerning this central task and responsibility as Christian leaders, which is, "to be led deeper into the heart of Christ."⁵

Out of this authentic, loving relationship, Jesus promises that fruit will come. As one remains engrafted in Him, she will bear much fruit. Apart from Him, she cannot

⁴ Ibid., 37.

⁵ Ibid., 88.

produce any fruit. In this journey, God is glorified, fruit is born, and others would see that she is a disciple of Jesus (Jn 15:5-8). As referenced in Chapter 1, Tim Keel unpacks how this works within ministry: “Ministry is always the by-product of something else. What? The pursuit of God—Trees that are healthy simply produce fruit. They don’t try to make it happen, and they can’t stop it when it does. Fruit comes when everything else in the environment functions as it should.”⁶ As pastors pursue an authentic relationship with God, fruit will be produced as a natural outflow of God’s work through His faithful followers. This means that whatever degrees I may hold do not really matter in terms of producing fruitful ministries. What is most important is who I am in Christ. Authority and credibility in ministry come from a life lived in the Spirit. This is the point and purpose of this project. I desire my life and ministry to be authentically lived within the presence of God. Everything correctly flows from this interactive relationship with God.

The spiritual practices suggested in this project are the means to develop this interactive relationship. Any of the spiritual disciplines are not an end in itself. They are a means to an end. The end is an interactive relationship with God fully aware of His Kingdom, living and reigning with God within it. Willard explains, “Spiritual people are not those who engage in certain spiritual practices; they are those who draw their life from a conversational relationship with God. They do not live their lives merely in terms of the human order in the visible world; they have ‘a life beyond.’”⁷ Realizing this truth enables the disciplines to not become legalism. They are not hard and fast rules; they are leading and pointing to this relationship with God. This is the intent behind this project,

⁶ Keel, *Intuitive Leadership*, 220.

⁷ Willard, *Hearing God*, Epilogue, Loc. 2752.

which is that pastors would seek after God by following Jesus and doing what He did through a faithful habit of spiritual disciplines. This clearly defines the role of the spiritual disciplines within any local ministry context. The spiritual disciplines enable pastors to realize the vision.

Outcomes and Insights Gained

A significant insight for me throughout my time at Fuller and the work required of me within this project, is that I am deeply grateful for the person I am and the person I am becoming. With humility, I can honestly say that my life has been and is embodying what this project has been addressing. The challenges within ministry, the struggle for balance, my desire for God and my willingness for Him to work through me; all hold together within the journey I am currently on. I have been living this and it is healthy and right. I remember Willard discussing the spiritual disciplines and where they fit within ministry and his encouragement at the time was just to do these things (referring to practicing spiritual disciplines) and then God will take care of the results. These spiritual practices do not have to be done perfectly, but should be done. This has been my effort and journey over the past few years and I must say that I have seen some results. I certainly am not perfect in my disciplines, but I can increasingly see God at work within my life. I feel these practices and disciplines are increasingly becoming things I want to do. Not out of obedience or obligation, but desire. I want to be more like Jesus, and I am learning through experience how these disciplines are doing this in my life.

Next Steps and Plans for the Future of My Ministry

As I am concluding both my work within this project and my studies at Fuller in the DMin program, it would be my hope that the implications for God's ministry through me into the future have become obvious. I intend to live into what has been discussed throughout this project for the rest of my life. It is centrally important that my life is lived in the presence of God which leads into healthy and vibrant ministry. However, as I seek God, desiring more of Him, at times I feel further away. Bourgeault describes a common feeling that explains my experience: "The closer I get to the goal, the farther away I might feel. The more holy I become, the less holy I know myself to be. The more experienced I am in my ministry, the less competent I may feel to lead others to spiritual growth. Is this merely a loss of confidence, or is it part of the pilgrimage to spiritual maturity?"⁸ Certainly I feel inadequate at times, but I am not alone in these feelings. I have learned that I am not fit for ministry on my own. I am both broken and inadequate, but thankfully, God uses broken vessels.

As spiritual leaders, pastors must embrace the reality that all are students and learners in this area of spiritual leadership. Additionally, that is all one will ever be. However long I have been on this path or wherever I currently am at in terms of spiritual maturity, I am still growing in this relationship with God and will never "arrive" until I see the Lord face-to-face. This thought frees me from the burden of having to know it all within this area of spiritual leadership. My task is to seek God with everything I have. As I do, God takes care of the rest and I can know that He is present. I can rest into the

⁸ Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, Loc. 1419-12.

reality that, at any moment, the Holy Spirit is always the most important person in the room. He is working in and through me to bring about the fruit He desires.

As I seek to conclude this project, perhaps another valuable lesson for me has been the gift of perspective. The demands of ministry and family life can be all consuming. It has been a wonderful blessing to have the opportunity to step back and gain a deeper understanding and perspective of what is happening in the Church today and who I am within it, and how to be an authentic spiritual leader. To have the time and space to reflect upon recent cultural trends, the impact of post-Christendom, and post-modernism, the overwhelming demands often placed upon pastors, to be able to name these realities and see their influence and impact on what is happening within the Church and what that means for me is a gift that words cannot describe. I have been given a gift of being able to see the whole picture. This has given me a deeper understanding of what is happening in and around me, and what is centrally important.

I do not claim to be wise, but I believe God has granted wisdom through the work and study and practices this project has presented. This perspective and an ability to see God at work all around me enables me to function within the Church with a deeper understanding and awareness of what is going on. Out of this relationship, God works through me. With joy and enthusiasm, I am excited about what God has in store for His Church and me, whatever that may be.

God certainly has provided “fire for my ministry and oxygen for my soul.” This has honestly happened through my time in the DMin program at Fuller, for which I am deeply grateful. Gibb’s words have been true within my life, “(My) training must also

relate closely and comprehensively to the mission for which (I am) being prepared.”⁹ As a lifelong learner, this is what has happened for me. God is continuing to train me for service in His Church. As I have been in ministry for eighteen years, I have a profound appreciation of my need to constantly be growing and learning to be a faithful servant of God. I have grown in my ability to see God’s work in the world.

Part of this bigger picture perspective is the ability to see that God is moving. He has been moving and working throughout history and His work continues today and every day until Christ returns. God invites His people to join Him in what he is doing. Their story is part of His big story. Within the local church, they are journeying within His story. I am a part of God’s movement in history, within the local church; I have the opportunity to invite others into God’s story as together, we are authentically living into a vibrant relationship with Him.

Implications for the Church

People in the Church today need an encounter with Jesus. Once there is an encounter with the Living God, then everything else flows from there. However, if leaders do not embody this reality, it will not happen. It is for this simple and clear reason this project exists. My life, and any pastor’s life, must be lived within this reality. People are spiritual beings living into a spiritual reality. Pastors can then share knowledge of this reality as they are in a position to share this knowledge with others. They then experience the power of God flowing within them and in ministry, as they are clearly not doing this on their own.

⁹ Gibbs, *Leadership Next*, 39.

A pastor's work is not to perform; it is living in such a way that when they are ready to perform, they can accomplish the task that God desires. The bigger issue within ministry is one's lives, not his performance. As he does the things that can change him, his actions then change. The spiritual disciplines train people to do what they were previously unable to do. Awareness of the immediate presence of God and the ability to see and follow God's promptings allow the things pastors desire within ministry to show up. Authority, power, and the fruit of the Spirit are present. This allows pastors to become less concerned with outcomes. Outcomes are not their responsibility. Their life is their responsibility and they can make definite decisions and commitments that bring their lives within God's Kingdom. It is a great comfort to deeply realize that God is more interested in our lives than our ministry within the Church. As we do what Jesus did in the manner He did it, God secures the outcomes. Our lives point to and invite other people into the availability for all to live our lives within the Kingdom of God. I cannot think of a better path forward within ministry.

If pastors are continually growing in their interactive relationship with God, it would be healthy for the Church. People are finite beings seeking awareness and experience with the Infinite. This reality should cause anyone to become increasingly comfortable with what they do not know. Embracing the mystery and wonder of this eternal relationship allows one to see and experience God in the present moment. She is then able to see how God works through each person. Becoming increasingly comfortable with what one does not know allows her to rest into what she does know.

What she knows is that God is here, God is good, God loves, and God is active. As God is gentle with each one, it is “ok” to be gentle with herself in this realization.

Peterson discusses what he does not know in relationship to God: “It is difficult to retain an awareness of my ignorance—There is so much more that we don’t know—What if it is not our heads that are involved here but something more like hearts, lives? There is far more, then, that I don’t know than I do know.”¹⁰ Fruitful, spiritual leadership comes not from what I know, but the life I am living in relationship with God. Therefore, I desire to pursue this life. Anderson and Reese explain how this desire is centrally important: “Life is meant to be lived from a center, a divine Center. Each one of us can live such a life of amazing power and peace and serenity, of integration and confidence and simplified multiplicity, on one condition – that is, if we really want to.”¹¹ I know that I desire my life to be lived in continual awareness of the presence of God. Liebert confirms this desire: “Your only desire and one choice should be this: to want and to choose what better leads to my deepening my life in you.”¹²

It is my desire to to pursue this path realizing that there is freedom and joy in this journey. Liebert states that, “People who are spiritually free are tantalizingly alive.”¹³ Therefore, my life is my ministry. My life joins many other spiritual leaders throughout the history of the Church who all agree, “that life is for joy.”¹⁴ Praise be to God!

¹⁰ Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 190.

¹¹ Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, Loc. 1516-17.

¹² Liebert, *The Way of Discernment*, Loc. 952-53.

¹³ *Ibid.*, Loc. 908.

¹⁴ Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, Loc. 2048.

APPENDIX 1
ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

The following questions come from Ruth Haley Barton. Questions were adapted from a handout titled, “How is it with your Soul? An Assessment for Leaders” distributed at a conference entitled, “Leading in the Spirit.” The conference was part of the Hiller Lectureship Series by Sioux Falls Seminary and was hosted by Central Church in Sioux Falls on Tuesday, Apr 18, 2017.

I sense that I am going through the motions within ministry – talking about things I am not currently experiencing; discussing emotions I am not feeling, caring for people, but not really caring.

I am aware that something is not quite right in my life and ministry, but I do not know what to do differently nor do I have the time to really address this.

I am busy. Rushing from task to task without paying attention to what is happening within me or around me.

I am accomplishing the tasks ministry demands of me, but I am really disconnected from God and have lost a connection with what God has called me to do.

I am tired. Both physically, emotionally and spiritually. I do not know how to recover or become rested.

I am aware that, just below the surface, I am “barely keeping it together.” If pushed or challenged or criticized, I feel I am at the “end of my rope.”

I do not stop working, even when I know I should. I feel I have something to prove.

I am continually aware that God is with me

As I care for people, in the extremes of their lives (birth, death, sickness), I feel increasingly numb. This applies to my personal life as well. I cannot “feel” like I know I should.

I am falling prey to unhealthy behaviors (eating, drugs, alcohol, inappropriate entertainment, binges). Or desiring and dreaming about a different life.

I do not have time to take care of myself. Normal things like eating well, sleeping, exercise, running errands, and taking care of my home.

The people most important to me are not getting the best from me.

I do not have the time to do the things I enjoy.

I find myself avoiding people. They drain me, and I am already close to empty.

My spiritual practices have not been consistent or even practiced in quite awhile. I tell myself they are life giving, but I do not have the time or energy for them.

I feel isolated, dry, and alone. I have no one to talk to and no one would really understand my situation anyway.

Being honest about my struggles with anyone would only lead to losing my job.

I feel who I am is disconnected from what I do.

Beyond what I am doing for other people, it has been a long time since I have felt connected with the presence of God in my own life.

My ministry has become more important to me than my own relationship with God.

I spend all my time doing things for God and very little time being with God.

I see God working in and through me resulting in fruitful ministry.

APPENDIX 2

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS WITH PASTORS

The following questions are to be asked within an interview format with each pastor following the eight-week experience with spiritual disciplines. The intent is to ask directly, “What happened?” Did they see or experience growth, increased wholeness, increased awareness of the presence of God, and any increased health within their ministries?

Tell me what happened?

Review Appendix 1 responses before and after eight-weeks. Discuss and ask about any changes.

Review the content of page 37 in this project.

Did this happen? How? Can you be specific?

Have you seen any changes in your life or ministry?

Are you growing in your relationship with God?

Not - did you do everything I asked, but are you growing in your love of God and people?

Have you grown in the practice of contentment?

If so, what effects has this had on your life/ministry/relationships?

Are you more courageous? More patient? More willing? More ____ (what? Fill in the blank).

A large part of this project is about having “eyes of faith” to “see” God moving and working. Tell me about your ability to “see” God at work. Has your

“awareness” of God changed? If so, how? Do you sense a change in being a “detective of the Divine?” (p. 90). Can you “see” Him?

Tell me about your ability to listen to people and/or “be present” with them.

What has been happening within your ministry? Any changes? Signs of health?

Is there fruit?

Has your desire for this journey changed? (refer to page 102). Through this experience, do you see a path forward in ministry that is greater, healthier, and fuller than your previous experience?

(review page 112 then ask) Are you able to do that which God desires to do in your life and ministry? Has this changed?

How is your soul?

Tell me about the balance in your life between times engaged in active ministry with people and times alone with God. Has this balance changed? If so, how?

Are you less hurried?

Quote from the Abstract, “The hope is to stir desire within pastors to pursue this authentic relationship and present these spiritual practices as the avenue through which this relationship is cultivated.” Did this happen? To what extent?

Quote from the Abstract, “The intent is to provide an invitation into a way of being with God that is fruitful and vibrant. Ministry then naturally flows from this relationship.” Did this happen? To what extent?

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