Fall 12-1-2017

Implementing Spiritual Vitality in the Men of San Marcos Community Church: Holy Spirit and Spiritual Practices

John A. McComb
dminfacultyassistant@fuller.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin

Part of the Christianity Commons

Recommended Citation
https://digitalcommons.fuller.edu/dmin/306

This Project is brought to you for free and open access by the School of Theology at Digital Commons @ Fuller. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Fuller. For more information, please contact archives@fuller.edu.
This ministry focus paper entitled

IMPLEMENTING SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN THE MEN OF SAN MARCOS COMMUNITY CHURCH: HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

Written by

JOHN A. MCCOMB

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

has been accepted by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary upon the recommendation of the undersigned readers:

Randy L. Rowland

Kurt Fredrickson

Date Received: December 1, 2017
IMPLEMENTING SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN THE MEN OF SAN MARCOS COMMUNITY CHURCH: HOLY SPIRIT AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

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

BY

JOHN A. MCCOMB
NOVEMBER 2017
ABSTRACT

Implementing Spiritual Vitality in the Men of San Marcos Community Church: Holy Spirit and Spiritual Practices
John A. McComb
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2017

The purpose of the project is to develop a thirty-day spiritual formation program for the men of San Marcos Community Church in Central Texas. The program begins with an overnight retreat followed by four weekly meetings and daily spiritual practices. The goal is to give the men spiritual tools for accessing a deeper relationship with God.

This paper is presented in three parts. Part One examines the ministry context of San Marcos Community Church. It describes the cultural and demographic composition of both the town of San Marcos and the church. An overview of the need for this project is provided as well.

Part Two establishes the theological and biblical foundations relevant to the development of spiritual formation. The person and work of the Holy Spirit are foundational and are investigated through the theological writings of several authors. A description of how the Spirit operates through the disciplines is discussed, and theological reflection regarding divine encounter is explored as a theological base.

Part Three discusses the thirty-day program, designed to increase spiritual vitality among the men at the church. During this time the men will experience the practices of Lectio Divina, Journaling, the Prayer of Examen, and small group accountability. The men will be required to engage these practices during the program with the hope that they will adjust their lives and incorporate them permanently.

Content Reader: Randy L. Rowland, DMin
Words: 225
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the Board of Directors of San Marcos Community Church for giving me the time and opportunity to work on this project. I also would like to thank two men from my early years in Christianity: David Armstrong and Dave Depew, for helping me understand the importance of a theological education. Special thanks goes to Dr. Gary Aron for his encouragement throughout the process and to Dr. Bob Davis, who was a constant cheerleader and never let me quit. My editor, Lisa Marie Sandoval, was a great coach and tough critic. I appreciate that she believed in me and the validity of this project. Finally, I want to express deep appreciation to my beautiful wife Susan for putting up with me through this project as well as all the other crazy things I have pursued. She and my kids—Andrew, Hannah, and Rachel—are a huge blessing in my life.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS iii

PART ONE: MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION 2

Chapter 1. COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT OF SAN MARCOS COMMUNITY CHURCH 9

PART TWO: THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Chapter 2. LITERATURE REVIEW 54

Chapter 3. A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN MEN THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES 89

PART THREE: PRACTICE

Chapter 4. THEOLOGY, GOALS, AND PLANS FOR THIRTY-DAY SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAM 129

Chapter 5. IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAM 146

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 168

APPENDICES 174

BIBLIOGRAPHY 187
PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Men in North America are at risk, and there seems to be an attack upon masculinity. In the media many times men are portrayed like the famous cartoon character, Homer Simpson,\(^1\) as stupid, overweight, irrelevant, and controlled completely by their passions and appetites. The message seems to be that men need to give up their Neanderthal ways and become more like women. If men would become more sensitive, civilized, and feminized, all would be well.

There is some justification for this line of reasoning. There are distinct categories for the male gender: man and boy. In American society today, there are no discernable rites of passage that delineate manhood from boyhood. Consequently, there is confusion regarding the entry point to manhood. Many lose their virginity, some rob stores, and others join gangs in an effort to assure themselves they are fully male.

To add to the problem, over 40 percent of the children in America live in a home where the father is absent.\(^2\) In such a setting, a boy grows up un-fathered and un-mentored by a masculine figure. In many cases, a strange being emerges who is neither boy nor man but something in between: an adolescent who does not know who he is nor who he is supposed to become. An adolescent has the body and physiology of a man, but the emotional maturity of a boy. This mixed up, psychologically unformed, and emotionally


immature creature can cause pain and grief to women, children, and society in general—especially if he lacks a father figure to guide him.

The statistics regarding male violence are staggering. Jennie Ruby from the feminist journal, *Off Our Backs*, reports that 85 percent of all violent crimes are committed by men.³ Catherine Cloutier writing for the *Boston Globe* says that “1 in 6 women who have been victimized by domestic violence experienced being hit with a fist, and 29.7 percent said they had been slapped, pushed, or shoved.”⁴ Furthermore, one in every six women in the United States has been stalked, one in every five has been raped, and one in every four has been severely physically assaulted by an intimate male partner.⁵ This violence starts at a young age and can be seen in the 87 percent of stalkers who are men and in the physical aggression occurring in one in three teenage dating relationships.⁶ The report from the Commission of Domestic Violence funded by the American Bar Association declares, “Most perpetrators of sexual violence are men. Among acts of sexual violence committed against women since the age of 18, 100% of rapes, 92% of physical assaults, and 97% of stalking acts were perpetrated by men.”⁷ It is clear that


⁵ Ibid.


⁷ Ibid.
much violence in the United States can be attributed to the male gender. For this reason, 
the American male is in crisis. His anger and confusion often are turned into physical acts 
of violence and aggression against those weaker than himself. He needs help. Many men, 
even if they are not violent and aggressive, struggle with issues of self-worth, significance, 
and personal value at times. They feel isolated and lonely and believe they cannot live up 
to the demands placed on them by society.\(^8\) These are existing far below what God intends 
for them, and they are unaware that a better life is available. 

Such men search for identity and purpose. They must learn what it means to be 
truly masculine and perform their God-given role and duty to civilization. The Body of 
Christ can help. Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the influence of the local 
church a man can learn to protect and care for those in society. He can find his identity in 
God and live in the purpose for which he was created. He can be a positive influence 
upon his spouse and offspring, as God intended (Ephesians 5:25; 6:4). He can learn how 
to provide and live in a loving relationship, mutually beneficial with the feminine rather 
than abusing and seeking to conquer her. The local church benefitting from the Holy 
Spirit’s ministry and spiritual practices can help men find their true identity and the godly 
masculinity their creator intended. 

The leadership of San Marcos Community Church, which was founded in San 
Marcos, Texas in 2001 and identifies itself as Spirit-filled,\(^9\) has many non-Charismatic or 
Pentecostal members. It has passion to see all its members become what God intended. 

communitychurch.org/about-us/what-we-believe/.
From its inception, however, the church has attracted a large number of men. Presently, they comprise 49 percent of congregants,\textsuperscript{10} which is considerably higher than the average local church.\textsuperscript{11} The leadership of the congregation feel that this higher percentage offers an opportunity that must be seized. While the church has many programs and ministries to help women, there currently exists a lack of such intimate support to help men develop deep, rich inner lives with God through the Holy Spirit. Through a focus on developing spiritual practices, a new relationship with the Holy Spirit can be fostered. Deliverance, spiritual breakthrough, and emotional healing are just some of the fruit men can experience when they engage in Spirit-empowered formation.

Consequently, this project seeks to invigorate spiritual vitality into the lives of the men at San Marcos Community Church through the Holy Spirit’s ministry and spiritual practices. The goal of the program is to help men develop spiritual practices they can use every day. While retreats and conferences are valuable, and a short retreat will be part of the program, the pressing need is for men to learn to walk closely with God in the midst of their busy daily lives as they seek to be faithful to their spouses, children, vocations, personal missions, and local church relationships. Therefore, the program will offer exposure to various spiritual practices over a thirty-day period with the expectation that men will find some that fit and permanently incorporate those into their lifestyles.

\textsuperscript{10} John McComb, \textit{Congregational Survey} (San Marcos, TX: San Marcos Community Church, April 19, 2015). Survey administered during both Sunday morning services and also through the church website.

This discussion is presented in three parts. Part One describes the ministry context of the church and examines the area’s current demographics. It explores the history of San Marcos Community Church along with the challenges and opportunities that men face. It also explores the feminization of the American Church, reactions to it, and healthy relationships within it.

Part Two includes theological reflection, beginning with a literature review of six books pertaining to the Holy Spirit and spiritual formation within the context of the community of faith. Additionally, it establishes a theological framework based on the literature review and discusses the idea of divine encounter through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Certain passages in John’s Gospel will be studied as well as a Charismatic/Pentecostal theology of immanence. The spiritual disciplines in Jesus’ life will be observed along with a comparison of Dallas Willard, Richard J. Foster, and Peter Scazzero regarding their recommendations on spiritual practices. Specifically, four spiritual disciplines will be examined for the purpose of fostering spiritual vitality. Lectio Divina, Prayer of Examen, Journaling, and small group accountability will be weighed for the purpose of creating a rich interior life with God.

Part Three of the paper presents the ministry strategy. It sets forth the objective and plans for the program, which include the theological implications of the study. It discusses strategic goals as well as the target population and the training of leaders. The project begins with selection. A pilot program will limit enrollment to no more than twelve men, who are positioned not only to experience its power in their own lives but also to be trained as future leaders. In this manner, the program can expand logarithmically if
needed. The first twelve are critical and should be men who have experienced spiritual
rebirth and conversion to follow Christ as well as have leadership potential in the church.
In the second generation of the program it is possible for men who are seeking God, but
who have not been reborn, to participate as long as they have an opportunity for this
during the first week. Spiritual hunger must be present in potential members.

The program begins during the Lenten Season with an overnight retreat where
participants tell their stories, practice various prayer exercises, and bond with one
another. They will leave the retreat with a thirty-day plan regarding daily prayer,
Scripture readings, and a list of things they will refrain from for the duration of the
program. The idea is to take advantage of Lent, when men’s focus naturally is on
removing spiritually unhelpful things from their lives while adding positive things. After
the initial retreat, the men will begin practicing daily sacred time with God that includes
prayer, Scripture, and reflection. The group will meet weekly for four weeks to
experience new spiritual practices, discuss progress, and pray for one another. During
these meetings, accountability groups of four members each will be formed. At the fourth
meeting, they will design permanent personal programs consisting of the disciplines they
have experienced and will use in their daily lives. At a follow-up meeting forty-five days
after the conclusion of the program, participants will discuss progress and adjustments
they have made to fit their daily routines. Part Three discusses all of this in more detail
and presents a timeline for the project, resources needed, and an assessment plan.

The proposed program has the potential to change men’s lives by exposing them
to the Holy Spirit’s ministry through the effective use of certain spiritual practices. If a
man commits the time and energy required, the program can have a lasting impact not only on his life but on those he influences. Since the program is designed to be replicated and the initial members are selected with multiplication in mind, the ministry can expand rapidly. It easily could be modified for specific groups, such as pastors or ministry leaders, and even transplant to other congregations.
CHAPTER 1
COMMUNITY AND CONTEXT OF SAN MARCOS COMMUNITY CHURCH

This chapter explores the Central Texas region in which San Marcos Community Church is located. It delves into the spiritual history of the area and examines its current socio-demographics, which include ethnic compositions and influences of the nearby university. Overall, the community context is comprised of a small-town culture currently experiencing a boom economy. This chapter also investigates the history of San Marcos Community Church, its Spirit-filled and interdenominational nature, the demographics of the congregation, its regional influence, and the balanced gender composition. The chapter concludes with an examination of the feminized American Church, men’s place within it, and current opportunity available for a spiritual formation program designed for men to engage more deeply within the Body of Christ at San Marcos Community Church.

Brief History of San Marcos, Texas

The town of San Marcos is located at the headwaters of the San Marcos River in Central Texas, a site archeologists have declared to be one of the oldest continuously
inhabited places in North America. Its modern history begins in the late 1750s with the founding of a small village, by Spanish explorers, where the oldest road in Texas, the El Camino Real, crosses the San Marcos River. Spain could neither populate nor hold its land in Texas, as the Comanche Indians and draught were constant threats. Europeans first arrived in the area in the 1840s and pioneered a farming community; shortly thereafter, the first churches were chartered.

The Presbyterian, Christian, Baptist, Episcopal, and Methodist churches all were founded during this era either by circuit riding or bi-vocational ministers who saw the spiritual needs of the residents. Several of these pioneer church planters were men who possessed a strong fervor for God and had given him their full allegiance. It is interesting, however, that a few of the church founders, and almost all of the second-generation leaders, were also highly committed Freemasons; and though they were of different denominations, they had that commonality. This raises questions about the depth of their commitment to Christ, as the lodge seems to have held their highest allegiance. Although it was culturally acceptable to be a member of a Protestant church during this era, there is no record of revival or strong spiritual vitality in the community.

During this early period, two institutions were developed: the San Marcos Baptist Academy and the Methodist-sponsored Coronal Institute. In 1905 several Baptist pastors saw the need for a school and began raising money and developing plans. The citizens of

---

1 Francis Stoval et al., *Clear Springs and Limestone Ledges: A History of San Marcos and Hays County* (Austin, TX: The Hays Historical Commission, 1986), 157. All historical information is from this source, unless otherwise noted.

2 Ibid., 92, 94, 97, 100, 102, 104, 107, 141.
San Marcos raised half the initial funds needed to open the school, while the Baptist church provided the rest, and classes began in September 1908 with two hundred students and thirteen faculty. The academy has undergone many changes since, but it is thriving and reached its highest enrollment in the 2012-2013 academic year. Currently, it is not particularly known for its Christianity, and the word “Baptist” has been removed from the official name. When considering its founding, it is hard to determine if there was a move of God involved or if it was simply the product of the political climate of the era.

The Coronal Institute was founded in 1868 and flourished for fifty years, finally closing its doors on Christmas of 1917. It was founded by members of the Methodist Church and the Episcopal Methodist South denomination. It met its demise due to competition from the two other educational institutions in town, The San Marcos Baptist Academy and the recently founded South West Texas State Normal College, which is the predecessor to Texas State University. Historians also believe the severe drought of 1916 through 1918 played a more important role in the school’s closing. Apparently, there were many Methodist ministers displaced during the drought, thus upsetting the parish cash flow that kept the institution funded. As with the Baptist Academy, it is difficult to determine if the impetus for founding this school was education or spiritual vitality. It was probably not spiritual fervor but a growing need and desire for the offspring of the pioneers to be educated. Since there was no other influential religion in the area and no

---


4 Ibid.

5 Stoval et al., Clear Springs and Limestone Ledges, 148-154.
public school system, education and Christian values were tied together. This led to the contemporary context of San Marcos, in which residents can see themselves as having a Christian culture without necessarily delving deeply into the richness of a biblical faith.

**Past Moves of the Holy Spirit in the Area**

A problem with “Christian culture” is the difficulty of determining where true spiritual fervor lies and where ethical interests dominate the political landscape. This has been the case in San Marcos for many years. However, two historical events can be classified as moves of God. One was in the late 1800s among the Hispanic population. The other occurred in the 1970s and was associated with the larger, more global Charismatic Renewal.

The 1880s Hispanic population in the San Marcos area, though a minority and predominately Catholic, experienced a significant move of God. In 1887 the Anglo pastor of the First Presbyterian Church discovered a group of Mexican-born farm workers meeting for prayer and Bible study. He visited a meeting and was so impressed that he petitioned the Presbyterian Church to found a mission among them. This group was formed previously by José Botello, a visiting Mexican who led them in informal Bible studies and gained many converts. Once permission was given to establish a church, no easy task in the Anglo-dominated society of the era, which viewed them as too illiterate and poor to properly govern themselves, they started the first Hispanic Presbyterian congregation in Texas. The church is still active and is known as the Memorial Presbyterian Church. In addition, the Reverend Walter Scott, the son of Scottish Presbyterian missionary parents, who had been raised in Mexico, helped start other Presbyterian congregations in the
villages around San Marcos. He was fluent in Spanish and was affectionately known as “St. Paul” by the members. Finally, another group of devout Mexicans who met along the banks of the Blanco River in July 1889 began what is now known as the First Hispanic Baptist Church.

These significant events in the spiritual life-history of San Marcos are remarkable when considering the influence the Catholic Church held over the people. Traditionally, and even currently, Hispanics in Texas are Catholic by birth and culture. Only in recent decades have they dared to venture outside the confines of the Catholic system. The fact that mostly illiterate Mexican farm workers were meeting to study the Scriptures and founded their own, non-Catholic churches is amazing. Although little is written about these events, they only can be described as a move of God.

The second move of God that influenced San Marcos occurred over a period of years and through several different avenues. In the late 1960s, a chaplain at San Marcos Baptist Academy experienced what he called the baptism in the Holy Spirit and began praying with others to experience this phenomena. It was accompanied by speaking in tongues and significant supernatural miracles. At about the same time, a group of local Lutherans were experiencing the same blessings and wanted to discover more. A number of students at San Marcos High School experienced not only conversion to Christ but also the manifestation of the Spirit, and they began to study the Bible together and tell their

---


7 Ibid., 36.
friends about Christ. The Baptist chaplain, the Lutheran believers, and the high school young people rented a building downtown and began meeting together. They called themselves the New Testament Church.\(^8\)

About this time, Gary Job Corps, a federally funded program which helps inner-city teens acquire job skills, was founded a few miles outside San Marcos.\(^9\) When the teens came into town on Saturday nights to drink and carouse, they encountered the believers from the New Testament Church, and over five hundred people were converted to Christ in the summer of 1970. This movement changed its name to Hill Country Faith Ministries, bought property, built a Christian school, planted nine churches throughout Central Texas, and opened a Bible-training college. It was fueled by a constant flow of university students from Southwest Texas State University. This movement had a global impact, as some members founded a band and evangelized for a number of years in Ireland.\(^10\)

The church still exists and, although it has gone through many seasons and changes, it still impacts the area. While God has worked through programs like the Methodist-sponsored Walk to Emmaus,\(^11\) and other churches have been founded and have

---

\(^8\) Bobby Hill, interviewed by author, San Marcos, TX, May 22, 2005. Hill was living in Virginia and was fifty-one years old at the time of interview.


\(^10\) Hill Country Church, “History,” accessed August 10, 2016, [http://hillcountrychurch.net/about/history](http://hillcountrychurch.net/about/history). Jim Darnell, interview by author, Burnet, TX, January 26, 2014, is founding pastor of Hill Country.

flourished, the events surrounding the birth of Hill Country Church and its influence encompass the most significant move of the Spirit in the history of San Marcos.

**Current Demographics**

The ministry context of San Marcos Community Church is tied to the demographics of the San Marcos area. The diverse demographics help make the area unique. Large numbers of Hispanics, students attending Texas State University, San Marcos’ small-town culture, and the current economic boom all flavor the setting of the church.

**Ethnicity**

The three main ethnicities represented in San Marcos and Central Texas are Hispanic, Anglo, and African American. The African Americans are the least represented and only comprise about 5 percent of the population. Anglos are the majority and comprise 53.7 percent, but there is a significant Hispanic influence. Although Latinos represent only 37.8 percent of the population, they total 70 percent of students in the public school. Many Anglos choose to home-school their children, send them to one of several private Christian schools in the area, or ship them out of the district to public schools with better reputations. However, the Hispanic influence upon the town is significant and growing.

San Marcos has attracted Hispanics, mostly from Mexico, for many decades. In the earlier part of last century many came to work in the cotton fields, when agriculture was

---


the main source of employment and cotton was the dominant cash crop.\textsuperscript{14} Prior to World War II, they lived mostly in the rural areas outside town and were employed as farm labor. After the war, however, they began moving into town, placing their children in school, and starting businesses. Beginning in the late 1940s San Marcos began gaining a reputation as a regional center for Hispanic Civil Rights. There were several influential persons as well as organizations such as the G.I. Forum, League of United Latin American Citizens, and the founding of the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce that thrust the town into the center of this movement.\textsuperscript{15} Although racism was an issue all along, since the early 1900s the town has enjoyed a high number of Hispanic-owned businesses, making San Marcos an attractive option for others of Mexican heritage looking for a place to settle. This trend continues. In 1987 there were 181 Hispanic-owned businesses, by 1992 there were 408, and currently there are 630.\textsuperscript{16} As American-born Hispanics now move into the middle class and additional immigrants continue to cross the Southern Texas border from Mexico, the Hispanic influence will remain significant and increase in San Marcos.

Texas State University

Another demographical influence is Texas State University. It was founded in San Marcos in 1899 and has a current enrollment of over 35,000.\textsuperscript{17} For generations the town

\textsuperscript{14} Davis, Sueños y Recuerdos del Pasado, 7.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 51-65.

\textsuperscript{16} United States Census Bureau, “San Marcos, Texas.”

and the college have had a symbiotic relationship. The university is and has been the largest employer in town. This not only brings in white-collar educational professionals but provides many blue-collar service jobs to the community as well. Much of the predominately blue-collar Hispanic labor force has found employment at the university for decades. In this way, the presence of the university has had a large impact on the growth of that demographic in the area and is a stabilizing factor in the local economy. This has far-reaching ramifications, as it creates numerous business opportunities ranging from restaurants to real estate. These businesses find an abundant source of labor and clientele from college students. Both the town and university benefit from this arrangement.

Other than providing a stabilizing factor to the local economy, which benefits the Body of Christ in San Marcos greatly, the university impacts the local church in two ways. First, it brings an educated demographic in the form of professors and academicians to an otherwise rural Texas town, which normally would not host academia. These educated people have positively influenced local churches for generations by providing leadership, wisdom, and financial contributions.

Second, the university brings students. Although most are temporary residents and do not contribute much financially, they add spiritual vigor. The young people’s vitality is a welcome presence in local churches as they serve, interact, and worship with the older generations. The university and the city are so intertwined that it would be difficult to discuss the city apart from the university’s influence. It flavors all aspects of life in San Marcos, from politics to business and even religion.
Small-Town Culture

San Marcos is located along Interstate 35 between San Antonio and Austin. It is just far enough away from both to escape the status of bedroom community, which is characterized by sprawling subdivisions, soccer moms, and the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA). In an effort to maintain its small-town feel, certain political factions have resisted growth. Depending upon how many seats this group holds on the City Council and the Planning and Zoning Commission determines the business atmosphere of the town. Many of these politicians arrived years ago and want San Marcos to remain as it was in the 1960s or 1970s. For the most part, the city has a reputation of being against growth and development. This frustrates many of the pro-business people, and there is always plenty of rancor in local politics. Those seeking the abundant and affordable housing that a suburban, commuter community offers are disappointed in San Marcos.

The anti-growth position has helped San Marcos maintain its small-town ethos, which is not all bad. In some ways, it has helped the community maintain its rural heritage. Since change is slow in San Marcos, the rural traditions of long ago still can be found. People are proud their ancestors once farmed in the area, and it is easy to find families who have been in the community for four and five generations. This people group is basically conservative in both politics and lifestyle. There are numerous part-time farmers and ranchers, and many residents live on rural acreage. Hunting and fishing are common hobbies. Dove hunting in late summer and deer hunting in the fall are major recreational events, as some men spend every weekend in November and December
pursuing white-tailed deer. Not all men of the community express their masculinity by being avid outdoorsmen, but this persona is welcomed and considered normal.

Another small-town dynamic makes San Marcos unique. The society is not mobile. Many have been here for decades and enjoy long-term friendships, which provide a backbone for a non-mobile society and can be helpful to the local church. The negative side is that such a society may be slow to allow new people to penetrate and assimilate into their spheres of relations. However, once newcomers are accepted, they can expect to experience the deep friendship a small town offers. The small-town ethos of San Marcos is very different from the neighboring communities of Kyle and Buda, which have experienced economic development and the suburban growth that comes with it. These are bedroom communities of Austin, which are comprised mostly of commuters. They offer much in the way of recreation and junior sports programs but have lost touch with their rural roots of bygone eras. It is this quality of San Marcos that not only keeps people from leaving but attracts newcomers.

Economic Boom

The recent economic boom makes Texas a busy and growing place. From December 2013 to December 2014 the state added 457,900 new jobs, ranking first in the nation in job growth.¹⁸ The Census Bureau claims that between July 2013 and July 2014

---

Texas added 451,320 new residents and grew to 26.9 million.\textsuperscript{19} Most of this growth is concentrated in the metropolitan areas of the state. However, San Marcos is included in the Austin – Round Rock – San Marcos Metropolitan Area, which ranked number nine of the nation’s ten fastest growing metropolitan statistical areas. The area grew by 37.3 percent between 2000 and 2010.\textsuperscript{20} Texas ranked number four for percentage of personal income growth by state between 2012 and 2013. “If Texas were a nation, its economy would rank as 12\textsuperscript{th} largest in the world by Gross Domestic Product.”\textsuperscript{21}

Oil and gas production and related manufacturing are the largest income producers, with the tourist industry following a close second. The state ranked first among busiest international border crossings in 2013 with over 3.57 million trucks; 7,971 trains; and over 31.5 million personal vehicles, coming north from Mexico. Texas ranks first in export revenues, totaling almost $289 billion in 2014. “The state’s top value-added exports in 2014 were petroleum and coal products, industrial machinery (including computers), electrical machinery, organic chemicals, and plastics and resins.”\textsuperscript{22} This economic and population explosion has affected San Marcos. The U.S. Census Bureau claims the county grew by 4.8 percent in the past year, making it the fifth fastest growing county in the nation.\textsuperscript{23}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 4.\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 5.\textsuperscript{24} Anita Miller, “Census: Hays Co. Grew by 4.8 Percent,” \textit{San Marcos Daily Record}, March 27, 2015, 1.}
As stated above, there are very few new homes in San Marcos; and most of the growth is in portions of the county closer to Austin, where plentiful housing is available. Nonetheless, Austin, just to the north, is the third fastest growing area in the nation with 25,395 people added in 2012 and 2013; and San Antonio, to the south, as the seventh largest city in America, added 25,400 new residents during this time period.\textsuperscript{24} While most of this growth is slightly to the north or south, the school district, which normally adds about 75 new students per year, claims that 425 new students enrolled in the fall of 2014.\textsuperscript{25} This indicates that the county’s growth, although mostly in the suburbs of Austin, has impacted the town.

The economic boom affects the local churches, as most draw from the regional population. For instance, San Marcos Community Church attracts people from about a forty-mile radius. This means that those living in the suburban communities closer to Austin or San Antonio are willing to drive to San Marcos for church. Additionally, the job growth along the Interstate 35 corridor between Austin and San Antonio is bringing people into the church’s reach. In the past few years, numerous new residents have visited. Several have made San Marcos Community Church their spiritual home, which is considered a blessing by the church leadership.\textsuperscript{26}

San Marcos is a unique setting in which to minister. Its small-town feel influenced by a growing Hispanic population and Texas State University make it distinctive and culturally flavorful. The economic boom Texas is experiencing has had an impact, yet its principal

\textsuperscript{24} Eudaily, “San Marcos Rate of Population Growth Leads Nation.”


\textsuperscript{26} The Sunday Morning Worship average attendance grew by 34 percent from 2013 to 2015. San Marcos Community Church Board of Directors, \textit{Meeting Minutes} (San Marcos, TX: San Marcos Community Church, 2014-2016). Statistics compiled by Jon. T. Zmikly, an associate pastor at the church.
influences on the town remain to be seen. It is in this setting that San Marcos Community Church was planted, has flourished, and continues to live for the Kingdom of God.

San Marcos Community Church

San Marcos Community Church was founded in the fall of 2001 as a church plant from Church of the Hills in Austin. At the time, I was senior associate pastor there and led the new church plant with about thirty-five people, including children, to meet in San Marcos High School. The church flourished in the high school and moved to a larger rented facility 3½ years later. It remained in that facility for almost ten years and during that period acquired twenty-three acres of land for a permanent campus.

The highway in front of the church was selected by the State of Texas for expansion, which required the church to move to another leased facility while concluding a capital campaign fund for the new campus. The only leased facility available was located ten miles west of San Marcos and Interstate 35. As a result of the move and the difficulties associated with accessing the new location, church attendance dropped by about 20 percent; however, the financial giving did not. The church remained financially healthy and construction began on the new campus, as members were faithful not only to tithe but to contribute substantially toward the building fund. The church now inhabits the new campus, which is located along the Interstate 35 corridor in San Marcos. It carries a small amount of debt on the new facility that should be paid off within a few years.

27 Ibid.
The church defines itself as interdenominational and Spirit-filled, with a theology that is Reformed but Charismatic and Pentecostal in style. Worship is active, and members are encouraged to demonstrate their love and adoration for God through song and raised hands. There is a high regard for the Bible as the inerrant Word of God. The church’s mission statement reads: “Inviting off-centered people to submit to a God-centered lifestyle.”\(^{29}\) The church attempts to fulfill this by offering two Sunday morning services where worship, preaching, and personal ministry occur. A mid-week meeting designed strictly for prayer and worship is the backbone of the church and is considered the dynamo that keeps the community of faith focused correctly and accessing divine power. Members are encouraged to join one of the small groups that meet throughout the week at various locations to discuss weekly Scripture readings assigned by the leadership and to pray for one another. Members who make these three items a priority experience emotional healing and spiritual growth that can come only from the Holy Spirit as he works through the Word of God and members of the Kingdom of God to change lives.

Regarding demographics, the church is 73 percent Anglo, 23 percent Hispanic, 1.7 percent African American, and 1.7 percent Asian and in 2014 averaged 226 in Sunday morning attendance. There is virtually no gender gap, with the church’s makeup being 49 percent male and 51 percent female. When considering income, 36 percent of the members earn less than the median household income of $51,900. On the other hand, 38 percent make between $50,000 and $100,000 annually, 19.5 percent earn $100,000 or more, and 6

\(^{28}\) San Marcos Community Church, “What We Believe.”

\(^{29}\) San Marcos Community Church, accessed August 9, 2016, http://sanmarcoscommunitychurch.org/.
percent take home over $200,000. Regarding education, 6.5 percent did not finish high school, 50 percent are high school graduates, and 37.5 percent have college degrees, with almost 6 percent holding graduate degrees. About 70 percent of the congregation own their own homes. This means the congregation has some racial diversity and is economically diverse, fairly well educated, and comprised of permanent residents.

San Marcos Community Church has an influence that reaches beyond the city limits. Located along the Interstate 35 corridor, people living in other communities will travel, in some cases, many miles to find a church they enjoy. In addition, the people are accustomed to driving several miles to work and shop. The majority travel to Austin or San Antonio at least once a week for various reasons, whether they are employed there or not. Commuting is a part of everyday life in Central Texas and driving some distance to church is not viewed as an obstacle. The church has members who live up to thirty miles away—and in rare cases, even farther—and this gives the church a regional influence. Geographically speaking, the church impacts a sphere of roughly sixty miles, which encompass a population of more than 464,000 persons.

San Marcos Community Church is vibrant and healthy. It has been in existence for fourteen years and has learned much about itself and the people of the community. The congregation is enjoying its new location and expects to make a larger impact in the

---

30 McComb, Congregational Survey.

region. As the church continues to live missionally in the community and as new residents come to central Texas, God will do his work in people’s lives. The lack of gender gap will be especially attractive to men in the community.

It is rare that a church intentionally attracts so many men. An interesting global report by the Pew Research Center conducted in 192 countries comprising 2,500 censuses and surveys finds that women are more religious than men.\textsuperscript{32} This is particularly acute among Christians in the United States. Compared to other economically advanced countries, religious commitment in the United States is high, but the gender gap is great.\textsuperscript{33} Women are 13 percent more likely to agree that religion is “very important” in their lives.\textsuperscript{34} Regarding daily prayer, there is a 17 percent difference; and 64 percent of Christian women pray daily, whereas only 47 percent of Christian men claim to do so.\textsuperscript{35} The report shows that 50 percent of Christian women attend worship at least once a week, compared with only 44 percent of the men.\textsuperscript{36} The report goes on to state: “According to media accounts, women so outnumber men in the pews of many U.S. churches that some clergy have changed décor, music and worship styles to try to bring in more men.”\textsuperscript{37} Summarizing, the Pew Research says, “On all the standard measures of religious


\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 9.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 10.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 1.
commitment examined in the study, Christian women are more religious than Christian men.”  

Since San Marcos Community Church attracts such a high percentage of men, it has a spiritual responsibility to raise them up as disciples of Jesus Christ. This means understanding the specific challenges and opportunities they face.

**Challenges Facing Men**

The Church of Jesus Christ can help men to discover their true identity, grow into their destiny, and avoid many pitfalls associated with maleness in North American culture. In order to access healing, however, the Body of Christ must be perceived as welcoming and inviting. This section explores the perils confronting men in modern society and the obstacles often found in the local church that can discourage males from flourishing in God’s image.

**Men at Risk**

American men are in desperate circumstances. Patrick Means in his book, *Men’s Secret Wars*, sheds light on how many American men are in such a plight. He states, “Tonight, about 40 percent of American children will go to sleep in homes in which their fathers do not live. Before they reach 18, more than one-half of our nation’s children are likely to spend at least a significant portion of their childhoods living apart from their fathers.”  

This is a tragedy for both boys and girls and creates the seed-bed for many

---

38 Ibid.

emotional problems later in life.\textsuperscript{40} For a boy, however, the absence of a father leaves him searching for his true identity. Men who never have experienced a father’s approval, mentorship, and guidance will lack genuine relationships in their lives.

In \textit{Wild at Heart}, John Eldredge refers to this lack as the “father wound” and describes the devastating effects it has upon every relationship in the man’s life.\textsuperscript{41} Such a person begins to develop two identities: one is the persona that he projects to the world, the false self, while the other is the true self. The true self is wounded and trying to figure out what it means to be a man and to be masculine. The wounded true self creates pain and heartache for the man and those in relationship with him, until he is healed. Since his earthly father has failed him through abuse, absence, or rejection, he cannot access the answers he desperately needs. Healing only comes from understanding how Father God views him and the ministry that emotionally healthy men can provide.\textsuperscript{42}

Means describes the emotional pain and self-medicating behaviors in which men engage. In a confidential study of Christian male leaders from many denominations he discovered the following:

[A whopping] 64 percent struggle with sexual addiction or sexual compulsion, including but not limited to use of pornography, compulsive masturbation, or other secret sexual activity. 25 percent admit to having had sexual intercourse with someone other than their wife, while married, since becoming a Christian. Another 14 percent acknowledge having had sexual contact short of intercourse outside of their marriage since becoming a Christian.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 56-59, 83-86, 91-94.

\textsuperscript{41} John Eldredge, \textit{Wild at Heart: Discovering the Secret of a Man’s Soul} (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2001), 60-75.

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., 39-139.

\textsuperscript{43} Means, \textit{Men’s Secret Wars}, 133.
This means that instead of protecting and cherishing their marriage, many men are causing damage. They allow their personal problems to destroy the wholesomeness and sanctity of their marriage. This is a great tragedy because these women can be their greatest ally in the quest for emotional healing and health. By working together in honesty and openness, they can expose the broken places in the man’s life and seek healing together. Such men have access to a friend and helper who can hold him accountable for his actions and speak truth when his dysfunctions surface. Sadly, many men do not see this. Instead, they move toward isolation and allow the shame and guilt of their misbehavior to drive them further from the woman they love and those around them. This emotional distance causes another layer of shame and guilt, as the man feels like a failure in his marriage.

Means mentions another challenge men often face: relationships. In regard to relationships with women, he describes three dysfunctional relationship styles: the “controller,” who seeks to dominate women in his life; the “caretaker,” who is addicted to approval and has a fear of rejection or disapproval; and the “isolator,” who avoids authentic connections. All three approaches cause great difficulties in a man’s relationship with women. The “caretaker” fears disapproval and abandonment and as a result usually takes the role of the passive male. He begins to view himself as a victim in the relationship, and this causes conflict. Means says, “Women married to both Controllers or Caretakers eventually feel smothered and resentful.” The “isolator” fears he cannot maintain a healthy relationship with a woman, because if she discovered his true self she would reject him. Therefore, he distances himself from any emotional attachment through

44 Ibid., 152.
overwork or other activities that keep him away from home and threatening relationships there.\textsuperscript{45} Instead of standing as strong warriors in Christ, such men flee in fear. Without older males modeling healthy relationships with both genders, men struggle to connect. This can cause men to stuff their emotions and self-medicate.

One way men self-medicate is by creating secret lives to cope with their inner emotional pain. The behaviors are not restricted to sex but may involve drugs, alcohol, and secret financial dealings. Leon J. Podles speaks of the psychology of masculinity and claims that to be masculine the boy must reject the feminine of his mother and join the men. Masculinity is not a one-time decision to leave the feminine but a decision that must be acted upon many times throughout a man’s life. Podles asserts that a man must decide that he will not return to being “mommy’s little boy” but rather embrace his adult manhood in all aspects of his being. However, a man does not stay in this phase. Podles states that the man who has rejected the feminine must come back and re-attach to the feminine in order to procreate, protect, and provide; essentially, this is how civilization survives. The man who does not reconnect with the feminine, and therefore complete the cycle, is not masculine but dangerous and possesses some sort of deformed masculinity.\textsuperscript{46}

The absence of fathers and healthy male role models creates a problematic existence for many men. To compensate, men put on what has been called the Masculinity

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 149-153.

Mask. By doing this, they never acknowledge or show the pain, anger, or grief present in their lives. They believe being tough means not showing emotional weakness. Such men become out of balance and plagued with numerous emotional and psychological issues that keep them from experiencing healthy relationships with their spouses, children, and other men. They feel alone much of the time and are unhappy creatures who take out their frustrations on those closest to them through verbal and sometimes physical abuse, although they long for affirmation and affection.

Spousal abuse can be categorized as emotional, physical, and sexual. Emotional and verbal abuse are defined as remarks that attempt to demean or destroy a wife’s sense of self-worth. Physical abuse is when a man injures his wife in a nonsexual manner, and sexual abuse is when a man forces sex on his partner. All three are defined as violent acts.

Domestic violence is a large issue in the United States. Battering is the single largest cause of injury to women, and three to four million women are beaten in their homes every year. Over two thousand women are murdered every year by a domestic partner, and almost three in ten women have experienced sexual or physical violence and/or stalking by an intimate partner in their lifetime. Roughly one in seven women have

---

49 Ibid., 2.
50 Ibid.
been stalked by an intimate partner during their lifetime to the point that they felt harm was imminent, and at least one in five women in the United States have been raped in their lifetimes. A whopping 72 percent of all murder-suicides involve an intimate partner, with 94 percent of the victims female. In the Christian community one in four couples record an episode of physical abuse within their marriage. Even within the Body of Christ, the danger to women is real. In many cases, these men loath their lifestyles but do not know how to change.

In his book, Bringing Up Boys, James Dobson claims that it is the breakdown of the nuclear family that is to blame for men’s misbehavior. He writes: “Historically, when the family begins to unravel in a given culture, everything from the effectiveness of government to the general welfare of the people is adversely impacted.” The reason is the absence of father. He claims that masculinity is learned, primarily from a boy’s father. There are two particularly important stages in a boy’s life where a father is indispensable: around three to five years and at the onset of puberty. At both points, it is critical that the boy have a father present in order for his masculinity to develop properly.

52 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
56 James Dobson, Bringing Up Boys (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2001), 53.
57 Ibid., 58.
Dobson claims that the boy needs to “identify his gender assignments and understand what it means to be a man.”58

To illustrate this point, he speaks about Pilanesberg National Park in northwest South Africa where young bull elephants became increasingly and uncharacteristically violent, especially against white rhinos. Apparently, with no provocation the young male elephants would gore and kill the rhinos. Typically, both species coexist peacefully in the same habitat, so this behavior was disturbing and unsettling. After research, it was discovered that the violence was a by-product of a government program to harvest older male elephants. Dobson says, “Almost all the young rogues were orphaned when they were calves, depriving them of adult contact. Under normal circumstances, dominant older males keep the young bulls in line and serve as role models for them.”59 The lack of the older male influence left the younger ones with a deformed identity, which resulted in terror for the habitat.

Eldredge agrees that masculinity is learned. He claims that it is bestowed upon a boy as he learns from other men what it means to be a man, emphasizing that a boy cannot learn masculinity from other boys or from the world of women. It is from men that it is passed down.60 Like Dobson, he claims the father is essential in the process. Historically, boys have learned masculinity by living and working in close proximity

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 60.

60 Eldredge, *Wild at Heart*, 62.
with their fathers. Through that relational engagement, boys are forged into men. Young males need their fathers, but many do not have access to that blessing.

In his chapter titled “The Elusive Father Blessing: Manhood without Models,” Means gives advice to men lacking a healthy relationship with their fathers.\(^{61}\) He is addressing grown men who, for one reason or another, did not have functional fathers during their developmental years. His audience realizes their lack of healthy masculinity that has resulted and want help. He outlines three important steps that need to be taken: a man must attempt relational reconciliation with his biological father, he must seek deep friendships with other men, and must allow God to give the blessing that his father is missing.\(^{62}\) Means includes a leader’s guide for a twelve-week men’s small group study. He encourages men to seek the emotional healing and health they are lacking by engaging Scripture and the community of other Christian men.\(^{63}\)

While Dobson, Eldredge, and Means have different reasons for writing, all three assert that masculinity is learned and stress the importance of a boy’s father in the process. According to them, a man cannot develop an emotionally healthy masculinity without other men, especially fathers. When men have grown up without the benefit of emotionally healthy fathers or other good male role models, the Church of Jesus Christ can help. It is important to understand that men not only need role models but the right type of role models. There is no better place than the community of faith in which to find these men.

---


\(^{62}\) Ibid., 66-81.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., 258-287.
Christ and the Scriptures must be the center of such a community. The local church is the ideal setting for godly masculine growth and the development of male emotional health.

Feminization of the Church Experience

When thinking about men and their involvement with Church, there is one issue that cannot be overlooked. It seems that some of the masculine gender are not intrinsically attracted to Jesus’ Church. Statistics presented earlier in this discussion demonstrate that while the Christian Church does not necessarily repel men, it does not naturally seem to attract them. This must be investigated. If this is the case, then discovering the cause of men’s absence in church is important. It is also important to understand the consequences of declined male involvement.

When discussing the presence or lack of one sex in an institution in comparison with another, the term “gender gap” is used. The purpose is to compare the percentages present. The Pew Research Center conducted a global and massive survey in 2016 to investigate gender gap in religions around the world. They discovered that the United States is more religious but possesses a wider gender gap than other developed nations. The study shows that in America 47 percent of men and 60 percent of women say that religion is “very important” in their lives. This demonstrates a 13 percent gender gap. Among those Americans who identify as Christians, 32 percent of the men and 40

---


65 Ibid., 51.

66 Ibid.
percent of the women claim to attend church weekly. While this is lower, it still represents an 8 percent gap between the sexes. Barna Group reports, “Historically, men have been less likely to regularly attend church than women,” and the research organization’s founder writes: “Women are twice as likely to attend a church service during any given week. Women are also 50 percent more likely than men to say they are ‘religious’ and to state that they are ‘absolutely committed’ to the Christian faith.”

This trend is not limited to North America or even Western democracies but is global in scope. Joshua Georgen of Latin American Missions says, “Following Jesus Christ isn’t usually seen as the most macho thing for a man to profess. As a result, throughout Mexico many mothers take their children to church service alone, while their husbands remain at home.” He goes on to cite Nicaraguan missionaries who claim that “60-80 percent of worshippers in Nicaraguan churches are female, and up to 90 percent of attendees at their leadership seminars are women.”

At first glance, someone might mistakenly assume that men are simply less religious than women, but this is not the case. Besides Christianity, there are four other major world religions—Judaism, Hinduism, Islam, and Buddhism—and none of them

---

67 Ibid.


71 Ibid.
possess a feminized gender gap of greater than 12 percent. In fact, Black Islam in America possesses a majority of male members. Podles says, “There is something about Christianity, especially Western Christianity, that drives a wedge between the church and men who want to be masculine.” This trend seems to be growing. For instance in 1998, 55 percent of Baptist churches reported a gender gap of more than 12 percent, but by 2007 it had increased to 69 percent. Between 1998 and 2007 Pentecostal denominations reported a 20 percent increase in local congregations that had 12 percent or more gender gap.

Although Barna’s recent research shows that both men and women are deciding not to attend local American congregations as they did twenty years ago, statistics indicate that women are still more numerous than men in church. Many men are not finding meaning in church but need the support and help the Body of Christ offers. For some reason, they tend to shy away from local church involvement, thus distancing themselves from the healing and guidance they hunger for.

When considering why some men do not seem to feel welcome in church, it is important to investigate the root causes. Christianity was founded by a male figure, Jesus Christ. It has experienced much male influence throughout its development, so it is a puzzle as to why it is not more attractive to men. Women have played major roles in religion since the beginning, but why is the Church presently not attracting the male gender as much? It seems there are at least three possible factors.

---

72 Ibid., 16.


74 Murrow, Why Men Hate Going to Church, 16.

75 Barna Group, “Five Factors Changing Women’s Relationship with Churches.”
One reason some men feel alienated from church may be the presence or echoes of Bridal Mysticism in the liturgy. Bridal Mysticism is a type of Christian devotion that uses romantic language to describe the soul’s relationship to God. It is highly individualized in its focus, because it often replaces the community of faith as the bride of Christ with the individual worshiper. This emphasis tends to create a liturgical environment of pious individualism where the worshiper is, functionally, a female lover adoring her husband.

Podles believes this is an important factor in Christian feminization. When discussing the origins of feminization in the Church, he explains that it actually began about the thirteenth century. He claims that prior to this time period the Church in the West was fairly well balanced with an equal distribution of both sexes. Podles thinks that this type of devotion probably can be traced back to Origen and interpretation of the Song of Songs in the second century; however, it was Bernard of Clairvaux’s fame and influence in the late Middle Ages that gave it momentum. Podles writes: “The language that expressed the union of the soul and God in erotic terms was highly congenial to women.” The presence of Bridal Mysticism frequently can be found in literature of the era, especially among women visionaries, where the love affair between Christ and the soul leads to engagement and eventual marriage. Later mystics such as Henry Suso, Theresa of Avila, and John of the Cross demonstrate this influence in their theology as

---

76 Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 104.
77 Ibid., 106.
78 Ibid., 102.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid., 105.
well; and as a result, Podles concludes, “The Western Christian has traditionally been a female soul in love with her Bridegroom.”

The emotional intimacy that Bridal Mysticism encourages is difficult for some men. When discussing men and intimacy, Archibald D. Hart says, “One major area of emotional discomfort for men is relationships. There is a dread of closeness in all relationships, a dread of intimacy. Men don’t quite know what to do with the feeling associated with affection, especially when it is nonsexual.” Podles views it differently. He states, “Since normal men reject both homosexuality and femininity as incompatible with the masculinity for which they are always striving, bridal mysticism and the metaphors and attitudes to which it gave rise have placed a major obstacle to men’s participation in the Church.” Either way, it seems that many men are uncomfortable utilizing eros-saturated language when it comes to their intimate relationship with God. This type of worship environment places a heavy emphasis on the individual’s ability to love and adore God in a specific and limited way.

Another possible reason that men may not be attracted to church is the music. It seems that much of the Bridal Mystic language that some men feel to be incompatible with their masculinity is also present in certain songs used in churches. In particular, the Christian genre of music referred to as Praise and Worship is the focus of this criticism.

---

81 Ibid., 108.


83 Ibid., 119.
It is prevalent and has come to define the sound in many evangelical churches.\textsuperscript{84} This form of music began in the late 1960s and early 1970s as young people, raised on rock and roll, were discovering faith in Christ and entering churches. They felt emotionally disconnected from the hymn-based music found in most evangelical churches at the time. As a result, they began writing their own. The result was a new sound that utilized the instruments found in rock bands with a focus on Jesus as the object of adoration.\textsuperscript{85} With the entrance of Praise and Worship, a shift occurred. The older, hymn-based music was mostly about God, but the new songs were sung to God. “The difference may seem subtle, yet it completely changes how worshippers relate to the Almighty. Praise and Worship introduced a familiarity and intimacy with God that’s absent in many hymns.”\textsuperscript{86} It is the intimacy of singing to God rather than about God that seems to be the issue.

In “The Feminization of the Church,” Holly Pivec claims that church music is a contributing factor to men being absent from church. She quotes Steve Craig, leader of the men’s ministry at Yorba Linda Friends Church, where over four hundred men attend. He says, “In our men’s ministry, we’re beginning to take out the flowery songs and replace them with the warrior-type lyrics and more masculine things that men identify with.”\textsuperscript{88}


\textsuperscript{85} Murrow, \textit{Why Men Hate Going to Church}, 70-72.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 74.


\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
Mike Erre, who is the director of a men’s ministry of over four hundred at Rock Harbor Church in Costa Mesa, California, agrees and says, “The classic example is the worship pose of the eyes shut and the arms raised in this tender embrace, singing a song that says, ‘I’m desperate for you. You’re the air I breathe.’ Guys don’t talk to guys like that.”

Matt Redman, who has written many Praise and Worship songs, concedes that some of the romantic imagery used in contemporary worship songs does not connect with masculine men. He says connotation is important. The words used when writing a song need to transfer the same meaning to the listener. He claims to have some regret about the romantic language in some of his songs and feels the meaning could have been better conveyed if he had chosen different words.

If the music seems too feminine, some men might struggle to engage the worship music found in their local church. Since the lyrics are supposed to be sung directly to God and the words used are romantic in nature, such men can have trouble vocalizing and expressing their amorous feelings for the God-man Jesus. In this way, it may be an area of struggle in which they are not completely comfortable or even threatens their masculinity. For example, with a song that employs kingly images or talks about God’s warrior attributes, these same men might feel more comfortable engaging in worship.

A third possible reason why some men may not feel comfortable in Jesus’ Church is the loss of a healthy, functioning biblical patriarchy. The term “patriarchy” often connotes

89 Ibid.

abuse or misuse of authority. However, biblical patriarchy is actually the opposite. It embodies the heart of God to protect, love, and empower along with Jesus’ humble service and heroic sacrifice—especially when it comes to the mutuality of male and female in church and family life.

Part of biblical patriarchy involves being a role model, a leader others can look up to. If this is lacking, the Church has failed. Cardinal Raymond Leo Burke declares, “A man who has not been formed with a proper identity as a man and as a father figure will ultimately become very unhappy. These poorly formed men become addicted to pornography, sexual promiscuity, alcohol, drugs, and the whole gamut of addictions.” Burke recommends the Church put energy into evangelizing and including men. He also states that the practice of confession needs to be emphasized. Men need to understand the devastating effects of sin in their lives. He says leaders in the Body of Christ need to display qualities of selflessness, chivalry, and discipline while demonstrating kindness and charity.

Another aspect of biblical patriarchy is how men are willing to provide and sacrifice for those they love. In the men of San Marcos, this takes shape in their hunger to be heroes in their daily life at work, home, and even in serving their country in the military. This is

---


94 Ibid.
not to say that women do not give and sacrifice for those they love. Podles explains this aspect from a historical-societal perspective. He says that in order for a tribe, community, or civilization to survive it takes both masculine and feminine qualities in the humans involved. At the basic level both shed blood in order for the group to exist. Women bleed through menstruation and childbirth. Up until modern times, in Western societies women risked their lives in order to bring children into the world. They faced the possibility of death at every pregnancy. Men, on the other hand, risked their lives for the group through warfare. Men bled and suffered violence in order to protect the group from extinction.95 David D. Gilmore speaks along these lines in *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. He writes: “Men nurture their society by shedding their blood, their sweat, and their semen, by bringing home food for both child and mother, and by dying if necessary in faraway places to provide a safe haven for their people.”96

According to Podles, this thought is behind the biblical concept of patriarchy, which viewed in its proper light is a good thing. He says true patriarchy is not male dominance, where men are valued over females, but a system of protection and sustenance for the community.97 He argues that masculinity’s purpose is to provide safety and stability to society by staying and providing after the act of sexual intercourse. Masculinity, in its pure form, provides for female and child. In this manner, a society is able to grow and flourish.98

---

95 Podles, *The Church Impotent*, 44.


98 Ibid., 64-68.
These basic concepts about masculinity presented by Podles and Gilmore help when thinking about the local church. In Western society where many women work outside the home and in which law enforcement officers are present, it may be difficult to imagine that the masculine is needed for protection and provision. When thinking about the Church, however, these traits are still needed and appreciated. One’s thinking must be adjusted to realize that protection and provision speak to a deeper reality, one of stability. The masculine is needed in the Church as a stabilizing force. Just as in primitive societies where the masculine guards and provides, so does Western man when he becomes fully engaged in the Church. His emotional and physical presence, financial involvement, and sacrificial giving of time and resources help make the institution stronger. When the masculine is committed to a local church, he acts as role model to his family and other men. His presence and involvement show that Christ’s Church is an important endeavor. By placing a high value on the Church the masculine shows that it is of higher value than other things in society that vie for his attention and resources like hobbies, sports, and other recreational activities. If allowed by the leadership structures of the Church, he will do all in his power to make sure the Church prospers financially and spiritually. His involvement imparts stability and safety and can even serve as the motivation to leave behind any of his unhealthy behaviors that impede these priorities.

In Scripture it is assumed that men are present and actively engaged in church life. There are mandates and charges given in the New Testament, where men are addressed directly. Fathers are tasked with specific instructions regarding their behavior toward their families (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21; 1 John 2:13). Likewise, husbands are told how to
properly relate with their wives (Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 7:3; Colossians 3:19; 1 Peter 3:7), and both young and old men are given specific instruction regarding their actions and attitudes (Titus 2:2, 6; 1 John 2:13). These passages give clear proof that men were present in the New Testament communities of faith and were expected to actively participate in those groups. With biblical exhortations such as these, it is hard to imagine how a local church can be considered healthy if men are absent or under-represented.

Similarly, it would be tragic if women were absent or under-represented. Feminine presence, power, and perspective are needed for the Church to be healthy. Conversely, the same must be said about men. Without their presence, power, and perspective, the Church cannot be considered healthy. Regarding the feminized church, the issue is not women’s presence and involvement; rather, it is male underrepresentation at the lay level and worshipping in pews. There is a way forward that celebrates both genders and acts in charity towards both.

The Importance of Women and a Balanced Approach: Opportunities for Men

The New Testament presents the balanced presence of women and men in the early Christian communities. Women were highly involved in Jesus’ ministry (Luke 8:1-3; Matthew 27:55; Mark 15:40-41). In both Acts and Paul’s letters it is clear that women were important figures in the movement. The missionary couple, Priscilla and Aquila, is one example. In ancient times the husband’s name usually was mentioned first, indicating his primary role of importance, but with these two her name precedes his three out of six times (Acts 18:18; Romans 16:4; 2 Timothy 4:19). This indicates her importance. In Romans 16 Paul refers to women as well as men as his partners in the work. The list of female
coworkers and Christian leaders is impressive: Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2); Mary (Romans 16:6); Junias (Romans 16:7); Tryphaena, Tryphosa, and Persis (Romans 16:12); Julia and Nereus (Romans 16:15). In Colossians Paul mentions a woman named Nympha as the leader of a local house-church (Colossians 4:15). The same is probably the case with Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14). A close reading of Philippians 4 indicates Euodia and Syntyche were important figures in the church in Philippi (Philippians 4:2-3). In the letter to Philemon a woman named Apphia also is listed as one of the recipients (Philemon 2). This is quite revealing about her importance in the church there. Phillip had four daughters who were involved in the ministry of prophecy (Acts 21:9). These and other references lead the New Testament reader to conclude that women enjoyed partnership and leadership roles in the early Church. Strengthening men in their walk with Christ can help them enjoy their partnership with women, as both genders exercise their God-given gifts in ministry and leadership.

Just as the presence and ministry of women matter in the Body of Christ, so the presence of men in the Church matters. The reason for this seems to be found in two ideas: first, the image of God and its relationship to humanity and the Church; second, the New Testament’s specific instructions for men and the roles they are expected to perform in the community of faith. There must be certain attributes that men bring to the Church that will leave the institution lacking, if they are absent or missing in representation.

The idea of humanity created in the image of God finds its basis in Genesis 1:27: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and
female he created them.” 99 Jürgen Moltmann discusses Joel 2:28-30 and argues for a shared eschatological spiritual outpouring on both men and women. His main topic is the Holy Spirit and how God empowers the Church. Moltmann says that human beings are created in the image of God as both man and woman. There is a community of sexes in the eschatological community of faith. 100 Starting from the early Christian experience of Pentecost he claims that a pneumatological concept of the church must be developed in which there is one Spirit but many gifts. 101 He writes: “To be a woman is charisma, to be a man is charisma, and the different charismata operate together for the rebirth of life.” 102 In this specific context Moltmann addresses the misinformed idea that men are superior to women in the Church, but in doing so he demonstrates the opposite as well. He shows that men have a definite place when he says, “And through both Christianity and the feminist movement, men will be liberated from the dominating role which isolates them from life and alienates them from themselves, freed for their true humanity, their own charismata, and for a community with women on all levels in society and the church, a community which will further life.” 103 His comment implies that once the community is functioning properly, men will not be cut off from themselves but liberated to discover their human identity and dynamic as part of the Body of Christ.

---

99 All Scripture is take from The Holy Bible: New American Standard Version (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), unless otherwise noted.

100 Jürgen Moltmann, The Spirit of Life (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 239.

101 Ibid., 240.

102 Ibid.

103 Ibid., 241.
Miroslav Volf also sees the image of God as key. He suggests that in the creation narrative humans are not the image of God in their sexuality but in their common or shared humanity. He claims that humanity must look to the Trinity as an example of how the two sexes should relate to each other and reflect the image of God. In the Trinitarian relationships he finds that each, while being distinct, is interdependent with the other. Volf states that the relationship among the members of the Trinity is characterized by self-giving love; this should be the model for male-female relations in the community of faith.

N.T. Wright discusses the image of God as well and believes the concept is mostly vocational. He refers to humans as imagers of God. What he means by this is that redeemed humanity are reflectors of God. This works two ways. They reflect God to the world through efforts in bringing justice, restoring relationships, and creating beauty. In turn, they reflect and represent the world to God through prayer, praise, and worship. He bases his thoughts on the idea of redeemed humanity as a royal priesthood. Although Wright does not speak directly to the issue of male and female in his comments, he is clearly speaking of both sexes being involved and mentions the royal priesthood consisting of both


105 Ibid., 173.

106 Ibid., 184-187.

107 Ibid., 188.


women and men. He clarifies the task of reflecting God to encompass the whole of redeemed humanity. When one considers the magnitude of the task, it requires everyone, both men and women, to be actively engaged in the Church as mission. The vocational mandate suggested by Wright must include women and men as the image of God.

It seems clear that Moltmann, Volf, and Wright understand that both men and women are equally important to the Church and that both must be involved if the image of God is to be adequately represented. A mutual respect, interdependence, and love must be present for proper imaging to occur. Given this mindset and working from this platform, the local church has a responsibility to ensure the spiritual formation of both men and women. To overlook or undervalue half of redeemed humanity would be a serious mistake. The local church cannot be considered healthy without an equal representation of genders. Together they bring unique influences, and God expects both to be involved. Therefore, men must be equally represented and spiritually active in Christ’s Church.

Challenging Men

Men need a challenge. They demonstrate they come alive and thrive on it. This can be seen in how they tend to fight to overcome any obstacle for a woman’s affections and woo her hand in marriage; cheer loudly at their child’s little league game and professional sporting events; and engage in hardcore extremist athletics such as boxing, football, and wrestling. Such men approach their spirituality in a similar way. Even the Bible shows story after story of men facing obstacles and overcoming struggles in order to grow and

110 Ibid.

111 Volf, Exclusion and Embrace, 188-190.
live out their faith. Joseph thrived under the hardships placed upon him in Egypt (Genesis 39-41). David grew and developed strong character under the challenges of Saul’s wrath (1 Samuel 18-31). In the New Testament, Peter denied Christ three times yet persevered through his failure to become the leader of the early Church (Matthew 28:69-75; Acts 2:11). In a similar way, Paul repeatedly responds to challenges throughout his life in a positive and victorious manner (Acts 13-28). Men, particularly those in San Marcos, need to be challenged to go higher and delve more deeply into life with the Spirit.

There is something in the male composition that thrives on competition. In an effort to understand the root issues behind the salary gap between men and women, several studies have shown that men’s attraction to competition is the key.112 Lee Dye states, “Men are 94 percent more likely than women to apply for a job with a salary potential that is dependent on outperforming their colleagues,”113 because “men are raised to slay wild beasts and triumph over their male friends.”114 Another interesting example of the male attraction to competition can be found in the realm of sport. It seems that men are attracted to competitive sports in much larger numbers than women.115 This draw to competition is also noticed in viewership.


113 Dye, “Men Crave Competition, in Work and Play.”

114 Ibid.

Spectatorship of competitive sports is an overwhelmingly male audience.\textsuperscript{116} Jeffery Kluger says, “Women’s professional soccer is taking off around the world, but it’s men who make up most of the viewership, not women. In Germany, the male share of the audience for women’s soccer is actually greater than it is for men’s, 64\% to 58\%.”\textsuperscript{117} It seems safe to say that men crave competition, and this can be seen in work and play.

This potential can be harnessed for good. The idea of competition and struggle should be involved in male discipleship. If competition against oneself, the Devil, or the forces of evil can be incorporated into and highlighted within the Christian experience, it is likely that men might be drawn to participate—particularly if they are brought together in Christian brotherhood, as a team.

In his article “Why Do Men Stay Away,” Tom G. Long offers the best idea yet for challenging men: make Christianity harder.\textsuperscript{118} He draws the reader’s attention to the Greek Orthodox Church, the only Christian denomination that does not possess a feminized gender gap. It is a conservative denomination with an all-male clergy. The group takes discipleship seriously and as a result holds men’s attention. Long claims that men need a challenge and goals; they need to risk and experience both victory, and sometimes, even failure.

In an effort to understand the attraction for men in the Eastern Orthodox Church, Frederica Mathewes-Green polled one hundred males who joined the Orthodox Church as

\begin{itemize}
  \item\textsuperscript{116} Ibid.
  \item\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
adults. She wanted to know what drew them to the Church. Their response showed several attractions. In Orthodox worship and life there is a clear path to victory, and the goals are made clear. The purpose of worship is union with God. They also liked the Eastern Church’s continuity with the past. The ancient spiritual traditions meant much to them because, for many centuries, this specific type of discipline had helped many previous pilgrims. This added a stabilizing factor to their Christian experience. They were attracted to the lack of sentimentality, the masculine leadership, and the fact that Christ was always kept as the center of worship.

Past these responses, however, they overwhelmingly stated that the main attraction was the challenge that Orthodoxy presents. They claimed it is demanding, active, and appeals to a man’s desire for mastery over himself through discipline. One of the men said, “Orthodoxy is serious. It is difficult. It is demanding. It is about mercy, but it’s also about overcoming oneself. I am challenged in a deep way, not to feel good about myself, but to become holy. It is rigorous, and in that rigor I find liberation. And you know, so does my wife.” Mathewes-Green comments, “In a time when churches of every description are faced with Vanishing Male Syndrome, men are showing up at Eastern Orthodox churches in numbers that, if not numerically impressive, are proportionately intriguing. This may be

---


120 Ibid.
the only church which attracts and holds men in numbers equal to women.” She attributes the male attraction to the rigors the church places upon its members.

Men and their masculinity demand they be in the thick of battle. They want to give their lives for a cause—the larger the cause, the better. They want to make a difference in the world and desire to be part of a group that is doing that. God’s work is the most serious business to which a person can be dedicated, because it deals with eternal matters. Men need to be summoned to a higher calling, a higher level of spirituality. They need to know that there is a battle of epic proportions taking place (1 Corinthians 15:55-57; Joshua 1:9), and there is a place for them on the frontline. They need to be enlightened to the ramifications of failure in this battle (Matthew 7:26-27), yet they also need revelation concerning the victories that are available to the faithful and valiant warrior (Revelation 3:21; 21:7).

The ancient spiritual practices need to be reintroduced to the men of San Marcos Community Church. They need to be reframed and presented so that a man can see his intrinsic value not only to himself but to those whom he loves the most and the broader Kingdom of God. Ancient spiritual tools have stood the test of time and all sorts of political governments and are proven as instruments of incredible worth in matters of the soul. Teaching the ancient ways can serve as life-change agents and perhaps provide to men an enduring way forward. Practicing spiritual disciplines creates venues where God can be accessed at new and deeper levels. The men of San Marcos Community Church are hungry for the opportunity for such life-change, and restoring the practice of time-honored disciplines can help in their spiritual development.

121 Ibid.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

To thoroughly understand how God shapes and changes human beings, one must investigate the role of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines. This chapter provides a foundation for theological reflection concerning both. Spiritual vitality originates with the Holy Spirit, and a renewed spirituality can benefit men in their relationship to the community of faith and the mission of the church. Spiritual practices are needed for men to develop an awareness and sensitivity to the Spirit. To facilitate understanding both the Spirit and the disciplines, six books are reviewed. The first three concern the person of the Holy Spirit, and the remaining three focus on the spiritual disciplines.

The Person of the Holy Spirit

*The Go-Between God: The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission*
by John V. Taylor

The work of Bishop John V. Taylor was published in 1972 at the height of the Charismatic Renewal in the Anglican Church. He brings to his writing both pastoral experience from his work as a parish priest and a missionary perspective from his assignments in Africa and other parts of the world. He possesses a towering intellect that
is reflective, informed, and educated. His goal is to help Christian mission by providing a fresh understanding of the Holy Spirit and God’s actions.\(^1\) *The Go-Between God* is divided into two parts. The first deals with the identity of the Holy Spirit, and the second demonstrates how the Spirit is expressed in the life of the believer. It is a fascinating work of literature that demonstrates deep theological reflection and provides fresh insights into who the Spirit is and how he operates in the world.

In the first part, he introduces the reader to the person of the Holy Spirit by describing six facets of His ministry: “annunciation,”\(^2\) “conception,”\(^3\) “gestation,”\(^4\) “labour,”\(^5\) “birth,”\(^6\) and “breath.”\(^7\) He states that one’s awareness of the Spirit is the impetus for all Christian outreach. Awareness is intensified through revelation which reveals God’s wisdom and guidance that were previously undistinguishable.\(^8\) In addition, the Spirit creates an awareness of God that was previously unexperienced and incomprehensible. The Spirit also generates awareness by illuminating the other person, who may have remained un-focused and unimportant until the Spirit makes him a central


\(^2\) Ibid., 3-24.

\(^3\) Ibid., 25-41.

\(^4\) Ibid., 42-63.

\(^5\) Ibid., 64-82.

\(^6\) Ibid., 83-105.

\(^7\) Ibid., 106-128.

\(^8\) Ibid., 31.
subject of one’s perception. Taylor’s discussion regarding the Spirit’s awakening of awareness is fascinating.

He then describes the Spirit as working from the inside of creation to bring redemption and healing to God’s good creation. The Holy One provides an awareness of the unattained in creation, fostering a desire and situation of choice. As the Holy Spirit reveals that there is more available, the person either makes the choice for healing and redemption, thus partnering with the Spirit, or remains trapped and sick. Taylor concludes with the idea that one’s intimate relationship with God derives from the work done together in the world as they both move toward healing creation.

In a most interesting discussion, Taylor explores the Spirit with references to Greek mythology. He says that under the high altar of St. Peter’s in Rome there is a pre-Constantine mosaic depicting Christ as the young Apollo in the chariot of the sun. This image fits well with the Greco-Roman philosophers who viewed the Spirit as intellectual truth and light but relegated him to a civilized and controllable role in church life. This depiction has been harmful, because it has tamed the Spirit. Taylor contends that the Spirit is more like Dionysus, who is wild and untamable. By missing and not expecting the impolite, messy, unexpected, living breath of God, the American Church has grown dull and stale. Taylor ends this portion with a directive that one must have both divine

---

9 Ibid., 19.
10 Ibid., 33.
11 Ibid., 37.
12 Ibid., 50.
action, exemplified by Dionysus, and divine direction illustrated by Apollos, as he attempts to educate the reader of the primordial nature of the creator Spirit.\(^\text{13}\)

In the remaining chapters describing the Spirit’s personality, Taylor emphasizes three concepts. First, the Spirit brings new creation from the future into the present.\(^\text{14}\) The author stresses the importance of “Now” by likening it to the listener of a beautiful symphony by Beethoven, who in the present enjoys the beauty of each note rather than longing for the ending.\(^\text{15}\) This is the way of the Spirit. He is interested in new creation entering the old at every moment, and the believer should be aware of this.

Taylor then describes the importance and life-changing idea of the believer’s relationship with Father God. He says that just as Jesus enjoyed an intimate relationship where he referred to Father as “Abba,” the believer also is entitled to this intimacy.\(^\text{16}\) This intimacy occurs not just individually but corporately, as the community of faith labors together to do the Father’s work in the world. He stresses that the community of faith, as the Body of Christ on the earth, is the new humankind. It is the Spirit working together, interweaving and flowing among believers that manifests in power. Using the example from Acts 3:1 when “Peter and John” went to pray and healed the blind beggar, Taylor says it was in the “and” where the Spirit was to be found.\(^\text{17}\)

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 52-58.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 80.

\(^{15}\) Ibid.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., 94.

\(^{17}\) Ibid., 110.
Part Two of Taylor’s work is concerned with evangelism, ethics, interfaith dialog, spiritual gifts, and prayer. He uses the description of the Spirit provided in the first part of his discussion to fill these concepts with new insight and illumination. Although some of the same ideas are projected onto these practical realities, he also brings forth new revelation. For instance, in discussing situational ethics, Taylor declares the answer lies in abiding in Christ’s love. One should do what is necessary but only in the light of Christ’s presence through the Holy Spirit. After Taylor describes the person of the Spirit in new and intriguing terms, he then applies these concepts to practical ministry tasks.

While Taylor discusses several ideas for increasing spiritual vitality in men, three stand out. First, the “Abba” relationship that Jesus experienced with the Father is now available to believers. The relationship was revolutionary at the time and was a gift to the Church. Such intimacy is necessary, if men are to move past their fears and insecurities and begin to trust God in new ways. Actually, it is the foundation of all emotional and spiritual healing. Without it, no amount of spiritual practice will suffice, as it becomes only legalism and duty. The loving relationship of the “Go-Between” God is required for safety and security to trust and grow.

18 Ibid., 133-152.
19 Ibid., 153-178.
20 Ibid., 179-197.
21 Ibid., 198-222.
22 Ibid., 223-243.
23 Ibid., 177.
24 Ibid., 94.
Second, the idea of Christian community is needed. Taylor declares that the Spirit manifests himself strongly in community.²⁵ He implies that power is released in the synergy, in the in-between of people in Christian community. This idea will be helpful to the men as they discover the Spirit’s life-changing power in their small group structures. Together, they will be empowered to practice and succeed in the disciplines. Alone, they will be weak and vulnerable, but in the Spirit’s in-between-ness they will experience the victory and power over vices and habitual sins.

Last, the idea of the Spirit as Dionysus is intriguing. For too long the Spirit has been relegated to dogmatic ideas and institutional rituals. He has been discussed but not experienced enough at San Marcos Community Church. There is more to the Spirit. He needs to be understood and experienced as primordial, creative, and even unpredictable. Freedom and joy occur when the Spirit is asked, allowed, and expected to manifest himself in his true identity. Of course, safeguards are needed.²⁶ The Spirit is different from Dionysus in that God is not only divine action but also divine direction. His actions and ministry are not unlawful or chaotic, as they are always under the Father’s direction and point to Jesus the Christ.²⁷ Nonetheless, abundant freedom and joy are needed in the Christian life, and men must learn that this is part of their inheritance in the Lord. When people experience the release and deliverance available through the Holy Spirit, they will experience new joy and hope, as Taylor points out.

²⁵ Ibid., 110.
²⁶ Ibid., 61.
²⁷ Ibid.
Although Taylor’s work is helpful, it has limitations. For instance, he writes as a missionary to missionaries and focuses upon finding the Spirit in interfaith dialog with Hindus, Muslims, and Buddhists. Even though the ministry context of San Marcos Community Church is broadening, these concepts are not relevant to the project. There is also not enough discussion regarding inner healing. The Spirit is intimately involved in emotional and inner healing. Although Taylor discusses the “Abba” relationship that is now a believer’s possession, he does not provide enough detail for a group of men to understand its mechanics and apply it. Understandably, this was not part of the scope of his work, but it would have been interesting to have the benefit of Taylor’s analysis.

In summary, Taylor’s book describes the person of the Holy Spirit with respect to Christian mission and applies these divine attributes to the activities of evangelism, ethics, interfaith dialog, spiritual gifts, and prayer. His book is helpful in describing the “Abba” relationship of the believer with Father God, the in-between-ness of the Spirit in the community of faith, and the unpredictability of the primordial Spirit of creation.

*God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul*  
by Gordon D. Fee

In *God’s Empowering Presence*, Gordon D. Fee uncovers Paul’s view of the Holy Spirit in the life and practice of early church plants. Fee claims the Spirit was much more crucial to Paul and the Christian life in those churches than it has been in Western Christianity. He states, “For Paul the Spirit, as an experienced and living reality was the
absolutely crucial matter for the Christian life, from beginning to end.”

In this two-part Herculean work of about nine hundred pages, Fee starts by arguing from the exegesis of key portions of all Paul’s letters. Then he offers a synthesis of his research. While the first part is valuable for its in-depth study of specific texts, the author’s thinking and reasoning are revealed in the second part.

Ultimately, Fee concludes that the modern Western Church neither expects nor experiences the level of Spirit-empowered and infused life that Paul’s churches enjoyed. Rather, it has lost its eschatological outlook and its self-understanding of living “between the time of the beginning of the end and its consummation at the return of Christ.”

This can be observed in the Church’s relationship to the world system. If the Church has lost its perspective on such issues, it will accept the values and lifestyles offered by the world. Fee suggests that the way forward is not the restorationist approach of tearing down existing forms of worship and replacing with others; rather, it is in the gradual integration of the existing structures with a fresh anointing of the Spirit.

Fee writes:

A genuine recapturing of the Pauline perspective will not isolate the Spirit in such a way that “Spiritual gifts” and “Spirit phenomena” take a place of pride in the church, resulting in churches which are either “charismatic” or otherwise. Rather, a genuine recapturing of the Pauline perspective will cause the church to be more vitally Trinitarian, not only in its theology, but in its life and Spirituality as well. This will not mean the exaltation of the Spirit, but the exaltation of God; and it will mean not a focus on the Spirit as such, but on the Son, crucified and risen, Savior and Lord of all.

---


29 Ibid., 899.

30 Ibid., 902.

31 Ibid.
He concludes by stating that Paul’s way must become the believer’s way if churches are going to make a difference in the post-Christian and postmodern Western culture. He recommends prayer as a starting point and in this he is absolutely correct, as only the Lord can make these dry bones live.32

Fee’s work contributes to the project of increasing the spiritual vitality in men in several ways. First, he discusses the Spirit’s role as God’s presence in the gathered community: God dwelling in the midst of his people.33 He views the Church as the new temple, in that God has returned to his people and dwells among them in presence and power.34 This helps contemporary followers of Christ understand they are part of something much larger than themselves, an eschatological community living during the last days of world history. This adds meaning and purpose that far outshine the unholy trinity of secularism, materialism, and rationalism offered by the media and contemporary culture. Additionally, God’s presence is not only corporate but individual. Thus God can be experienced through the Holy Spirit on a personal level, which is needed particularly if men are going to change. Long-lasting personal growth occurs when God’s presence meets and ministers to them, personally and privately.

Second, the Spirit among God’s people creates fellowship. The Spirit forms community out of disjointed, disinterested individuals. His fellowship draws them together spiritually and is invaluable for their growth in God. While they cannot do much

32 Ibid., 901.
33 Ibid., 843.
34 Ibid., 845.
isolated and alone, God is with them as they come together. Fee claims this phenomena occurs because the individuals are “immersed in the same reality, Spirit.” He asserts, “Created and formed by the Spirit, the early communities thus became a fellowship of the Spirit.” As men bond with one another through the course of the program contained within this strategy, hopefully they will experience this life-changing dimension of God.

Fee’s discussion of ethics and the Spirit is also helpful. His beginning point is Paul’s discussion of Torah. For Paul, after Christ, keeping the Torah was viewed as “works of the law” and could not achieve right standing with God. Nevertheless, Paul insists on ethical, Torah-like behavior as a standard for Christian life. Fee helps by saying that “the gift of the eschatological Spirit, who has rendered Torah observance obsolete, has at the same time made possible the ‘fulfillment of the righteous requirement of Torah.’ That is, the goal of Torah, God’s own righteousness reflected in his people, is precisely what the Spirit can do, which the Torah could not.” For New Testament people, it is not religious observances that are pleasing to God but “walking in the Spirit.” Fee says, “Thus, rather than give them Christian ‘rules’ he gives them the Spirit.” This puts the Spirit as the central player in the Christian life. Fee further states, “Only dependence on the Spirit

35 Ibid., 872.
36 Ibid.
37 Ibid., 877-881.
38 Ibid., 877.
39 Ibid., 879.
can enable one to know what is pleasing to God.” The entrance of the Holy Spirit changes people from the inside out, thus fulfilling Jeremiah’s prophecy of a new heart (Jeremiah 31:33). The Spirit’s entrance reorders a person’s whole way of life Godward.

This revelation is necessary in two ways: men need to know there is power for life-change available, and that change cannot be achieved through religious legalism. In a program such as the one proposed in this project, it might be easy for participants to slip into legalism as they engage the spiritual disciplines. There may be a tendency to think that their efforts are actually making the difference when it is the Spirit that makes change possible. So the focus is on God, not people’s ethical behavior. In the program, the members must understand that God is always to be the focus. As the Spirit guides and empowers the practices prescribed in the program, the fruit should be righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit and nothing less.

Finally, Fee helps through his thoughts on prayer. He demonstrates that Paul’s life was one of constant and continual prayer. He claims that before Paul was a missionary or theologian, he was a person of prayer and this was his central spiritual practice. In the “Abba” relationship with Father, the indwelling Spirit provides, so all prayer is possible. Fee claims that prayer is the most important tool available for eschatological people, because they live in the confusing middle of what some call the “already, but not yet.” The Kingdom already has come, but not yet in its fullest consummation, and so the end-

---

40 Ibid., 878.
41 Ibid., 866.
times community lives in this tension. It is in this place that prayer accesses the “already” of the Kingdom and calls it forth into the “not yet” of the present reality.

This helps because prayer is a large part of the proposed program. Understanding the Spirit’s role in prayer is important. The men in the program need to understand as they embark upon new experiences with prayer that God is helping them. He is the one, through the Spirit, enabling them to pray. They also need to know that prayer works and that calling upon God actually brings supernatural aid. If they will pray in the Spirit, they will see change not only in their personal lives as they engage a new level of intimacy with their “Abba” but tangible results as God responds. Confidence will grow as they experience the Spirit as the cause, the power, and the answer to their pleas.

When considering the proposed program, Fee’s study has some limitations as he concentrates on the Spirit restricted to Paul’s epistles and leaves out the other New Testament authors and the Old Testament. While the reader has a good idea of how Paul viewed the Spirit, there is no other perspective. Other resources, however, are available that expound on the third person of the Trinity. This is good since Paul’s thinking concerns practical advice given to his churches as they grappled with being the eschatological people of God two thousand years ago. Paul never penned a theological treatise on the Holy Spirit but wrote bits and pieces of advice and wisdom given to particular people concerning specific situations.

The other limitation concerns spiritual practices. Fee says nothing regarding how the disciplines of prayer, fasting, solitude, silence, and the like might increase one’s spiritual vitality. Again, he limits his discussion to Paul’s view of the Spirit through
exegesis of the Pauline epistles. While the discussion is helpful, it leaves unanswered the main question of how the Spirit can be readily accessed. Other questions regarding increased awareness of the Spirit, further surrender to the Spirit, and the Spirit’s role in personal prayer also remain unaddressed.

In summary, Fee argues the Spirit was crucial for Paul and the churches he led. The Spirit created the end-times community of faith and was the agent of transformation among its members. The author feels the contemporary American Church is lacking in this area and that modern congregations are not as Spirit-centric as Paul’s churches. For the proposed project, several thoughts are helpful. The Holy Spirit as God’s presence among his people, the fellowship that presence creates, and the ethics and prayer that come from this presence are necessary for the proposed program. The book is limited in scope and does not inform the reader what other apostles thought or practiced regarding the Spirit-directed life. Neither does it offer insights about the Spirit from the Old Testament. It also fails to provide a discussion on how Paul viewed spiritual disciplines and their interaction with the Holy Spirit. These points would have been helpful in increasing the spiritual vitality of men through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

*The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*
by Jürgen Moltmann

Moltmann’s goal is to redefine the third member of the Trinity, because he feels the Holy Spirit has been too narrowly confined by theological dogma—hence, the title *The Spirit of Life*. He argues that the Spirit is not estranged from human life on earth but rather
God’s presence is in it. He distinguishes the work of the Spirit from that of Christ by implying that the Spirit takes Christ’s work and makes it effective and relevant. It is Christ’s liberating and redeeming work that now is released through the Spirit. As he says, “The operations of God’s life-giving and life-affirming Spirit are universal and can be recognized in everything which ministers to life and resists its destruction. This efficacy of the Spirit does not replace Christ’s efficacy, but makes it universally relevant.”

Moltmann adds a second emphasis to his thesis by affirming life in general. He claims the Spirit wants humans, and all of creation for that matter, to experience life from God. As much as there is destruction, tragedy, and death in the world, there are also miraculous outbreaks of life, which is the work of the Spirit. Life is to be viewed as a great gift from God and one that needs to be pursued in whatever form it is discovered. He describes his book as a “holistic pneumatology and as a way of deepening the concept of life.”

To prove his argument he divides his work into three parts: experience of the Spirit, life in the Spirit, and fellowship and the person of the Spirit. He starts with experience, because it is through experiencing the Spirit that people become aware of God. Moltmann states that experiencing God comes through encounters with Christ and an anticipation of New Creation. He says, “In this sense pneumatology presupposes

---

42 Moltmann, The Spirit of Life, x.
43 Ibid., xi.
44 Ibid., 31-38.
45 Ibid., xiii.
Christology, and prepares the way for eschatology.”  

He stresses that the purpose of the Spirit is for experiencing God in the present, which also gives hope for the eschatological consummation of all things.

In his second part, the author discusses life in the Spirit and redefines the Protestant dogma of *ordo salutis*, order of salvation. He asserts that most theological work done in this area is “one-sided,” as it focuses primarily on the work of Christ in salvation and leaves out the work of the Spirit. He implies the order of salvation is much affected by the work of the Spirit, in that the Spirit brings the power of the resurrection into the life of the believer. Therefore, the order of salvation should not be viewed as stagnant and historical, but dynamic and present. It is the Spirit that gives resurrection and New Creation power to the saved life and offers the believer the ability to live the salvation Christ purchased. In the discussion he addresses liberation, justification, sanctification, charismatic gifts, and theology of mystical experience and demonstrates the Spirit’s presence and involvement in each area.

In the third part of his discussion, Moltmann describes the fellowship and person of the Spirit. Here he ties in his ideas about life with the Spirit. He implies that experiences of

---

46 Ibid., 18.
47 Ibid., 81.
48 Ibid., 99-122.
49 Ibid., 123-143.
50 Ibid., 161-179.
51 Ibid., 180-197.
52 Ibid., 198-213.
God through the Spirit are not only individual but arrive through fellowship with others and nature. He says, “That is why bodily experiences, sensuous experiences and experiences of our fellow creatures in nature enjoy the same rank in experience of God as experience of the self, or the social experience of love.” He seems to be implying the Spirit is life, and anytime life is experienced it is actually the presence of God. This furthers his thesis that the Spirit is universal and is much more active and present than previously considered. He stresses that pneumatology, while transcendent and cosmic, is also very immanent. He then discusses the personhood of the Spirit and speaks of metaphors used in Scripture. After this, he examines the Trinitarian personhood of the Spirit. In this discussion, he attempts to demonstrate ways in which the Spirit manifests himself to the world.

Moltmann’s work contributes to the project in several ways. After discussing how the individual experiences life and God, he uses the term “immanent transcendence” as a way of expanding the traditional view of how God is perceived. He proposes this term to emphasize that God is present in every experience and not restricted to individual experience. He says, “It is possible to experience God in, with, and beneath each everyday experience in the world.” Moltmann attempts to present a holistic view of the Spirit that comprehends human beings but also embraces the whole of creation. This puts humans in an interconnected relationship with one another, nature, and the environment.

53 Ibid., 221.
54 Ibid., 225-229.
55 Ibid., 269-285.
56 Ibid., 289-306.
57 Ibid., 34.
This idea will prove helpful as the men are encouraged to experience God through spiritual practices. They can come to understand that God can meet them individually through divine revelation and in the gathered community of faith and in creation as well. The program is designed to help men connect with God in their everyday lives, so Moltmann’s concept of immanent transcendence is useful. The men will know they can experience God through the ordinary routines of their daily lives, because the Spirit of life is everywhere and is available to reveal God in those places.

Moltmann interprets the Old Testament words ruach and shekinah as the divine presence among God’s people. The ruach of God is much wilder and more dangerous than the traditional mainstream concept of the Holy Spirit. He says, “Ruach creates space. It sets in motion. It leads out of narrow places into wide vistas thus conferring life.”\(^{58}\) He also discusses the relationship between ruach and shekinah and defines shekinah as the very presence of God that accompanies God’s people wherever they venture. Of this term he says, “The Shekinah is certainly the present God, but this presence is distinguished from his eternity. If the Shekinah is the earthly, temporal and spatial presence of God, then it is at once identical with God and distinct from him.”\(^{59}\) Both terms help to understand how the Spirit of life manifests in and through believers in Christ. On the one hand, the ruach of God represents freedom and liberty that accompany God’s healing presence, while the shekinah of God is the presence that never leaves one alone.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 43.

\(^{59}\) Ibid., 48.
Both concepts are valuable. As the men engage the Spirit of life they need to know that freedom, space, expansion, and the joy that accompany these liberties are available to them. Also, the discussion regarding shekinah brings assurance that when they fail or falter, the shekinah is there to restore and replace. The shekinah represents the “God who suffers with us.”\textsuperscript{60} The Spirit of life suffers alongside the people of God. As Moltmann highlights, this is exactly what happened in the exile. The shekinah accompanied the people of God while they were displaced and cut off from the tabernacle.\textsuperscript{61} These concepts help one understand that the Spirit of life is much more encompassing than previously thought. Moltmann’s insights regarding the nature of the Spirit help immensely, because life in God is not as precarious or fragile as might be expected. The Spirit seems more interested in the believer’s success than believers could possibly be themselves. This is an assuring idea and one that can help San Marcos men as they engage the Spirit of life.

The third concept Moltmann discusses is freedom.\textsuperscript{62} He implies that the Spirit brings freedom and liberty and that true freedom is found only in relationship and submission to God. Many in Western countries might prefer to have freedom separate from God, because they view God as a dictator or taskmaster and think that true freedom is found away from his presence. Moltmann counters that it is only in the Spirit of God that true freedom is found. Of this freedom, he writes: “It means being possessed by the divine energy of life, and participation in that energy. Through trust in the God of the

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 99-112.
Exodus and the resurrection, the believer experiences and partakes of this liberating power of God which raises to new life.\textsuperscript{63} This freedom allows believers to make personal decisions of faith that no one can take away. It also encourages them to live in community with others. This freedom enables people to share what they have with others, so that there is a sociality associated with the Spirit of life.

Freedom also brings hope for the future. Moltmann says it is not so much what people were freed from but what they were freed for that matters most.\textsuperscript{64} The men need to understand this concept of true freedom. There may be the tendency to think that giving more time and energy to God produces bondage or legalism. They need to realize that only in submission to God are true self-determination and emancipation found. As they further interface with the Spirit, they can expect to find liberty and the accompanying joy it brings.

When considering increasing the spiritual vitality of the men at San Marcos Community Church, Moltmann’s work has limitations. The book is intellectual and academic with little practical application. For example, it does not indicate how the Spirit of life frees people from demonic and addictive bondages or how a believer can increase awareness and availability to the Spirit. He does not explain how people can experience the Spirit as \textit{ruach}. Neither does he describe how the concept of \textit{shekinah} can benefit the male as he makes a living, leads his household, pays his bills, and is faithful to both family and church. These sorts of questions remain unanswered. While Moltmann’s book is broad both theologically and academically, it leaves the reader desiring more application.

\textsuperscript{63} Ibid., 115.

\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 120.
In 1935 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was asked by the leaders of the Confessing Church to oversee the illegal and clandestine seminary training of young pastors in Pomerania. He accepted the challenge and moved to Zingst and then Finkenwalde, where he lived in community with twenty-five young men. Based on biblical insights from this experience, he wrote *Life Together* in 1938. The book is an excellent resource, as it provides insightful discussion regarding the phenomena of Christian community. His thesis is that the life of a Christian is often lonely and separated from others. Christ scatters his followers throughout the world, and this is their lot. Many are imprisoned, sick, or confined to situations that prevent them from experiencing community. Consequently, Christian community is to be considered a privilege and a blessing rather than taken for granted. He further states that those fortunate enough to experience Christian community on a regular basis should be extremely grateful. Community only can be accessed in and through Jesus Christ; it possesses a spiritual rather than a human or natural base. The remainder of the book is a discussion and explanation of the elements that comprise this divine reality.

In the first of five chapters, Bonhoeffer provides an in-depth description of Christian community, which is quite helpful to a local church pastor. Although his ministry context was a seminary, the end product is the same. Through his discussion of the corporate spiritual disciplines of praying the Psalter, Scripture reading, singing,

---


66 Ibid., 18-19.
praying, eating together, and working, one gains knowledge and insight about the goals and elements of fellowship among Christ’s followers. Then the author examines the private spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, meditation, prayer, and intercession before closing with a discussion on ministry to one another. He defines personal ministry as considering others more important than oneself and confessing one’s faults to others.\textsuperscript{67}

In this thought-provoking book there is wisdom for those ministering in the local church.

Bonhoeffer’s work contributes to the project of increasing spiritual vitality in men in three ways: the discussion and definition of Christian community, the insights offered concerning private disciplines, and the discussion on ministering to others. The discussion on the goals and boundaries of community will be helpful, because the men will be forming community not only during the initial weekend retreat but also for the duration of the program as they will work in small groups throughout the thirty days. Bonhoeffer says that there are two realities: true spiritual community and false human community. In the true community, Christ is the only common factor among members and the sole reason for bonding. They must realize they are sinners and their only hope is in Christ and his righteousness. So, it is his righteousness that provides membership and ongoing adhesion to the group. All members must view themselves as sinners saved because of the cross of Christ.\textsuperscript{68} The true community is defined by \textit{agape}. Human community, on the other hand, is not spiritual; it is carnal and based upon one person’s ability to dominate and control others by manipulating, influencing, and dominating or subjugating. This community is

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 17-39.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 21-30.
not *agape* but *eros*, as human souls attempt to merge with other souls by forcing them into one’s sphere of power and influence.\(^{69}\) This discussion is helpful as it illuminates relationships found in the local church. It is impactful for the project because the men are members of the local church and already have been participating to some degree in both the true and false communities. At the beginning of the program, it will be imperative to present Bonhoeffer’s insights regarding true Christian fellowship in community.

Bonhoeffer’s third chapter describes private spiritual disciplines,\(^ {70}\) and this will be a large portion of the program in addition to fellowship and community. He speaks of the primacy of silence and solitude, Scripture meditation, private prayer, and intercession for others. In my experience, these seem to be the practices most lacking in men’s lives. They find it easier to attend church meetings with others and thus attain some social interaction but are terrified of being alone with themselves or God. This is a major problem, and private spiritual disciplines will be emphasized where participants set aside daily time for journaling, Scripture reading, and prayer. The program will be a success if these practices become habits the men intend to continue throughout life. In so doing, the men will be positioned to experience the Spirit in new and exciting ways, and New Creation will flow into their lives as they open to these new avenues in God.

The third area concerns ministering to others and is important because the men will interact with one another in both small and large groups for the duration of the program. They should understand, as the author points out, that ministering to others

\(^{69}\) Ibid., 31-39.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 76-89.
basically means serving them. In particular, Bonhoeffer’s discussion on listening explains that an important way to show others love is by actively listening to them. He says many people need a listening ear but often do not find it among Christians. Believers talk when they should be listening, which is the beginning of spiritual death.\textsuperscript{71} In brotherly pastoral care, there is an obligation to listen; but listening with half an ear is impatient, inattentive, and actually despises the other person.\textsuperscript{72} If the men can achieve a level of community under Christ, where they no longer feel the need for personal significance or the need to be perceived by the pastor as someone of value, and can find their value solely in Christ, they might be able to really listen to one another. This will communicate true brotherly love that many rarely encounter. For this reason, active listening will be needed as they meet together in small groups on a weekly basis. Bonhoeffer helps by emphasizing this important aspect of Christian community.

When considering limitations of \textit{Life Together} for the proposed program, one needs to understand the goal of Bonhoeffer’s book. His emphasis was on a group of seminarians living together for an extended length of time in an illegal community under Nazi dictatorship. They were fully aware that their divine vocation might easily require the forfeit of their lives. Given this ministry context, there are things in the book that the men in the proposed program may find too extreme. Nevertheless, all followers of Christ should be as dedicated as the men at Finkenwalde, but perhaps that is too ideal. There is a difference in the starting points as well. The Finkenwalde men were called to be vicars

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 98.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
and pastors to the Confessing Church in a dark time of German history. The men in the San Marcos program are ordinary followers of Christ who simply want to know God better and be better equipped for his Kingdom.

While certain corporate spiritual practices outlined in the book will be experienced at the weekend retreat and the weekly meetings, they will not be as intense because the men in the program will go home to their families each evening and the program only lasts thirty days. The goal is for the men to experience selected corporate practices that Bonhoeffer offers, engage in most of the private practices described, and to become better ministers to one another. If these can become lifelong habits, the program will be a success.

_Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth_
by Richard J. Foster

Foster’s book has become a classic in the study of spiritual disciplines in the evangelical community, and the proposed project would be incomplete without his input. He believes the practice of spiritual disciplines is the key to freedom and joy in the Kingdom of God.73 He argues that they are not for giants of the faith or contemplatives but for ordinary followers of Christ.74 Inner growth and spiritual depth should be the goal of every Christian, and the disciplines are the avenue. However, in American Christianity there is a tremendous ignorance of these things and a lack of their practice. Due to this deficiency, negative

---


74 Ibid., 1.
ingrained habits and personal problems plague Christians. Rather than enjoying the liberation available in Christ, they live spiritually sluggish and non-vibrant lives.

In order to prove his point, Foster discusses three main areas of spiritual practice: “inward,” “outward,” and “corporate.” He says that meditation, prayer, fasting, and study are inward or private practices, while simplicity, solitude, submission, and service are outward and involve others. He defines the corporate disciplines as confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. Others categorize these spiritual practices differently, so there is probably no correct listing. For Foster, the point is to enhance spiritual growth through these actions. He clearly understands that a person is considered righteous by faith in Christ and the practices are not utilized to make one acceptable to God. When one comprehends the depth of the gospel message that righteousness is a free gift, the person is tempted to conclude that no further action is necessary. Foster says, “The moment we grasp this breathtaking insight we are in danger of an error in the opposite direction. We are tempted to believe there is nothing we can do.” He continues, “Is it not logical to conclude that we must wait on God to come and transform us?” This, he says, is the wrong conclusion. There is indeed something more; redeemed people must place themselves at God’s disposal. They must position themselves to cooperate with the work

75 Ibid., 13-140.
76 Ibid., 141-201.
78 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 7.
79 Ibid.
of righteousness that God has begun in their lives. Foster writes: “The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”

He uses an analogy from agriculture by implying the spiritual practices are God’s method for planting the believer in the fertile ground so that God can begin the work of growth and transformation. He stresses the path is not the agent of change, but God is. The practices only position the believer to receive the change God desires. The book proceeds to explain each discipline and discuss how they can be applied by ordinary followers of Christ while they live out their calling in contemporary culture.

Foster’s work is beneficial to the proposed project of enhancing the spiritual vitality in men. His thesis is aligned perfectly with the goals of the program and his comments on solitude, meditation, and prayer fit perfectly. One of the primary goals of the program will be the development of personal and daily sacred time set aside for God. Foster’s discussion regarding solitude is foundational. He maintains there is a stark difference between loneliness and solitude. People are terrified of being alone, but Christ calls people from the dark emptiness of loneliness into the rich and rewarding place of solitude. He claims, “Loneliness is inner emptiness. Solitude is inner fulfillment.” He proceeds to explain that solitude is the place where God meets with the individual and

---

80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid., 8.
83 Ibid., 96.
space must be created for this to occur. He gives practical applications by describing how the ordinary person can construct a life full of solitary moments and spaces. 

In the proposed program, the men will be challenged to find a place and time to meet with God daily. They will be expected to make this place safe from external distractions and to diligently guard the appointment. They will need to be creative and discover a time and location that works best for them. Foster proposes early morning, but each man will have to work until he finds something that fits. If the men have developed the habit of sacred space by the end of the program, they will be different from most in American Christianity and will be in a position to experience God at new levels.

Within the sacred space of solitude, one is not idle. Foster helps by examining both private mediation and prayer in the context of solitude. The goal of Christian meditation is unlike other forms found in Eastern religions, where the goal is emptying oneself. Christian meditation is never oriented toward emptying, but filling. Followers of Christ spend their efforts in meditation focusing on Scripture, on hearing God’s voice, and on a deeper friendship with Christ. As one practices and reflects, the Spirit begins to reveal wisdom and guidance needed for daily life. Foster stresses that Christian mediations are extremely practical as God releases revelation regarding all sorts of human problems encountered in work, family, and life. Once the men experience God in this manner and expect him to give practical guidance and revelation, they will see its value and add it to their lives.

84 Ibid., 105-108.
85 Ibid., 21.
86 Ibid., 22.
Private prayer experienced in the context of solitude is another practice that Foster includes in his work. The author claims that prayer is the most central of all the disciplines, because it leads to unceasing communion with God. Foster states that life with God is not fatalistic or predetermined. On the contrary, prayer is the proof that God intends to include his followers in the destiny and outcome of his project on earth. The Bible encourages prayer, intercession, and not to accept things as they naturally occur; rather, Christ followers are called to face challenges and petition God for change. In making prayer central, the believers become intimate with God as they work together toward common goals. If the men can begin to experience change as a result of their prayers, they will be inclined to make it permanent. There is no excuse for a prayer-less Christian existence, when so much is available as people enter into this amazing spiritual practice. It is hoped that San Marcos men discover this for themselves as they engage the program. Foster’s comments on prayer are insightful and helpful.

When considering enhancing the spiritual vitality in men through the proposed program, Foster’s book has some limitations. For example, his discussion on the corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration is valuable to local church work in general but does not add much to the program. Since the men spend most of their time in a small group environment with weekly time constraints, these practices cannot be utilized to their fullest. Also, his discussion on the outward disciplines of simplicity, submission, and service will not be factors in the proposed program. It is hoped that once the men experience inner life change due to the program, these things might begin to

---

87 Ibid., 33.
manifest in their orientation toward others. Additionally, Foster includes a discussion of the habit of study in his section on inward disciplines. He maintains this is as an important aspect of inward transformation. It differs from Scripture meditation in that its goal is analytical, while meditation’s goal is devotional. Intellectual stimulation is helpful in the life of a disciple, yet this is outside the sphere of the program. Scripture study will not be primary, but Scripture meditation will be. Hopefully, the program will produce men who desire a deeper intellectual and theological grasp of Scripture, but the immediate goal is a devotional orientation to Scripture.

_Celebration of Discipline_ is a classic in the field of spirituality and is helpful in many ways, so it should not be overlooked when designing a program of spiritual formation in men. It is extremely valuable in the areas of solitude, meditation, and prayer. Foster opens one’s thinking to the immensity of the spiritual practices and how they have been utilized over the centuries by so many. Armed with his insights, readers are encouraged to experiment and engage in new practices with the promise of a transformed inner life.

_Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community_  
by James C. Wilhoit

James C. Wilhoit believes the primary purpose of the local parish should be spiritual formation. He bases his thesis on the Great Commission of Matthew 28:18-20 and feels this transformation should translate into Christlikeness. The primary goal for the local church should be fostering spiritual life among members so that they attain the same lifestyles, attitudes, and actions that Christ possessed while living on earth. This conviction led him to ask if this type of transformation was occurring in the local parishes. Happily, he
found several such congregations and realized they had four things in common. In the book he describes the four attributes and considers them to be a curriculum for growing in Christ. He believes that all churches should have the four characteristics of receiving, remembering, responding, and relating—all of which he describes in detail and believes should be present in any local church that takes personal transformation seriously.

Wilhoit claims the first attribute, “Receiving,” is the most important because without it no one will be changed. He says it is characterized by “optimistic brokenness.” This is a term he utilizes to describe people who realize their need for grace and transformation and believe that through Christ’s power change is possible. He contrasts optimistic brokenness with other attitudes which, though often present in Christian groups, never achieve spiritual formation. He labels the other attempts as “Sin management,” “Thoughtful self-discipline,” and “Realistically trying.” None of these achieve Christlikeness because they lack the foundation of complete brokenness before God. The others are simply self-generated attempts that lack the power of God. Wilhoit shows how a church can foster an atmosphere of “Receiving” through creating a culture of openness, casting vision that change is possible, worship, confession, and prayer meetings. All of these actions can cultivate an environment of Receiving.

---


89 Ibid., 62.

90 Ibid., 82-87.
The second attribute for change is “Remembering.” To attain spiritual transformation into Christlikeness, a congregation must be oriented toward recalling where they came from and their absolute dependence upon the cross. Wilhoit describes how people who perceive their need for grace obtain it, while others who do not see the need miss it. He says grace is the gift from God that enables one to live in a Christlike way. A group of people must be reminded constantly of their absolute dependence upon the grace of God. In a church, this can be fostered through the teaching of biblical stories, small groups, and reliance upon the Spirit’s anointing.

The third ingredient for spiritual formation is “Responding.” Wilhoit claims that people are formed spiritually as they respond to God’s grace by reaching out to others in need. He implies that disciples are formed as they serve the cause of Christ in the world. To encourage this in a church, empathy, evangelism, and biblical teaching are needed. Responding to God’s grace flows from Jesus’ commands to love God and love one’s neighbor. In the act of responding, followers of Christ will experience spiritual transformation because God expects us to be involved in his work in the world. There is a special anointing upon those who engage the world for Christ’s sake.

91 Ibid., 104-145.
92 Ibid., 106.
93 Ibid., 123-130.
94 Ibid., 147-175.
95 Ibid., 149-152.
96 Ibid., 166.
The final characteristic of parishes that are creating spiritually transformed congregants is “Relating.” Churches that purposefully create space for members to form meaningful relationships focused on personal change see people becoming more and more like Christ. It takes time to obtain the practice of confession and purposefully participating in church life. The idea is not to simply offer a place for members to experience fellowship but to foster humility and brokenness in the body through group interaction that has a goal of spiritual formation into Christlikeness. The members who participate in these “relating” functions offered by the church do so because they are aware of and desire the goal of Christlikeness.

Wilhoit’s contributions to the project are important in two areas. His concept of optimistic brokenness is imperative for spiritual transformation. Without seeing oneself in need of change, none will happen. Although human beings are saved by grace and therefore justified, they never outgrow the need for continuous grace to live the Christian life. In addition, believers will never experience spiritual transformation without seeing their need for it. Alternatively, people can view themselves as perpetual sinners who can never attain freedom or change, thus forming a spiritual victim mentality. This viewpoint is neither biblical nor healthy and must be rejected. Consequently, optimistic brokenness gives hope because it relies on confident hope that change is available yet realistically is limited to those who understand their personal need. This concept is foundational to the

---

97 Ibid., 177-202.

98 Ibid., 187-191.
proposed project. Both optimism and spiritual brokenness are needed for the men to experience increased spiritual vitality through the Holy Spirit and the disciplines.

When discussing his fourth ingredient for transformation, Relating, Wilhoit mentions the importance of formational relationships.⁹⁹ This is exactly what the proposed program attempts to do. The men form small groups at the initial weekend retreat, and these groups remain intact for the duration. They meet weekly after the weekend retreat in their small groups to discuss progress and pray for one another. Wilhoit’s insights regarding this concept are helpful and need to be implemented. The groups in the program are for the purpose of accountability, a place where men may talk about the areas where they have experienced both victories and defeats the previous week. They must be open and honest about both aspects of their journey. In this regard, the groups are formational and are not simply for the purposes of friendship or assimilation into the church body. Wilhoit helps by discussing this important dynamic, required for growth to occur.

The book has limitations regarding increased spiritual vitality in men through interaction with the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines. For example, the book seems to be written for congregational transformation as a whole and not for individual programs in the church. His argument is one for fundamental congregational change. He implies the American church culture must shift in order to fulfill the Great Commission; and while I agree with his thesis, it is larger than the scope of the proposed project. Actually, the proposed program is an answer to Wilhoit’s charge. The men’s program does not encompass the totality of San Marcos Community Church, but it is a start. Ultimately, there

⁹⁹ Ibid., 181-184.
are ideas proposed in the book that can be implemented easily into the larger church culture that could be helpful, but his ideas are broader than a men’s spiritual formation program.

Similarly, his discussion on Responding is helpful for the larger church ethos and culture but has little bearing on the proposed program. He encourages service to the community through empathy and evangelism. While this is a helpful idea for the whole congregation, it is not applicable to the goals of the spiritual formation program. Hopefully, program graduates will be interested in these activities and include them in their transformed lifestyles, but there is not enough time in the thirty-day program for them.

Last, Wilhoit raised the idea of confession and examined its benefits. This concept was not originally thought to be greatly important to the program, but both Foster and Bonhoeffer mentioned it as well. Perhaps it needs to be added to the small group time during the weekly meetings. Most Americans have an aversion to being this vulnerable, especially males; but if presented properly, as these authors do, it may prove valuable. There is no doubt if the men can achieve a level of intimacy with one another where weekly confession occurs, it will greatly enhance their spiritual vitality.

Wilhoit’s book is helpful by defining optimistic brokenness and discussing the importance of formational relationships. It has its limitations for the proposed program but might be an excellent resource for church leadership. It is a deep and pithy work that gives much opportunity for pause, due to its penetrating and hard-hitting subject matter.

---

100 Ibid., 166.

101 Ibid., 193.
For this reason, it should be examined and explored further, not for the proposed project, but for the larger church body.

Summary

This chapter has provided a foundation through established literature for the proposed project by investigating the person of the Holy Spirit and the spiritual disciplines. Works by Taylor, Fee, and Moltmann have offered theological reflection concerning the person of the Holy Spirit and his actions. Bonhoeffer, Foster, and Wilhoit have provided insights regarding spiritual practices and implications.

Much benefit has been gained through these readings. Consequently, the strategy in this project is much more informed theologically and practically due to the authors’ contributions. The books have provided valuable insight for understanding how God changes and forms men through an increased awareness and experience of the Spirit through the spiritual disciplines.
CHAPTER 3
A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR CREATING SPIRITUAL VITALITY IN MEN THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

In order to develop a theological and biblical foundation for the dynamics involved in creating spiritual vitality, three theological concepts need to be examined. The first is the person and work of the Holy Spirit. He is the vehicle by which the Trinity dwells within human beings, influencing both them and creation in general. There can be no spiritual vitality without his presence. For this reason, portions of John’s Gospel will be explored in depth. The second concept is divine encounter. How humans encounter, communicate, and receive directives from God must be studied, since spiritual vitality comes from God. The Book of Acts describes many of these encounters, so it will be used as a resource. Finally, the use of spiritual disciplines and their effect upon spiritual vitality will be discussed. The widely respected views of Willard, Foster, and Sciascero on the disciplines will be analyzed and compared.

Following this discussion, four specific practices will be investigated as aids to help the men in the program increase their spiritual vitality. Ultimately, this chapter will show that in order to increase spiritual vitality, the Holy Spirit, divine encounter, and the
spiritual disciplines must be engaged. Overall, this discussion will develop a theological and biblical foundation for the dynamics involved in creating an environment conducive for spiritual renewal.

The Role of the Holy Spirit

The story of the Bible is the story of God communicating with humans. The interaction between God and his created ones begins in the garden with Adam and Eve (Genesis 1) and moves through the Old Testament. God used multifaceted means to interface with people. These included visions (Genesis 15:1; 46:2), dreams (Genesis 28:12-15; 37:5), angels (Genesis 19:1-3; Judges 6:12), direct vocal oration (1 Samuel 3:4; 1 Kings 19:13), a burning bush (Exodus 3:4), and even a donkey (Numbers 22:30). The Incarnation described in the Gospels demonstrates God’s intense desire to be known by humanity. God became flesh and “tabernacled” among his followers in order to explain himself and his character (John 1:14).

After Jesus’ ascension (Acts 1:9) and glorification (Acts 7:55), God continued to communicate. Jesus declared his disciples would be baptized in the Holy Spirit and be his witnesses throughout the earth (Acts 1:5-8). The purpose of this was to continue the work of God that Jesus had initiated. His disciples were to do the very things Jesus had done. They were to heal the sick, exorcize demons, and preach in power (Matthew 10:8). In doing this, they were living proof that the Kingdom of God had indeed come to earth. God’s power and presence was not limited to the person of Jesus; it was in operation through his followers as well.
It seems the Holy Spirit is the main character in the Book of Acts as the message of Christ spreads. Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit as he preaches (Acts 4:8). This shows that God is intent upon communicating to humanity. Ananias and his wife are killed by God for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:3), through which God communicates the concept of holiness that accompanies his divine presence. The first deacons are chosen based on the Spirit’s presence in their lives (Acts 6:3), and it was important for even the new converts in Samaria to have the Spirit’s presence (Acts 8:14-17). Through the Holy Spirit in these circumstances, God expressed himself and his character. The early Church and every believer since has had to learn who God is, what he expects, and how he is present among his people. This happens through the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Through divine communication, the Spirit of God guides and empowers. For this reason, the Holy Spirit offers guidance to Phillip and helps him decide what to do regarding the Ethiopian eunuch and then transports him to another town after he baptizes the man (Acts 8:28-40). The Spirit called upon Barnabas and Paul to be sent out as missionaries (Acts 13:2), while later Paul and Silas are forbidden by the Spirit to preach in Asia and Bithynia (Acts 16:6-7). The Spirit’s presence was so important that Paul makes sure the new converts in Ephesus receive him (Acts 19:1-6). In all of this, the Holy Spirit is the main character. While there are other methods God uses to communicate, such as visions (Acts 9:10-16; 10:3, 17; 16:9; 26:14-19), angelic visitations (Acts 12:7; 27:23), an earthquake (Acts 16:26), and personally appearing (Acts 23:11), the Holy Spirit seems to be the main vehicle.
When considering the manner in which divine encounter occurs in a post-Pentecost setting, the Holy Spirit is the central figure. John’s Gospel has much to say about the third person of the Trinity. John 14:16-20 and 14:26 together with John 16:7 and 16:13-14 offer insight regarding the person and ministry of the Holy Spirit. The first of these insights is found in John 14:16-20 and establishes the Holy Spirit as the paraclete:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. After a while the world will behold Me no more; but you will behold Me; because I live, you shall live also, In that day you shall know that I am in the My Father, and you in Me, and I in you.

In these verses Jesus make several important statements. In John 14:16, he says that he will ask and the Father will give another *parakletos*. In John 14:17 he identifies the *parakletos* as the “Spirit of truth,” which must be associated with the Holy Spirit. Later in that same verse, Jesus declares that this entity is with his followers and remains in them. John 14:18 says that he will not leave them as orphans but will come to them. Then in John 14:20 Jesus claims that on the day the Spirit comes to them, they will know that he is in the Father and that they and he are in each other. With respect to such indwelling, there are a couple of ideas presented that need to be investigated: the word *parakletos*, translated as “helper” or “encourager” in John 14:16 and *te emera*, “the day,” referred to in John 14:20.¹

The word used in John 14:16, *parakletos* (paraclete), has been translated as “helper,” “intercessor,” and “advocate” in English. In classical Greek, the word was

---

employed in a legal context in the courts, where a paraclete was similar to a professional legal advisor who assisted the accused person.² It seems that it was originally used in the passive sense, as one summoned to help. In the New Testament, however, the word does not have a passive but rather an active sense. The paraclete is one who is sent, not summoned.³ This person is one who brings active help—hence, the English words “helper” or “encourager.” It seems this person takes the place of Jesus in the lives of the disciples.

Furthermore, these verses need to be read in context. Starting in John 12, the Gospel moves Jesus toward his passion. The sayings in these chapters look forward to a time when Jesus will not be with them. This idea is clear. The paraclete comes after Jesus’ physical presence is absent. In these verses he is preparing them for what they can expect, and he is assuring them that divine accompaniment will be present. Jesus does not tell his followers how the paraclete will be in them and what mystical force will join them to him, but he confirms it will occur.

The second idea presented in these verses is that of time. There is coming a day when the paraclete will arrive. Jesus declares that he will not leave them as orphans but will come to them (John 4:18). This might lead one to believe he is speaking of the Parousia,⁴ but in the next verse he clarifies. He declares that in a short time the world will not be able to see him, but the disciples will. He claims that he will be alive and they will share in his spiritual vitality (John 14:19). Here Jesus refers to his death and


³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., s.v. “parousia.” Here it is defined as the second coming of Christ.
resurrection that will happen soon (John 14:19). In light of this, it seems that he could not possibly refer to his second coming when he states, “I will not leave you as orphans, I am coming to you” (John 14:18). He clearly indicates a time when he will no longer be on the earth in his physical form but rather will dwell with them in some new way.

Additionally, he states that on that day the disciples will know that they are in Jesus and he in them (John 14:20). Since John’s Gospel was written towards the end of the first century, most readers of this Gospel would have been aware of the explosive growth of Christianity since the time of Jesus’ resurrection and certainly would have heard of the events described in the Book of Acts. They would have understood that te emera, the day, mentioned in John 14:20 clearly described the arrival of the Holy Spirit and the events surrounding the Day of Pentecost. As one from the Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, I feel strongly that Acts 2 describes this event. However, there are some that believe John 20:22 has some bearing upon the discussion.\(^5\) John 20:22 reads: “And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit.’” Although a thorough investigation regarding when the disciples actually received the Holy Spirit is beyond the scope of this discussion, one comment is in order. It is not clear what transpired in John 20:22, but Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father and was still present, albeit in resurrected form. It seems that John 20:22 does not represent te emera referred to earlier in the Gospel, simply because the ascension has not occurred. If this were te emera, one

would think there might be some sort of change in the disciples’ lives, but none is recorded. On the other hand, there are dramatic events during and immediately following the arrival of the Spirit in Acts 2. Whatever occurred in John 20:22, it must have been some sort of pre-Pentecostal experience, because the results do not compare with the effects of the Spirit’s arrival in Acts.

Another passage that proves helpful in discovering more about the paraclete is found in John 14:26, which reads: “But the paraclete, the Holy Spirit, which the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and remind you of all the things I told you.” In this verse the paraclete is identified as the Holy Spirit. He is sent from the Father in Jesus’ name, which is another way of saying that he is separate from both the Father and Son but sent from both of them. In this verse, the Spirit’s task is to teach and remind the disciples of Jesus’ teachings and instruction. The passage does not reveal the mysterious way in which these lessons will be taught; rather, it emphasizes the source as the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit’s role is that of teacher, and he extends the teaching ministry of Jesus into the post-resurrection era. In other words, the divinely sourced instruction and guidance comes to the disciples through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Apparently, he is able to forward the teaching ministry of God in the lives and hearts of Jesus’ followers. This demonstrates that the Spirit is the connector between the divine and physical realms. He is able to transcend the barriers of human communication and give instruction from the interior rather than the exterior of a person. Romans 8:9 sheds light on this: “You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. But if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to him.” This verse discusses the

95
interior nature of the Spirit. The deciding factor of whether a person is one of God’s children or not is the presence of the Holy Spirit. The internal presence of the Spirit not only brings the teaching ministry of Jesus to individuals but also declares a sense of possession or ownership. The Spirit’s presence is an indicator of who belongs to Christ and who does not. Scripture does not tell how this happens, only that it does.

John 16:7 says, “But I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for if I do not go away the paraclete shall not come to you; but if I go, I will send Him to you.” This is another passage in which more information regarding the paraclete is given. Jesus says it is more advantageous for the Spirit, rather than his person, to be with them. Here he implies that the Spirit can do more for them than he can. Although Jesus does not specify the reasons, his corporeal form was limited to being in one place at one time, while the Spirit is capable of being in many places and people simultaneously. It seems clear that Jesus and the Spirit cannot both be present. It is either one or the other. This emphasizes the point made in John 4:19 that a change is coming. Jesus will not leave them to fend for themselves but declares his divine presence will accompany them in another manner. These statements demonstrate that Jesus and the paraclete have the same ministry and are one, in some sense, yet they also are different from each other as they cannot both be present at the same time.

Another passage that gives insight regarding the paraclete is John 16:13-14. This passage refers to guidance as a ministry of the Spirit. It reads: “But when the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own initiative, but whatever he hears, he will speak; and he will disclose to you what is to come. He shall
glorify me; for he shall take of mine, and shall disclose it to you.” John 16:13 adds to what John 14:26 states about the Spirit furthering the teaching ministry of Christ. Jesus said in John 14:6 that he is the truth, and in this verse Jesus says the Spirit will guide the disciples into all truth. This simply means that not only does the paraclete extend the teaching ministry of Jesus, he also is a guide into further revelation about God. In a sense, teaching and guiding might be considered the same, since both entail instruction, but in Greek the word for “guide” is specifically different. It means to lead or conduct someone to an unknown place. It is used in the sense of leading a blind person or leading souls into knowledge.

The difference between teacher and guide is significant. A teacher presents otherwise unknown knowledge and facts, but a guide accompanies the pilgrim on a journey. This is an added dimension. The Spirit will join with the disciples and not only extend the teaching ministry of Christ but actually be present with each new and challenging situation. As followers of Christ travel through uncharted territory in their earthly pilgrimage, the Spirit serves as their constant teacher and a guiding light through a dark world (cf. Psalm 119:105). This resonates with the closeness and intimacy that they experienced while traveling with Jesus for the three years of his earthly ministry. He was there to help them understand life through the lens of the Kingdom of God. In the post-resurrection era, they will enjoy this same benefit, but it will be the Spirit rather than Jesus of Nazareth who accompanies them.

John 16:14 further states that in doing this the Spirit will glorify Jesus. Once again this emphasizes the oneness, yet separateness of the two beings. By furthering the

---

revelation of Christ, the Spirit will bring glory to Jesus. The Greek word *doxa* is used in this verse; and in this sense, it means to bring fame, renown, or honor.\(^7\) Essentially, the Spirit makes Jesus famous by revealing hidden spiritual things about him to the disciples. He explains and magnifies Christ’s greatness to his followers. As with the concept of guide, there is the sense that this is an ongoing act. It does not cease but will continue until the *Parousia*. There is also the idea presented that the revelation of Jesus and the fame that is due him is inexhaustible in this life. This seems to have two effects. It is as if the Spirit does not tire of bringing Christ glory by spreading his fame. Until the second coming, there never will be a time when the Spirit stops bringing renown, honor, and glory to the person of Christ. In addition, there seems to be an endless supply of revelation to bring. There will not come a day when the Spirit declares that he has run out of revelation and truth regarding Christ. Ephesians 3:8 declares that the riches of Christ are unsearchable. This does not mean they cannot be obtained through Spirit-led guidance and revelation; rather, they are so rich and deep that their depths cannot be fully plumbed in this life.

Much can be learned about the Holy Spirit from John 14:16-20, 26 and John 16:7, 13-14. He is the active force of God in the lives of the disciples after Jesus was glorified and ascended to the Father. He is sent to dwell inside them in a mystical sense and to extend the teaching ministry of Christ through his presence. He also serves as a guide for them as they strive to live correctly in light of the resurrection. While the Spirit’s ministry is multifaceted, the idea of ongoing guidance seems to carry much weight. Without Jesus as their constant companion, they need a guide and Jesus says he will send one.

\(^7\) Ibid., 204.
The Book of Acts demonstrates that he guided the early Church in various ways. For this project, the idea of “guide” is important. The men engaged in the proposed program must learn that there is an inner guide available. It is through the believer’s interior life that God’s guidance is received. Without the inner witness of the Spirit of God, the men are alone and left to wonder what God desires for their lives. With the presence of the Spirit, however, all things are available. He is the instructor and constant coach who can lead them forward in the ways of God. For spiritual vitality to grow and remain abundant, it must be accessed through the paraclete that the Father and Son graciously have provided.

**Divine Encounter**

The grand narrative that the Bible describes is the story of God engaging with his creation, and he has not been lacking in his efforts to communicate with his created beings. For the proposed project to be successful, the men must experience God’s divine encounter in the here and now and as hope for a transformational future. This is vital if their spiritual vitality is going to increase. Consequently, it is important to understand how and why divine encounter occurs. Although God visited his people in many ways in the Old Testament, this present study focuses on post-ascension, post-resurrection, and post-Pentecost experiences through the Holy Spirit.

**Post-Pentecost Divine Encounter**

This project focuses on men being transformed through an encounter with God. The Book of Acts helps by giving examples of how this has occurred in the past and how

In Acts 10:1-8, a Roman soldier named Cornelius has an encounter with God. He is no ordinary gentile. The Bible describes him as “a devout man, and one who feared God with all his household, and gave many alms to the Jewish people, and prayed to God continually” (Acts 10:2). About 3:00 p.m. he has a vision in which an angel says, “Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God” (Acts 10:4). The angel then tells him to send some men to Joppa and request that Peter come to Caesarea. He obeys the angel and sends the men to get Peter. Scripture does not say that he was praying when the vision occurred, but there is a strong probability that he was. It was the “ninth hour,” and this was a traditional time of Jewish prayer. Whether he was in prayer at the time or not, he was a person who worshipped the true God and sought him on a regular basis. His life was God-oriented and God-focused. He was a man known for his piety, and this was the spiritual environment that invited God to communicate with him.

It is clear from the text that Cornelius was not expecting an angelic visitation. The encounter was a surprise to him. He was not seeking God in prayer for a particular situation or desperately crying out in response to a sudden crisis. Another thing to notice is that the angel was very specific about his instructions. After the encounter, Cornelius knew exactly what he was supposed to do. There was no vagueness in the vision, and he obeyed his heavenly visitor. Cornelius understands that he has experienced a divine encounter. This is clear from the statement of his servants in Acts 10:22, “Cornelius a

---

8 Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of the Acts*, 216.
centurion, a righteous and God-fearing man well spoken of by the entire nation of the Jews, was divinely directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and hear a message from you.”

In Acts 10:9-23 the apostle Peter is in prayer. There are two instances of divine encounter that occur. The first is a vision similar to what Cornelius experienced, but the second is something different. In the first instance Peter falls into a trance, sees a vision of unclean animals, and is commanded by a voice to eat them. He claims that, being a good Jew, he does not eat unclean food. Again the voice tells him that God has cleansed these things, and they are no longer unholy. This is different from Cornelius’ experience in that there is no angel, only a voice. It is also dissimilar in that the instructions are not clear, rather vague and requiring interpretation. They are similar, however, because they both occur in a trance or vision. The second encounter is different from the first. It occurs a short time after the trance, “while Peter was reflecting on the vision.” This is when the Spirit chose to speak (Acts 10:19). In this setting Peter is not in a trance but simply in deep thought and reflection. The reader is not told exactly how the Spirit spoke to Peter, nor how he heard the instructions, but he did understand. He is told that he is to go with the men from Caesarea, who are looking for him. He is instructed not to fear, because the Spirit has sent them. It is clear that Peter attributes both the vision and the secondary instruction to the Spirit of God. He has experienced a divine encounter.

Another instance of divine encounter occurs in Acts 13:1-4. Essentially, the church at Antioch is gathered and something interesting occurs: “And while they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and
Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away. So being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia and from there they sailed to Cyprus” (Acts 13:2-4). There are several points of interest in this passage.

First, the divine encounter occurs in the context of ministering to the Lord. The Greek word used is *leitourgeo*, which is translated as “service” in most instances. The word group is scarce in the New Testament, appearing only fifteen times in its various forms; and in most cases, it refers to cultic-sacred tasks such as priestly service. Its use in Acts 13:2, however, is different. Its meaning is completely spiritual and applies to the Christian worship experience. It is not used in service to God’s people or ritual service at the temple but rather as service toward God.

Second, this service is similar to the act of altar-building in the Old Testament, where the patriarchs would offer sacrifices for the purpose of meeting with God. Abraham is an example of this: “He built an altar to the Lord and called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 2:8). The erection of an altar for the purpose of sacrifice was the manner in which the pre-tabernacle people sought divine encounter. It seems that the Antioch Christians are doing the same thing but in a post-temple, post-resurrection, and post-ascension era. The reader is not told how they were ministering to the Lord, only that they were. Somehow they were creating an environment through their actions, which were pleasing to God. This was the setting for a divine encounter.

---

Third, it is not clear how the Spirit spoke to them, although it probably happened through one of the prophets present at the meeting (cf. Acts 13:2). Nevertheless, the instruction was clear. They were to make plans, change direction, and engage Saul and Barnabas for a new task. It seems the community of faith did not respond in obedience immediately. Instead, they committed the idea to prayer and fasting. Somehow through the means of prayer, reflection, and fasting, the leadership of the church also experienced a divine encounter that concurred with the prophetic utterance. There must have been an instance in each life in which they also experienced the voice of the Spirit confirming the idea. Once they felt confident that God had truly spoken, they laid hands on Saul and Barnabas and sent them out.

Collectively examining the discoveries regarding several instances of divine encounter in the Book of Acts, a number of things can be concluded. First, these encounters happen to God’s people. In all three instances godly people were the recipients of the visitation. The visitations came in various ways. For Cornelius, it was a vision. Peter also experienced a vision, but he experienced the Spirit directly as well. The congregation at Antioch heard the Spirit, presumably through a member with a prophetic gift, but somehow this message was confirmed in the hearts and minds of the others as they reflected upon it. This must be considered a divine encounter as well. Last, it seems these encounters occurred while people were practicing their faith. Cornelius was at prayer, Peter was at prayer, and the Antioch church was involved in some form of Christian worship when these encounters happened. This leads to the idea that spiritual practices may enhance the opportunity of divine encounter.
There are several instances other than the ones mentioned above where God’s Spirit visits the people of God. Once again, the study is limited to the Book of Acts, simply because it is the best biblical source of post-ascension history available. The three instances to be investigated are the events surrounding the coming of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), Peter’s deliverance from prison (Acts 12:5-10), and Paul and Silas’ miraculous release from the Philippian jail (Acts 16:25-26). All of these are descriptions of Christ followers practicing their faith in one form or another—and as a result, the Spirit of God manifests himself.

Prior to his ascension, Jesus told the disciples that in the near future they would experience a baptism, not in water but in the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5). He further stated the Spirit would come upon them and they would receive spiritual power due to this experience (Acts 1:8). After they witnessed his ascension, they returned to Jerusalem and committed themselves to prayer and some form of communal living. It was during this time that the promised Spirit descended upon them:

And when the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent, rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance. (Acts 2:1-4)

The disciples were anticipating the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit. They had no idea what that experience would entail or its effect upon them, but they eagerly waited. Their waiting was not passive. Acts 1:14 says, “These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer.” While they waited on God to fulfill his promise, they
were active in prayer and expectancy. There was a spiritual hunger present in their gatherings. No one can say what their prayers were, but it is likely they were praying for God to do the next thing, given their present state of suddenly being without the physical presence of Jesus in their midst. Their patience and spiritual action of prayer reveals they were convinced that God was not finished with them or his plan on earth. Jesus had promised there would be a new chapter soon coming (Acts 1:8), and the disciples were praying for this to happen. It was in the environment of anticipation and in a room saturated with prayer that the Spirit moved among them. The spiritual practice of prayer combined with assurance that God would do what he had promised brought the divine encounter that changed the world. One has to wonder if the event would have occurred if they were passive about the promise. Fortunately, for the fate of the planet, they did not possess this mindset. On the contrary, they practiced their faith by praying and longing for God to fulfill his promise to them. They utilized the spiritual discipline of prayer to cooperate with God’s promised future.

Another encounter occurs in Acts 12. This is the account of one of Peter’s imprisonments. It was a dark time for the Church in Jerusalem as Herod killed James, the brother of John, and had captured Peter as well (Acts 12:3). The reader is not told how long Peter was imprisoned, but it does say that fervent prayer was being made for him (Acts 12:5). The night before he was to appear before Herod, an angel released him and guided him from the prison. He went immediately to the house of Mary where the believers were gathered in prayer for him. When told by the maid that Peter was standing
outside, they were incredulous. They could not comprehend that God had sent an angel to release him (Acts 12:1-17).

This passage gives another example of divine intervention. Once again, it is fervent prayer that is the catalyst for the miracle. There seems to be no passivity among the group, nor fatalistic thinking regarding Peter’s fate. They gathered for corporate communication with God to spare their leader’s life. One can imagine the fervency, especially given the fact that James had lost his life recently to the same tyrant detaining Peter. The group aggressively and actively engaged the spiritual tool of prayer, and a supernatural event occurred. As a result of their petitions, an angelic messenger was dispatched to undo and break the physical laws of the natural world and release Peter from confinement. This event shows how fervent, heartfelt prayer brought the divine intervention.

Another example of divine intervention involving imprisonment occurs in Acts 16. Paul and Silas, on their second missionary journey, were jailed for preaching the Gospel in Philippi. They were beaten and then chained inside a locked prison. However, “about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns of praise to God, and the prisoners were listening to them; and suddenly there came a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison house were shaken; and immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s chains were unfastened” (Acts 16:25-26). As a result of this divine encounter, Paul and Silas not only are released from prison but lead the jailer and his entire household to faith in Christ (Acts 16:33).
In this situation, Paul and Silas could have been overwhelmed with grief and depression; and maybe they were, but they began to exercise the spiritual practices of praise and prayer. It was during the active engagement of these spiritual tools that the divine encounter occurred. It seems the utilization of these practices brought the intervention of the Divine. As in the other passages examined, the disciples were not passively resigned to their fate. On the contrary, they practiced their spiritual disciplines with expectancy and hope that God would respond. They petitioned God for assistance and, in this case, added praise to their prayers. Such deep practice of vibrant spirituality filled their environment with faith and led to adoration and praise, despite their dire predicament. It was in this setting that God moved by sending an earthquake that somehow opened the prison doors and caused chains to fall from the prisoners. As in the other passages, this instance also shows how active engagement in spiritual practices can bring release and divine intervention.

**Spiritual Disciplines**

Jesus utilized spiritual disciplines in order to maintain his focus on the Father’s mission. He regularly withdrew for extended times of prayer (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16; 6:12). Scripture records an extended fast in which he defeated Satan’s temptations and prepared himself for public ministry (Matthew 4:1-11). Even before Christ, for centuries, men and women began utilizing spiritual practices in order to enhance their awareness of God and their availability to him (Job 1:5; Daniel 6:10; Jonah 3:7-9). Since Christ’s ascension, his Church also has practiced certain habits. After the Reformation, Protestantism viewed many of these practices with suspicion because they were closely associated with the
Roman Catholic Church and monasticism. As time has progressed, however, there surfaced a new openness and curiosity regarding these practices. In recent times, several Protestant authors have advocated their use. In particular, Willard, Foster, and Scazzero all find the disciplines to be important for life with Christ.

Spiritual Disciplines Examined

Both Willard and Foster have written excellent books on spiritual disciplines. Scazzero’s work also must be included, because it is very practical and argues for the inclusion of spiritual disciplines in the believer’s life. Willard in his book, The Spirit of the Disciplines, grieves that many contemporary Christians lack life-transforming power. He claims the churches in Western Christianity have done very little in the way of giving members the tools and the power for Christlike living. He says that most churches have given up on the idea of life transformation and that they do not have a plan for changing lives. When referring to American churches he says, “By the middle of this century, we had lost any recognized, reasonable, theologically and psychologically sound approach to spiritual growth, to really becoming like Christ.” Willard claims that Jesus meant the Sermon on the Mount to be taken seriously, and his disciples were expected to live out the demands of that teaching.

---

11 Ibid., 16.
12 Ibid., 15-16.
13 Ibid., 8.
Furthermore, disciples down through the ages have been expected to live up to that standard, and this must include modern followers of Christ. Disciples of Christ are supposed to act like Jesus. They are supposed to demonstrate the same attitudes and behaviors that Christ did while on earth. In this regard, salvation by faith in Jesus and the resulting regeneration it brings must be supplemented with spiritual practices, which train the body in godliness. Willard goes so far as to say that Christ himself spent his life in spiritual preparation for his earthly ministry. Being the Son of God did not excuse him from the bodily preparation needed for his ministry.\textsuperscript{14} He claims that to act like Jesus, followers must practice the same lifestyle as Jesus. He lists several spiritual practices that Christ utilized to prepare himself for ministry.\textsuperscript{15} His thesis is that believers should demonstrate lifestyles that reflect Christ, and in order to do this they must train their minds and bodies in holiness. Training in godliness requires practices, and this is where the spiritual disciplines come into play.

Willard maintains that salvation is more than forgiveness; it is a lifestyle, and redemption must involve the disciplines.\textsuperscript{16} He categorizes these into two groups: “disciplines of abstinence” and “disciplines of engagement.”\textsuperscript{17} Under the category of abstinence he lists solitude, silence, fasting, frugality, chastity, secrecy, and sacrifice. For Willard, the spiritual practices of engagement are study, worship, celebration, service, prayer, fellowship, confession, and submission. Willard believes that true spirituality

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 32.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 158-192.
must involve body, mind, and soul. People who truly live in their salvation surrender their behavior to be tempered by these spiritual practices. The result is a transformed life that is wholesome and good. For Willard, the disciplines are for the purpose of taming the bodily appetites, which keep the disciple in bondage to the flesh. He believes the flesh must be taught the new way of salvation, and the pathway is the disciplines. He claims that the person who engages these practices will experience the good life that Jesus spoke of in Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-11). Living that teaching is not out of reach for the ordinary Christian; rather, it is expected. The disciplines are simply a means by which to foster an environment that invites the Holy Spirit to work.

In *Celebration of Discipline*, Foster takes a slightly different approach. He maintains the primary purpose of the disciplines is not to live a Christlike life but to draw more deeply into God.\(^\text{18}\) His resource is for believers who have found their life spiritually shallow and plagued by ingrained negative habits. He advocates the disciplines as a means of escape for the Christian stuck and trapped in spiritual lethargy. He believes spiritual practices open the door to Christian liberty, freedom, and joy.\(^\text{19}\) They are the foundation for a victorious Christian life. They are mandatory, if one is going to break through sinful lifestyle patterns into the new and fresh life Christ has made available.\(^\text{20}\)

Like Willard, Foster believes that life transformation is needed and spiritual practices are the vehicle, but his goal is a deeper Christian life and not simply embodying

---

\(^\text{18}\) Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 2.

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid., 6-9.

\(^\text{20}\) Ibid., 4-6.
Christ’s behavior. Definitely, these two go hand in hand, and end in the same place. He says the belief and practice of “instant satisfaction” in the Western world is creating hollow and shallow people. The current need is for people of interior depth. The disciplines can provide this.\textsuperscript{21} He categorizes the disciplines differently than Willard, too. He puts them into three categories: “Inward,” “Outward,” and “Corporate” disciplines.\textsuperscript{22} The inward practices are meditation, prayer, fasting, and study. The outward disciplines are simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. The corporate disciplines are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration. If these are practiced, one will come to experience God at a much deeper level than previously imagined. Foster sees the disciplines as a means to a more profound and fuller Christian experience.

Another author who advocates spiritual disciplines is Scazzero. In \textit{Emotionally Healthy Spirituality},\textsuperscript{23} he tells his story and confesses he was an emotionally unhealthy New York pastor, who was trying to juggle all the pressures and responsibilities that comprised his life and ministry. He came to the painful discovery that he was an emotionally unhealthy individual.\textsuperscript{24} His book is the tale of his escape and healing. He believes emotional health and spiritual maturity are linked and advocates a return to contemplative spirituality as the answer. Similar to Willard and Foster, he claims that without a commitment and plan for developing a deep interior life, people are driven by

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{21} Foster, \textit{Celebration of Discipline}, 1. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 15-76, 79-140, 143-201. \\
\textsuperscript{23} Peter Scazzero, \textit{Emotionally Healthy Spirituality} (Nashville: Integrity Publishers, 2006), 7-21. \\
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid. 
\end{flushleft}
dysfunctionality that keeps them in bondage to entrenched thought and behavioral patterns that retard emotional healing. He refers to this psychological entrapment as the “false self.”

The false self is a cruel task master that mandates one is not valuable unless one’s performance, possessions, and popularity meet certain standards. The standards of the false self are constantly moving to higher and higher markers, resulting in frustration and disillusionment. Scazzero asserts that these bondages have been entrenched in family lines for generations and are not easily recognized or broken. For this reason, people must examine their past in order to move forward into the future God has for them.

He claims the escape from such an existence is found in a radical commitment to the ancient spiritual practices. After offering suggestions for escape, based upon his journey, he suggests the practices of Daily Office and Sabbath-Keeping be introduced, in order to maintain the emotional freedom God has brought through the revelation and self-discovery found in examining one’s life and family history. According to Scazerro, the Daily Office involves time in which one stops, centers, is silent, and engages Scripture. He recommends that the practice of Lectio Divina (spiritual reading) be used in the exercise. He then advocates Sabbath as a way to maintain emotional health. This practices includes ceasing from common weekly activities for a day, resting from services performed the

---

25 Ibid., 74-79.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 93-116.
other six days, and through the act of contemplation delighting in God and what he has done.  

After spending considerable space discussing these two activities, he then urges the development of a Rule of Life for each individual. The Rule of Life includes the Daily Office and Sabbath-Keeping but goes further. Far from being a monastic tool limited to the convent of monastery, he uses Daniel’s life as an example of how to utilize a rule of life in the midst of active engagement with the culture.  

He argues that four categories must be involved: Prayer, Rest, Work/Activity, and Relationships. Under each major heading, he adds certain disciplines involved. In order for the discipline of prayer to be effective it must include Scripture, silence and solitude, the Daily Office, and study. Likewise, for rest to occur Sabbath-Keeping, simplicity, play, and recreation should be involved. In the area of work/activity both service/mission and care for the body must be utilized. The final category concerns relationships and includes emotional health, family, and one’s community of faith.  

In short, Scazzero advocates a total life overhaul. He claims that a purposeful life must be contended for and will not happen unless plans are made and followed. He argues for a disciplined life that includes certain spiritual practices. Only through these activities will one enjoy the life of emotional health offered in Christianity. In order to

---

28 Ibid., 165-173.  
29 Ibid., 197.  
live in the freedom and joy God intended, a new and disciplined life full of God’s presence experienced through spiritual practices must be engaged.

It is interesting that none of the three experts—Willard, Foster, or Scazzero—mention divine encounter as a result of the disciplines. For them the practices are for life transformation. Willard believes they are for training the body toward godliness. Foster says the practices lead to a rich and deep interior life resulting in an increased awareness of God. Scazzero, writing out of his own crisis, sees the spiritual disciplines as a lifestyle that empowers emotional health. It seems these authors stop short of the whole and limit their discussions to the natural/physical universe, while failing to mention the supernatural. The result of practicing such things surely does change the natural/physical emotions and attitudes of the practitioner, but they also place the person in a position to receive divine and supernatural influences. Nevertheless, Foster does state that “the Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”31 He is on to something here. The disciplines put the practitioner in an environment conducive for divine influence that otherwise would have not occurred. In a way, all three authors assume this, but none of them actually state it. In this way, their fruitful discussions cease too soon. They need to press on to emphasize how the natural and supernatural overlap in the practice of certain activities. To me, the disciplines can be a sort of portal into the supernatural. This is what occurred in some of the Acts passages discussed earlier.

Essentially, as the disciplines are engaged, God shows up.

---

31 Foster, The Celebration of Discipline, 7.
Four Spiritual Practices

Although there are numerous disciplines that can be utilized for the men of San Marcos to encounter a deeper experience with God, only four have been selected for the project. These include Lectio Divina, the Prayer of Examen, Spiritual Journaling, and Confession. The purpose of the project is to initiate and introduce the men to four specific practices. These have been chosen because they are practical for a busy person and are foundational for constructing an interior life with God. They promote Bible reading, prayer, reflection, and accountability. If during the course of the program the men are able to practice these disciplines and find personal meaning in them, it is hoped they will utilize them the rest of their lives. If they find them a benefit, it is more likely they will go further and experience deeper gain by exploring other disciplines. It is hoped that as they begin to live purposeful Godward lives, they will seek these on their own.

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, otherwise known as contemplative Bible reading,\textsuperscript{32} is a method of engaging Scripture that has profound results. It is different from regular Bible study, which primarily engages the intellect. It draws the participant into the text through listening, meditation, contemplation, and prayer.\textsuperscript{33} It can be engaged individually or in a group setting. For the purposes of this project, it will be conducted in a group setting.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[33] Ibid., 12-13.
\end{footnotes}
Lectio Divina focuses on small portions of Scripture that are read several times. Each time, the listener is expected to hear direction from God through the Word of God. It begins with the preparation of calming oneself for the purpose of being able to hear God through the text. The text is read twice with a short pause between the readings. The participant listens for a word or phrase that stands out, then repeats the word or phrase quietly or silently. When invited, participants are instructed to share that word or phrase with the group without elaboration. Then the text is read again. This time it is followed by meditation, and practitioners of Lectio Divina are asked how this word or phrase connects to their lives. They are encouraged to put their thoughts into two sentences and share them with the group. The passage is read a third time, after which participants are invited to respond further. The listener needs to ask God how to respond. There is great power in asking God what is required. They share this with the group and then close by praying for one another.\textsuperscript{34}

While this method of engaging Scripture can and should be practiced individually, a group setting is sometimes better for those with busy lifestyles, who may or may not be disciplined enough to practice it on their own. In \textit{Contemplative Bible Reading}, Richard Peace implies there are two issues involved in group Lectio that need to be kept in mind. The first involves action. He says there is great power in telling others what God is requiring and asking them for support in prayer and accountability.\textsuperscript{35} However, he also says that God does not always expect people to do something in response to Scripture. As

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 15-17.

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 16.
the text is engaged, God may simply want to remind the listener of a truth or promise or may desire the participant to simply rest in the knowledge of who God is. Since there is not always a physical action required, the group needs to know this beforehand. Another issue is that of impropriety. It may not always be wise to force participants to share with the group intimate thoughts that God has revealed. Group members need to feel free to pass when it comes time to share their word or phrase with the group. If these two issues are addressed prior to the exercise; participants will have a much easier time hearing from God without having to worry about confidentiality or embarrassment. Hearing from God through Scripture is the goal of Lectio, and it is a powerful tool that needs to be introduced and utilized.

**Prayer of Examen**

According to Peace in *Meditative Prayer*, the Prayer of Examen was first introduced by St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Society of Jesus. Many of the early Jesuits were missionaries and geographically far removed from a local priest and parish. There was no way they could attend mass or practice confession. Loyola wanted them to be able to examine their lives and stay spiritually fit without the luxury of a local church. The Prayer of Examen provided a perfect solution, as it is a tool for reflection and contemplation.

---

36 Ibid., 17.

37 Ibid.

The prayer utilizes a three-step approach. Practitioners quiet themselves in God’s presence and reflect upon the last twenty-four hours. First, they focus on gratitude. They meditate about the activities, events, and happenings that have affected them in the past day. As they think about these things, they soon realize God has been active in their lives and there is much room for gratefulness. The participant either writes or vocalizes personal gratitude to God for these good gifts. After reflections on gratitude, the person begins to recollect thoughts, images, experiences in the past twenty-four hours in which God has been present. Practitioners search their memories to discover where and when they have sensed God’s presence. They offer these reflections to God either in written or verbal form. In so doing, they recognize that God has been active in their lives during the past day. Finally, those who engage in the Prayer of Examen reflect upon their failures and sin in the past twenty-four hours. They are interested to discover where they have fallen short or failed God and his calling in some way. They take time to scan their memory and bring these things to cognitive attention. Then they ask God to forgive them for these failings and shortcomings. As in the other cases, this can be done in verbal or written form.

By reflecting on the past day and looking for areas of gratitude, presence, and failure they have examined themselves thoroughly and offer these recollections to God in the form of prayer. In doing so, they purposefully take account of their lives and have made the necessary acknowledgments, confessions, and thanksgivings to their creator. Peace says, “The prayer of examen is one way to prevent days from going by

---

39 Ibid., 55-56.
unexamined and un-lived." He concludes by stating, “In the end, the prayer of examen is about noticing: noticing the good gifts God gives us, noticing the presence of God in our lives, and noticing the way we fail God. When we notice, we become more conscious. When we become more conscious, we grow.” This is precisely the point of this discipline: to increase awareness of God and to allow this recognition to propel Christ followers into spiritual growth. The growth occurs as they amplify their attentiveness to God’s gracious presence on a daily basis. In thinking of his immanence, believers are more apt to pay attention to the manner in which they spend their time.

Spiritual Journaling

Spiritual Journaling is a form of prayer. It differs from a personal diary in that the conversation is between the writer and God, not the writer and the writer’s own mind. For many, it is an excellent way to get in touch with inner issues that sometimes remain buried in the busyness of life. Journaling is a private discipline where the writer engages God through the written word rather than the spoken or contemplated word. The practitioner writes their thoughts, reflections, praises, confusions, or even disagreements with the Almighty. It can be an extremely open and honest way to communicate with

40 Ibid., 55.

41 Ibid., 57.


43 Ibid., 75-80.
God. The sole purpose of this discipline is to talk back to God. It gives the follower of Christ a chance to unpack feelings and emotions in a safe environment.\textsuperscript{44}

It also is beneficial, because once something has been committed to paper it can be re-visited. In this regard, it is unlike vocal prayer that once uttered, is gone. By reviewing one’s words, a person is enabled to take the thoughts deeper or in divergent directions. Even though it might seem like a one-way means of communication, it is surprising how the Holy Spirit speaks through this exercise. As the writer processes issues through journaling, the Spirit can give instruction, guidance, and comfort.

It truly is a discipline in which one encounters God in intimate and personal ways. I have found the practice to be of utmost importance when trying to maintain emotional health. It is not good for one to bury emotions or feelings deep in the psyche. These things must be brought forth, confronted, and processed in a healthy manner.

Many men have trouble getting to root issues in their lives. In many instances, they live fast-paced and pressure-filled lives that do not lend themselves to reflection and contemplation. There is a social stigma attached to getting help in this area. Many men have a problem going to a therapist or professional counselor.\textsuperscript{45} It is not viewed as a manly thing to do. Many are embarrassed to admit they need the help of one of these professionals. While there is a place for these professions, Spiritual Journaling should be recommended as a first step simply because, ultimately, it is God’s presence that brings healing (Psalm 16:11). While spending valuable time and money on professional help can

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Means, \textit{Men’s Secret Wars,} 171.
be useful, in many instances the Spirit of God can provide the relief needed directly. Journaling can be a good place to start digging into this area, with a minimal time and financial commitment. Regardless the time invested, Spiritual Journaling requires diligence and the personal discipline of setting aside daily time for the exercise. A deliberate effort given to this practice can liberate the soul.

In *Spiritual Journaling: Recording Your Journey Toward God*, Peace says that “life is a series of interconnected periods of time, and each period has its own distinctive character.”46 He includes chapters in his book that deal with specific epochs of life. He claims that journaling can help make sense of experiences in life. By assessing the past, present, and future, those who journal are able to access healing and obtain meaning for themselves.47 This is particularly true, and it is my experience, that if one combines the Prayer of Examen with journaling, much benefit is derived when processing present situations. Despite one’s present circumstances, both the past and the future are important, so writing about them can be a source of emotional healing and prophetic invitation as well. Peace also mentions journaling as a means to better understand Scripture.48 Personally, I have found that by combining the revelations gleaned from Lectio Divina and Spiritual Journaling, one not only can access deep meaning but also record impressions from God, which offer key guidance.

---


47 Ibid., 78.

48 Ibid., 85-96.
Consequently, Spiritual Journaling is an indispensable resource for followers of Christ who intend to deepen their interior life with God. It provides a way to examine one’s past and seek inner healing through the Spirit’s intervention. It is a vehicle for making sense of one’s present situation and processing the emotions and feelings associated with everyday life. It serves as a means to receive prophetic invitation from God regarding one’s future and offers a safe place to record one’s dreams and aspirations and determine if these may be included in God’s preferred future. Ultimately, Spiritual Journaling can be a way to interface with Scripture and discover new revelations from God through the Bible, as it serves as a valuable tool for emotional health and spiritual maturity.

Confession

Bonhoeffer says, “Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation.” Confession is both ancient and biblical. James exhorts, “Confess your sins to one another, so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much” (James 5:16). The purpose of confession is to restore one to fellowship with God and the Christian community. It removes the isolation that sin creates and provides a vehicle for joy and new life to be experienced.

Confession lies at the heart of community. It is only when people are able to vulnerably and humbly lay open their soul before one another that real relationships have a chance to form. In order to foster true community, those engaging in mutual confession

must understand how to respond with humility, honor, and discretion. Confession occurs when one Christian hears the failure of another and extends the forgiveness of Christ to that person. It is a powerful tool that Jesus gave the Church (John 20:23).

Willard places confession within the larger discipline of “Fellowship.”50 He says that in confession we lay aside the practice of hiding and pretending and are completely transparent.51 He believes that confession and fellowship go together. They are reciprocal, and one cannot be experienced without the other.52 This seems to be correct in that there can be no real fellowship without honesty. Confession is necessary for genuine relationships. The community of faith is comprised of people who are connected with one another through human relationship and relationship with God through the salvation provided by Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father (1 Peter 1:2-5). Since Jesus’ Church is a living organism comprised of people who are interconnected with one another and God, when thinking about this particular discipline, maybe the word “honesty” should be substituted. True community is the goal, and this only can be reached as members stop hiding behind props that mask their real selves. Authentic relationships where freedom reigns begin when Christ followers enter into honesty and vulnerability one with another.

This type of intimate friendship must be developed over time. Trust must be built before vulnerability can be achieved, especially among the American male population

---


51 Ibid., 188.

52 Ibid.
which the present project targets. This type of fellowship is sadly lacking yet very much needed. The average American male who resides within the San Marcos ministry context tends to be a lonely isolated creature. He needs the power and deliverance that true, deep, spiritual friendship can offer.

Beyond simply having a true friend to help one through life, there is an actual spiritual power in the practice of confession. Jesus has given Christians the power to forgive one another. He said, “If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained” (John 20:23). Bonhoeffer views it from this perspective: “Our brother has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ’s stead and he forgives our sins in Christ’s name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God.”

This is a mystery yet need not be neglected, simply because it is mysterious. Rather, men can press into this practice to discover the depths hidden there. Bonhoeffer goes on to say, “A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light.”

Along these lines, Foster speaks about the power of absolution. He says it is important that forgiveness is actually spoken out loud. The confessor needs to hear another human utter the phrase, “You are forgiven.” Foster writes: “The assurance of

53 Bonhoeffer, Life Together, 112.

54 Ibid., 116.
forgiveness is sealed in the Spirit when it is spoken by our brother or sister in the name of Christ.”

This too is a mystery but a wonderful reality when one person utters these words to another following humble, honest, and vulnerable confession of failure or sin. The power is in being accepted and respected, unconditionally loved, despite one’s brokenness and failure. This must be what James is speaking of when he declares that healing will follow confession. As Scazzero asserts, it must have something to do with emotional and spiritual healing.

Furthermore, it is interesting that James mentions prayer in association with confession. This is crucial. The presence of God must be invoked in such a setting, or else it may be found to be nothing more than two sinners commiserating with each other shrouded by little hope of change. Ultimately, the end goal of confession is healing and deliverance, and only the presence of God can bring these. Confession is not practiced so a person can feel better about a miserable condition; it is practiced so that a new future can be attained. John’s epistle says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The cleansing from unrighteousness is what is needed. That only can come through the power of God. If Christian sinners could achieve righteousness or deliverance over a particular sin on their own, they would not need God’s power nor confession. They cannot get the freedom they desire, and that is what drives them to Christian friends who can help. However, it is not just the confession but the invocation of God’s power that brings freedom and healing. It is

---


56 See discussion earlier in this chapter regarding Scazzero’s *Emotional Healthy Spirituality*. 
important to keep this goal in mind. Without the goal, confession easily can devolve into endless meetings saturated with hopelessness. Deliverance and rising to God’s preferred future are the purpose of any Christian confession.

Summary

This chapter has explored the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the concept of divine encounter, and spiritual disciplines. The goal has been to develop a theological and biblical basis for increased spiritual vitality. While the findings and how they relate to the proposed program are forthcoming in Part Three of this discussion, it is noteworthy to highlight a few conclusions now.

First, the Holy Spirit is God’s immanence. It is his presence in the life of a believer that opens the door to communication with God. He is God’s very presence with his children. In the passages discussed, the main mission of the Spirit seems to be teaching and guiding. The men in the proposed program will need his presence in their lives, as they seek to know God better.

Second, the idea of divine encounter is vital. It is closely associated with the person and work of the Holy Spirit but is not limited to him specifically. Some of the biblical passages studied found that God uses other means such as dreams and visions to direct and guide his people. In most biblical instances, the divine encounter occurred while people were practicing their faith.

This leads directly to the third item of note: spiritual disciplines. It seems that certain spiritual practices put human beings in a position to receive more readily the Holy Spirit’s ministry of divine encounter. This is important to the goal of increasing spiritual
vitality. If a person is able to experience God’s immanence, then an increased level of spiritual vigor, excitement, and joy are available.
PART THREE

PRACTICE
CHAPTER 4
THEOLOGY, GOALS, AND PLANS FOR THIRTY-DAY SPIRITUAL FORMATION PROGRAM

This chapter sets forth a preferable future regarding a thirty-day program to launch spiritual formation in the lives of men at San Marcos Community Church. This discussion summarizes key theological implications from Part Two and gives a brief overview of the new ministry initiative. Then the chapter presents ministry goals and a strategy, defines the target population, and describes the leadership training required to implement the proposed program.

Summary of Theological Implications

Part Two was divided into two chapters: literature review and theological reflection. Both combine to provide a biblical and theological foundation for the new ministry program. The literature review offered two distinct categories: books dealing with the person and work of the Holy Spirit and resources focused on spiritual practices and community. The literature associated with the Holy Spirit was helpful and three general thoughts emerge. First, the Spirit is wild and creative. He is the Spirit of life and brings wholeness and healing when present. Life change is possible due to the power and life-force
associated with his presence. Second, he is the actual presence of God among God’s people. He is connected to them and will not leave them. His presence makes intimacy between humans and God possible. In the person of the Spirit, God is with Christ followers at all times; and thus the gathered community of faith becomes the new temple, the place where God and humans interface. Last, the Holy Spirit is the bond between individual believers. There is something mysterious that occurs in the “in-between-ness” of individuals that creates community. In this mysterious connection there is both power and presence. The Holy Spirit’s ministry makes fellowship and love possible within the community of faith.

The literature regarding spiritual practices and community highlighted the importance of private spiritual practices. While community is important, in order for spiritual transformation to occur, solitude and the spiritual disciplines that can be practiced privately are essential. This is where the individual becomes familiar and comfortable with the presence of the God through the Holy Spirit. It is where true intimacy originates and gestates. Private spiritual practices are the prerequisite for true community. Due to the importance of private practices, many people, especially introverts, might be tempted to stop there. However, for spiritual vibrancy to increase, community also is needed. One cannot progress in the way of God in isolation. The Almighty has designed spiritual growth to include others. As people interface, engage, and fellowship with one another, the full manifestation of the Spirit is realized and ultimately reflects the Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. As the community practices formational relationships, listens to one another, and develops humility, concrete hope for change emerges.

---

1 Taylor, The Go-Between God, 127.
The literature review offered a new and exciting view of the Holy Spirit’s personality and his work among the people of God. It revealed that individual spiritual practices are foundational to an increase in spiritual vitality. It also showed that private spiritual disciplines are not enough; rather, they are the starting point for growth. To attain the goal, community is needed. Christian community is the greenhouse in which the individual follower of Christ develops and grows into maturity. In order to increase spiritual vitality, the person of the Holy Spirit, private disciplines, and the community of faith are all vital elements.

After establishing this foundation, several concepts were explored theologically and biblically. The purpose was to discover how people encounter God and are transformed. This is the essence of the proposed project. In order to discover how spiritual vitality is increased, the person of the Holy Spirit, divine encounter, and the spiritual disciplines were targeted for reflection and study.

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the Holy Spirit took the place of Jesus in the lives of the disciples. They had to adjust their lives to this new aspect of God’s immanence among them, as he is spirit and not physical. Unlike their relationship with Christ, which was physical, natural, and tangible, they had to learn to be sensitive to God’s direction and guidance in a spiritual manner. The Spirit was God’s active force in their lives. Like Christ, he was their teacher and guide; but they had to learn this was predominantly interior, rather than exterior. Although his guidance sometimes came through visions and prophetic utterances, there was an interior quality to it. They began to
recognize that the Spirit also dwelt inside them, and it was from this position Jesus acted as teacher and guide.

This is true today. There can be no increase in spiritual vitality without the Spirit’s presence working inside a person. The catalyst for change begins interiorly and continues to be fueled from God’s divine presence within. God’s influence in a person’s life will have external manifestations, but ultimately the life of God begins and is maintained by an internal presence known as the Holy Spirit.

While closely related to the person of the Holy Spirit, and a byproduct of his activity among God’s people, the idea of divine encounter plays a key role. Several biblical passages were examined to discover how people encountered God. In the passages discussed, the encounter happened to God’s people. In other words, the people who received the divine communication were covenant people. They were either Jews or disciples of Jesus. While a person outside the covenant of grace might encounter God, biblically speaking it is usually a benefit reserved for God’s chosen people. This was the case in the passages examined. In these verses, the encounter came in various ways: visions, trances, prophetic utterances, and the most mysterious of all an inner recognition that God had spoken. In the passages explored, the encounter occurred while people were practicing their faith. The ones who experienced God’s visitation were either at prayer or engaged in some sort of Christian worship. This made the point that most divine encounters happen when someone is involved in a spiritual practice. Spiritual practices seem to enhance the frequency and availability of divine encounter.
For this study, Willard, Foster, and Scazzero were chosen for investigation. Although all three had different starting points and reasons why spiritual disciplines should be utilized, all concluded that life transformation was the goal. While life transformation is a worthy goal, the focus needs to be on God rather than the person. God and a greater sensitivity to his presence should be the goal of all spiritual practice.

For this reason, the four spiritual practices of Lectio Divina, Prayer of Examen, Spiritual Journaling, and Confession have been selected as key practices for this project. All four of these can be utilized to create a larger awareness of God’s presence. Lectio is a practice that can help the men of San Marcos hear God through Scripture. It can open their spirits to the teaching and guiding ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Prayer of Examen is also a way of listening to God, but it provides an avenue for talking back to God as well. Through the expressions of gratitude and confessions of sin, they can realize that life is lived in God’s presence. Through contemplation of God’s presence in daily life, they can cultivate their experience of God’s immanence. Spiritual journaling is a form of prayer and self-care. As the men write thoughts, reflections, petitions, and adoration, they open themselves to become transported into the presence of God on earth. There is something about writing a letter to God that seems to bring forth a greater awareness and receptivity to his Spirit. While the three aforementioned practices deal primarily with the individual and God, confession has a communal element to it. In the act of humble and mutual submission through confession, genuine fellowship and community are formed. There is a ministry of the Holy Spirit available in the “in-between-ness” that only can be accessed in community. In other words, if spiritual practices are restricted to individuals in solitude, there is a
dimension of the Spirit that will be missed. The Spirit is the adhesive that forms all Christian community; this must be experienced or spiritual vitality will not be enhanced. Confession forms true community, and in true community the Spirit manifests himself.

Ultimately, the Holy Spirit, divine encounter, and the spiritual disciplines are needed in order to increase spiritual vitality, which is the goal of the new ministry initiative. The men of San Marcos Community Church are in need of a vision of God’s preferred future, and most likely they are not unique. God has a plan for men (Jeremiah 29:11), and it is grander and more expansive than they can imagine. In order to access the destiny God has, they must change the status quo in their lives. They cannot continue to live as they do and expect to experience more of God’s presence. They must increase the spiritual vitality that is resident, yet somewhat dormant in their lives. The proposed program intends to awaken the men of San Marcos to who God is and open their eyes to what he has purposed for them.

**Overview of the New Ministry Initiative**

The proposed program is a thirty-day experience that combines an overnight retreat followed by four weekly meetings in which various spiritual exercises are experienced and discussed. It takes place during Lent for the purpose of reflection and life transformation. The overnight retreat happens on a Friday evening and concludes by mid-afternoon the following day. The retreat will involve various individual prayer exercises, provide an opportunity for the men to get to know one another, and conclude with the formulation of a thirty-day personal growth plan.
The personal growth plan will be custom-designed by each man for himself. At the retreat, the men will have time for prayer and reflection, as they seek God about the design of their personal plan. The thirty-day plans should include both additions and subtractions from the men’s normal way of life—in other words, activities that enhance spiritual receptivity while resisting the temptation to continue other habits that are not helpful or wholesome. At the end of the retreat, they will pray for one another and commit their personal plans to God. The idea is to practice a new way of life for a full month. It is hoped that some of the new activities become permanent and that some of the old negative habits are left behind. The men will meet weekly to discuss their progress. They will be empowered to encourage one another and pray for areas of struggle, as they endeavor to fulfill their commitments to God.

After the retreat, the men will meet weekly for four weeks to learn about and experience certain spiritual practices. It is hoped that these practices will be incorporated into their lives, as they purpose to increase spiritual vitality. They will use a daily Scripture reading log in conjunction with these meetings and will be required to participate in the body life of the church by attending both Sunday worship and Monday night prayer for the duration of the program.

The first weekly meeting will occur the day following the end of the retreat. The topic of the first meeting is Lectio Divina. The men will have the opportunity to learn about it and practice it at this meeting. They also will be provided time to meet in small groups to discuss their individual personal growth plans. A handout featuring an article will be distributed. Then they will pray for one another and dismiss. The weekly articles
will give greater depth and appreciation to the overall project by introducing the men to various spiritual topics.

The following three weeks will follow a similar format with the addition of a discussion of the weekly article. The Prayer of Examen and Spiritual Journaling will be the topics of the second and third meetings. The fourth and last meeting will focus on the implementation of what has been learned. The men will discuss the effects of the program on their individual lives. They will talk about what worked and what did not work for them individually. They will be asked to develop a new individual plan based upon these conclusions. The new plan should include some of the new practices that work for them personally and incorporate it into their lives for the next forty-five days.

At this point, the program has ended with the exception of a questionnaire given forty-five days after the last weekly meeting. This questionnaire seeks to discover what long-term change has occurred in the men as a result of the program. It is hoped that the men will have added certain spiritual practices to their daily routines while relinquishing other activities that are not helpful. The overriding objective is to increase spiritual vitality in the men through the Holy Spirit’s ministry, divine encounter, and key spiritual practices.

Goals

Since the proposed program seeks to increase spiritual vitality in the men of San Marcos Community Church through the Holy Spirit’s ministry and spiritual disciplines, five specific goals are set forth. The first is to experience the Holy Spirit’s presence through various prayer exercises and certain spiritual disciplines. At first glance, this might sound like an unmeasurable goal, but it is not. During the overnight retreat the men will
practice prayers that will involve their imaginations. These exercises will open their souls to the ministry of the Holy Spirit in a unique way. It is hoped that they will experience the Spirit’s presence as they engage in these prayers. After the initial retreat, they will set apart daily time to meet with God individually for thirty days to practice various prayer exercises and spiritual disciplines. If they are faithful to set aside space in their daily routines for this sacred time, they will encounter the Holy Spirit in new and fresh ways.

The second goal is for the men to cognitively understand and have the opportunity to practice the spiritual disciplines of Lectio Divina, Prayer of Examen, and Spiritual Journaling. They will learn about the components involved in these exercises and be given time to experience and practice them. It is expected that they will begin to utilize these in their daily private devotional time with God. As they use these tools, the hope is that they will experience the Spirit’s presence through them.

The third goal is to spend thirty days living in a purposeful manner by following the personal growth guide developed at the retreat. The idea is for the men to pray, hear from God, and design a personal growth plan that they will utilize for thirty consecutive days. The plan will be cognitive in the sense that they will learn more about God as they engage Scripture on a daily basis, but it primarily will be active. The plan must be acted upon. It will be a discipline to engage the plan for the duration, but this is the goal. The idea is to help participants realize they can discipline themselves for a more purposeful life. They are not helpless victims of their appetites and passions; rather, they are spiritual warriors created in the image of God, full of the Holy Spirit, and as such they are able to take charge of their destinies. If they are able to spend thirty days declining to engage in
negative and destructive behaviors and experience replacing those behaviors with positive spiritual exercises, they will have a taste of the vibrant life available in Christ and have greater hope that they will be able to do it for the rest of their lives.

The fourth goal is for the men to emerge from the program able to design a lifelong program for spiritual health and vitality. After learning about and practicing certain prayer exercises and spiritual disciplines, and spending thirty days taking charge of their lives, they will be empowered to custom-design a plan that will work for their unique personalities and in their unique setting. After experiencing the various disciplines and exercises offered in the program, they will be able to pick and choose the ones that they feel comfortable with and can utilize. They will be better positioned to implement these for lifelong use, because they have practiced for thirty days.

The fifth goal has to do with fellowship. They will practice fellowship with one another for the duration of the program. This concept cannot be taught. It must be experienced. It is in the experiencing of it that its value is appreciated. In the program, the men will learn that they are not alone and need not isolate. The men will experience fellowship and friendship beginning at the overnight retreat, but it will continue for the duration of the program as they meet weekly in small groups to discuss their victories and struggles associated with the thirty-day spiritual formation plans. The men should emerge from the program seeing the need for fellowship and possessing the capacity to practice it. The groups will be encouraged to keep meeting on a weekly basis at the conclusion of the program.
In summary, in order to increase spiritual vitality in the men of San Marcos Community Church, five goals have been set forth. The men will open themselves to experience the Holy Spirit through prayer exercises and spiritual disciplines. They will have an understanding and practical experience with Lectio Divina, Prayer of Examen, and Spiritual Journaling. They will be empowered to take charge of their lives by faithfully completing thirty days of purposeful living. They will be able to design and practice a personal growth plan that is both unique and beneficial to their lives. Finally, they will have experienced fellowship with local brothers in Christ and come to see the value in continuing this important activity for the rest of their lives.

**Strategy**

In order to achieve the goals stated above, a strategy is needed. This section addresses how the goals will be accomplished. The various activities leading up to the launch of the new ministry will be discussed and a detailed description of the components will be provided. By discussing these strategic steps, the goals become more focused and concrete. Without a strategic plan, the program cannot become a practical reality.

The first step is to determine how men utilize their time. Time is a precious commodity in modern society. When asked to spend some of it on God, there may be some pushback. Most San Marcos men in today’s fast-paced, technological age assume they do not have any extra time.\(^2\) They are tempted to think they have none to spare as they are overcommitted fulfilling their responsibilities vocationally and domestically. For

---

\(^2\) John McComb, *Congregational Survey* (San Marcos, TX: San Marcos Community Church, November 1-15, 2009).
this reason, a congregational survey is administered in order to determine what amount of weekly time is spent in unproductive activities. The results of the survey are revealed at the overnight retreat for the purpose of demonstrating how much of this precious resource is squandered. This demonstrates that there is sufficient time to invest in a Godward, purposeful life.

The second step is to present the program during the Sunday morning announcements. This will be published in both the weekly bulletin and on the website. This needs to be done for five to six weeks prior to the initiation of the program. Men will need time to hear about the program and ascertain whether they could benefit from it. It also will be important for the leadership of the church to personally invite selected individuals to the program. The promotional time is also to help wives understand the need and potential for this spiritual formation experience for their husbands, instead of seeing it as yet another activity that interrupts family time. If this second step is performed well and with passion, the program will create much interest. By saturating the church with information, talking with individuals, and having their wives discuss the potential benefits, the program can attract a number of interested candidates.

After the announcement phase, an orientation meeting for the interested men will be offered. This meeting will answer questions regarding dates, time commitments, and personal lifestyle adjustments needed to properly engage the proposed program. It will be important for the men to understand that this is a serious commitment and one to which they must give their full attention and interest. For this reason, a covenant will be

---

3 See Appendix A for “Lifestyle Survey.”
presented to them. The covenant will be an agreement between them and the leadership stating they will give the program their full effort and attention for the duration. They will agree to spend time daily with God utilizing the Scripture reading log, attend the overnight retreat, attend Sunday worship every week, attend the Monday Night Prayer meeting, and do all of the assignments associated with the program. Although the covenant will not stop all attrition, it can help the men understand the seriousness and gravity of the new ministry initiative.

The overnight retreat is the next stage of the strategy. The retreat will accomplish two things: establish the importance of fellowship and expose participants to prayer exercises, where they will encounter the Holy Spirit. While both are needed, the latter is vitally important to the success of the program. Some of the prayer exercises will target inner healing and intimacy with God. The establishment of spiritual disciplines will be fruitless, unless there is motivation. The motivation comes from God’s love. If the men can experience God’s love through the prayer exercises at the retreat, developing spiritual practices will be much more likely. Increasing spiritual vitality has its foundation in intimacy with God. The men must experience this at the retreat. If this occurs, they will hunger for a deeper relationship with the God who loves them genuinely. After spending just one evening and a full day together, they will leave having formulated a thirty-day personal growth plan. The retreat will be the catalyst for the overall experience. It will provide vision and goals for the duration of the program.

---

4 See Appendix B.
Following the retreat, the men practice daily time with God. They also meet once a week to learn new spiritual practices, discuss the weekly readings, and experience emotional and spiritual support in a small group environment. They will be expected to integrate the community life of the church into their weekly routines for the duration of the program. The purpose of this is to practice a new way of life while remaining fully engaged in their vocational and domestic responsibilities. They will be encouraged to attend both the Sunday Morning worship service and the Monday Night Prayer meeting. If they are family men, engaging in these corporate practices will set an example to their families by bringing them along to these events.

On the fourth and final meeting of the program, the men celebrate their victories by publically sharing what God has done in their lives since the retreat. At this point, the men will be more connected emotionally, because they have been involved in supporting one another for the previous month. They will celebrate together as victories are shared. At this final meeting, the men are encouraged to develop a daily plan that will work for them over the next forty-five days. The purpose of this is to help set the stage for engaging in spiritual practices for the rest of their lives. Participants will pick and choose from the various spiritual disciplines presented and design a plan that can work for their unique personalities and stages of life.

Then the men share these plans with the group. There is a closing time of prayer where each man is commissioned to continue the progress that has been made. He also will receive the laying on of hands by the church leadership and prophetic prayers of
blessing are invoked. It is hoped that each man leave this meeting emotionally and spiritually strengthened and commissioned to move forward into God’s preferred future.

The strategy is fairly simple. In order to increase spiritual vitality in the men of San Marcos Community Church, they are invited to the program, attend an orientation meeting, engage in the overnight retreat, and design their thirty-day personal growth plan. They will emerge having taken control of their time through discipline and time management. This can produce feelings of joy and personal purpose because they will have experienced disciplining themselves to live toward a God-ordained purpose and future. They can exit the program also having experienced friendship and fellowship with other men, having completed their thirty-day growth endeavor and possessing the training and ability to engage in spiritual practices the rest of their lives.

**Target Population and Leadership**

The men of San Marcos Community Church are the target of the new ministry initiative. It is not necessarily limited to the men of the church, since it can have a positive effect on any adult male who is spiritually minded and desires to grow. Men may want to invite an unchurched friend to participate. However, the program is designed specifically for men who have experienced spiritual regeneration. The program’s purpose is to train men in the spiritual disciplines, so there must be some degree of spiritual understanding and fervor present. There has to be something the Holy Spirit can inflame. It is possible that an unbeliever might join, but he must have committed his life to Christ by the end of the evening on the retreat. Everything that happens after that requires the spiritual receptivity that only accompanies a spiritually reborn person (John 3:3-8).
Consequently, there needs to be an opportunity given at the retreat for both first-time commitments and recommitments to Christ. This will ensure that all are more or less at the same starting place.

Additionally, male staff members and certain lay leaders will be included. They will be involved in the program, as each is given certain teaching assignments. The senior leader will lead most of the retreat exercises, but the other staff members will assist. At the weekly meetings, the staff members will be assigned to teach one of the major spiritual disciplines. For instance, one will be assigned Lectio Divina, another will share about the Prayer of Examen, and another will explain the concept of Spiritual Journaling. In this manner, they not only participate in the disciplines along with the other men but experience a more profound level of understanding because they are teaching it to others.

The program will occur during the Lenten Season in the winter of 2018. Specific dates as well as retreat location options will be discussed in the weekly staff meeting. The orientation meeting date also will be planned by the church staff, as this program must operate simultaneously with other previously planned activities. The new ministry initiative must complement the overall vision of the church and not compete with existing ministries. The integration of the proposed spiritual formation experience into the larger body life of the church will be assured by having the senior leader and staff directly involved in the planning and execution of the program.

**Brief Summary**

This chapter has examined the theological implications of the discussions in Chapters 2 and 3 concerning the Holy Spirit’s role in divine encounter. The role of the
spiritual disciplines in creating an environment conducive for increased spiritual fervor has been discussed. A description of the goals for the program along with a workable strategy for both the retreat and a thirty-day spiritual growth plan have been provided.

The male church members will be trained and equipped for their roles in the program. The church staff will set potential dates for both the program and the orientation meeting that precedes the new ministry initiative. By including all male church staff and as many male lay leaders as possible, the program will be assured to receive top priority.
CHAPTER 5
IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS AND EVALUATION
OF THE PROGRAM

This chapter describes the implementation and evaluation of the project. It presents program details and a timeline. The resources required for both the overnight retreat and the weekly meetings that follow are discussed as well. Two questionnaires will be administered: one during the last week of the program and another forty-five days after its completion. While it is important to analyze the participant’s response to the newly acquired spiritual tools during the last days of the program; more importantly, it will be more useful to see if the program has affected the men’s use of time with respect to spiritual disciplines six weeks after the program ends.

Spiritual Formation Program

The Prayer Retreat

The Spiritual Formation Program consists of an overnight retreat followed by four weekly meetings. The number of men in the program needs to be limited to about twenty. Any more than this and the quality of fellowship will be diluted. The men need to feel the
retreat is a safe environment in which to share their emotions and experience the Spirit
together. The retreat begins on Friday evening at 7:00 p.m. and has three components:
friendship formation, which will occur on Friday evening; inner healing and intimacy
with God, which will happen through the prayer exercises on Saturday morning; and the
“30-day Spiritual Growth Plan,” which is the focus of the Saturday afternoon exercises.

The purpose of the retreat is to get away from the noise and busyness that
surrounds most lives. When talking about the importance of a retreat, Ron Parrish says,
“Televisions, radios, electronic devices, people talking, traffic noise, and a host of other
noisy clatter keeps us from obeying this admonition, ‘Be still, and know that I am God.’”¹
He goes on to imply that creating this kind of space takes intentionality, but the sacrifice
to do so is worth it.² The retreat is important, because it creates an environment that is
conducive for hearing God’s voice. Being separated from the normal noise of life can
help the men connect with God.

On Friday evening, the men will enjoy a meal together where initial fellowship
will take place. Around 7:30 p.m. the group will gather for a short time of worship. As
the senior leader and facilitator, I will explain the schedule for the weekend and give a
detailed explanation of the thirty-day program of which the retreat is the first part. The
results of the congregational survey will be revealed.³ The purpose of this is to help the
men clearly understand what they can expect from the program and what will be expected

¹ Ron Parrish, Building Your Spiritual Core: 101 Creative Ways to Connect with God (Lititz, PA:
House to House Publications, 2016), 172.

² Ibid.

³ See Appendix A.
of them. After the introduction to the program, the men will be divided into groups of five. They will be instructed to take twenty minutes each for the purpose of telling their stories to one another. They will be given guidelines for the story time, which will include the following: an explanation of their family of origin; their elementary, junior high, and high school backgrounds; any family information they would like to share; and finally, their story with God. The group will want to know how God intersects with their personal backstories.

Since storytelling can extend without one realizing it, it will be important for each group to have someone who will keep them on track and on time. This will ensure other group members have equal time to share. It should be remembered that not all men will be comfortable sharing at intimate levels this early in the program. This is fine and should be allowed. Each man needs to be able to share at a level where he is comfortable. The group must be seen as a safe place or else the program’s success will be limited.

After all men have had the opportunity to share their stories, one man will close the group time in prayer. These initial groups will be comprised of the same men for the duration of the program. This will help ensure a deep level of bonding. Many participants likely have not experienced such a deep level of connection with other men. The groups will provide accountability and friendship that can help them process the new ideas and practices the program requires. I will call the men back together in the large group, explain the importance of a personal relationship with Christ, and give the men an opportunity to respond. Some will desire to commit their lives to Christ for the first time, while others will need to recommit themselves to Christ. This is an important part of the
program. Without spiritual regeneration, the program will not work. The remainder of the evening is considered free time for the men. Depending upon the facility, basketball, ping pong, guitar playing, cards, and dominoes should be available. Some men will choose to retire for the night at this point. Also, it will be important that dormitory-style housing is utilized. Common living space is an added aspect that can foster the bonding experience.

The next morning, breakfast will be served at 8:00 a.m. At 8:30 a.m. the Saturday portion of the program will begin with a series of prayer exercises. These exercises are based on the prayer style taught by St. Ignatius of Loyola. The exercises will require the men to utilize all five senses and their imaginations.\(^4\) It is an effective prayer style that the Holy Spirit uses to bring emotional and inner healing to the participant.

The men will be encouraged to spread out in the room and find a comfortable place. The first prayer exercise will be for the purpose of learning how to prepare for prayer and intimacy with God. They will be asked to begin to repeat one of the following phrases: “Jesus,” “Jesus Christ Son of God have mercy on me a sinner,” “My Lord and My God,” “Come Lord Jesus,” or “Totally yours, God.”\(^5\) In doing so, they will begin to center their attention upon God. Then, participants will be invited to picture themselves in a fort, cathedral, or some other safe and secure place. They will be encouraged to hum or sing soft praises to Jesus. Several examples will be given to help them know how to start their personal worship. They may begin to utter “Praise God, Praise God” to the tune of Amazing Peace, Meditative Prayer, 90.

\(^4\) Peace, Meditative Prayer, 90.

Grace,⁶ sing I Love You, Lord,⁷ or engage in some other melody commonly sung at church that is personally meaningful for them. The prayer leader will demonstrate, so the men will feel empowered to do this. This praise time should last between eight and ten minutes.

The next prayer exercise will follow immediately and emphasize intimacy between the men and God. The men will be given a pencil and paper. They will be instructed to draw a picture of themselves and God. They are not to give much thought to what they are drawing but rather need to sketch the first thing that comes to their minds regarding themselves and God. After completing the drawing, they will sit in silence and think about why they drew God in this manner. They will be instructed to pray and ask God to give them revelation. Then they will ask God why they drew themselves in this way. Once they feel God has shown them all that he desires to reveal, they will simply relax in the silence with God. After everyone has completed both their drawing and reflection, the leader will ask each to share with the group what they drew and what God has revealed. Each man should share at whatever level of vulnerability in which he is comfortable. The prayer leader should allow about ten minutes for this exercise.

This will segue into the next prayer exercise, which requires a personal notebook. The notebooks will be provided to participants. The purpose of this exercise is emotional healing. In this prayer, the men will be asked to have a conversation with a younger version

---


of themselves. They are to picture a room containing three chairs. They are in one, Jesus is in one, and a younger version of themselves is in the third chair. They will be instructed to picture their younger self at a particularly difficult, traumatic, or rebellious time in their lives. In their imagination they are encouraged to have a conversation with their younger self. They may need to be tender and loving, or they may need to be tough in their conversation. Regardless the situation, they must be honest and not hold back anything emotionally. When they have said all that comes to mind, they need to relax and reassure the younger self that they love him and then escort the younger self out of the room. At this point, they will be instructed to tell Jesus all that comes to mind without worry or anxiety about how he will respond. After the conversation with Jesus, they are to sit quietly and record their thoughts in their journals. This exercise should take about thirty minutes.

At this point, it may be important to take a ten-minute bathroom break. Maintaining the presence of God will be important, however, so total silence will be respected. After ten minutes, the group will be called back together. The next exercise will focus upon forgiveness and freedom. This portion begins by practicing one or more of the techniques learned in the first prayer exercise. The leader will give the men two minutes for centering themselves on God. Then they will be instructed to ask to identify the person with which they are currently experiencing the most relational conflict. They are to imagine that person sitting across the room in a chair and to imagine that person saying anything that is on his or her mind. That person is free to speak without any consequences. The men are to listen

---

8 Thibodeaux, *Armchair Mystic*, 70.

9 Ibid., 85.
quietly as this person vents personal emotions and feelings. After this, the men will be instructed to freely share their feelings and emotions toward this other person without fear of repercussions or reprisal.

The men then will be instructed to imagine Jesus sitting in a third chair. He is asked for his input regarding the situation. This means asking Jesus what he thinks about the conflict. In their prayerful imagination, participants will seek Jesus for his insights and considerations. They will be encouraged to ask themselves how their attitudes might be adjusted or changed as a result of this encounter with Jesus. Afterwards, participants will invite God into the situation and then relax in his presence. The senior leader will guide participants to write in their journals any insight they have gained from this exercise. Ten minutes will be allowed for this exercise.

The next exercise emphasizes mission and purpose. Participants will be coached to use their newly formed skill of centering upon God, learned in the first prayer exercise. They are to close their eyes and listen as Mark 9:14-29 is read aloud. They will be instructed to imagine themselves in this scene. They are asked to identify with one person in the Scripture, to imagine themselves as this person and investigate the feelings experienced. The leader will allow five minutes for this exercise. The men then will be asked to share with the group who they were in the scene and what God showed them. The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate to the men that they can hear God through Scripture. This can help to give them confidence that they can hear God speak. At the conclusion of this exercise, the group will take an hour for the lunch break.
While the morning prayer exercises will have focused upon emotional healing, intimacy with God, and the ability to hear God through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the afternoon sessions will center on the formation of the 30-day Spiritual Growth Plan. The first prayer exercise will be Group Lectio Divina\textsuperscript{10} based on Titus 2:11-14. The men will reassemble in their small groups from the previous evening. They will be guided to close their eyes and quiet themselves, as the passage is read aloud two times by the prayer leader. The men will listen for a word or phrase that impresses them or catches their attention. They are to share this word or phrase with their small group. As the passage is read a third time, the men will be encouraged to think about how the phrase connects with their lives. The leader allows two to five minutes for this. Participants will be invited to share with their group how this phrase impacts their life. As the leader reads the passage a fourth time, the members are asked to think about what God is inviting them to do. The leader asks them to share with their group what action God has emphasized as a result of encountering him in this passage. They then are instructed to pray for the group member on their left as they close. This exercise will take between ten and twenty minutes based upon the size of the groups and the amount of communication transpiring in the groups.

After the Group Lectio Divina exercise, the video \textit{Noise}\textsuperscript{11} will be shown. The purpose of this is to demonstrate the amount of unproductive noise and confusion that surrounds the normal American on a daily basis. It is hoped the video will make an

\textsuperscript{10} Peace, \textit{Contemplative Bible Reading}, 15.

\textsuperscript{11} Rob Bell, \textit{Noise}, Nooma 005 DVD (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2005).
impact by helping the men understand how much chaos surrounds their lives and how this unnecessary activity retards the spiritual life they seek to develop. The expected outcome is in a changed perspective and attitude. After viewing it, the men should be empowered to take charge of their lives by being purposeful in their daily existence. The video emphasizes the importance of making space for God in daily life.

The video is a perfect precursor to the next and final exercise of the retreat. The men are given a worksheet titled “30-day Personal Growth Plan.” This worksheet focuses on five areas: Daily time with God, Media, Food and Exercise, Finances, and Evangelism. It asks men questions regarding these areas of concentration. The guide leads participants to design a lifestyle plan for the next thirty days. They are to focus upon the changes that they individually need to be make in all five areas. They will be instructed to write these things down and then will have forty-five minutes to spend alone with God to pray and reflect upon their plan. It is hoped that participants will design their plan with prayerful thought and consideration. The men are expected to finish the worksheet and then come back together for the closing of the retreat portion of the program.

After forty-five minutes, the leader will gather the men together for final thoughts. He will cast the vision for the four weekly meetings that will begin the next day, Sunday, and will inform the men that the 30-day Personal Growth Plan will be discussed at that time. Afterwards, the leader will thank them for their active participation in the retreat. Finally, he will mention any logistical needs associated with checking out of the retreat center and then ask the men to join hands and together recite the Lord’s Prayer.

12 See Appendix C.
The Weekly Meetings

Following the retreat, there will be four consecutive weekly meetings. These will be held on Sunday evenings from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. at the church campus. The purpose of these gatherings will be multifaceted. At these meetings, the men will be exposed to spiritual exercises that can benefit them the rest of their lives. They also will discuss several important journal articles that can expand their thinking regarding the use and practice of spiritual disciplines. Another benefit of the meetings will be to strengthen their fellowship one with another and to routinely call them out of chaos and loneliness. The weekly meetings will demonstrate that spiritual support and comradery are critical to developing a healthy spirituality. Also, participants will be instructed to bring their same retreat notebook to the weekly meetings, in order to add new information as they participate in the exercises and to keep an ongoing record of divine revelations they receive.

The first meeting, which will occur the day following the close of the retreat, will begin with an ice-breaker. The facilitator will start by asking the men to state their name and what impressed them the most about the retreat. Since the discipline learned at the first meeting is Lectio Divina, there will be a short teaching regarding the origins of Lectio Divina and how it is applied. This will take about five minutes. The men then are given a worksheet\(^\text{13}\) explaining the steps involved in individual Lectio Divina. Participants will be allowed twenty-five minutes to engage this practice. At the conclusion of this exercise, the men will assemble in their small groups.

\(^{13}\) See Appendix D.
These are the same groups that were formed the first night of the retreat. They will begin their group time by discussing what God showed them during the individual Lectio exercise. This should take about ten minutes. The men then will discuss their spiritual transformation plans. They will tell the group their goals over the next thirty days. There should be goals for all five of the categories listed on the Personal Growth worksheet.\(^\text{14}\) The men will close their time together by praying for one another. The total time allowed for small groups is twenty-five minutes. Participants then will be given their Spiritual Reading Log for the week\(^\text{15}\) and an article, “Saying Yes and Saying No” by M. Shawn Copeland.\(^\text{16}\) The purpose of this article is to open men’s eyes to the importance of training for faithful living and deeper spirituality. These will be discussed at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be a week later at the same time and place, at the church campus on Sunday from 5:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m. The meeting will begin with an ice-breaker in which the facilitator will ask each man to give his name and share a spiritual victory that he had the previous week. The facilitator also will ask participants to give their input regarding the Copeland article. The men then will receive a brief explanation of the Prayer of Examen. This will be the spiritual discipline experienced in the second week of the program. After the brief teaching, they will be given the Prayer of Examen worksheet\(^\text{17}\) and twenty minutes to engage this discipline individually. Afterwards, the men will assemble in

\(^{14}\) See Appendix C.

\(^{15}\) See Appendix E.


\(^{17}\) See Appendix F.
their small groups. Once again, these are the same groups that were formed at the retreat. By now the men ought to feel comfortable with one another and begin sharing on deeper emotional levels. They will discuss the things God showed them during the Prayer of Examen exercise. Once they have finished this, they will discuss progress and challenges they are experiencing with their personalized spiritual transformation plan. They will be asked where they have experienced victory and where they have struggled in reaching their goals in the previous week. Thirty minutes will be given for the small group time. The meeting will conclude by distributing the Spiritual Reading Log for week two and an excerpt from Mark E. Thibodeaux’s *Armchair Mystic: Easing into Contemplative Prayer* regarding the four stages of prayer.  

The third weekly meeting will be held at the same time and place as the previous two meetings. The facilitator will begin by asking the men for their input regarding the Thibodeaux article. The leader then will give a brief teaching about the importance of Spiritual Journaling and distribute the Spiritual Journaling worksheet. If participants forget to bring a notebook and pen, writing utensils will be available. They will spend about thirty minutes processing and engaging the Spiritual Journaling exercise alone. At the conclusion of the allotted time, the men will assemble in their small groups and discuss the areas in which they are experiencing victory regarding their spiritual formation plans and share the areas of struggle. They will conclude their time together by praying for one another. As before, thirty minutes will be allowed for the small group

---


19 See Appendix G.
discussions. After the conclusion of the small group time, the men will be given the weekly Spiritual Reading Log\textsuperscript{20} and an assignment.

The homework assignment will consist of using their journals to divide their lives into several categories. Examples of this would be early childhood, elementary, junior high school, high school, early twenties, later twenties, thirties, forties, and so on. They will be instructed to recall the activity of God during these periods of life.\textsuperscript{21} They should seek to discover how God was working in their lives at that time. They will be instructed to take this exercise seriously and give it the time it deserves. They also will be given “Keeping Sabbath,”\textsuperscript{22} by Dorothy C. Bass, for the purpose of gaining an understanding of the importance of rest and rhythms in life. This will be discussed at the next meeting. The meeting will conclude by holding hands and reciting the Lord’s Prayer together.

The fourth and final weekly meeting will be held at the same time and place as the previous ones. This gathering will begin with a discussion regarding the article, “Keeping Sabbath.”\textsuperscript{23} The men then will receive instruction regarding the development of a useable lifestyle plan. Over the past month they will have been exposed to several new spiritual practices and prayer styles. They will have utilized a weekly Spiritual Reading Log and experienced deeper friendship and accountability through regular small group meetings. Now is the moment to formulate a lifestyle plan that can work for them personally as they

\textsuperscript{20} See Appendix E.

\textsuperscript{21} Peace, \textit{Spiritual Journaling}, 33-42.


\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
move forward from the structured thirty-day program. They will be given a worksheet\textsuperscript{24} with detailed instructions regarding the development of a lifestyle plan that fits their individual personalities and responsibilities. They will be provided with twenty minutes to work on this assignment.

Afterwards, the men will gather in their small groups to discuss the journaling assignment from the previous week. Each man will be expected to share something he has learned about himself and God through the exercise. Participants then will dialog about their lifestyle plans with one another. They will be encouraged to challenge one another regarding these plans. The tenor of this needs to be grace and acceptance, but it also must be seasoned with truth. The lifestyle plans must form an environment that fosters change and positive spiritual vitality, or they are worthless.

The tendency of some men, once they have completed the program, might be to revert back to their previous ways of life regarding time management and spiritual practices. This would be a mistake, so the men in the small groups must hold one another accountable for plans that are presented. Now that they have spent a month together and have come to know one another’s strengths and weaknesses, participants should be able to speak honestly and openly.

Once this is complete, the facilitator will call the men back together and distribute a questionnaire.\textsuperscript{25} This will be filled out by the men prior to leaving the meeting. The gathering will conclude with participants holding hands and reciting the Lord’s Prayer. The

\textsuperscript{24} See Appendix H.

\textsuperscript{25} See Appendix I.
men will be informed that a follow-up questionnaire\textsuperscript{26} will be sent to them in forty-five days for the purpose of determining how much long-term impact the program has made upon them.

**Timeline**

The timing of the program needs to coincide with the church season of Lent. In her book, *Welcome to the Church Year*, Vicki K. Black discusses the Lenten season and says, “Lent can thus be a time for clearing away those things that stand in the way to a vibrant spiritual life, as well as a time for adding practices in prayer, study, and outreach that lead to God.”\textsuperscript{27} Such is the stated purpose of the program. In this way, to increase spiritual vitality in men has everything to do with the purposes of Lent. Through their participation, men will attempt to fulfill the Lenten ideal by exchanging their existing habits and life patterns for a preferred future that is spiritually alive and vibrant.

Overall, there are four steps involved in bringing the program to fruition. The men on the church staff who will participate as facilitators need to be trained. The congregational survey needs to be administered to all men in the church. An orientation meeting needs to be scheduled and planned. Finally, the program must be executed during the Lenten season. In order to do this, it is important to look at the calendar and plan well.

Lent starts on Wednesday, February 14, 2018 and ends on Thursday, March 29, 2018. Easter is Sunday, April 1, 2018. Since the program is only thirty days and Lent is

\textsuperscript{26} See Appendix J.

\textsuperscript{27} Vicki K. Black, *Welcome to the Church Year: An Introduction to the Seasons of the Episcopal Church* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2004), 56.
forty days, actually forty-five including Sundays, there is some room to move the start date a week or two. Nonetheless, the church staff training needs to occur in December 2017. Initially, this will entail a senior pastoral meeting with the other two male staff members to ask which Sunday evening topic they would like to teach. They also will be asked about the retreat. It will be most beneficial if all three of us can share the responsibility of teaching and leading. As senior pastor, I will facilitate the evening session and the first prayer exercises on Saturday morning of the retreat. After that, one or both staff members will be tasked with facilitating the rest of the activities. Likewise, I will facilitate the first Sunday evening session but can delegate the other evenings to each staff member. These assignments need to be discussed and decided early in December, so the staffers have time to ask questions and prepare prior to the busyness associated with the Christmas season.

In January 2018, the Lifestyle Survey\textsuperscript{28} will be administered to the men of the church. Since this process needs to be explained, the day of the survey offers the perfect opportunity to begin announcing the program. In order to obtain an adequate sampling of the men, the survey will need to be administered three consecutive Sundays, as most people do not attend church every week. It also will be helpful to have an online version of the survey available. Targeting men with both options, online and hard copies, invites greater congregational participation. Therefore, the best time to have the survey available likely would be from Sunday, January 14 through Monday, January 29, 2018.

\footnote{28 See Appendix A.}
In January, in conjunction with the survey and announcement of the program, an orientation date needs to be announced. The purpose of the orientation meeting will be to answer questions and give general information about the program to interested persons. It is an informational meeting regarding subject matter, requirements, dates, times, and locations of the meetings associated with the program. The men will need this information in order to decide if they are interested and if their schedules will allow them to participate. The covenant associated with the program also will be presented at this meeting. The importance of finishing the program and being faithful to its requirements is important. A good date for the orientation meeting would be Sunday, January 28, 2018, directly following the morning worship service. If needed, another identical meeting could be scheduled the following Sunday for those unable to attend the first one. If the announcements are presented with passion and purpose on the Sundays in January, there should be excitement and momentum associated with the idea.

In order to take full advantage of the Lenten theme and associated momentum, it will be important to begin the program as close to the beginning of Lent as possible. If the retreat center is available, the retreat will be held on February 16-17, 2018 (Friday and Saturday). The first weekly meeting will be held the next day on Sunday evening, February 18, 2018. The rest of the Sunday meetings can occur on February 25 followed by March 4 and 11, 2018. As stated above, if the retreat center is not available on the third weekend in February, the program could be shifted back a week or even two. This would not be ideal, however, because the earlier date would allow the men to have completed the program prior to Easter. If the earlier date is utilized, the men would not
only have completed the program by Easter but also have several weeks experiencing their new lifestyle patterns that are the result of the program. This could energize the Easter 2018 celebration with fresh passion and purpose as they enjoy the new spiritual vitality that has entered their lives.

**Resources Needed**

There will be a number of resources needed for the program. The facilities are the most important and therefore must be secured first. The retreat center should be reserved as soon as possible. Most centers book dates a year in advance or more, so for a February retreat the center should be contacted by the fall of 2017, if not earlier. The center needs to have food service available, because the men will eat three meals while there. The center also should have sporting equipment available for the men to utilize during their free time. Audio/visual equipment for showing the video needs to be available at the center or else brought from the church. The same could be said for any worship music that might be utilized. This will be assigned to the worship minister. It will be his responsibility to contact the center and determine the tools available. Paper and writing utensils need to be available for the various prayer exercises. Overnight accommodations must be adequate. As stated earlier, a dormitory-style sleeping arrangement will be sought for establishing comradery and fellowship. The center must be within a hundred miles or less from the church, so the men can arrive after work on Friday evening.

The church facility where the weekly classes will be held is the next level of priority and should be secured as soon as dates are known. The program will be limited to twenty men, so a medium-sized classroom will serve well. Paper and writing utensils will
be needed for the weekly meetings. The staff facilitators will be responsible for bringing all necessary supplies for their particular learning sessions.

Beyond these two facility needs, the other resources are minimal. Each man will need to have a spiral notebook for journaling and taking notes on the teachings. He also will need to have access to a user-friendly version of the Bible for the weekly Scripture Log. The men will need some money for the program, but the amount is minimal: just enough to cover the cost of the overnight retreat and the cost of the teaching materials. There are three reasons for this. First, the program needs to be self-sustaining, if it is going to become a normal part of the church’s life. It is hoped that this occurs and, if it does, the program does not need to put an added burden on the church’s annual budget. Second, and probably more important, San Marcos men do not seem to value things unless they pay for them. Free items are not viewed as valuable. In order for them to feel that they are getting something of worth, they need to invest in it. Third, by charging for the program, the attrition rate will be slowed. If people pay for an event or program, they usually attend simply because they have money involved. So, the program should cost enough to create value in the minds of the men and pay for itself without burdening the church budget yet have a manageable fee so as not to prevent the participation of men who earn a lower income.

Assessment Plan

Even though the church leadership is convinced this program is needed and will be welcomed by the church body, an assessment will be performed to determine if the program has met these perceived needs. In order to properly assess it, several factors must be taken into consideration. First, it will be interesting to see the actual numbers. The first
indicator of success will be how many men actually sign up. As stated earlier, in order to be effective the program needs to be limited to the first twenty men who sign up with their money. It is hoped that the leadership will have to turn away a significant number of candidates. If this happens, another program could be quickly scheduled. If there is a high number of applicants, the program does not need to wait until the following Lent season but could start as soon as the retreat center is available and the staff facilitators secured. Therefore, the number of initial applicants should be one point of assessment.

Another assessment is attrition. It will be interesting to notice how many men drop out of the program after attending the retreat. It is assumed that if a man signs up and puts money down, he will attend the retreat. After all, San Marcos men seem to be attracted to events and activities. The real temptation to quit will come after the retreat. The program is designed to break old habits and patterns and establish new ones. When their daily lifestyles are challenged to be altered due to the demands of the program, the temptation to maintain the status quo will be acute. It will be important to observe how many press through to completion and how many decide the lifestyle change is too much.

Providing a questionnaire on the last day of the weekly meetings will be another tool for evaluating the effectiveness of the program. These questionnaires need to be anonymous and honest, if the church leadership truly is to know if the program did anything to alter the men’s daily lifestyles. The program is designed to be engaged in the midst of life. With the exception of the retreat, the program should happen in the middle of the men’s normal and busy lives. The idea is to introduce spiritual disciplines into their daily routine that can blend in and begin to create God awareness while the men are faithfully working, raising families,
and doing life. The first questionnaire will help in determining what disciplines have been incorporated into the men’s daily lives and which ones have had no lasting impact. In addition to the first questionnaire administered during the last weekly meeting, there will be a second one given forty-five days later.\(^{29}\) This one is the most important, because it reveals what longer lasting change has really occurred in their lives. A person can alter behaviors for a short-term goal, like completing the thirty-day program, but permanent change is difficult. It will be crucial to note what long-term transformation occurs as a result of the program. The second questionnaire will help to discern this.

After calculating how many men signed up and completed the program and after reviewing both sets of questionnaires, then the real impact of the program can be weighed. It is hoped that the men will have incorporated one or more of the disciplines learned and have begun practicing some form of daily private time with God. The real test, however, will be how their outer lives have changed. One can practice all the disciplines in Scripture and still be unaffected. Their inner lives must change. If this happens, they will demonstrate more of the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). To determine if this is occurring, asking participants’ wives and those with whom they live would be the best assessment tool. The real discovery of such results essentially is found in the number of changed lives and the depth to which that change has occurred. For this reason, the last section of both questionnaires seeks input and perspective from those who daily reside with participants.\(^{30}\)

\(^{29}\) See Appendix J.

\(^{30}\) See Appendices I and J.
Brief Summary

This chapter has explained the implementation and evaluation process of the proposed program. A detailed description of the program has been provided as well as a timeline. The required resources for both the overnight retreat and the following weekly meetings have been explained. The two questionnaires associated with evaluation have been presented.

Overall, it will be important to analyze the change in the men’s lifestyle and habits. Their use of time must be altered, if they are to gain the benefits the spiritual disciplines offer. Most importantly, however, it will be interesting to observe changes in behavior associated with the program. It will be crucial to discover if the men’s spiritual vitality has increased due to the measures implemented. If at the end of the program the men are not loving God and loving those around them more, the program has failed.

Probably the true evaluation will come from those closest to the men: their wives, children, and coworkers. The other members of San Marcos Community Church will be helpful in this regard. As the men continue their journeys of faith with other members of the church, all will know whether the program has been a success or not.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Men in America need help. They are experiencing an identity crisis. While this may seem to be an extreme statement, it is important to remember that many were not raised by godly fathers and have no idea how to adequately fulfill the roles in which they now find themselves.¹ They are expected to be providers, husbands, fathers, and role models for their children yet many have not experienced these things for themselves and so are not sure how to proceed successfully.² They desire to do well but have very little support from the contemporary post-Christian culture; they often find little assistance from society and sometimes feel maligned for attempting to fulfill their masculine roles.³ Masculinity without guidance, boundaries, and controls can be dangerous for women, children, and society in general. Daily news outlets report stories that confirm this fact.⁴

However, there is hope. God has an answer. Both men and women were created in God’s image (Genesis 1:27). He has a higher and better plan than the one offered by the current society and media in America. God created man to fulfill his masculine role in the family, church, and community. There is no need for men to be defined by low expectations and low performance. God desires to help men rise up and take their God-given roles seriously while earning the respect of those closest to them (1 Timothy 3:4;

---

¹ Means, Men’s Secret Wars, 57.
² Ibid., 17-29, 56-66.
³ Dobson, Bringing Up Boys, 161-180.
Ephesians 5:33). This will not happen automatically; it requires focus and effort. Although God has a preferred future that is good and fulfilling (Jeremiah 29:11), men must take action (Colossians 3:23-24). They must decide they need the help that God offers and take the appropriate steps (Matthew 7:7).

The first step involves taking God seriously. God is the creator, and human beings are his creation (Genesis 2:7). As such, the first thing a man must do is become a devoted follower of Christ (John 14:23). Only through a personal relationship with Christ can a man assume his rightful place as a citizen of God’s Kingdom (John 3:3). Only as he puts himself in the correct position, under God’s rule, can he expect to begin to enter into the destiny that God has planned (James 4:10). Many men understand this and have made such a commitment. They have experienced regeneration, have chosen baptism, and have joined a local church.

Although men take the important step of joining a local church, they have been disappointed in what they have found. Many have not discovered the tools they desperately need. Instead, they encounter a church culture with programs primarily designed for women and children. Although many men can and do benefit from these various programs, men and their unique needs also require discipleship. They require spiritual formation programs to help them reach the good and wholesome preferred future that God has for them. The programming designed for women and children need not suffer from such a proposal. God loves all humans and both genders equally. There does not need to be an “either/or” attitude in Jesus’ Church; rather, the “both/and” approach is more biblical (Galatians 3:28). God wants both the feminine and the masculine to grow
into Christlikeness in the local church. That is the purpose of the Body of Christ. It should be a place where all can find the guidance, teaching, and power of the Holy Spirit available to live life as God intends.

San Marcos Community Church is prepared to offer a program that can increase the spiritual vitality in men by exposing them to the Holy Spirit’s ministry through the spiritual disciplines. This ministry focus paper has explained the ministry context, offered extensive theological reflection, and provided in-depth explanation of the praxis needed to do this. It is believed that the men of the church will experience true life change as they engage the program. The result can be a group of men who love God and love their neighbor in ways that only God can create. Rather than being defined by the media and contemporary culture in the United States, these men can be defined by God and his calling on their lives. They can experience the elation of taking charge of their lives through discipline. They can enjoy renewed respect awarded them by their wives and significant others, as they rise above slothful and lazy lifestyle habits. More importantly, they can encounter and experience a new level of intimacy with God as they engage him on his terms, through spiritual practices. They can emerge from the program spiritually invigorated and primed for future transformation. The results potentially could have an effect upon generations, as these men rise to their God-ordained place in relationship with him in their families, church, and community—essentially, becoming fathers to the fatherless (Ephesians 6:4) and spiritual warriors who set captives free (1 John 5:4).

The initial program will be limited to twenty men in San Marcos Community Church and led by the male staff pastors. After the pilot program, however, the plan
could increase logarithmically if the proper leadership were in place. This would be the next natural step for the spiritual formation program, and it could expand in several ways. It could repeat within the church on a regular basis and need not coincide with Lent, even though this is the perfect time of year for such an idea. The program could be held throughout the year. As soon as one ended, another could begin. The only restriction would be facilities and leadership personnel. To counter the latter, lay leaders easily could be trained to facilitate and lead. Likewise, the facility requirements could be creatively re-thought. There is a likely host of venues that could accommodate such activity—even nearby churches, if they are interested in developing such a spiritual formation launch pad for the men of their congregations.

The program also could be used with women. Although the focus of this particular paper has been men and their unique needs, many women hunger for increased spiritual vitality as well. The program easily could be adjusted for women and fine-tuned to hone in on any specific needs they face. This would require female leaders and facilitators, but this should not be a problem. None of the spiritual disciplines or prayer exercises in the program are gender-specific, so the handouts included in the Appendices and weekly articles would be useful.

Along these lines, the program also could be designed as a spiritual formation experience for both men and women together. I have experimented with this twice and have found that it works very well in a co-ed environment. Even as a seminar for the spiritual formation of marriages, the proposed format could work. I have witnessed the prayer exercises offered at the retreat actually bring married couples closer. As husband
and wife observed each other receiving emotional and inner healing through the Holy Spirit, the shared experience increased their mutual love and commitment and strengthened their marriage vows. The only adjustment needed in this situation is that the small groups, both at the retreat and in the four weekly meetings, must be gender-specific. Many men simply will not share deeply in the presence of their wives and other women. I imagine this is probably the case with many women as well, especially those who have experienced abuse at the hands of men.

Finally, the program might be expanded outside the local church. It even holds the potential for mission, if done correctly. This would take some serious thinking and planning because, in its current state, it is assumed all participants are spiritually regenerate. However, God’s love has no boundaries, and he can reach people through the disciplines and prayer exercises without a previous spiritual commitment. It would be interesting, and possibly amazing, to see what occurs when an unbeliever is exposed to the power of the Holy Spirit through these activities. The participants would have to willingly submit themselves to the program and its disciplines for thirty days. It would take a dedicated person to sign up for such an adventure, but it would be fascinating to see the results.

In the end, the men of San Marcos Community Church hunger for the opportunity to experience God at a new level. Most have never been to a retreat of any sort, much less a prayer retreat offering Ignatian prayer exercises. Most do not spend daily time with God. Many have never heard of Lectio Divina, the Prayer of Examen, Spiritual Journaling, or Confession, much less participated in these activities. Some will decline
the opportunity to increase their spiritual vitality by these means for various reasons. For many, time will be an issue. Others may fear the vulnerability and intimacy with both God and other men. Some, however, will take the challenge. These are the ones that are tired of the status quo. There will be various reasons behind their decisions, but they will sign on for the adventure. They will risk the time commitment, the personal vulnerability required, and the fear of failure to grasp something that could be. They will accept the risk in order to gain God’s preferred future for them and those they love. It will be exciting to see how God changes their lives.
APPENDIX A
LIFESTYLE SURVEY

A. Time

1. What time do you wake up for the day?

2. What time do you go to sleep?

3. How much time do you spend commuting per day?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
   c. 1-2 hours
   d. More than 2 hours

4. Out of a 24-hour period, how much time do you get to yourself?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
   c. 1-2 hours
   d. 2-3 hours
   e. 3-4 hours
   f. More than 4 hours

5. How much time do you spend watching television on a daily basis?
   a. Less than 30 minutes
   b. 30 minutes – 1 hour
   c. Between 1-2 hours
   d. Between 2-3 hours
   e. Over 3 hours

6. How much time do you spend engaged in social media, playing video games, or surfing the internet on a daily basis?
   a. None
   b. Less than 30 minutes
   c. 30 minutes – 1 hour
   d. Between 1-2 hours
   e. Between 2-3 hours
   f. Over 3 hours
B. **Finances**

7. How much money do you spend per month at your favorite store?
   a. Less than $10
   b. $10-$25
   c. $25-$50
   d. $50-$100
   e. $100-$200
   f. $200-$300
   g. More than $300

8. How much do you spend on alcohol and tobacco per month?
   a. Less than $10
   b. $10-$25
   c. $25-$50
   d. More than $50

9. How much do you spend on technology per month? (includes cable T.V., Satellite, mobile phone, internet, Netflix, video rental, etc.)
   a. Less than $10
   b. $10-$25
   c. $25-$50
   d. $50-$100
   e. $100-$200
   f. More than $200

10. How much do you spend on hobbies per month?
    a. Less than $10
    b. $10-$25
    c. $25-$50
    d. More than $50

11. How much do you spend on physical fitness per month?
    a. Less than $10
    b. $10-$25
    c. $25-$50
    d. More than $50

C. **Health**

12. How healthy is the food you eat?
    a. Very healthy
    b. Somewhat healthy
    c. Not very healthy
    d. Very unhealthy
13. How many times per month do you overeat?
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice
   c. Three to four times
   d. Several times
   e. Almost all the time

14. How often do you exercise? (20 minutes/day or longer)
   a. Never
   b. Once or twice a month
   c. Once or twice a week
   d. Three or four times a week
   e. Everyday

D. Spiritual Practices

Rate the following spiritual practices by placing a letter behind the practice.
(N=Never, A=Once a year, M=Once a month, W=Once a week, E=Everyday)
   a. Silence/Quiet Time
   b. Meditation
   c. Fasting
   d. Sabbath Keeping
   e. Journaling
   f. Bible reading
   g. Worship and Singing to God
   h. Intercessory Prayer
   i. Evangelism
   j. Volunteer Service
   k. Spiritual Retreats
   l. Regular Church Attendance (at least three times a month)
   m. Regular Small Group Attendance (at least three times a month)

15. In what areas of spiritual practice would you like to grow?

16. In what areas of your life do you need God’s help the most? (check all that apply)
   a. Time Management
   b. Spending
   c. Eating
   d. Exercising
   e. Spiritual Habits
   f. Managing Emotions
   g. Relationships
   h. Parenting
   i. Marriage
   j. Work
   k. Other (please list)
I _______ ________ understand the importance of faithfulness and perseverance when it comes to spiritual formation. I promise to take this program seriously and will complete all assignments to the best of my ability. I will attend the Prayer Retreat and the following four weekly meetings. I will attend Sunday worship and participate in the Monday night prayer meeting during the program. I will actively participate in the small groups associated with the program and will pledge to pray for the other men in my group. My purpose is to get to know God better. I will be a full and active participant in this program for its duration.

_________________________  ______________________
Name                                      Date
APPENDIX C

30-DAY PERSONAL GROWTH PLAN

A. Time

a. How much time are you going to spend with God daily?
b. When are you going to do it?
c. Where are you going to do it?
d. How are you going to limit screen time? What changes are you going to make? (computer, social media, gaming, television, etc.)

B. Finances

a. Is your budget working? Do you have a budget? Is your budget God-honoring? Do you tithe?
b. What needs to change for your financial life to be pleasing to God?

C. Health

a. How are your eating habits going to change? Be specific.
b. When and where are you going to exercise? What type of exercise will you engage?

D. Spiritual Practices

a. What Spiritual Practices will you engage? (Silence/ Quiet time, Meditation, Fasting, Sabbath Keeping, Journaling, Bible reading, Worship and Singing, Intercessory Prayer, Evangelism, Volunteer Service, Tithing, Giving above the Tithe)
b. How will you engage these practices? Be specific.
c. In what area of your life do you need God’s help the most?
d. How will this 30-Day Personal Growth Plan help you?
— Get into a comfortable sitting position in a place where you can be alone.

— Center yourself on God by singing to him quietly or repeating a phrase such as “Jesus, Son of God have mercy on me a sinner,” or “My Lord and my God,” or “Come, Lord Jesus,” or “Totally Yours,” etc.

— Continue these practices until you feel God has prepared you to hear his voice through Scripture.

— Read Ephesians 1:3-14 quietly three of four times. As you read these verses, a phrase or word or group of words will stand out to you. (At this point, you may want to write the phrase or word in your journal.)

— Begin to think about the phrase or phrases that God has given to you. Ask yourself why these verses impress you. Begin to write or meditate upon these thoughts.

— Thank God for the insight that he has given you through his Word. Begin to pray your thoughts back to God. He has spoken to you, so now it is your turn to speak to God.

— This is a good time to shift your attention to the things on your prayer list. Begin your daily prayer time at this point.

— End your time of spiritual reading/prayer with a song or the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13.
APPENDIX E

SPIRITUAL READING LOG

Week #1

Monday – Hebrews 1:1-14 or John 1:1-18
Tuesday – Hebrews 2:1-10 or John 1:19-28
Wednesday – Hebrews 2:11-18 or John 1:35-42
Thursday – Hebrews 3:1-11 or John 1:43-51
Friday – Hebrews 3:12-19 or John 2:1-12
Saturday – Hebrews 4:1-13 or John 2:13-22
Sunday – 1 Corinthians 12:1-11 or John 2:1-11

Week #2

Monday – Ephesians 4:1-16 or Mark 3:7-19a
Tuesday – Ephesians 4:17-31 or Mark 3:19-35
Wednesday – Ephesians 5:1-14 or Mark 4:1-20
Thursday – Ephesians 5:15-33 or Mark 4:21-34
Friday – Ephesians 6:1-9 or Mark 4:35-41
Saturday – Ephesians 6:10-24 or Mark 5:1-20
Sunday – Hebrews 10:19-31 or John 5:2-18

Week #3

Monday – Hebrews 8:1-13 or John 4:43-54
Tuesday – Hebrews 9:1-14 or John 5:1-18
Wednesday – Hebrews 9:15-28 or John 5:19-29
Thursday – Hebrews 10:1-10 or John 5:30-47
Friday – Hebrews 10:11-25 or John 6:1-15
Saturday – Hebrews 10:26-39 or John 6:16-27
Sunday – 1 Corinthians 14:12-20 or Luke 4:21-32
APPENDIX F

THE PRAYER OF EXAMEN

— While alone and in a comfortable position, center yourself on God by singing or repeating a phrase. (Same as in the Lectio exercise)

— Continue this until you feel you are properly focused on God.

— Make a mental or written list of the previous 24 hours. Be specific. Go through your day hour by hour.

Gratitude: Examine the last 24 hours and begin to thank God for all he has done. Quietly verbalize your gratitude by saying, “Lord, thank you for ______.”

Awareness: After expressing your gratitude to God, begin to think about his presence. During the past 24 hours, where did you notice God’s presence in your day? In what conversations, events, and situations were you aware of him? Thank God for being there.

Confession: After expressing your gratitude and noticing God’s presence, begin to think about instances where you failed as a follower of Jesus. In what situations did you allow yourself to be unfaithful, unbelieving, or less than you should have been as a disciple of the Lord? Remember there are two types of sins: sins of commission and sins of omission. Sins of commission are things you have done or said, while sins of omission are things you should have done but did not. Ask God for his forgiveness.

— End your prayer time with a song or the Lord’s Prayer found in Matthew 6:9-13.

APPENDIX G

SPIRITUAL JOURNALING

— Practice centering yourself on God through song or phrasing. (as learned in previous weeks)
— Continue this until you are properly focused on God.
— Journaling, there are two options:
  a. Write a Letter to God – Write a letter to God about something that is on your mind.
     o Write about a person with whom you have conflict or concern.
     o Write about a time period in your life.
     o Write about a current challenge in your life.
     o Write about a part of God’s character that you don’t understand. Ask him about it.
  b. Prayer – Write a prayer to God
     o Prayer of Examen (last week’s lesson).
     o Prayer of Intercession for someone or some issue of concern.
     o Prayer of adoration and worship.

APPENDIX H

LIFESTYLE WORKSHEET

You have spent the last thirty days living in a purposeful and disciplined manner. You have experienced several spiritual practices and prayer styles. You have been involved in a support group. You now have to decide what permanent changes need to be implemented.

A. Time
1. In what ways has the program changed the manner in which you spend time?

2. During the program what activities did you exclude from your schedule? Which of these activities will remain excluded?

3. Which activities did you add during the program? Which of these will you retain?

4. Will you continue to set aside daily time for God? If so, where and when?

B. Finances
1. Regarding finances, how has your life changed as a result of the program?

2. What spending did you exclude or restrict during the program?

3. What financial practices did you add?

4. What changes will you permanently implement?

C. Health
1. In what ways did your eating and exercise habits change as a result of the program?

2. What spiritual practices helped in this area?

3. What will you permanently implement?

D. Spiritual Practices
1. What spiritual practices did you find helpful during the program?

2. Which ones were difficult for your personality and lifestyle?

3. Which ones worked well for you?

4. Which of the spiritual practices and prayer exercises will you incorporate into your lifestyle?
E. How Did God Help?
1. In the areas of need identified on the 30-Day Personal Growth Plan, which ones have changed? What has God done as you have been faithful to complete the program?

2. How will you continue to have success in these areas after the program ends?
APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRE #1

1. If you could rate your love for God on a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the best, how would you rate your love for God prior to the program?

2. If you could rate your love for God on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your relationship with God after the program is over?

3. Has your love for others increased, decreased, or remained the same as a result of the program?

4. Have others (those closest to you) noticed a change in your life as a result of the program?

5. What part of the program was the most helpful?

6. What part of the program was the least helpful? Why?

7. Would you recommend the program to other men? Why or why not?

8. Should San Marcos Community Church offer this program again? What changes would you suggest?

FOR WIVES OR SIGNIFICANT OTHERS ONLY:

1. Has the program benefitted your husband?

2. In what positive ways has he changed as a result of the program?

3. Should San Marcos Community Church continue this program for men?
APPENDIX J

QUESTIONNAIRE #2

1. It has been forty-five days since the Spiritual Formation Program at San Marcos Community Church ended. What impact, if any, did the program make on your life?

2. What spiritual disciplines have you incorporated into your daily life?

3. Would you say that your love for God has increased, decreased, or remained the same as a result of the program?

4. Has your compassion for others increased, decreased, or remained the same as a result of the program?

5. On a scale of 1-10, (10 being the highest) how would you rate your relationship with God prior to the program?

6. On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your relationship with God now?

FOR WIVES AND SIGNIFICANT OTHERS ONLY

1. What long-term change, if any, have you noticed in your husband/boyfriend as a result of the Spiritual Formation Class?

2. How could the program be improved?
BIBLIOGRAPHY


187


190


