Doctoral Project Approval Sheet

This doctoral project entitled

INITIATING “CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLESHIP” AS A SOUL CARE MINISTRY AMONG DENVER AREA PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS

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

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INITIATING “CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLESHIP” AS A SOUL CARE MINISTRY AMONG DENVER AREA PASTORS AND MINISTRY LEADERS

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

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ABSTRACT

Initiating “Contemplative Discipleship” as a Soul Care Ministry Among Denver Area Pastors and Ministry Leaders
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The purpose of this project was to assist a cohort of twenty pastors in the Denver area in deepening their relationship with God through an experiential process of nine monthly retreats, spiritual direction, and daily prayer practices.

This project is at the intersection of two ministry challenges. The first is the declining spiritual health of pastors and ministry leaders due to the extensive pressures they face coupled with a dearth of places to experience authentic intimacy with God and others. The project facilitated personal renewal, spiritual community, and the cultivation of healthy rhythms to sustain leaders in the midst of demanding lives. The retreats provided a safe place for intimacy with God and fellow leaders. The daily prayer practices established habits to deepen their conversation with God.

The second ministry challenge is the realization that the contemporary model of spiritual direction, which I have practiced for twenty years, is not supported by ancient Christian spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, or biblical discipleship. Theological reflection on discipleship in the Gospel of John and the study of ancient Christian and Ignatian spiritualities have produced a new ministry model that I have named “contemplative discipleship.”

The ministry project employed the facets of contemplative discipleship over the nine-month process. Assessment of the project validated that contemplative discipleship is a significant means to spiritual renewal, healthy life/work rhythms, and deepening discipleship to Jesus.

Content Reader: Dr. Kristin Huffman

Words: 226
For Janis, whose love, companionship, and support instilled resilience in me to keep going through the dark times. You are truly a one-of-a-kind disciple of Jesus.

For Lucy, Charlie, Violet, and Emi, grandchildren, the delights of our life, and with apologies for the hours this project took me away from you.

For Blakely, from your beautiful yet brief presence on this earth I have learned to groan with God until everything that is sad becomes untrue.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Debbie, Stephen, Ally, and Charlie, the leadership team who risked with me on this journey of sharing the transformational voice of Love with our friends.

Thank you Susan, Janis, Erinn, Janet, Monica, and Eric, the serving team, whose servant hearts provided the abundant hospitality that “set the table” for a deep experience of the radical hospitality of our relentlessly generous God.
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PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Discipleship to Jesus is not an idea that has been tried and found wanting in the twenty-first century church, rather it is an endeavor that has been largely untried. Certainly, there have been a plethora of discipleship programs, but no thoughtful New Testament (NT) reader could describe what Jesus did with his disciples as a program.

Fernando Segovia, a NT scholar, pinpoints the situation:

Without a doubt, one of the most fundamental and recurring questions in the history of the Christian tradition has been the definition of Christian discipleship: that is, what exactly does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and what precisely does the concept of “following” entail not only in terms of an overall conception or attitude toward life in general but also in terms of concrete day-to-day living and existence?1

These overarching questions have stirred me to address a shift in my personal ministry from classic spiritual direction to what this project refers to as contemplative discipleship.

This project emerges at the intersection of two ministry challenges. The first is the declining spiritual health of pastors and ministry leaders due to the extensive pressures they face coupled with a dearth of places to experience authentic intimacy with God and others. The project aims to facilitate personal renewal, spiritual community, and the cultivation of healthy rhythms that can sustain leaders in the midst of demanding lives. A series of retreats will provide a safe place for intimacy with God and fellow leaders. Daily prayer practices will be provided to establish habits of deepening conversation with God. To address this challenge, the project aims at renewing these leaders’ discipleship to Jesus.

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The second ministry challenge is the realization that the contemporary model of spiritual direction, which I have practiced for twenty years, is not supported by ancient Christian spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, or a biblical theology of discipleship as seen in Dallas Willard’s writings. Theological reflection on discipleship in the Gospel of John along with my DMin course work has produced the new ministry model of contemplative discipleship. The project implements contemplative discipleship through spiritual direction relationships, guided prayer practices, and monthly retreats for rest, reflection, and community.

The purpose of this project is to assist pastors in the Denver area in deepening their relationship with God through an experiential process of nine monthly retreats, spiritual direction, and daily prayer practices. My aim is to contribute constructively to what Dallas Willard considers the most significant enterprise of our time: “the greatest issue facing our world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”

2 The two words “contemplative” and “discipleship” have been joined together by others, but not as an alternative to contemporary spiritual direction as a means of soul care. In their collegiate ministry materials InterVarsity Fellowship uses “contemplative discipleship” to refer to a contemplative exercise in the “discipleship cycle” (https://collegiateministries.intervarsity.org/resource/contemplative-discipleship-cycle). In her book Balance of the Heart: Desert Spirituality for Twenty-first Century Christians (Wipf and Stock, 2012), 66, Lois Farag briefly mentions “contemplative discipleship” as way of conducting one’s personal discipleship in the absence of a spiritual director by contemplating the virtues seen in the people one meets. She is encouraging a personal spiritual discipline, not a way of discipling others.

work toward the goal of discipling others while losing focus on their own identity as disciples.

The global need Willard expresses so powerfully and clearly is also the local need within my context which includes pastors, missionaries, and ministry leaders. Though I teach about spiritual formation and discipleship in my seminary classes and meet individually with pastors and missionaries for spiritual direction, neither of those directly fulfills the commission of Jesus to “make disciples” (Mt 28:19). However, combining the two into a ministry of contemplative discipleship would address the need in my context. Therefore, the target audience will be the pastors and leaders participating in the series of retreats, daily prayer practices, and monthly spiritual direction, which together are called The Praxis.

The idea for The Praxis has been in the making since the late 1990s, when the need for leaders to minister out of the fullness of their personal life with God was recognized by the developing spiritual formation community in Denver. A group of pastors began to meet as Spiritual Formation Partners for mutual encouragement, to offer resources to other leaders, and to sponsor spiritual formation events. In 2007, Denver Seminary began to train a new generation of spiritual formation practitioners through a MA in Christian Formation and Soul Care. As the bridge person between these two generations, I sensed God’s invitation to be a catalyst to unite them to develop The Praxis.

4 All Scripture quoted is from the New International Version, unless otherwise noted.
Part One of the paper locates the project in the cultural and pastoral ministry contexts out of which the participants are drawn. These contexts reveal some of the sources of the personal and ministry pressures that cut into personal vitality and ministry effectiveness. Thus the ministry context of the study is the lives of the pastors and ministry leaders who are participating in the project. The personal needs of these leaders which arise out of their cultural and ministry contexts are what the project seeks to address.

Part Two of the paper provides the biblical, historical, and theological foundations to address the needs identified in Part One. The discontinuity of contemporary spiritual direction with earlier models and with biblical discipleship accounts for its weakened ability to provide the soul care ministry leaders need. By way of contrast, biblical discipleship as presented in the Gospel of John and its continuities with ancient Christian and Ignatian models of spiritual direction form a proposed new form of soul care: contemplative discipleship. This form recognizes that discipleship and Spiritual formation are two sides of the sanctification coin. In Philippians 2:12-13 Paul charges his readers to “work out your salvation” because it is “God who is at work in you.” The inworking is Spiritual formation and the outworking is discipleship to Jesus. The disciple of Jesus works out in faith and obedience what the Spirit of God has first worked in by grace. Therefore, throughout this paper Spiritual formation and discipleship will be used interchangeably.

\[5\] It is with intention that “Spiritual” is capitalized since it is the Holy Spirit that accomplishes the formation of the entire person, not simply one part known as the spirit of a person.
Seminaries, institutes, conferences, and missional organizations are places of ideas, words, and training for ministry. Though it is seemingly counterproductive to clutter the clear needs for training in knowing and doing among eager leaders with the complex issues of being that are raised in spiritual formation and contemplative discipleship, there are strong and clear reasons for doing so.

First, this helps keep the main thing as the main thing. Most of what goes on in our groups has its focus on ministry or preparation for it. In this environment it is easy to fall prey to the reality that, according to Oswald Chambers,’ “the greatest competitor of devotion to Christ is service for Him.”⁶ Intentional engagement in discipleship allows earnest believers to heed Jesus’ caution to the seventy in Luke 10:20 to find their joy, not in successful ministry, but in relationship to God.

Second, intentional discipleship to Jesus encourages people in ministry to become Spiritual leaders not simply ministry practitioners. My thirty years of offering soul care to ministry leaders has led me to two conclusions. First, the gaping hole in ministry preparation for most is Spiritual formation and discipleship. Second, the great majority of congregations and Christian ministries desire Spiritual leadership above all else. Both the need and the desire extend to the roots of the church:

In the early centuries of the Christian church, the primary focus of the education of the priest or pastor was on spiritual or character formation. …the early church fathers and mothers were concerned that persons not assume the clerical office if they lacked the necessary spiritual maturity, even though they may possess

knowledge and skills. On balance the primary qualification for ordination in antiquity was to possess the desire for God.\footnote{J. M. Houston, J. I. Packer, and Loren Wilkinson, \textit{Alive to God: Studies in Spirituality Presented to James Houston} (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 239.}

In an age of efficiency and technology desire for God returns leaders and those led to their authentic identity.

Third, Spiritual formation, as Eugene Peterson writes in \textit{Under the Unpredictable Plant}, allows us to “acquire a spirituality for our vocation—an interior adequate to the exterior…”\footnote{Eugene H. Peterson, \textit{Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness} (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 3.} The alternative, he warns, is that “the very work we do and our very best intentions, insidiously pride-fueled as they inevitably become, destroy us and all with whom and for whom we work.”\footnote{Ibid., 114.} Otherwise, leaders become spiritual travel agents handing out brochures to exotic places they have never actually seen. Spiritual formation allows ministry to become the overflow of a full life with God, rather than a drain on emotional and spiritual resources.

Part Three of the paper describes the ministry plan and process which includes monthly retreats, small groups, daily prayer practices, and monthly spiritual direction between retreats. Assessment of the project will be accomplished through a participant self-assessment survey, assessment by each participant’s spiritual director, quantitative assessments collected by the ministry team, and assessment of the effectiveness of the contemplative discipleship model by the core leadership team.
The development of leaders who can thrive personally and lead congregations effectively requires opportunities to which many leaders are not instinctively drawn. Due to the immense pressures that pastoral leaders face, they often resort to providing quick-fixes to an acute, presenting problems, to conferences featuring the best and brightest that provide only a fleeting charge of motivation, or to continuing education courses that allow them to escape the deeper issues. All of these can be profitable if accessed at the right time with the proper motivation, but none have the thriving of the pastor as their goal.

The goal of thriving in ministry requires the following components: 1) a safe environment where pastoral leaders are free to be themselves, to share honestly without fear of being judged, and to let go of comparison and competition, 2) a place for physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and vocational rest (this cannot be overstated), 3) a community of peers that has the option of being sustained for years to come, 4) content designed with pastoral leaders in mind that is offered with brevity, with kindness, and with care, 5) an opportunity that allows pastoral leaders to experience God, themselves, and others in fresh, deep, and renewing ways by engaging in guided practices, and finally 6) a seasoned spiritual director to companion the pastoral leader through personal joys and struggles, spiritual journey movements, and ministry transitions. These components will form the ethos of this project.
CHAPTER 1:
COMMUNITY CONTEXT

Denver is a context of extremes. In a city where diversity and tolerance are extolled, ethnic influences beyond the dominant white culture are minimal. It is a place where younger generations desire to live and fulfill their craving for outdoor adventure yet struggle to afford once they arrive. Beautiful examples of pastoral unity and collaboration are set in a landscape of theological tensions. Pastoral leaders in the area have reached the pinnacle of effectiveness and the depths of humiliating failure.

Cultural Climate of Denver

A variety of factors contribute to cultural climate of the Denver metropolitan area. Among them are a lack of racial diversity, the influx of millennials, the allure of outdoor recreation opportunities, the high cost of living, and a post-Christian outlook. The following sections will briefly describe each of these factors.

Lack of Racial Diversity

Despite a generally progressive and inclusive image, the reality of the Denver metro area according to the census data is that of the dominant white culture. In summary, according to the 2010 census, the Denver metro area was 67 percent white, 22
percent Hispanic or Latino, 5 percent Black or African-American, 4 percent Asian, and 2 percent “other.” Comparing the 2000 census data with estimates for 2017 yields one obvious trend: the Hispanic/Latino population has increased from 17 percent to almost 23 percent, while the White population has decreased by almost the exact same percentages. Examining the data by county reveals an even greater lack of racial diversity within suburban counties: the White population in those counties approaches 80 percent.

The challenge for this project will be gathering a group of racially diverse leaders in a context where there is limited diversity. That there are few gatherings that are multi-racial and that leaders tend to associate in mono-racial settings add to the challenge. This project seeks to break this status quo.

Influx of Millennials

In the past five years Denver has seen a significant population surge and particularly as a result of millennial migration, gaining the status of a “millennial boomtown.” “Metro Denver is an attractive location for millennials, bolstered by a vibrant job market, high quality of life, and convenient transportation options. Numerous studies have ranked Metro Denver as one of the top locations for millennials.”


result Money Magazine designated Denver as a “mecca for millennials” evidences by these rankings: “third for attracting the most millennials moving from another city by the 2016 Mayflower Mover Study;” “seventh-best city for millennials out of twenty-five major cities in 2015;” “seventh-best city for educated millennials by the American Institute for Economic Research.”

The Millennial population, which includes those born between 1981 and 1997, is Metro Denver’s largest generational group comprising 24 percent of the region’s population or approximately 891,500 people. Millennials not only make up one-third of the workforce, they also represent a third of all entrepreneurs in the region. This is consistent with quality of life as a major factor in millennial migration, since there is no better way to maintain independence of choice than being one’s own boss.

These statistics indicate that Denver attracts millennials who are mobile, educated, entrepreneurial, and value a higher quality of life. This played out anecdotally for me when I was the speaker for a church men’s retreat. Of the roughly eighty men in attendance, well over half had moved to Denver in the last three years and fit the profile identified by the statistics.

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6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.
Priority of Outdoor Recreation

Though the economy and job growth are the primary factors of the population surge, near or at the top of every survey of reasons people move to Colorado is the active outdoor and mountain lifestyle. In one survey, outdoor winter activities were the second most important reason people moved to Colorado with outdoor summer activities ranking first.\textsuperscript{12} Colorado has the lowest obesity rate in the nation.\textsuperscript{13} The level of physical activity accounts for that as a report by the Colorado Parks and Wildlife demonstrates: according to this report, 43 percent of Americans participate in running, hiking, or cycling while the figure for Coloradoans doubles that percentage.\textsuperscript{14}

The active outdoor lifestyle that characterizes Colorado residents is a boon to their physical health but can have detrimental effects in other dimensions of life. Virtually every local church must deal with the reality of many of their parishioners taking off to the mountains a couple of times a month. Some have accommodated with mid-week or Sunday evening worship services to address the reality that engagement with the creation of God is not the same as encountering the God of creation. Another negative effect of the active lifestyle occurs as people pursue their individual hobbies in isolation leading to social disconnection. Some churches have found that offering hiking, cycling, skiing, or other activity-based groups is a way to draw people into the life of the community.


High Cost of Living

While Denver is ranked as the second-best place to live by *U.S. News and World Report*,\(^\text{15}\) the privilege of enjoying its benefits comes with a hefty price tag. The average home price in Denver is $394,000 compared to the national average of $227,000.\(^\text{16}\) In one year (from 2017 to 2018), the cost of living rose in Denver by 24 percent.\(^\text{17}\) There is no indication that the upward trend will end soon. This means that most people work longer in order to afford to live and play in Denver, leaving less discretionary time for church and community activities.

Post-Christian Outlook

In a 2017 Barna Group study, Denver ranked as the fourteenth most post-Christian city in the U.S.\(^\text{18}\) Religious “nones” outnumbered Evangelical Protestants 29 percent to 26 percent in a 2014 Pew Forum study.\(^\text{19}\) Pastor Karl Vaters identifies eight assumptions that can no longer be made by pastors and church leaders in this post-Christian culture: 1) Biblical literacy; 2) frequent attendance—regular attenders are now twice monthly; 3) consistent giving; 4) political alignment—diverse views among Jesus

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\(^{16}\) Ibid.


followers; 5) agreement with a biblical sexual ethic; 6) understanding of the reality of sin;
7) recognition of the need for salvation; 8) salvation through Christ alone.\textsuperscript{20} Pastors who
are serious about engaging Denverites have a daunting challenge that can be
professionally invigorating but personally depleting. The added study, effort,
relationships, and creativity required to lead a church in this culture eventually takes a
heavy toll on their souls. This project aims to care for the souls of these challenged
leaders.

**Pastoral Ministry Climate of Denver**

The pastoral ministry climate in Denver is distinctive but not unique to other non-
Bible belt cities. There are the standard divisions between evangelical, mainline
Protestant, and Catholic sectors, high profile leadership failures and successes, and
movements toward collaboration. However, in each of these there is a distinctive nuance
found in the Denver climate. In addition, there are some unique climatic elements in
Denver. One is the influence of spiritual direction represented by all three of the Christian
traditions mentioned above. The other is the theological nuancing that is occurring in the
evangelical church.

**Conservative/Progressive Divisions**

Evangelical Christians are the largest religious group in Denver, but both the
Catholic and mainstream Protestant churches exert considerable influence.\textsuperscript{21} This is

\textsuperscript{20} Karl Vaters, “8 Assumptions Pastors Can’t Make in a Post-Christian Culture,”
*Christianitytoday.com*, accessed July 6, 2019, https://www.christianitytoday.com/karl-

\textsuperscript{21} “Religious Landscape Study: Adults in Colorado.”
evident in the presence of their representative seminaries: Denver Seminary (evangelical); St. John Vianney (Roman Catholic); and Iliff Seminary (United Methodist). Inside each of these groups there is a nuanced theological tension. The Catholic archdiocese has a strong conservative perspective while there are many Catholic ministry groups that do not share that leaning. In the Anglican community, there are the traditional Episcopal parishes that are being challenged by the conservative and growing Anglican Church in North America.

Most relevant to this project is the increasing division between conservative and progressive evangelicals. The center of the tension resides in questions regarding sexual ethics and the level of inclusion of LGBTQ persons. Pastors on all sides are holding to the authority of Scripture but are coming to diverse conclusions. There will likely be participants in this project from a variety of perspectives.

High Profile Leadership Successes and Failures

Perhaps nothing sends chills through a pastor’s spine like seeing a respected and beloved leader plunge into the abyss of moral, ethical, or spiritual failure. Like any large city Denver has seen its fair share of leadership failures. The most visible of those was that of the pastor of the largest church in Colorado who was also president of the National Association of Evangelicals. In one leader was seen the height of success and the depth of failure. Far too many others simply dry out, burn out, or tire out, and withdraw quietly.

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Every pastor knows a fellow leader who imploded in the midst of external successes or one who, after many years of seeming faithfulness, simply does not finish well. The common denominator in all of these cases was an interior that was not adequate for the exterior—a spirituality that could not support their ministry. This project is designed to strengthen pastors and leaders at foundational levels, so that they can not only survive but thrive through the strains and stresses of ministry.

Influence of Spiritual Direction

The ministry of spiritual direction has a long, varied, and rich history in Denver. One of the earliest training programs began at the Vincentian seminary, St. Thomas, which no longer operates in Denver, but whose Formation Program for Spiritual Directors lives on.\(^{23}\) Its focus is providing the ministry of spiritual direction to those on the margins. A more recent Roman Catholic spiritual direction program from the Ignatian tradition trains directors to offer the Spiritual Exercises.\(^{24}\)

Denver Seminary began offering a Certificate in Evangelical Spiritual Guidance (spiritual direction) in 1999 which expanded to an M.A. in Christian Formation and Soul Care in 2007. From this department the Soul Care Initiative was developed under which this project has been conducted. The newest program in Denver to offer spiritual direction training is sponsored by the Vineyard Church and is called The School for


Spiritual Direction.²⁵ In addition there is an organization, Colorado Spiritual Direction, that provides continuing education and supervision for spiritual directors from all traditions.²⁶ The cumulative impact of all of these offerings has been to raise the awareness and sense of need for soul care among pastors, providing a fertile environment for this project.

Movements Toward Collaboration

The largest and most visible example of collaboration among Christians in Denver is the annual Prayer Luncheon which draws hundreds of attendees including the governor, the mayor of Denver, business leaders, and church leaders from across the spectrum. Another broad-based collaborative effort titled “Healing Our Divides” has been sponsored by Iliff Seminary, Denver Seminary, and Regis University for the past two years to provide an opportunity for a series of moderated discussions of divisive issues.

While the previous two examples are great and popular examples of collaboration, the real work of cooperation and community happens at the grass roots level. In most areas of the metro area, such as Golden, Littleton, Englewood, and Central Denver, there are groups of pastors who meet for prayer, support, and missional cooperation. This is evidence of a willingness for friendships to develop across denominational, theological, and social boundaries. Having such a generous spirit of community in place acclimates pastors to participate in this project with those from diverse backgrounds.


CHAPTER 2:
PROFILE OF PARTICIPANTS

This chapter will attempt to describe the ministry context as located in the lives of the pastors and leaders who are participating. These descriptions will include personal and ecclesial characteristics, the motivations that prompt participation, and what is expected of the participants. The context will provide the foundation for the ministry plan.

Demographics of Participants

One of the goals of the project was to have diversity among those who were participating. While this goal was met in terms of age, gender, and, to some degree, in ecclesial affiliation, it was not met in the area of racial diversity.

Personal

In the cohort of twenty pastors and faith leaders there twelve men and eight women. The age distribution was well balanced: seven participants in their thirties; seven in their forties; four in their fifties; and two in their sixties. Regrettably, there was only one non-white participant, an African-American woman.
Ecclesial

The cohort represented the larger community in its denominational participation. Non-denominational evangelicals were the largest group with eight participants followed by four Presbyterians, four Baptists, and two Anglican/Episcopalian. There were no Catholics and overall the group could be described as progressive Evangelicals. Vocationally, ten from the cohort served as pastors at a senior level of leadership. Four were leaders of faith-based non-profit organizations. Four occupied supervisory roles in parachurch ministries. Two were seasoned missionaries with member care responsibilities.

Motivations of Participants

Motivations of participants were evoked by a perceived sense of need, by ministry challenges, by their current support system (or lack thereof), and by desires for personal rhythms and spiritual practices. Only applicants who exhibited a proper motivation were accepted into the cohort. The following responses were gathered prior to the beginning of the project from each participant.

Sense of Need

A clear sense of need and desire was the single most important credential that qualified leaders for the cohort. Here is a sampling of stated needs from participant applications:

“In many ways I have been thrust into ministry at break neck speeds, and have paid a price. Better pacing is required.”

“I am feeling the need for deep rest and substantive change in my life.”
“I am in a season of life with high responsibility and low margin. After trying and failing to implement a pastoral rule on my own last year, I’ve come to understand that I thrive when I have an infrastructure and guidance provided by others.”

“A rediscovery of joy and lightness in my life and ministry.”

“To learn and experience more of what receiving and resting in God looks like in my life.”

“To intentionally deepen my life with God in the company of peers with the same desire.”

“I am in a significant season of transition and I seek direction as I walk it.”

“I am compelled to be intentional in creating margin in my life to slow down to create space for connection.”

“Having been in a process of deconstruction of many aspects of my faith and some of the certainty that went with it, I now need and desire to reestablish some new rhythms for growth.”

“With a lot of loss and transition in this season it has brought me to a place where a lot of stuff from my past is being brought up and has made me really come to a place of what do I believe about God.”

“I am in the process of recovering from burnout, exhaustion, and woundedness. It is my desire to strengthen my spiritual life and increase my intimacy with God.”

“I long to experience more of God…in a daily, relational, power-infused way. I want more and need more of God…and a like-minded community.”

“A depth of spiritual experience that is new and different, and very much needed.”

“I am looking for rest and actually wondering what that looks like for a pastor.”

A hunger for a deeper life with God in community seems to be the common thread in these statements of need.
Ministry Challenges

Faith leaders rarely escape the pressures and demands of ministry even when they deeply long for sanity and health. The challenges of ministry leadership create the sense of need that was reported by participants in the previous section. Some of the stated challenges were:

“Dealing with negative and complaining congregants.”

“I am discouraged by the state of the institutional church—divisiveness and tribalism.”

“People leaving the church and the lack of involvement and commitment of those who stay.”

“Lack of funding and financial partnerships for effective ministry.”

“Jealousy and competitiveness from other ministers.”

“Working alone, pressure to perform, administration.”

“Traveling to teach and preach; fundraising.”

“Dealing with a constant flow of problems.”

“Spiritual warfare.”

“Changing role in the organization.”

“The quantity of work and the resulting stress.”

“Feeling lonely in my work.”

“Very difficult situations with various people and that takes its toll on my energy and emotions for what I am called to do.”

“Relationships, especially at the church, which call for more wisdom than I often feel I possess. And the growing number of details that call for my attention suck the life out of me at times.”

“Working at the pace of the possible rather than the pace of my soul.”
“Isolation and organizational details.”

“70-80-hour work weeks stacking on top of each other.”

“Administrative and organizational aspects of my work.”

Some of the common themes were isolation, administrative and organizational details, workload, and relational conflicts.

Current Support System

The sense of need in the face of ministry challenges is either intensified or mitigated by a leader’s support system. All of the married participants listed family as a primary means of support. This is a pleasant surprise in a culture where ministry is often characterized as destructive to family life.

Isolation in ministry is countered by peer relationships. For ten of these leaders this meant involvement in a pastors group. For four others it was simply close friends that provided support. Another four reported not having close friends or peer support. Over half found this support outside their ministry organization rather than within it.

Only nine of the twenty leaders mentioned support from mentors, therapists, or spiritual directors. With the intensity of ministry challenges, it is concerning that only a minority of these leaders look beyond peers and family for support. Possibly the need for additional support elicited their participation in this project.

Personal Practices and Rhythms

The maintenance of life-giving personal practices and healthy rhythms are the responsibility of each leader. Certainly support systems of family and community can
enrich and deepen personal choices, but the individual leader must decide to receive the resources that are available.

Only three participants were satisfied with their current rhythms of life. Seven self-identified as inconsistent and in need of healthier rhythms. Similarly, prayer was found to be fulfilling by four of the cohort, while five felt stuck in prayer and four others found prayer to be difficult and/or inconsistent. Three regularly engaged in contemplative prayer.

The primary spiritual practice identified by participants was engagement with Scripture, cited by eleven respondents. Given that evangelicals comprise the cohort, this number is not surprising. Other practices that were identified include time in creation (twelve), sabbath (six), physical exercise (six), solitude (six), and art (three). The time in creation and physical exercise practices connect with the cultural climate of Denver described above in Chapter 1.

**Expectations of the Participants**

As in the financial world so it is in the world of the leader’s soul: without investment there can be no return on investment. Though no financial cost was required to participate in this project, it was made clear that the cost was not in dollars but in time and energy.

**Retreat Attendance**

The one non-negotiable of acceptance into the project was attendance at all nine retreats. The opening and closing retreats were two days with an overnight. The January retreat was a full twelve hours, while the other six were four-hour evening retreats. If an
applicant was not available for one of the retreats, they were asked to apply again the following year. The rationale undergirding this policy is that, while emergencies do occur which may require a participant to miss a retreat, any absence not only affects the individual but the community as well. It also communicates that care for one’s soul takes precedence over other demands. Therefore, 100 percent attendance is the expectation since the retreats provide the content theme for each month, at least one communal meal, and a small group experience. It is here that guidance for the month is received, personal reflection occurs, and relationships are formed.

Monthly Spiritual Direction

Each participant is provided a trained spiritual director from the project leadership team. The commitment is to meet for one hour each month of the project duration with their director at an agreed upon time and place. The participant and the director sign a Covenant for Spiritual Direction.

In the spiritual direction sessions, the participant is able to process how they are digesting the month’s theme and the month’s prayer practice. The director is careful to refer the participant to their own conversation with the Lord while discouraging the notion that the theme or prayer practice are homework. The monthly sessions are essential to insure the participant’s personal engagement with the entire process.

Daily Prayer Practice

Each month at the retreats, participants are given a daily prayer practice booklet based on the theme for the month. Though it is impossible to evaluate prayer on the basis of time spent, participants are required to invest at least fifteen minutes daily into the
month’s prayer practice. The practice will be demonstrated at the retreat and reinforced
by the spiritual director in the monthly direction session. Participants will have the
opportunity to share their experiences in prayer with their small group as well. In all three
settings—large group, small group, and in spiritual direction—the emphasis will be on
developing a loving, friendly conversation with Jesus, not on perfecting any specific
prayer form.

A Gift to Be Received and Savored

There is a risk in offering this experience as a gift with no financial investment
whatsoever. Participants could develop the false assumption that since it is free to them, it
must not be valuable. However, the high cost of their time investment should dissolve
that assumption. On the positive side, a gift leads to gratitude while a purchase leads to
entitled expectation. Receiving this experience as a gift opens these leaders’ souls in a
way that payment for services would not.

The final requirement asked of participants is that they refrain from sharing any of
the material they encounter during the nine months until the project is over. They are then
free to share at will. The occupational hazard of pastors and leaders is to simply be a
pass-through vehicle for information and experiences without allowing either to impact
or transform them. Savoring the experiences of this project, marinating in the content,
and soaking in the abundance offered, will guard against this temptation. When a log is
removed from the campfire it quickly loses its fire and heat. The intent of this requirement
is to keep participants in the fire of transformation for the full nine months.
PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION
CHAPTER 3:

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter’s literature review will address the issues requiring further reflection in the chapters to follow.¹ Two specific issues are present given the nature of discipleship and this project’s scope. The first is the discontinuity between historical spiritual direction which had a view toward discipleship and contemporary spiritual direction which often lacks a discipleship focus. The second issue is the contribution of Willardian theology as a bridge between discipleship and spiritual direction.

Discipleship in the Gospel of John

It is surprising that the term μαθητής (disciple), which occurs more frequently in the Fourth Gospel (FG) than in any of the other New Testament Gospels, has garnered so little serious attention in the literature.² While the theme of discipleship attracted some focus in recent years “the role of the disciples in John has escaped the intense interest that

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¹ Portions of the material in this chapter are used by permission of the faculty of record, Dr. Gary Moon, SP 726, Spiritual Direction Cohort, Year 2, Fall 2016, from the Final Academic Paper written by me and submitted by that course.

² Seventy-three times in Matthew; forty-six times in Mark; thirty-seven times in Luke; and seventy-eight times in John.
has recently been turned on their role in Mark.”

Though the renowned Johannine scholar Raymond Brown suggested that “discipleship is the primary category in John,” Segovia a few years later still had to conclude that in Johannine scholarship “the question of discipleship has been largely by-passed.” Marinus de Jonge, reflecting the same opinion, ascribed the title “The Book of the Disciples” to the FG while embracing the view that the Gospel in its canonical form was addressed to believers as a challenge to genuine discipleship. The literature survey to follow will be a representative review of the research on discipleship in the Fourth Gospel.


In 1960 E.J. Tinsley published his extensive study of Christian spirituality from the perspective of imitation beginning with the statement that “for the believer the life and activity of the incarnate Lord Christ has paradigmatic significance both as to form and content.” Tinsley uses form to refer to the believer’s perception of, experience with, and participation in the historical realities of the content (i.e. Creation, Incarnation, and Redemption).

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8 Ibid., 7.
Tinsley begins with the concept of *mimesis* in the ancient world; “knowledge of God was held to result in or require a real likeness to him, and religion in some way to render life an imitation of the life of God himself.”\(^9\) Next he describes the “way” of Israel in Old Testament history and imagery as the foundation for presenting Israel as the *imitator Dei*.\(^10\) From there it is a smooth transition to the Father-Son relationship where Jesus’ imitation of what he sees the Father doing becomes the model for the disciples’ imitation of Jesus. Especially relevant to the current study is the chapter “Jesus the Imitator of the Father in St. John”\(^11\) which represents the first appearance in the literature of Johannine discipleship as a topic to be considered.

Tinsley’s language of imitation will yield in this study to the more text-based language of discipleship, though the concepts are similar. Jesus is not primarily an imitator, according to John, but a reflection and revelation of the Father. The choice of imitation as the framework for the Father-Son and Jesus-disciple relationships tends to externalize what is a deeply internal communion, flatten what is a deeply textured union, and naturalize what is a divinely inspired mission.

Nonetheless, Tinsley’s directions will prove useful for this study, particularly his proposal that, in a particular and dramatic way, the Fourth Gospel presents Jesus as a Son who is one with his Father in complete and utter communion. This study will attempt to show that just as the words and works of Jesus flow unstoppably and naturally from this communion, so the words and works of the disciples are to flow from their communion

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\(^9\) Ibid., 27.

\(^10\) Ibid., 31-49.

\(^11\) Ibid., 118-33.
with Jesus. Tinsley states that “running through the Gospel there is a clear parallelism between the Father-Son relationship and the Jesus-disciple relationship.” The parallelisms, according to Tinsley, are dependence, mission, love, and union. It is these parallelisms that form the essence and basis of discipleship.

_Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship_  

The premise of Rekha Chennattu's study _Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship_ is clear. The opening scenes of the Fourth Gospel (1:35-51) show how Jesus interacted with a number of characters in a manner she believes recalls Yahweh's covenant appeal to Israel in the Old Testament. Because there has been a suggested correspondence between the literary structures of the Sinai suzerain-vassal covenant and those of the farewell discourse (13-17), John must be using the covenant motif as an organizational principle for his evangelistic theology. Therefore, it is possible to abstract the language of covenant relationships from the farewell discourse and analyze its usage by Jesus in his final interactions with his disciples in John 20-21. This, in turn, will help define discipleship, as John expected Jesus' words to be applied in the Christian community.

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12 Ibid., 128.

13 Ibid., 128-130.


15 Ibid., 89-139 (especially 137-139).
If Chennattu is correct in each of these premises, there is a cohesive flow of logic and cumulative supporting evidence throughout the study. If not, her work is a series of interesting but isolated investigations. The latter may well be the case for several reasons.

First, Chennattu's correlation between John 1:35-51 and Old Testament covenant motifs appears unlikely. Chennattu's approach seems tenuous at best, especially when diagrammed out. The supposed correspondences are not intrinsic to the passage itself and are found primarily in the use of certain words that need not be limited to covenant language.

Second, in moving quickly to the Farewell Discourse, Chennattu bypasses the book of signs (chapters 2-12) almost entirely. In any study of the FG, this is an unwise step. The signs are intrinsic to understanding the intent of the Fourth Evangelist, and if there is a strong covenant thrust to his theology, it must be identified through the signs.

Third, there are clear discipleship teachings pervading John 2-12 (e.g., Jesus and Nicodemus in 3:1-21; Jesus and the Samaritan woman in 4:1-42; Jesus and the nobleman in 4:43-53; Jesus and the disabled man in 5:1-30; Jesus speaking on discipleship in 6:25-71; Jesus at the Feast of Tabernacles in 7:37-52; Jesus and the blind man in chapter 9; Jesus and the Passover crowds in chapter 12) that ought not to be neglected in a study like this. Fourth, the covenant motifs that she finds in the farewell discourse are not actually tied to literary development or structure as much as they are to word use and the dynamics of Jesus' relationship with his disciples. Chennattu does not convincingly

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16 Ibid., 42-43.
demonstrate that the intent of the evangelist was to link the discourse to covenant ideology.

Finally, though the presence of covenant motifs and terminology recognizable to the first readers of the FG is certainly likely, it is not clear that covenant is the overriding focus for the Fourth Evangelist. Chenattu is to be admired for her imaginative and bold approach to discipleship in the FG. However, in so doing she has overlooked the obvious and less novel characteristics of discipleship: active sharing in the life of Jesus and participation in the mission of Jesus.

_The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church_ 17

_The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: With Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church_ is the definitive study of mission in the Fourth Gospel. Köstenberger methodically and thoroughly explores his subject beginning with a semantic-field approach linguistically, followed by an exegetical study of the missions of Jesus and his disciples, and concluding with implications for the contemporary church. His examination of the continuities and discontinuities of the missions of Jesus and his disciples finds him placing the emphasis on the discontinuities.18

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18 Ibid., 197-8.
Köstenberger’s conclusion regarding the discontinuities between the missions of Jesus and his disciples determines his understanding of the relationship between discipleship and mission. He rightly contends that discipleship and mission should not be separated, for in John “those who follow Jesus closely are at the end commissioned to be sent into the world. Thus, while a disciple's being sent out is preceded by a time of following Jesus (‘discipleship’), a person's ‘discipleship’ includes and entails that person's (‘evangelistic’) mission to the world.”19 The fact that mission is an integral dimension of discipleship, as Köstenberger states, is foundational to this project, as will be seen in subsequent chapters. Indeed, it is the reversal of the relationship between discipleship and mission that has created the need for this project.

While in these and other brief statements Köstenberger affirms that the relational dimension of discipleship is foundational to mission, he registers disagreement with the contention that “for John the disciples’ internal relationships are more important than their external relationships.”20 Further, in giving a scant seven pages out of two hundred and twenty21 to discipleship, what he calls the foundation for mission, he loses touch with Johannine values and proportions in regard to how dependent mission is on discipleship.22 In Chapter 4 it will posited that, indeed, according to the FG it is only the

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19 Ibid., 177 n. 129.
20 Ibid., 189.
21 Ibid., 176-80, 189-90.
22 For elaboration on these points see my article, “The Place of Mission in Johanne Discipleship: Perspectives from the Motif of Agency, Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care 6 (Spring 2013): 38-45.
internal relationships of communion that make the external relationships of mission possible, both for Jesus and his disciples.

**Historical Perspectives on Spiritual Direction**

“Welcome, child,” he said.
“Aslan,” said Lucy, “you’re bigger.”
“That is because you are older, little one,” answered he.
“Not because you are?”
“I am not. But every year you grow, you will find me bigger.”

The familiar children’s story by C.S. Lewis, with Aslan as the Christ-figure, captures beautifully the earliest and truest goal of spiritual direction: an ever-expanding soul that is growing in its knowledge, receptivity, obedience, experience, and above all, love of Jesus Christ, who is “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Heb 13:8). Both the ancient tradition of spiritual direction in Eastern Christianity and Ignatian spiritual direction unveil in their own distinctives the way to deeper union and communion with Jesus. These traditions will govern the implementation of the project.

_Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East,_ Irénée Hausherr

_Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East_ is a compendium of spiritual direction wisdom from ancient Christian sources. The Eastern Christian tradition recognized that before Jesus could become “bigger” there would be things within the human person that must grow smaller, namely, the “passions.” These self-consuming

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drives within the human person have a diminishing effect because they turn the person in on themselves, thus keeping the image bearer small by restricting the vision of God and the experience of love.

On the contemporary scene passions are rarely, if ever, noticed or discussed, but their effects are shrinking souls and crippling the witness and impact of God’s people. In terms of congregations it is often true that “there is no place in their structure and rhythm where a serious discussion concerning the state of one’s soul is expected.”26 Perhaps this can be attributed to the soul conditions of ministry leaders as Eugene Peterson pinpoints: “American pastors are abandoning their posts, their calling. They have gone whoring after other gods. What they do with their time under the guise of pastoral ministry hasn’t the remotest connection with what the church’s pastors have done for most of twenty centuries.”27

The responsibility being abandoned is keeping their communities attentive to God through prayer, Scripture, and spiritual direction. The overarching and ubiquitous need is expressed succinctly by the twentieth century hermit and representative of the Eastern tradition, Matthew the Poor: “the world now thirsts to see living faith in the person of Jesus Christ; not simply to hear about it, but to live it. So many books tell about Christ; so many preachers speak about Christ; but so few people live and speak with Christ.”28 Image-bearers are not satisfied with simple knowledge by description or knowledge

27 Eugene Peterson, Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 1.
28 Matthew the Poor, Orthodox Prayer Life: The Interior Way (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 189.
about, they want knowledge by acquaintance, a relationship of love. The Praxis will offer these leaders spiritual direction—guiding them toward rest, toward confronting their passions and their effects, and toward restoring their love relationship with God. In time the inevitable result will be more communities full of love for God and neighbor.

The first line of Augustine’s *Ordo Monasterii* clarifies where an ordered life begins: “before all else, dearest brothers, let God be loved and then your neighbor, because these are the chief commandments which have been given us.” In the broadest sense The Praxis will guide pastors and leaders in the reordering of their lives around loving communion with God. They will be gently led into a new order by the rhythms of a monthly retreat, monthly spiritual direction, monthly prayer focus, and the experience of spiritual practices.

Neither the rigor of the desert or the monastery will be found in the order we will encourage and certainly not Augustine’s suggestion of whipping those who are disobedient. However, the rule does not need to be extremely ascetic to combat the passions. In Augustine’s more moderate view it was “better to need less than to have more.” Bondi explains from the perspective of the desert monks: “we must take care of our necessities and not pamper our desire for self-indulgence or we will trap ourselves into being unhappy or even helpless once we are addicted to our pleasures.” For today’s pastor/leader this is not primarily about food, clothing, or luxuries, but about approval,


31 Ibid, 73.

status, and power. The rule can quietly reorient one’s focus from the passions of the ego to the love of God.

Current viewpoints notwithstanding, prayer is not simply a “quiet time” or one option on the spiritual discipline buffet. It is conversation with God, relationship with God, that becomes a way of life. Prayer is life, life with God. It is what drew the first hermits to the desert and what has drawn monks together seven times a day for fifteen centuries. Prayer is ultimately about communion with Christ. As Matthew the Poor states, “…prayer becomes our supreme concern, our main preoccupation, which outweighs all other cares; our duty, which challenges all other duties; our pleasure, which surpasses every other pleasure. We would then pray at all times, in all circumstances, in all places, in all conditions. We would pray in an insatiable hunger for contact with Christ.”

The Praxis seeks to encourage a life of prayer through teaching, modeling, experiences with a variety of prayer forms from the Christian spiritual tradition, and a monthly prayer/reflection focus.

Matthew the Poor identifies three major impediments to prayer for those who have moved beyond the beginnings: spiritual aridity, spiritual languor, and loss of purpose. Spiritual aridity is dryness in prayer that can be accompanied by disillusionment or dismay at its first occurrence because the consolations of God’s presence have severely lessened or disappeared. This would be known as a period of desolation in the Carmelite tradition and can be a purifying and deepening season when

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33 Matthew the Poor, *Orthodox Prayer Life*, 220.

34 Ibid., 233-255.
understood and embraced. Unfortunately, due to lack of deeper teaching on prayer many of the participants in The Praxis will no doubt enter in a state of aridity.

Spiritual languor is the loss of the will and eventually the desire to pray. As the word suggests, it is a period of languishing in which the disposition and power to pray have evaporated. Many pastor/leaders simply become more active when finding themselves in this state, attempting to dull the pain of their souls with the anesthetic of busyness. It is the pastor/leader in this condition who is a ripe candidate for The Praxis.

The third impediment to prayer is the loss of purpose. This happens when prayer no longer seems to work as expected. The pray-er is not receiving what is asked for in terms of material blessings, success in work, peace in relationships, or a myriad of other requests. Prayer became a means to an end that for a while a gracious God accommodated, but the time comes to mature in prayer beyond petition. For some this can become a crisis of faith requiring urgent spiritual direction. For others it becomes a search for more, a deeper relationship to God. It is for these that The Praxis will be especially well-suited.

*Like the Lightning: The Dynamics of the Ignatian Exercises*35

In regard to his intent, the author is clear that he is not writing a commentary on the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius nor a how-to book on making the Exercises. Rather, his hope is to “reflect on the Exercises as a unit, in their integral makeup and in their overall movement,” and his intention is to “highlight some aspects of the Exercises in

such a way that the reader might gain a freshness of insight with which to direct an Ignatian retreat from a new depth of understanding…”  

36 From this intent it can be gathered that he is writing to those who, in some form or fashion, guide others through the Exercises. However, my reading of the text leads me to believe that a much wider audience would profit by it.

The argument of the book unfolds in three movements. In the first, the broader dynamics of the major elements of the Exercises are considered. The second movement focuses on some of the specific exercises that determine the overall dynamic flow. Lastly, some attention is given to the rules for discernment in terms of their sense of movement.

The most helpful contribution of the book for my purposes is the brilliant articulation of the nature of the Exercises as a book of spiritual exercises that deepen discipleship to Jesus.  

37 That is, the content, as with any exercise book, is the participant’s life experience. It is so crucial for disciples of Jesus to embrace any and all spiritual exercises, practices, disciplines, and postures as working on their whole life and their real life. The point is not to become proficient at spiritual exercises but to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

The foundational Ignatian exercises of the Principle and Foundation, the Call of the King, and the Contemplation on the Love of God will be foundational for the ministry of contemplative discipleship, each providing an essential building block for discipleship.

36 Ibid., 3.

37 Ibid., Chapter 1.
to Jesus. Adapting these exercises to the content of each life will require ongoing
discernment and responsiveness to the movements of the Holy Spirit in each disciple.

The Principle and Foundation offer an enticing invitation to friendship with God.
Fleming translates the opening line of the Foundation: “God who loves us creates us and
wants to share life with us forever.”38 It staggers our finite minds almost to the point of
unbelief that the Creator wants to share life with us. Not only that, he has created
everything as a means for us to know and love him.

Jesus is seen in the Gospels as having friends and inviting all into friendship with
him, even the “tax collectors and sinners” (Mt 11:19). Ignatius, modeling his group after
Jesus, first described his associates as “friends in the Lord.”39 My desire would be for
The Praxis to be seen as an opportunity and invitation to friendship with Jesus and his
friends.

Desire is a key word for Ignatius.40 It is all too common to encourage desire for
God before acknowledging God’s desire for his image-bearers. It is God’s desire that
evokes human desire. Ignatius begins with God’s desire to share life with those he
created.

God’s desire is reflected in the first question asked by God in the Bible, “Where
are you?” (Gn 3:9). In that question can be heard longing, desire, and love. It is

38 Ibid., 9.


40 Much of the material to follow is based on my notes from Trevor Hudson’s Denver Seminary
reminiscent of the image of God given to us by Jesus in the father of the prodigal son whose longing was demonstrated in his constant watching for his son’s return.

The first question asked in the New Testament springs from the desire of the wise men, “Where is the child…?” (Mt 2:2). Both questions surface the desire for relationship—the first from God, the second from an image-bearer. God’s question, “Where are you?” echoes through the ages and invites reflection whenever it is heard. God desires us to reflect on where we locate ourselves in relation to the divine presence. Ignatian spirituality is a reflective spirituality that invites us to look at the reality of our life, not the illusion of it. The reason is sound for as Trevor Hudson said, “We don’t learn from experience. We learn by reflecting on our experience.”

Jesus also asks the desire question directly in John 1:35, “What do you want?” Jesus genuinely wants to know. In fact, how could he love us if he has no interest in what we want? He wants us to verbalize to him (the Ignatian colloquy) what we want, what we fear, what hurts us. This is not about giving information; it is about growing a friendship. When the friend of Jesus stops sharing his heart with Jesus the relationship will soon grow cold and static. We must not leave our personal longings unattended.

The Ignatian phrase, “finding God in all things,” is another way of saying that Jesus is always present and will never leave me or forsake me. The bookends of the Spiritual Exercises are the Principle and Foundation and the Contemplation on the Love of God. Together they communicate that God is giving every created thing for the

41 Ibid.
42 Ganss, Ignatius, 458-459.
deepening of my life with God. This is a vision of reality that is healing, integrating, and grace-filled. Ignatius says that God is in all and can be encountered in every location and situation. Since God is to be found in all things, the one non-negotiable that Ignatius laid down was the practice of the Prayer of Examen which is the discipline that allows one to notice and respond to God’s ubiquitous loving presence and speaking voice. The Examen will certainly be one of the practices integrated into The Praxis. It will be important to provide a solid, if brief, theological foundation for its use.

Ignatius instructed his friends to “Go set the world on fire” yet he also said, “We do not preach, but we speak familiarly of spiritual things with a few, as one does after dinner, with those who invite us.” Conversation and friendship were the means of mission for Ignatius and his friends and their way of helping souls. These means will be reflected in the monthly retreats of The Praxis as we gather around the table as friends for dinner and conversation.

**Contemporary Perspectives on Spiritual Direction and Discipleship**

This section will review an outstanding articulation of the principles and practices of contemporary spiritual direction. In contrast, a work on the theology of biblical discipleship will be reviewed. The discontinuities between contemporary spiritual direction and biblical discipleship will be explicated in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

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Holy Invitations: Exploring Spiritual Direction by Jeannette Bakke is as thorough and articulate description of contemporary spiritual direction as one could hope to find. She describes contemporary spiritual direction in Chapter One: “present-day directors do not give answers or tell directees what to do in their relationship with God or when making life choices. Instead, they listen with directees for how the Spirit of God is present and active. Directors support and encourage directees as they listen and respond to God.” Similarly, in Chapter Two the “heart of spiritual direction” is shown to be two-fold: first, conversations that “focus a deal on day-to-day prayer experience” and second, “the opportunity to tell our story unhindered.” Bakke makes clear the ironic reality that there is little, if any, direction in contemporary spiritual direction. For many this is the gift of such a ministry after a lifetime of being told what to do.

The content of spiritual direction conversations is the focus of Chapter Eight. The emphasis in these conversations is on giving attention to the present experience of the directee, allowing the directee to choose the topic of conversation, listening to God, and

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46 Ibid., 42.
47 Ibid., 44.
48 Ibid., 129.
49 Ibid., 131.
50 Ibid., 133.
and the director’s skillful employment of evocative questions.\textsuperscript{51} Clearly, in these conversations, the director is a responder while the directee is the initiator.

Bakke herself contrasts this mode of soul care with other helping relationships including discipling.\textsuperscript{52} She recognizes the primary difference is the presence of teaching as part of the discipling process and its absence in spiritual direction. The question that lingers for contemporary spiritual directors is how their ministry is a fulfillment of Jesus’ command to make disciples when it is described as “teaching them to observe all I have commanded you” (Mt 28:18-20).

\textit{The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God}\textsuperscript{53}

Dallas Willard, author of \textit{The Divine Conspiracy}, states that his hope for the book is to “gain a fresh hearing for Jesus” among his target audience of “those who believe they already understand him.”\textsuperscript{54} In addition he adds:

\begin{quote}
It is my hope with this book to provide an understanding of the gospel that will open the way for the people of Christ actually to do—do once again, for they have done it in the past—what their acknowledged Maestro said to do. Perhaps the day will come when the “Great Commission” of Matthew 28:18-20 would be fully and routinely implemented as the objective, the “mission statement,” of the Christian churches, one-by-one and collectively.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 137.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 31-2.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid., xiii.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., xv.
\end{flushright}
His hope for the book has become the vision for my ministry. Further, the author describes the book as presenting “discipleship to Jesus as the heart of the gospel.”

For Willard this means becoming students of Jesus in order to learn how to live in the kingdom of God now.

Because of the comprehensiveness and depth of the book it is challenging to summarize its argument for as Richard Foster states in the Foreword: “Willard…actually teaches us the whole Bible—indeed, the whole of our life before God.” In Chapter One the reality and availability of the present kingdom of God is established, described, and defined as the good news that Jesus announced and embodied. Chapter Two explains how the gospels of sin management have displaced the gospel of the kingdom and have separated salvation from life. Chapter Three describes the worldview of Jesus as one in which every inch of the universe is joyfully inhabited by God, providing a gateway to understanding the message of the kingdom of God. The following chapters provide an enticing vision of the character of the kingdom of God and those who dwell in it through an eloquent and profound exposition of the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount. Chapters Eight and Nine, in my view, are the key that unlocks the message of the book: one can live in the kingdom of God now, possess the good life, and become a good person by deciding to become a disciple of Jesus. This means submitting to Jesus and his training curriculum in order to become like him.

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56 Ibid., xvii.

57 Ibid., ix.
The first chapters of this book lay the theological foundation and vision for my shift from spiritual direction to discipleship while the latter chapters provide the means for accomplishing the vision. The two primary means are leading people into intentional discipleship to Jesus and providing them with appropriate training to flourish as disciples. There are no limitations inherent in this book for the ministry challenge on which I am embarking. The limitations are in my ability to live out its message.
CHAPTER 4:
A THEOLOGY OF DISCIPLESHIP

Discipleship to Jesus is not an idea that has been “tried and found wanting”¹ in the twenty-first century church, rather it is an endeavor that has been largely untried.² Certainly, there have been a plethora of discipleship programs, but no thoughtful New Testament (NT) reader can describe what Jesus did with his disciples as a program. One NT scholar pinpoints the situation: “without a doubt, one of the most fundamental and recurring questions in the history of the Christian tradition has been the definition of Christian discipleship: that is, what exactly does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ, and what precisely does the concept of “following” entail not only in terms of an overall conception or attitude toward life in general but also in terms of concrete day-to-day living and existence?”³ These overarching questions lead to the ministry challenge


² Portions of the material in this chapter are used by permission of the faculty of record, Dr. Susan Phillips, SP 738 Cultivating Spiritual Thriving, Summer 2019, from the Final Paper written by me and submitted for that Fuller Seminary Doctor of Ministry course.

³ Segovia. Peace I Leave, 1.
addressed in this paper: to articulate the shift in my personal ministry from classic spiritual direction to what I am calling contemplative discipleship.⁴

Discipleship entails a master and a disciple. By the time the gospels were written the term μαθητής was used with the general connotations of a “learner” and “adherent,” but it was used more regularly to refer to an “adherent,” according to Wilkins’ lengthy study of the term.⁵ He concluded that the master defined the conditions of the adherence, but it ranged from being a pupil of a philosopher, to being the follower of a great thinker and master of the past, to being the devotee of a religious figure.

The type of adherence involved in discipleship to Jesus must be clarified. It would seem apparent that a master would dictate the terms of the relationship to a disciple, but in the literature of Christian discipleship this assumption is often bypassed or ignored, leaving the impression the disciples defined discipleship for themselves. Does Jesus in the Fourth Gospel (FG) explicitly state his expectations for his disciples or are they free to choose the terms of their discipleship? If Jesus defines the terms of discipleship, what are those terms? And finally, are those terms arbitrarily chosen by Jesus or do they have a foundational rationale undergirding them?

This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that the elements of the spirituality of Jesus (his lived experience of the Father through the Spirit) as presented in the Fourth Gospel are to be understood as mediated to the disciples through their communion with Jesus. These elements provide the content for Johannine discipleship. In other words,

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⁴ See note 2, page 3 of the Introduction.

disciples are invited into the same dimensions of relationship with Jesus that Jesus had with the Father.

In a profound and almost mysterious sense, those who affirm a Trinitarian God understand relationship (that is, communion) to be the most essential reality. John Zizioulas, drawing on the church fathers, explains, “The being of God is a relational being: without the concept of communion it would not be possible to speak of the being of God.” More pointedly he states, “…the being of God could be known only through personal relationships and personal love. Being means life and life means communion.”

Communion then is the intimate sharing of relationship, thoughts, and feelings through which persons come to know one another. Dimensions of communion that can be observed in the FG between the Father and Jesus and between Jesus and the disciples are life, knowledge, love, abiding, and indwelling. The limitations of this paper will allow focus only on the first dimension, life.

My aim is to contribute constructively to what Dallas Willard considers the most significant enterprise of our time; “So the greatest issue facing our world today, with all its heartbreaking needs, is whether those who, by profession or culture, are identified as ‘Christians’ will become disciples—students, apprentices, practitioners—of Jesus Christ, steadily learning from him how to live the life of the Kingdom of the Heavens into every corner of human existence.”

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7 Ibid., 16.

The global need that Willard expresses so powerfully and clearly is also the need within my context which includes practitioners and students of spiritual formation and spiritual direction, pastors, and missionaries. Though I teach about spiritual formation and discipleship in my seminary classes and I meet individually with pastors and missionaries for spiritual direction, neither of those fulfills the commission of Jesus to make disciples. Combining the two into a ministry of contemplative discipleship is what I believe would address the need in my context. Therefore, the target audience would be seminary students in the classes I teach, former directees who are willing to transition into a discipleship relationship, and the pastors and leaders participating in The Praxis, a nine-month soul care experience.

**Social-Cultural Background to Discipleship**

The word became flesh and dwelt among us, among other ways, as a master teacher and as a rabbi. The background section seeks to offer insight in regard to how Jesus tabernacled as a human in the social-cultural context of first century Palestine.

**Greco-Roman Philosophical Schools**

The Greek philosophers were traveling teachers who focused not simply on ideas but on a way of living. The students/disciples of a philosopher learned by following the lifestyle pattern of their teacher as well as by remembering his teaching.\(^9\) Followers could be identified by virtue of their sharing of the lifestyle characteristics of the master.

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The scene in John’s Gospel where the Baptizer points out Jesus to two of his disciples as he passes by, and then they follow him, has points of similarity to the story of Zeno, who became a disciple of the philosopher Crates:

Zeno, who by now was thirty years old, was sitting in a bookseller’s shop. He was reading the second book of Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and he was seized with such a strong emotion that he asked where it was possible to meet men of that high moral stature. By a happy coincidence, Crates was passing by at that very moment, and the bookseller, pointing to him with his finger, said to him: “Follow that man.” From then on, he was the disciple of Crates and dedicated all his energies to philosophy.”

Such was the ancient eagerness of disciples to follow a master which seems rather strange to twenty-first century observers. One question surrounding discipleship may be whose viewpoint is actually strange. If the concept of adherence to a master is unpalatable, then biblical discipleship will be dismissed as a relic of a bygone era. However, acquiring an accurate picture of discipleship in the ancient world may actually create a hunger for what is lacking in our world. The examples to follow provide color and texture to the picture of ancient discipleship.

Plato describes Pythagoras “presiding over a band of intimate disciples who loved him for the inspiration of his society and handed down a way of life which to this day distinguishes the Pythagoreans from the rest of the world.” Certainly this could an apt description of a group of sincere followers of Jesus. Socrates was a master of masters. His disciples became masters in their own right, such as Plato. Another adherent was Xenophon, who defended Socrates at his trial: “…nothing was more useful than the

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companionship of Socrates, and time spent with him in any place and in any circumstances. The very recollection of him in absence brought no small good to his constant companions and followers.” Disciples of Jesus would speak in equally lofty terms of their teacher.

Seneca, a contemporary of both Jesus and the apostle Paul, advised, “choose a master whose, life, conversation, and soul-expressing face have satisfied you; picture him always to yourself as your protector and pattern. For we must indeed have someone according to whom we may regulate our characters.” Though modern and post-modern persons would not readily admit to choosing a master, all do, even if by default. The default master is self, ego, and the illusion of being the master of their fate. Submitting to the values, lifestyle, and ways of being of another requires a major paradigm shift for those who cherish self-sufficient independence.

A thoroughgoing summary of the cultural deep-rootedness of the master-disciple relationship is provided by Seneca:

Cleanthes could not have been the express image of Zeno, if he had merely heard his lectures; he also shared his life, saw into his hidden purposes and watched him to see whether he lived according to his own rules. Plato, Aristotle, and the whole throng of sages who were destined to go each his different way, derived more benefit from the character than from the words of Socrates. It was not the classroom of Epicurus, but living together under the same roof, that made great men of Metrodorus, Hermachus and Polyaenus.

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14 Ibid., 6:5-6.
This analysis by Seneca demonstrates that in the Greek philosophical schools, adherence was first to the master’s lifestyle, values, and person and secondarily to his teaching. Jesus’ disciples follow this pattern for they attached themselves to Jesus before they had a deep understanding of his teachings.

Rabbis and Their Disciples

While the Greek culture provided a context for first century discipleship, the roots of a master-disciple relationship are evident in the Hebrew Scriptures. The relationships of Moses to Joshua, Eli to Samuel, and Elijah to Elisha set a pattern. Elisha’s call to follow Elijah (1 Kgs 19:19-21) is described by Josephus as discipleship: “[Elisha] followed Elijah. And when he desired leave to salute his parents, Elijah gave him leave to do so: and when he had taken his leave of them, he followed him and became the disciple and the servant of Elijah all the days of his life.”¹⁵ Elisha’s subsequent desire to receive a double portion of Elijah’s spirit and his imitation of Elijah using his cloak to strike the water of Jordan (2 Kgs 2: 7-15) reveal that the notions of following the example of the teacher and the disciple’s succession to the teacher’s role are found early in Israel’s history. A century later Isaiah is recorded to have disciples who followed his teaching (Is 8:16-18).

That the Pharisees had disciples (Mk 2:18) would indicate that the rabbi-disciple relationship was part of the fabric of first century Palestinian Judaism. The *imitatio*

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magistri (the imitation of the master) comprised both words and deeds as this description illustrates:

The most mature teachers thus incarnated the perfect tradition from the fathers, from Sinai and from God. That is why their words and deeds were of such interest. The pupil had to absorb all the traditional wisdom with “eyes, ears, and every member” by seeking the company of a Rabbi, serving him, following him, and imitating him and not only by listening to him. The task of the pupil is therefore not only to hear but also to see. The pupil is a witness to his teacher’s words; he is also a witness to his actions as well. He does not only say “I heard from my teacher” but also “I saw my teacher do this or that.”

While there are many examples in the Talmud of the attention to detail and scrupulous following, none is more extreme than this: “R. Akiah followed his teacher R. Joshua to the toilet to learn how he did it—sitting not standing, north and south rather than east and west, ‘I learnt it is proper to wipe with the left hand and not with the right.”

Jesus clearly embraced the role of Master and Rabbi. His many invitations of “Follow Me!” (Mk 1:17,20; 2:14; 8:34; Jn 1:43; 12:26; 21:22, for example), and his clear statements: “You call me Teacher and Lord…I have set you an example, that you should also do as I have done to you.” (Jn 13:12-15) and “A disciple is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like the teacher,” (Lk 6:40) provide ample evidence of Jesus’ intention to enlist disciples in much the same way as the prophets, the Pharisees, the philosophers and the rabbis.

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17 Quoted in Griffiths, *The Example of Jesus*, 24.
Purpose of the Fourth Gospel

There are two statements of purpose in the FG. Both employ ἵνα (in order that) clauses and both clearly identify ζωήν (life) as the stated purpose. The first comes from the mouth of Jesus, “I came that they may have life” (10:10) and the second from the pen of the evangelist, “but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name” (20:31). This statement is one of dual purposes: the penultimate purpose of believing followed by the ultimate purpose of the possession of “life in his name.” The purpose of Jesus became the purpose of the evangelist. In this detail the author of the Gospel provides a hint of his own discipleship as he follows the example given by Jesus (13:15).

The issues surrounding the purpose of the FG are complex and beyond the scope of this paper. Though there are many variations on these two themes, simply put, the Gospel was either written as a missionary document to bring the unbelieving to faith\(^\text{18}\) or as a testimony of faith to bring assurance, strengthening, and enlivening to those who

already believe.\textsuperscript{19} The two purposes may not be as disparate as commonly thought,\textsuperscript{20} especially when John’s usage of \textit{μαθητής} is considered. A disciple could be one who simply “walks behind” Jesus (1:37), who comes to faith (2:11), who does not believe the word of Jesus until after the resurrection (2:22), who withdrew and was no longer walking with Jesus (6:66), who abides in the word of Jesus (8:31), who was willing to die with Jesus (11:16), who betrays Jesus (12:4), who love one another (13:35), who bears much fruit (15:8), who denies knowing Jesus (18:25), who went away to his own home (20:10), or finally, one whom Jesus loves (21:20). So, de Jonge is correct to title this Gospel as “The Book of the Disciples”\textsuperscript{21} since it could be concluded that the Gospel is for disciples at every conceivable stage of faith—from betraying unbelief to trusting belovedness.

Koester is correct in identifying life as a “central theme for John,” but appears to miss the obvious when he says that the “concept is never fully defined.”\textsuperscript{22} Jesus’ words in


\textsuperscript{21} Jonge, \textit{Jesus}, 1-27.

\textsuperscript{22} Craig R. Koester, \textit{The Word of Life: A Theology of John's Gospel} (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 56.
17:3 would seem to offer a clear definition: “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Since “life” is the stated purpose of the Gospel readers would expect from the Fourth Evangelist (FE), as a master of symbolism, a liberal employment of a symbol for this foundational theme.²³ He does not disappoint. Jones concludes his study on the topic writing “water symbolizes Jesus, the message he proclaims, and the possibility of new life he represents.”²⁴ This symbol is virtually ubiquitous in the narrative, from the water of baptism in the first chapter to the water flowing from the pierced side of Jesus in the nineteenth chapter. It is frequent and pervasive because it symbolically reflects the author’s purpose—life in Jesus’ name.

Life in the FG cannot be restricted to the initial entrance into it. The birth from above (3:1-12) that is imparted by believing in Jesus (3:15-16 and many others) is the way into the divine and eternal life, but just as in the natural realm the purpose of life is not to be born but to live, so John’s purpose is to lead his readers, through believing in Jesus, not just into birth, but into life. Through his skilled characterizations of the disciples, individually and corporately, John gives his readers a wide range of opportunity to identify with the disciples in the narrative—from the “come and see” (1:39) curious to the “let us go die with him” (11:16) committed, and every point in between. This broader


interpretation of what John means by disciple gives greater credence to Brown’s claim that “discipleship is the primary category in John.”

In the sections to follow each of the “just as” sayings of discipleship will be viewed through the lens of the Father/Jesus relationship and through the lens of the Jesus/disciples relationship. The Father/Jesus relationship exposes the aspects of communion and mission upon which the Jesus/disciples relationship is patterned.

**Live**

As the investigation into the “just as” sayings begins, it would seem that the life that Jesus shares with the Father includes the knowing, loving, abiding, and indwelling aspects of their relationship, just as the disciple’s life with Jesus includes the knowing, loving, abiding, and indwelling aspects of that relationship. The focus in this section will be upon Jesus’ statement “just as the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so whoever eats me will live because of me” (6:57) and its implications for discipleship.

Consistent with the FG’s purpose (life in his name, 20:31), the first “just as” saying to appear in the narrative concerns the source of life. Within the span of fifty verses (6:22-71), the Bread of Life discourse, some form of “life” or “live” occurs seventeen times. The “just as” saying itself appears in 6:57 (cf. 14:19: because I live, you will live also). After feeding the five thousand (6:1-15) Jesus and his disciples retreated to the other side of the Sea of Galilee only to be met the next day by the same crowd who

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seemed to be expecting to be fed once again. This provided the occasion for Jesus’
teaching concerning the bread of life.

\(\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\iota\varsigma\ \zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) and \(\zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) in the Fourth Gospel

The two terms \(\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\iota\varsigma\ \zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) and \(\zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) are used interchangeably with \(\zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) serving as
a kind of shorthand for the fuller expression \(\alpha\iota\omicron\nu\iota\varsigma\ \zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\).\textsuperscript{26} “All told, ‘life’ is the subject
in virtually every chapter in the first half of John’s gospel”\textsuperscript{27} and “belongs indisputably to
the core of John’s theology and gospel.”\textsuperscript{28} Thirty-six occurrences are noun forms,
eighteen occurrences are verb forms of \(\zeta\alpha\omega\), and three occurrences are of the compound
verb \(\zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\omicron\), “make alive, give life to.”\textsuperscript{29} It is the “eschatological goal, the essence of
salvation,”\textsuperscript{30} and the “comprehensive concept of salvation which contains everything that
the Savior of the world, sent by God, brings to man,”\textsuperscript{31} according to the FG.

\(\zeta\omicron\omicron\omicron\) occurs in the gospel’s purpose statement of 20:31, forming an \textit{inclusio} with
1:4 of the prologue, “in him was life,” and highlighting the centrality of the theme of life
in the gospel. As John goes on to describe life and light in his Gospel, life in John 1:4 is

\textsuperscript{26} Köstenberger, \textit{Theology}, 346. See Keener, \textit{John}, 328: Even when not conjoined with ‘eternal,’
the term designates ‘eternal life’ (with one possible exception, John 4:50-51).

\textsuperscript{27} Köstenberger, \textit{Theology}, 342.

\textsuperscript{28} Schnackenburg, \textit{St. John Vol 2}, 352.

\textsuperscript{29} BDAG, 431.

\textsuperscript{30} Smith, \textit{Theology}, 149.

\textsuperscript{31} Franz Mussner, \textit{Zōē: Die Anschauung Vom "Leben" Im Vierten Evangelium, Mùnchener
Theologische Studien Historische Abteilung} (Munich: Karl Zink, 1952), 178.
referring to life before God or eternal life (the Greek article with ζωή here signifies a particular kind of life\(^{32}\)) rather than to human life in general.

The FG stresses the idea of ζωή as a gift from God. The Father has life in himself and has given the Son life to have in himself (5:26; cf. 1:4). The Son is the bread of life (6:35, 48) that gives life to the world by his death (6:51) and through his Spirit and words (6:63, 68). It is vital to remember that discipleship to Jesus is first and foremost the most incredible gift a human being can receive.

Jesus is the ζωή (14:6), has come to give ζωήν (10:10) and was sent by the Father for that purpose (3:16-17). Ζωή is given by the Spirit (6:63 ζωοποιέω; cf. 3:6) and received by believing (e.g., 3:16; 5:24; 20:31). The possession of life is presented as a present reality (5:24; 10:10) and a future expectation (5:39-40; 6:54) that “calls to mind the future that flows from the present.”\(^ {33}\) Both the words of Jesus (6:63,68) and the commandment of the Father (12:50) are said to be ζωή. Therefore the importance of abiding in Jesus’ word (8:31) and keeping commandments (15:10) is due to their power as conveyors of life.

In secular Greek βίος was interchangeable with ζωή, but is not used by John for whom ζωή had become a “fixed term in religious language.”\(^ {34}\) It is not “material improvement or magic power, but divine reality, a share in the life of God” that is

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\(^{34}\) Schnackenburg, *St. John Vol 2*, 354.
expressed through the categories of personal relation and participation. Indeed, it is the life that results from being “born from above” (3:3,7). Beasley-Murray summarizes, “The life eternal is participation in the life of God in Christ by virtue of his sacrifice and exaltation.”

The imagery surrounding ζωή suggests that it is not primarily a status that is achieved, but a dynamic reality that invites participation. It is received as water to drink (4:14), as bread to eat (6:51,58), as a light to walk in (8:12), and as a vine to abide in (15:1-6). The imagery of the vine, Jesus, as the source of life for the branches, the disciples, as long as they abide in the vine will be shown to be the overarching metaphor for discipleship in the FG.

ζωή in the Father/Jesus Relationship

That the Father was understood to be the source of all life is well attested in the OT (e.g., Dt 32:39; 1 Sm 2:6; 2 Kgs 5:7, and in the NT, e.g. Rom 4:17; 8:11. A larger conceptual framework is provided in the Wisdom of Solomon where the author, discussing idolatry, states, “For a human being made them, and one whose spirit is borrowed formed them; for no person is able to make a god like himself. For none can form gods that are like themselves. People are mortal, and what they make with lawless hands is dead; for they are better than the objects they worship, since they have life, but the idols never had” (Wisdom of Solomon 15:16-17). The logic of this text is that human

35 Ibid., 356.

36 Beasley-Murray, Theology, 4.

life is borrowed or dependent life. Humans can create, but what they create is not alive and therefore always less than their stature as living beings, exposing the tragic fallacy of idolatry. Walde concludes that this text provides “positive evidence of the contemporary Jewish conviction not only about how humans ‘have’ life but also that, …they cannot give it to others.”

In contrast to all other humans, Jesus gives life to whom he will (5:21) because his life springs from the living Father who has life in himself and has granted the Son also to have life in himself (5:26). Jesus’ life is not borrowed life, but the very life that was “in the beginning with God” (1:1-2). It is possible to emphasize the dependence of Jesus by focusing on the fact that he was granted by the Father to have life in himself or one can emphasize Jesus’ equality with the Father due to his possession of life in himself (5:26; cf. 1:4), a divine attribute. While acknowledging the full equality of the Son with the Father, the “just as” sayings as a whole favor the emphasis on Jesus’ earthly dependence on the Father for life, knowledge, love, abiding, and union. In particular this first saying emphasizes the Father as source, whereas the remaining “just as” sayings reflect a mutuality of knowing, loving, abiding, and indwelling between the Father and Jesus.

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38 Ibid., 412.

39 For insightful essays on these Christological issues see Fred Sanders, Klaus Dieter Issler, and Gerald Lewis Bray, *Jesus in Trinitarian Perspective: An Introductory Christology* (Nashville, TN: B & H Academic, 2007).

40 Swaim and Köstenberger affirm that “the Son is totally dependent on the Father” in his earthly ministry. *Father, Son, and Spirit: The Trinity and John’s Gospel*, 66.
ζωή in the Jesus/Disciple Relationship

The transition from ζωή in the Father/Son relationship to ζωή in the Jesus/disciple relationship is captured by this statement of Beasley-Murray referring to 6:57 as the basis for many of Jesus’ pronouncements concerning eternal life:

The relation to Christ of the believer who so “eats” the living Bread is analogous to the relation of the Son to the Father: as the Son lives “through the Father,” i.e., has his life from and is sustained by the Father, so the believer has his or her life from and is sustained by the Son. This is the consequence for humanity of the Son acting as the mediator between God and humankind.41

The life that originates in the Father flows to Jesus and from him to the disciples. Jesus lives διά the Father. Here διά with the accusative maintains the general sense of “through” primarily with a causal focus “owing to.”42 In reference to the “just as” saying in 6:57 Brown states, “Jesus seems to be speaking of the chain of sources of life.”43

All seven of the famous “I am” sayings of Jesus in the FG directly or indirectly throw light on the work of Jesus as the mediator of life. He is “the bread of life” (6:35), which will be discussed in the section to follow. He is “the light of the world” (8:12) who becomes the “light of life” for disciples. He is the “gate for the sheep” (10:7) that they may “have [life] abundantly” (10:10). He is “the good shepherd” (10:11) who laid down his life for the sheep. He is “the resurrection and the life” (11:25) for his disciples. He is “the way, the truth, and the life” (14:6) because he is the lone provider of access to the Father. He is “the true vine” (15:1) that provides life-giving nourishment to abiding disciples.


42 BDAG, 223.

43 Brown, John, 283.
Jesus—The Bread of Life for Disciples

In the John 6 discourse Jesus firmly instructs the crowd not to work for perishable food, but for the food that endures to the eternal life that Jesus gives (6:27). This food is the bread of heaven and gives life to the world (6:33). Jesus then boldly announces that he is, in fact, the bread of life that provides unending nourishment. Life is acquired through believing in the Son (6:40), which is the appropriate work to do (6:29). In the midst of the murmuring from the Jews, Jesus reaffirms that eternal life is possessed through believing (6:47) and that he is the bread of life (6:48). Jesus proclaims that he is the living bread, that the one who eats of this bread will live forever, and that the bread given for the life of the world is his flesh (6:51). Those announcements seem only to further the resistance and misunderstanding of his audience. Then come the most radical and puzzling statements of all: unless one eats the flesh of the Son of man and drinks his blood, there is no life in that one (6:53), but the one who does eat and drink has eternal life (6:54).

The “just as” saying of 6:57 serves as a summary of how life comes from heaven and the Father through Jesus to those who believe. Jesus then clarifies that the bread from heaven to which he refers is entirely different than what the fathers ate, regardless of how similar they may sound. The fathers ate and died, “but the one who eats this bread will live forever” (6:58). Jesus tries to explain to his murmuring (cf. 6:41) disciples that it is the Spirit who gives life and that his words are spirit and life (6:63). This explanation did not prove to be satisfying, for there were so many of the disciples who renounced their discipleship that Jesus asked the inner circle if they wished to go home as well. Then the climactic statement by Peter, a disciple who heard the words of Jesus well (“the words I
have spoken to you are spirit and life,” (6:63), “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (6:68).

Eternal life (αἰώνιος ζωή), occurring seventeen times, and the shortened form life (ζωή), occurring nineteen times, are the most prevalent terms used to describe the benefits of discipleship. Jesus is the life (14:6), but the Spirit is the agency who gives life (6:63). The difference is illustrated early in the narrative through Nicodemus. In Jesus’ secretive encounter with Nicodemus (3:1-15), the darkness of Nicodemus’ misunderstanding, a common literary device in this Gospel, hid the truth from him as effectively as the darkness of night hid him from his fellow Pharisees. Here, Jesus as the light is shining in the darkness of the night and in the darkness of Nicodemus’ misunderstanding, but Nicodemus could not grasp it (cf. 1:5). Being born from above by the Spirit as the only way of entrance into the kingdom of God was beyond his understanding.45

The spirit/flesh distinction causes Nicodemus to stumble in the same way that the disciples stumbled over it in 6:61-65.46 What Nicodemus missed and what the disciples as

44 Brown succinctly explains the Johannine misunderstandings, “This feature is sometimes the counterpart to the preceding; in other instances, it is related to the symbolic language of Jesus. When Jesus is speaking on the heavenly or eternal level, his remarks are often misunderstood as referring to a material or earthly situation. The water and bread that he employs to symbolize his revelation are not understood as symbols by the audience (4:10 ff., 6:32 ff.). His body is the Temple to be destroyed and raised up, but the hearers think of the Jerusalem Temple (2:19–22). In part this may be a studied literary technique, for the misunderstanding usually causes Jesus to explain himself more thoroughly and to unfold his doctrine.” Brown, John, cxxxv–cxxxvi.

45 This is the only occurrence of ‘kingdom of God’ in the FG. From this passage it seems clear that in the FG eternal life is equivalent to the kingdom of God leading Keener to suggest that John avoids using kingdom language because of the political ramifications of imperial religion that might ensue for Christians in Roman Asia in the mid 90’s. Craig S. Keener, The Gospel of John: A Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003), 1:328.

46 Similar also to the Samaritan woman’s misunderstanding in John 4.
a group were missing was the distinction Jesus was drawing between natural life/physical bread and eternal life/spiritual food. Wright clarifies,

Again and again in this gospel Jesus talks to people who misunderstand what he says. He is talking at the heavenly level, and they are listening at the earthly level. But because the one God created both heaven and earth, and because the point of Jesus’ work is precisely to bring the life of heaven to earth, the misunderstandings are, in that sense, natural.⁴⁷

The birth from above by the Spirit issues into a different kind of life and requires a different kind of eating to sustain. Believing in Jesus procures entrance into this new eternal kind of life (3:15-17).

Seeing is Believing—Entrance into Life

“Trusting” or “believing” is the single major subjective response sought in human beings by the Jesus of John’s Gospel for the acquiring of ζωή. Out of the 241 NT uses of πίστεύω, ninety-nine are in the FG with fifty-four in Paul. John’s sole preference for the verbal form while omitting the noun form πίστις, which occurs 142 times in Paul, is, according to Burge, “clearly intentional and designed to show the dynamism expected of this faith.”⁴⁸ Bruner observes that throughout the FG “not one single adverb or adjective is placed before the word ‘entrusting,’ such as ‘deeply’ or ‘sincerely’ or ‘completely.’”⁴⁹ Viewing these two observations together suggests that the FG presents faith as an active disposition toward Jesus (dynamism) that is either present or not (the complete absence of modifiers).


The prepositional idiom of John’s believing statement is striking: a form of πιστεύω + εἰς, literally, believing/trusting/entrusting into him. This construction appears thirty-eight times in the FG. English speakers do not say “believing or trusting or entrusting into” someone. Bruner is clarifying, “the Greek ‘into’ does us the great service of conveying trust’s direction, goal, and resting place: trust is directed ‘into’ Jesus, into his person, and rests there ‘in’ him, ‘into’ whom one has placed one’s life.” 50 Belief for a disciple is a personal commitment into as well as a mental assent about.

The metaphor for this initial life-giving believing is seeing. The metaphor is made explicit in 6:40, “…all who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life.” In light of Jesus’ first conversation with two potential disciples which ended with Jesus’ invitation, “come and see,” it is not surprising that “see” is the chosen metaphor for the initial act of believing. Indeed, following their seeing of the first sign at the wedding at Cana, they did believe (2:1-12). Perhaps more intriguing in regard to the metaphor is the curious insertion of the Greeks coming to Philip with their request, “we wish to see Jesus” (12:20-26). Though their request goes unanswered, within the week they would “see” him “lifted up” and have the opportunity to look upon him in faith. This is the same opportunity to see that every reader of this Gospel has. It does not seem out of the question that the FE uses the Greeks as representative of his ideal readers—possessing the critical desire to see Jesus, which for many leads to believing and life in Jesus’ name, thus fulfilling the evangelist’s purpose in writing. Finally, the metaphor is teased out to the point of extravagance in the story of the man blind from birth (9:1-41) who sees and

50 Ibid., 203.
believes, much to the consternation of those who claim to see yet remain blind in their unbelief.

Those who see and believe are fortunate, but in saying to Thomas, ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed’ (20:29), Jesus reveals that there is another kind of believing. It is a believing that continues not by seeing, but by eating the bread of life.

Eating is Believing—Continuing in Life

A different metaphor is employed for a different kind of believing that is required for the sustenance of this different kind of life. That metaphor is eating. It is not enough to look upon bread, to see bread to receive its nourishment and life sustaining nutrients. The bread must be eaten and digested, literally becoming part of the consumer. So it is with the Bread of Life. As the many present tense verbs throughout the discourse indicate, disciples continually feed upon the Bread in order to become those who abide in Jesus and Jesus in them (6:56). “Faith throws the believer upon and into its object; this spiritual eating and drinking brings the object of faith into the believer.”

The life shared between the Father and the Son is constant, continual and unbroken because it is a perfect communion between two perfect persons. That same life “is the consequence for humanity of the Son acting as the mediator between God and humankind” and is continually available to the disciple who feeds upon the life of the

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Son, which requires ongoing faith in Jesus as the source of the disciple’s life, not just the one time look of faith. This is the abundant life that Jesus came to provide; It is a life a disciple can simply have or “have it abundantly” (10:10). The difference is not in the life but in the level of appropriation. The life is the same, but the realization of the life may or may not be abundant. This deeper realization of the life is expressed through the metaphors of eating and drinking in the Bread of Life discourse.

Lazarus: Living Parable and Sign

Lazarus is the living parable of Jesus’ power to bestow life. In this last of Jesus’ signs, the physical represents the spiritual, as eating and drinking represent believing. The account of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead is recorded in only a few verses (11:38-44). Since his words were spirit and life (6:63), only a simple command was needed to raise Lazarus, who had been dead for four days. Jesus spoke with power and authority (cf. 2:7; 4:50; 5:8). When Jesus called Lazarus by name (11:43), he was fulfilling his role as the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name (cf. 10:3). Jesus also said, “My sheep hear my voice …and I give them eternal life, and they will never perish” (10:27-28).

Though he prays publicly for the benefit of his hearers before raising Lazarus, “Jesus is in constant communion with his Father, who always ‘hears’ even the unspoken thoughts of his heart, and therefore has already ‘heard’ his petition for Lazarus.”53 Here is a glimpse into the intimacy of the Father-Son relationship. By praying in public, Jesus does not engage in posturing but rather “seeks to draw his hearers into the intimacy of

53 Barrett, John, 402.
Jesus’ own relationship with the Father.” Lazarus embodied the intimacy Jesus desires with his disciples. He was called a friend of Jesus (11:11; cf. 15:15 “I have called you friends”); he was loved by Jesus (11:5; cf. 15:9 “…so I have loved you”); he was raised to life by Jesus (11:44; cf. 5:24 “has passed from death to life”); and he is connected with the death of Jesus (11:53; cf. 12:10 “so the chief priests planned to put Lazarus to death as well”).

In regard to Jesus’ proclamation, “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25), Minear declares “those who search the Gospel of John to find the central theme of the entire document can scarcely do better than to focus attention on the declaration Jesus made to Martha at the heart of the Lazarus story.” This miracle contributes to a central theme that has been developed up to this point in the narrative, namely, that Jesus is the life-giving Son of God.

Conclusion

Whitacre summarizes the purpose of the FG, “John wants his readers not just to see this vision of God, but to enter into the divine life that God is offering.” Similarly, Beasley-Murray states concerning Jesus, “He is the mediator of life in this world and life in the new creation.” Every intended reader would need a faith that leads to life in Jesus’ name or as Bouyer emphatically states: “the whole Gospel will, therefore, be

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54 Carson, John, 418.


56 Whitacre, John, 40.

57 Beasley-Murray, Theology, 12.
unintelligible unless the author’s plan be recognized: to show Christians Jesus as the
source of ‘life’—with all it means for him—and to open to them the channels set up by
Jesus to carry that life from his heart to theirs.” Though I would substitute disciples for
Christians, the channels to which he refers are the elements of discipleship presented in
the Fourth Gospel through the “just as” sayings. This first element is the *sine qua non* for
the others. The reception of this life by faith creates the possibility of participation in the
subsequent elements of discipleship. Disciples must first be enlivened before they can
know, love, abide, indwell, or be sent, but it is through these that the life becomes
abundant (10:10).

The remaining “just as” sayings provide the form and features of the life of the
disciple, revealing what constitutes that life. In regard to the comprehensiveness of the
Johannine concept of life Mussner states:

According to the Johannine conception there are not blessings of salvation which
are given to the believer in addition to the saving gift of “life”; the remaining gifts
of salvation are given and guaranteed along with the “life,” whether for the
present or for the eschatological future. Hence the Johannine Christ can proclaim
that he has come “that they may have life, and have it in fullness” (10:10), and
that the commission for man laid upon him by the Father is simply “eternal life”
(12:50).

It is this fullness of life in the kingdom of God that is the goal of the ministry of
contemplative discipleship.

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Know

The disciple is one who, by believing, has received eternal life and lives because of Jesus who lives because of the Father (6:57). One characteristic of that life is the mutual knowing reflected in Jesus’ statement, “…I know my own and my own know me, just as the Father knows me and I know the Father…” (10:14-15). The connection between knowing and eternal life is reiterated in 17:3, “And this is eternal life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” The second “just as” saying occurs within the context of the good shepherd discourse (10:1-39), an appropriate starting point for the understanding of the mutual “knowing” of the Father and Jesus and of Jesus and the disciples. This mutual knowing is apparent only in the FG, leading Hahn to suggest, based on this motif, “The image of discipleship is most profoundly described in the Gospel of John,” and that the relationship of the disciples to Jesus is one of “unique intimacy and complete trust.”

Just as the English word, “know,” can have a wide range of meanings, so it is with γινώσκω, a “verb that is variously nuanced in contexts relating to familiarity acquired through experience or association with pers. or thing.” The nuances include “to arrive at a knowledge of someone or something, to acquire information through some means, to grasp the significance or meaning of something, to be aware of something, to have sexual intercourse with, to have come to the knowledge of, to indicate that one does know.” The broad range of possible meanings extended from Hellenic usage through


61 BDAG, 199.
Hellenistic and LXX usage into the NT.\textsuperscript{63} For this reason, it is difficult to determine whether the background in a particular usage is Greek or OT. However, “where it expresses a personal relationship between the one who knows and the one known, the NT concept of knowledge is clearly taken from the OT.”\textsuperscript{64} This knowing in the context of personal relationship is what we have in John 10:14-15 between the Father and Jesus and between Jesus and “his own,” the disciples.

Contemporary epistemology distinguishes between the various kinds of knowledge. Epistemologist Richard Feldman points out two varieties, “No matter how many facts you know about a person, it does not follow that you know the person. Knowing a person or thing is being acquainted with that person or thing, not having propositional knowledge about the person or thing.”\textsuperscript{65} Propositional knowledge (PK) and knowledge by acquaintance (KA), though distinct, can function in a complementary fashion. For example, Jesus’ knowledge of the disciples is both PK, in that he knows facts about them, and KA, since he knows them through personal experience. The PK of Jesus about the disciples was quite thorough, as is seen in his knowledge of Nathaniel (1:47) and of the Samaritan woman (4:16-19), whereas the PK of the disciples about Jesus was embryonic. Jesus’ KA of the disciples was deeper still as seen in his knowledge of Judas’ betrayal (13:26) and Peter’s denials (18:17, 25-27). The disciples KA of Jesus produced a variety of reactions: faith (2:11, 22), surprise (4:27), terror

\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., 199-201.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{63} See NIDNTT Vol.2, 392-406.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{64} Ibid., 398.}\]
\[\text{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{65} Richard Feldman, Epistemology (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2003), 11.}\]
(6:19), complaint (6:61), resignation (6:68), frustration (11:21, 32), worship (12:3), misunderstanding (12:16), resistance (13:8), ignorance (14:5, 8), violence (18:10), weeping (20:13), joy (20:13), love (21:15-17), and assurance (21:24). KA involves encounters with the person known and in the cases of Jesus with the Father and with the disciples, those encounters evidence loving personal relationships. As Jesus knows the Father by deep and intimate acquaintance, so the disciples are to know Jesus.

Knowing in the Father/Jesus Relationship

As the Evangelist states in his prologue, Jesus “explains,” “makes known,” or, quite literally, “exegetes” (ἐξηγήσατο) the God “no one has ever seen” (1:18). Therefore, to know Jesus is to know the Father (8:19). Only Jesus knows the Father perfectly because he came from the Father (7:29). Further, he knows not only where he comes from, but where he is going (8:14). The knowledge of the Father’s actions and words is the source of everything Jesus does and says (5:19; 12:50). Since Jesus knows the Father completely, he witnesses to the crowd, “But you have not known him; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and keep his word” (8:55). This witness was his defense against the accusations from the Pharisees concerning his origin.

Beasley-Murray claims that knowledge in Greek thought was analogous to “seeing” with a view toward cognitively grasping the nature of an object or idea, but for the Hebrew it meant “experiencing” something or someone.66 As discussed above, both senses are present in Greek and Hebrew usage. However, in 3:11 the two senses seem to

66 Beasley-Murray, John, 170.
unite as Jesus speaks of what he knows and has seen. The parallelism\(^{67}\) in the verse between speaking and testifying and between knowing and seeing seems to show that Jesus’ knowing was both experiential (KA) and cognitive (PK), “first-hand and certain knowledge.”\(^{68}\)

**Knowing in the Jesus/Disciple Relationship**

The richness and depth of the mutual knowing that exists between the Father and Jesus is present between Jesus and his disciples. Jesus knows “his own,” the disciples, intimately and personally, just as the shepherd knows the sheep and calls them by name. Shepherds were known to express affection and familiarity with their sheep by the use of nicknames for them.\(^{69}\) “His own” know him and, like sheep, hear his voice and are led out (10:3). The sheep follow because they “know” the voice of the shepherd (10:4). The good shepherd is willing to lay down his life for these sheep that he knows individually by name, so that they may not only have life, but “have it abundantly” (10:10-11), which for the sheep means going in and out to find pasture (10:9). Pasture as the place of nurture, safety, and nourishment, recalls for the reader the themes of eating and life that were so prominent in John 6. Jesus is not only the good shepherd and the door for the sheep; he is also their pasture, a symbol of well-being and fulfillment.\(^{70}\) In the OT, it is especially the prophet Ezekiel who envisions pasture and abundant life for God’s people.

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\(^{67}\) See Schnackenburg, *John Vol. 1*, 375.

\(^{68}\) Ibid.

\(^{69}\) Keener, *John*, 805.

(cf. 34:12–15, 25–31). As the good shepherd, Jesus gives his sheep not merely enough but more than plenty (cf. Ps 23; Ez 34). The good shepherd does not come only to save, to ensure survival, but to lead them into abundant thriving. What he provides for their life is himself, as he said earlier, “…the bread which I shall give for the life of the world is my flesh” (6:51). The Bread of Life is now imaged as a pasture, a picture of the limitless and abundant life of provision for the disciple that comes with knowing Jesus and being known by him. At this point in the discourse (10:10) Jesus boldly states the purpose of his coming—to be the giver of abundant life to his followers, his own, those who know and are known by him.

The shepherd image captures the intimacy, trust, and personal relationship involved in the mutual knowing of Jesus and his disciples. This image would have been familiar to the Jewish readers of the FG since it was also used for God’s relationship with Israel in the OT, especially Ezekiel 34 where God shepherds Israel due to the failure of the unfaithful shepherds. In John 10 the good shepherd appears in the wake of the Pharisees’ casting out of the disciple whose sight had been restored, an indefensible example of their unfaithful shepherding. Even more familiar within the Jewish worship tradition would have been the image of “the Lord is my shepherd” from Psalm 23.

Similarities between Psalm 23 and John 10 abound and include: the personal intimacy between the shepherd and the sheep, pasture, significance of a name, the leading of the shepherd, provision by the shepherd, presence of life-threatening dangers, protection by the shepherd, and abundance of life.

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71 Ex 3:7; 33:12,17; Jer 31:34; Hos 6:6; 13:5; Na 1:7.
Jesus’ knowledge of his flock and their knowledge of him (10:14) are compared to the knowledge the Father and the Son have of one another (10:15). This knowledge is not simply knowledge about one another or merely the knowledge of an acquaintance. Rather, it is an intimacy that is love. The intimacy of the Father and the Son is so close it is described as a oneness (10:30), and a similar oneness of life is affirmed between Jesus and his disciples (for example, 15:1–7). The believer is not stirred into some cosmic soup, as in false forms of mysticism, but rather there is a radical oneness that does not obliterate the distinctness of the person. As the Holy Trinity is both One and Three, so the believer is one with God and yet distinct from God.

The frequent repetition and widespread distribution of the verbs for know throughout the FG extend and heighten the significance of this reciprocity beyond the capacity of the shepherd image.\footnote{οἶδα: eighty-four times in John and in every chapter except seventeen; γινώσκω: fifty-six times in John and in every chapter except nine, eighteen, and twenty.} The good shepherd knows “his own” and “his own” know him (10:15). This mutual knowing refers to “a thoroughly personal relationship in which the integrity of the persons is preserved.”\footnote{Robert Kysar, \textit{John's Story of Jesus} (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 163.} Jesus’ knowledge of his identity and character caused Nathaniel to ask somewhat incredulously, “Where did you get to know me?” (1:48). Jesus not only knew his disciples, he even knew what was “in” humankind so that he refused to entrust himself to them (2:24-25). He knew the interior movements within Simon Peter that would lead him to deny his master (13:36-38), as well as those that renewed his love for Jesus (21:15-18). Knowledge is power, but it can also be pain, as it certainly was for Jesus knowing that Judas would betray him (18:2). Jesus’ deep
knowledge of “his own” did not cause him to violate or compromise their free will or integrity, even to the point of allowing Peter to deny him and Judas to betray him.

Love

The FG, with respect to human relationships, substitutes for the Great Commandment of the Synoptics a “new commandment” based on the love of Jesus rather than on the love of self. Disciples are to love as Jesus loved them (13:35). The word in the Greek text that introduces the foundation of the new commandment is, not surprisingly, καθώς. It is present again in the restatement in 15:9-12 alerting the reader to the “just as” saying of discipleship: “as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you… love one another as I have loved you.”

Love in the Father/Jesus Relationship

In this “just as” saying love emerges, along with knowing, as another aspect of the shared life between the Father and Jesus. This is a love that the Father gave (δέδοκας) to the Son before the foundation of the world (17:24) and along with it entrusted all things into his hand (3:35). Then out of the depths of His love for the world God gave (ἔδωκεν) the Son of his love to those in the world that they might have eternal life, which is to share in the divine life between Father and Son (3:16 and 6:57). The NRSV translation of 1:18 provides an intimate picture of the love of the Father in saying that the Son was “close to the Father’s heart.” Jesus states his understanding of the Father’s love in 10:17, “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life, that I may take it again.” The image of “laying down” and “taking up” is a clear reference to the death and
resurrection of Jesus that both originates from and evokes the love of the Father. By willingly joining the Father’s mission of love to the world, Jesus evokes the Father’s love and expresses his love for the Father (14:31, the only verse in the NT that explicitly acknowledges Jesus’ love for Father). It could require an eternal debate to decide the greatest act of love: laying down one’s own life or giving up one’s only son. In reality they are the same expression of Trinitarian love poured out upon humankind who, tragically, hate the light of love and choose darkness (3:19-20).

Love in the Jesus/Disciple Relationship

Just as the mutual knowing of the Father and Jesus is the paradigm for the mutual knowing of Jesus and the disciples, so the mutual loving of the Father and Jesus is the model for the mutual love between Jesus and his disciples. The statement of 15:9, “just as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you” is not a simple comparison, but designates the source, cause, and intensity of Jesus’ love for the disciples that is best demonstrated in his death and resurrection on their behalf. Indeed, his act of self-sacrificial love “establishes the cruciform life as the norm for discipleship.”

The FE points out Jesus’ love for Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (11:5) and, in particular, Lazarus (11:3, 11, 36). The connection between love and friendship is first introduced in the Lazarus story (11:11) and later expanded to all who receive Jesus’ love being named “friends” (15:13-15). With Mary, Martha, and Lazarus the face of Jesus’ love is human, affective, and passionate, resulting in Jesus being “deeply moved in spirit

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and troubled” (11:34) and weeping (11:35). Even the Jews exclaimed, “See how he loved him!” (11:36).

Finally, Jesus’ love for all his disciples is given an object lesson, or “enacted parable,” as he takes up the towel and the basin to wash the disciples’ feet with the FE commenting, “…having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end” (13:1). The object lesson of being loved then becomes a charge to the disciples to love one another by following the example given by Jesus (13:15). Though ὑπόδειγμα (example) was well used in Koine Greek, παράδειγμα (paradigm) was preferred in classical Greek. Both words can mean pattern, example, or instance. Here the English word paradigm would seem to capture the spirit of Jesus’ words, for ceremonial footwashing is not being established, but rather loving servanthood that attends to the needs of the other, even when the other is an enemy, a betrayer. The washing of Judas’ feet was an enacted parable for loving one’s enemies. Jesus in every way proves to be the paradigm of love, humility, and selfless service.

What is implicit concerning ordered love in the Johannine Gospel becomes explicit in the Johannine epistle, “In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us…” (1 Jn 4:10) and even more starkly, “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). Part of the paradigm that Jesus provides for disciples is the priority of being loved before loving. Before the foundation of the world Jesus was loved by the Father, providing him with the love to lay down his life for his friends. The disciples then, having received that

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75 Hays, Vision, 144.

76 Barrett, John, 369.
immeasurable love, are commanded to love one another just as they have been loved. This means that discipleship does not end with the individual and that love is not limited to the community of disciples. The mark of discipleship is not an external characteristic, but reciprocal love,\textsuperscript{77} making discipleship for the community and the community for the world.

It would be difficult to find a more fitting conclusion to this section than these words of Bernard of Clairvaux:

Love is self-sufficient; it is pleasing to itself and on its own account. Love is its own payment, its own reward. Love needs no extrinsic cause or result. Love is the result of love. It is intrinsically valuable. I love because I love; I love in order to love. Love is a valuable thing only if it returns to its beginning, consults its origin and flows back to its source. It must always draw from that endless stream. Love is the only one of the soul’s motions, senses, and affections by which the creature in his inadequate fashion may respond to his Creator and pay him back in kind. When God loves, he wishes only to be loved in return; assuredly he loves for no other purpose than to be loved. He knows that those who love him are happy in their love.\textsuperscript{78}

**Abide**

The first discipleship pericope in the FG, 1:35-42, contains the first words of Jesus in this Gospel. More than likely the assertion is correct that the first words of Jesus in each Gospel give insight into understanding the purpose of the Gospel and serve as a prelude to all that follows.\textsuperscript{79} Jesus asks, ‘What do you seek?’ (1:38) foreshadowing a

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similar question directed to Mary Magdalene at the tomb (20:15). In both cases Jesus’ inquiry is directed toward disciples with the purpose of honing their understanding of discipleship. The disciples answer Jesus with a question of their own, addressing him as “Rabbi,” which the narrator interprets as “teacher” for the reader. The use of this title indicates that the disciples recognize Jesus as an authoritative figure and provides another link to a corresponding conversation with Mary Magdalene who addresses Jesus as “Rabboni” (20:16). The simple question of the disciples is “Where are you staying?” The term μένω means to stay or abide or remain and occurs three times in 1:38-39. Out of the mouths of Jesus’ new disciples the question seems quite appropriate taken on a literal level. However, the FG’s unique lexicography, the frequency of the term’s occurrences, and the previous usages of μένω in the narrative suggest that the reader might interpret the question differently. Jesus’ response, “Come and see,” seems to support that inclination, as Jesus would not as much want to show them his physical location as the place of his spiritual abiding, which is exactly what he does throughout the remainder of the narrative. Most importantly for the disciples is the reality that Jesus’ place of abiding can become their own. Brodie comments, “…regardless of where Jesus abode physically, his primary mode was spiritual,” allowing the reader to encounter Jesus despite geographical and chronological barriers.80

Abide in the Father/Jesus Relationship

The place where Jesus stays, remains, abides is in the Father’s love. In the previous reciprocity statement examined above, the fact of the Father’s love for Jesus was

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80 Brodie, John, 158-159.
clearly established by the FE, whereas abiding connotes the lived experience of that fact. Whether symbolic discourse, extended metaphor or illustrative comparison, mashal, or figurative discourse, the vineyard imagery is provided to assist in understanding what is involved in “abiding.” Jesus is the vine and the Father is the vinedresser. Though the relationship between the vinedresser and the vine lacks the organic, vital connection present between the branches and the vine, the vinedresser, according to Is 5:2, spades, clears, plants, and takes care of the vineyard. He is “in supreme control of the entire process.” This is consistent with Jesus’ own words reflecting his dependence on and functional subordination to the Father and His will: “My food is to do the will of him who sent me, and to accomplish his work” (4:34); “the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing” (5:19); “I can do nothing on my own authority” (5:30 and 8:28). In speaking of the Father abiding in him, Jesus provides the reason for his dependence and submission to the Father when he states, “The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells (µένων) in me does his works” (14:10). Finally, Jesus’ statement regarding the constant presence of the Father reveals the intimate spirit of vinedresser/vine bond, “And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him” (8:29). Where

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81 Köstenberger, John, 448.
82 Carson, John, 513.
83 Brown, John, 668.
84 Schnackenburg, John, 3:96.
85 The vine imagery is common in antiquity, but the majority of commentators favor an OT background for John 15 (e.g., Carson, Brown, Morris, Ridderbos, Köstenberger).
86 Barrett, John, 473.
Israel failed as a vine to produce good fruit, Jesus succeeded because he was willing to submit to the care, presence, teaching, initiative, and will of the vinedresser—abiding in his love.

Abide in the Jesus/Disciple Relationship

Abiding in the vine points to a relationship that endures, remains, and bears fruit. The Father abides in Jesus and Jesus abides in the love of the Father. Similarly, Jesus and his word abide in his disciples and they abide in His love (15:4-10). The image makes the jarring claim that love is manifested in obedience (15:10-11). However, when the nature of the commandment as life (12:50) is kept in view the rationale for obedience makes perfect sense. Knowing that the Father’s “commandment is eternal life” and that the love of God was the motivation for sending his Son so that believers might have eternal life, Jesus has no reservations about conditioning abiding on commandment keeping. This is especially true since love is the focus of the new commandment Jesus established earlier in the discourse (13:34-35) and restated here (15:12), creating a symbiotic relationship between abiding in love and commandment keeping. For the disciple of Jesus one is predicated on the other. Similarly, disciples abide in Jesus’ “word” (λόγος, 8:31) and the “words” (ῥήματα, 15:7) of Jesus abide in them.

The result is fruit that lasts (15:16), but apart from the disciple abiding in Jesus and Jesus in the disciple, just as Jesus dwelled in the Father and the Father in him, there would be no fruit (15:4-5). When this happens the purpose of the branch is thwarted and drastic action is required on the part of the vinedresser (15:2, 6). The organic connection between abiding and bearing fruit is lost if the disciple focuses on bearing fruit rather
than abiding. Throughout this section of the discourse (15:1-17) the imperative is to abide, not to bear fruit. Bearing fruit is the guaranteed result of abiding, the proof of discipleship (15:8), and the way that the Father is glorified, not to mention bringing joy to Jesus and the abiding disciple (15:11).

As in each of the “just as” sayings, here, also, is the element of growth and process causing Morris to conclude that the true disciple is always “becoming more fully a disciple.” Branches begin as simple and fragile shoots off of the vine, drawing their life, nourishment, and growth from the life of the vine. So disciples, according to the vine/branch image, are established by abiding in Jesus and in time will bear the fruit for which they are designed.

**Indwell**

The series of “just as” discipleship sayings reaches its climax in equating the indwelling oneness of disciples to that of the Father and Jesus, “…that they may be one, even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world might be believe that thou hast sent me… that they may be one even as we are one” (17:22-23).

It is important to notice that this “just as” saying occurs not in Jesus’ discourse with the disciples, as the previous statements have, but in Jesus’ discourse with the Father, in prayer. If indeed, this is the climax of the sayings, then it is fitting that it would occur in prayer, the climactic form of discourse. Another important observation is that for the first time the circle of disciples is enlarged to include an unlimited number of future...

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disciples who would believe through the word of the original disciples (17:20). The hermeneutical force of this statement of Jesus for understanding discipleship in the FG can hardly be overestimated, for as Schnackenburg comments, “The later believers are included among Jesus’ disciples in any reference to the original disciples chosen by Jesus.”\(^\text{88}\) For the FE then, “disciples” include the first hearers of Jesus who became his followers, the intended readers of his Gospel, and finally, all who believe as a result of their word.

Indwell in the Father/Jesus Relationship

The mutuality and reciprocity of the Father/Jesus relationship reaches new heights in the language of mutual indwelling. Jesus first makes the staggering claim by saying “I and the Father are one” (10:30) in conversation with the Jewish leaders and again when he says, “He who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:9). Everywhere in the FG from the first verse of the prologue to our current passage, the unity of the Father and Son is one that permits distinctions. “Always the relation between the Father and the Son is the paradoxical relation of distinction-in-unity.”\(^\text{89}\) It is the unity of the Father in Jesus and Jesus in the Father that is the height of reciprocity and mutuality.

Indwell in the Jesus/Disciple Relationship

The same formula using ἐν that denoted the Father/Jesus union is also used of the relationship between Jesus and the disciples. Indeed, μαθητής is always used with the

\(^{88}\) Schnackenburg, John, 3:209.

implication of a “supremely personal union” that extends to the inner life. This occurs most frequently with the verb to be (e.g., 17:21 and 23 five times), but, as we have seen, also with the verb to abide (6:56; 15:4, 5, 6, 7) in the vine and branch imagery. What has been implicit in the discourse becomes explicit in the prayer of Jesus. The disciples are clearly included in the reciprocal union of the Father and Jesus. Jesus’ relationship of union with the Father “is the prototype of the unity of the believers in the reciprocal relationship which the Son and the Father share (vv. 22-3).” The oneness of the Father and Jesus extends not only to the relationship between Jesus and the disciples, but also the relationship of unity between the disciples as well. One is challenged to find a more apt description of this unity than that provided by Cassian in the fifth century,

Then that perfect love of God, by which ‘he loved us first,’ will have also passed into our heart’s disposition upon the fulfillment of this prayer of our Lord, which we believe can in no way be rendered void. This will be the case when every love, every desire, every effort, every undertaking, every thought of ours, everything that we live, that we speak, that we breathe, will be God, and when that unity which the Father now has with the Son and which the Son has with the Father will be carried over into our understanding and our mind, so that, just as he loves us with a sincere and pure and indissoluble love, we too may be joined to him with a perpetual and inseparable love and so united with him that whatever we breathe, whatever we understand, whatever we speak, may be God. In him we shall attain, I say, to that end of which we spoke before, which the Lord longed to be fulfilled in us when he prayed: “That all may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they themselves may also be made perfect in unity.”

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90 Rengstorf, ὑπηρέτης, 442.
91 T.E. Pollard, “Father-Son,” 368.
North America Christianity is awash in all things missional. There are missional churches, missional leaders, missional conferences, missional spiritualities, missional theologies, and yes, missional coffee. However, in the midst of the theological rhetoric and the motivational bombast one is left wondering if actual engagement in genuine mission has increased. If virtually everything is described as mission, mission can easily lose any distinctive definition.

The statements of Jesus, “I do nothing on my own” (8:28) and “…apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5) are unequivocal. As Barrett comments, “The ministry of Jesus has no significance apart from the will of the Father; it is not the independent achievement of humanity but the fruit of submission.” Neither is the mission of the disciples possible apart from communion with Jesus. The first five “just as” sayings that have been examined describe the intimate relationship that exists between the Father and Jesus and between Jesus and the disciples: life (6:57), knowledge (10:14-15), love (15:9), abiding (15:10), and indwelling (17:21). The last “just as” discipleship saying, “…just as the Father has sent me, so I send you,” emerges, for Jesus, as the “culmination of his communion with God.” Even more so for the disciples does their mission flow from the life, knowledge, love, abiding, and indwelling that is their relationship to Jesus.

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93 This section is largely excerpted from my article, “The Place of Mission in Johannine Discipleship: Perspectives from the Motif of Agency,” Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care, Vol. 6, 38-45.


Tinsley observed that “running through the Gospel [of John] there is a clear parallelism between the Father-Son relationship and the Jesus-disciple relationship.”

Among the parallelisms that he notices is mission. Schweizer defined discipleship as a real sharing in the life of Jesus and a service of witness. Vellanickal, commenting on discipleship in the FG uses the term, “missionary-sharing,” leading others into the experience of abiding with Christ that one has experienced. Scholars have generally agreed that communion and mission are the two primary themes of Johannine discipleship, but that agreement is not universal. For example, Pazdan in her substantial study of Johannine discipleship omits the mission dimension of discipleship that is represented by the sending language of ἀποστέλλω/πέμπω. Similarly, Chennattu gives only scant attention to mission in her monograph on discipleship in the FG.

On the other hand, though Köstenberger rightly contends that discipleship and mission should not be separated:

The Fourth Gospel does not dichotomize between “discipleship” on the one hand and “evangelism” or “missions” on the other. Those who follow Jesus closely are at the end commissioned to be sent into the world. Thus while a disciple's being sent out is preceded by a time of following Jesus


99 Mary Margaret Pazdan, Discipleship as the Appropriation of Eschatological Salvation in the Fourth Gospel, (Toronto: University of St. Michael's College, 1982).

100 Rekha M. Chennattu, Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006).
('discipleship'), a person's 'discipleship' includes and entails that person's ('evangelistic') mission to the world.\textsuperscript{101}

the overall tenor of his work emphasizes the mission dimension of discipleship at the expense of the relational dimension. He registers disagreement with the contention that “for John the disciples’ internal relationships are more important than their external relationships.”\textsuperscript{102} Further, in giving seven pages out of two hundred and twenty\textsuperscript{103} to what he calls the foundation for mission, he does not adequately represent Johannine values and proportions in regard to discipleship and mission. In contrast Jensen, commenting on John 15, captures the inseparability of genuine communion and authentic mission when he states that Jesus clearly teaches that “without abiding, mission cannot be done” and that “any spirituality not expressed in outward mission through word and deed is not a normative spirituality.”\textsuperscript{104}

This section will explore the place of mission in the FG’s presentation of discipleship to Jesus through the perspective of the motif of agency. The fact is that Jesus sends the disciples just as the Father sent him. The central question then becomes, “How was Jesus sent?” Or as Brown puts it, “The special Johannine contribution to the theology of this mission is that the Father’s sending of the Son serves both as the model and

\textsuperscript{101} Andreas J. Köstenberger, \textit{The Missions of Jesus and the Disciples According to the Fourth Gospel: with Implications for the Fourth Gospel's Purpose and the Mission of the Contemporary Church} (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998) 177 n. 129.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 189.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 176-80, 189-90.

ground for the Son’s sending of the disciples.” Hopefully the concept of agency can be of help in clarifying this “special Johannine contribution” by providing insight into how Jesus was sent which would then inform the place of mission in the FG’s presentation of discipleship.

Sent in the Father/Son Relationship

Several authors deal with the Jewish principle of agency (shaliach) as a possible or probable background of the sending language in the FG. Keener expands the concept beyond Judaism noting the sending of heralds, the sending of governmental representatives who acted on Caesar’s authority, the sending of disciples by philosophers to teach in their place, and the sending of envoys from the gods for cultic and revelatory purposes. Keener concludes that “[t]he general institution of agency therefore informs the early Christian, including Johannine, conception of agency” but cautions that “the specific nuances of agency, which early Christian writers may have adopted and adapted, remain to be examined.” Those specifics will now be examined in light of the probability that the general concept of agency was prevalent in the minds of the readers of the FG as well as the evangelist’s.

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“As with many Rabbinic concepts, the rabbis trace the *shaliach* to the Torah (Babylonian Talmud Nedarim 72b),"\(^{109}\) but its legal institutionalization does not occur until after the exile (see 2 Chr 17:7-9), and it achieves its distinctive shape in the first century CE.\(^{110}\) Anderson makes a strong case for rooting the agency motif in Dt 18:15-22.\(^{111}\) Central to the identity of the *shaliach* is the authorization to carry on the work or do the business of another. The one who is authorized, the agent, “represents in his own person the person and rights of the other. The Rabbis summed up this basis of the *shaliach*… ‘the one sent by a man is as the man himself.’”\(^{112}\) This notion of agency is very similar to what is found in several statements in the FG, where Jesus as the agent is as his principal, the Father:

Anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. (5.23)
Whoever believes in me believes not in me but in him who sent me. (12:44)
And whoever sees me sees him who sent me. (12:45)
Whoever receives me receives him who sent me. (13:20)
 Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. (14:9)
 Whoever hates me hates my Father also. (15:23)

Borgen identifies what he calls the Rabbinic Principles of Agency that elucidate some of the specifics of the general concept.\(^{113}\) Some of these principles may bear

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\(^{112}\) Rengstorf, ‘*Apostello,*’ 415. The rabbinic language surrounding the *shaliach* was expressed with the customary masculine nouns and pronouns. It is also probable that senders and agents were both males, therefore I will not employ gender inclusive language in these contexts.

directly on the place of mission in discipleship as presented in the FG. Borgen’s first principle was identified in the above description of the concept of agency—the messenger fully represents in his person the sender and the agent is like his sender in function and effect.\(^{114}\) Keener asserts, “John portrays Jesus as God’s agent, his authorized, reliable representative.”\(^{115}\) In the case of Jesus, in addition to the sender/agent relationship there is the filial relationship of Father/Son. Friend observes:

> If the agent is as the one who sent him, how much more so would the son of the household be as the father who sent him. The son as agent emphasizes both the importance of the agency and replicates in visible form the principal. Instead of the agent having a merely a legal or task likeness to the sender, he additionally has an inherited likeness—a likeness of nature or being.\(^{116}\)

In the Jewish context, “the son of the household is the most qualified agent.”\(^ {117}\) Jesus is an agent who emerges out of an eternal intimate relationship from the heart of his Father the sender (1:18). This relational intimacy continues temporally throughout his mission for though he was sent from the Father, he could say, “And the one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone” (8:29). Further, at the end of his mission, Jesus prayed, “I glorified you on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do” (17:4). Within the prayer the communion of the Father and Jesus is expressed in terms of glory (17:4-5), words (17:7-8), name (17:11-12), oneness (17:21-23), and, climactically, love (17:26). Jesus as Son is the ideal and perfect agent because of the love and knowledge that bind him to his

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\(^{114}\) Borgen, ‘Agent,’ 139.

\(^{115}\) Keener, John, 315.


\(^{117}\) Friend, ‘Father,’ 22.
sender. His mission began, continued, and ended in communion with his sender, the Father.

A second principle clarifies the sender/agent relationship: “the sender is greater than the sent.”118 Keener points out that messengers, even in the OT, were often servants.119 The parable of the wicked tenants in Mark 12:1-9 provides a NT example of the concept of agency involving both servants and a son, as well as illustrating that the shaliachs ultimately lack the power of the sender. Even when the shaliach is a son, he is vulnerable to those to whom he is sent. At the footwashing, where Jesus assumes the role of a servant, he speaks proverbially and solemnly, “Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger (ἀπόστολος) greater than the one who sent him” (13:16). Hence, Jesus in the flesh could say “the Father is greater than I” (14:28) for the primary charge of his agency was to “lay down his life for his friends” (15:13) and for his sheep (10:15-18), the ultimate act of servanthood.

The third principle follows naturally: the agent is bound to the will of the sender.120 In the FG Jesus affirms that he came to do the will of the Father who sent him (6:38) and that he did nothing on his own (5:19, 30). These statements are what necessitate Jesus’ constant communion with the Father since doing the Father’s will requires knowing his will. How does Jesus do it? He only does “what he sees the Father doing” (5:19) and he speaks “these things as the Father instructed” him. As one who is sent, Jesus looks and listens to his sender for guidance and instruction, doing nothing on

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118 Borgen, ‘Agent,’ 140.
119 Keener, John, 316.
120 Borgen, ‘Agent,’ 144.
his own initiative. He is “totally dependent, hearing and judging according to the will of the one who sent him.”

The fourth principle frames the actions of the agent in a legal context, so that the sender takes legal possession of property when the agent does. Schmithals notes, “Thus *shaliach* is a fixed term of juristic technical language and designates a person who acts authoritatively for another…” In his many disputations with the “Jews” Jesus frequently falls back on his identity as a *shaliach* as a defense of sorts. He is not speaking or acting on his own, but as a representative of the one who sent him.

The fifth principle is evident at the conclusion of the agent’s mission: “In accord with the *halakah* an agent who is sent on a mission is to return and report to the sender.” This returning involved an evaluation of the trustworthiness of the agent in carrying out his commission. A negative report could result in a penalty or a modification of the agent’s terms. This, of course, was never an issue with Jesus who always did what was pleasing to the Father (8:29), whose food was to do the will of his sender and to complete his work (4:34), and who finished the work he was given to do (17:4) with a victory cry from the cross, “It is finished!” (19:30). Jesus was constantly aware that he came from the Father and was returning to the Father (6:33-35; 13:3; 16:28; 17:4-5).

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Friend suggests a final principle that involves agents extending their agency: “As noted in Kiddushin 41a, the agent can appoint an agent.’ However, Keener cautions that this practice may have been so rare as not to be immediately obvious to the early readers of the FG. Nonetheless, we can see that Jesus extends his agency by telling his disciples, “just as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:21). The Father sent the Son into the world and the Son sends the disciples into the world (17:18).

Sent in the Jesus/Disciples Relationship

Just as Jesus was sent by the Father not simply as a messenger or servant, but as the beloved Son, close to his heart, so the disciples who are no longer called servants, but friends, are sent as the friends of Jesus who he loved to the end. Just as Jesus was sent out from the Father but was never out of the Father’s presence, communion, or love, so the disciples are sent out with the indwelling Jesus, as well as another Comforter. Just as Jesus’ communion with the Father never ceased during his mission, so the disciples’ communion with Jesus is vital to their fruitful mission, as Jesus said, “Apart from me you can do nothing” (15:5). It is communion that sustains mission. Just as Jesus was sent as a vulnerable servant to lay down his life for his friends, so his disciples are to love one another as Jesus loved them—sacrifically, humbly, and with the heart of a servant. Just as Jesus did nothing on his own initiative, but only what he heard and saw from the Father because his will was completely submitted to his sender, so his disciples do

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126 Friend, ‘Father,’ 25. See also 25-27 for an analysis of the sources for the Jewish concept of agency.
nothing on their own initiative but only what they see and hear their master doing with no agenda of their own.

Finally, the resurrected Jesus, in a powerful visual of his “way” stands before his disciples, showing them his nail-scarred hands and his pierced side, and says, “Just as the Father has sent me, so I send you” (20:20-21). The extension of Jesus’ agency to his disciples parallels his agency with the Father. Just as Jesus acknowledged his communion with the Father as the source of his life and mission, so the disciples’ mission is exclusively dependent on their communion with Jesus. “With the appointment of the disciples as his agents, the pattern of relationship between Jesus and the Father has been duplicated and transferred to the relationship between Jesus and his disciples.”

It is out of their relationship of communion with Jesus that the mission of the disciples emerges, just as the mission of Jesus emerged out of his relationship with the Father. This leads Zimmerman to “postulate that metaphor of mission is always simultaneously also metaphor of relationship.”

Through the lens of the agency motif it appears that in the FG mission is dependent upon and derivative from communion, whether that be the mission of Jesus or the mission of the disciples, and that together and in that relation they comprise Johannine discipleship.

\[127\] McIlhone, ‘Agent,’ 311-12.

CHAPTER 5:
A PROPOSAL FOR CONTEMPLATIVE DISCIPLESHP AS A NEW MODEL OF SOUL CARE

This chapter proposes a model of soul care based on discipleship to Jesus.¹ The discontinuity between contemporary spiritual direction and discipleship demonstrates the need for a new model. The new model of contemplative discipleship can be depicted as a cord of three strands: biblical discipleship; early Christian spiritual direction; and Ignatian spiritual direction. Finally, these strands will provide the components of contemplative discipleship that will be implemented in this project.

The Discontinuity Between Contemporary Spiritual Direction and Discipleship

The resurgence of the ministry of spiritual direction over the past forty years has been a beautiful gift to the body of Christ. In no way does this proposal diminish the value of contemporary spiritual direction or even seek to be its replacement. It only endeavors, as a creative option, to combine the contemplative aspects of spiritual direction with biblical discipleship, as defined in the previous chapter. In this section the

¹ Portions of the material in this chapter are used by permission of the faculty of record, Dr. Gary Moon, SP 722, Spiritual Direction Cohort, Year 1, Fall 2015, from the Final Academic Paper written by me and submitted for that course.
discontinuities between contemporary spiritual direction and discipleship will be identified in terms of their respective goals, focus, and methods.

Goal

The goal of contemporary spiritual direction has been clearly stated by Barry and Connolly; “we define Christian spiritual direction, then, as help given by one Christian to another which enables that person to pay attention to God's personal communication to him or her, to respond to this personally communicating God, to grow in intimacy with this God, and to live out the consequences of the relationship.”

2 Another contemporary writer suggests that spiritual direction is “a little like bird-watching—waiting quietly and noticing what appears.”

3 This bird-watching style of noticing and responding characterizes well the posture of contemporary spiritual direction which would be categorized as “non-directive” as opposed to directive, with the goal and agenda set by the directee. In contrast, the process of discipleship has the clear goal of a student becoming like the teacher (Lk 6:40) with the teacher setting the terms of the learning process.

4 Many experienced directors such as Susan Phillips offer this disclaimer: “spiritual direction is entirely optional; it is not necessary for spiritual growth and flourishing.”

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4 See above p. 49.

This is perhaps the most glaring discontinuity with discipleship. According to Jesus’ mandate in Matthew 28:18-20 to make disciples, there is nothing optional about the process of discipleship and the only necessity for spiritual growth and flourishing is in learning to obey all that Jesus said. Similarly, the spiritual director is a listening companion on the journey of faith for directees, allowing them to set the pace and direction. In a discipleship relationship there is a clear leader as the Apostle Paul modeled, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1). In addition, due to its goal, it is not uncommon in a spiritual direction relationship for the director to be younger in age or in spiritual maturity than a directee. This arrangement can work since both acknowledge that the real director is the Holy Spirit who can be engaged by the listening presence of a gifted director regardless of age or maturity. By contrast, the discipling relationship assumes that the leader is further down the road in maturity, the spiritual journey, wisdom, life experience, and devotion to Christ, than those being led.

Focus

A troubling development of the past century for spiritual direction has been the dominance of sin management gospels\(^6\) from the theological left and the right. Neither evokes confidence in Jesus. The gospel of the left demands ethical adherence to social and political efforts toward justice with little attention to personal relationship with God. By contrast, the right offers forgiveness of sins and a ticket to heaven on the basis of mental assent to a set of doctrinal statements. This assent is called belief or faith or

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asking Jesus into your heart. The reality, however, is that this assent is neither belief nor faith, but rather profession.

Profession is simply a claim or affirmation that requires nothing of the professor. I can profess what I think to be true or what I know to be false. There is no limit to my potential professions. In that light one has to wonder how the phrase profession of faith came into such prevalent usage—only to remember that it meets the requirement of the sin management gospel. Those who begin their faith journey on the basis of profession often continue using profession as a way to convey to themselves and others that they are progressing in their Christian life. They may profess spiritual milestones such as a rededication of their life to God or a surrender to the call to ministry. More commonly their professions have to do with how they are doing in their everyday life with God, themselves, and others.

This sort of profession has serious ramifications for spiritual directors because the professor has grown up in an illusory world of profession rather than reality. They may be convinced by their own professions that they are mature in the faith when in reality they have scarcely begun. Listening in a caring way to a person in this condition will be an important first step which contemporary spiritual direction does well. The ensuing steps will be much more difficult as the director will need to challenge the person’s illusions while bringing them into contact with the reality of life in the kingdom of God. This type of challenge tends to be lacking in contemporary spiritual direction but is the focus of discipleship.

Faith, not simply profession of faith, ushers its possessor into the life from above, a kingdom life. When I believe something, I am prepared to act as if it were true. This
can work for my good or my harm. If I have complete faith that I can fly and then jump off a bridge, my faith leads to harm because it lacked knowledge. I have faith and knowledge that I can fly if I buy a ticket and board a jet airliner. That is faith based on knowledge. I know something when I can represent it appropriately on the basis of thought and experience.

The difference between knowledge and faith seems to be on display in 1 Peter 1:6-7, “In this you rejoice, even if now for a little while you have had to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith—being more precious than gold that, though perishable, is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” In the context of this discussion, genuine faith is based on knowledge. Trials come like fire and burn up what is not genuine. Knowledge is interactive relationship that comes through thought or experience or both.

In discipleship the distinction between knowledge and faith quickly becomes a conversational priority. Often the gap becomes visible when the person acts out in a way they know to be wrong or hold an attitude toward God that is contrary to their belief system. For example, a person could believe wholeheartedly that God loves them, but have no experience of God’s love to bring them the knowledge of God’s love. So here, as in all cases, it is better to know than to believe whenever possible. Discipleship guides believers into knowledge because it embraces a teaching component lacking in contemporary spiritual direction.
Methods

The superficiality of much contemporary Christianity is a result of a Christian life which has become a religious hybrid of correct doctrine and right action. Neither in the doctrine nor in the action is the Jesus truth lived out nor is God experienced. Knowing the right things and doing the right things without becoming the right kind of person prevents interaction with the invisible reality of God and the kingdom of God. This is in direct contrast to what we see in the New Testament particularly, but throughout the Scriptures—men and women interacting with the love and power of the Reign of God. In fact, Paul states that our reality is Christ in us, the hope of glory (Col 1:27). We are in him and he is in us. In fact, we are in the middle of the Trinity’s dance of love and power. Everything in the Bible is livable and experienceable. Moses, David, Jeremiah, Ruth, Esther, Matthew, John, Peter, Paul, Mary Magdalene, or Timothy have nothing on us. What they experienced of God and the kingdom is available to us.

Discipleship expands the frame of soul care since the goal is an experiential union with the Trinity in communion and mission. Though the personal intimacies and vicissitudes of life can never be discarded, they no longer need to dominate the conversation. While the central question of contemporary spiritual direction is, “Where is God in your story?” it becomes “Where are you in God’s story of love, justice, and redemption?” in the context of discipleship.

In discipleship the most powerful interaction with invisible reality is with Jesus as present teacher. The sense of Jesus literally being the master of life leads to being his apprentice in all things. He is the most brilliant, most understanding, most patient, most loving, and most powerful teacher, friend, and companion—beyond anything one could
imagine. His Sermon on the Mount provides a vision of life in the kingdom and a curriculum for Christlikeness that will occupy disciples for the rest of this life and into eternity. Sharing that life with God with others is the core of the work of contemplative discipleship.

The Continuity Between Early Christian Spiritual Direction and Discipleship

The desert dwellers saw the world “as a shipwreck from which each single individual man had to swim for his life…These were men who believed that to let oneself drift along, passively accepting the tenets and values of what they knew as society, was purely and simply a disaster.”7 Rather than drift, many heard the same call from God as Arsenius when he prayed for salvation, “Flee from men and you will be saved.”8 In obedience he left the privileged palace life in Rome for the austere desert life of Scetis. He later heard the same voice saying, “Flee, be silent, pray always, for these are the source of sinlessness.”9

Goals

The desert was the geographical destination of their flight. Union with God was the spiritual goal of their journey. The silence and solitude of the cell were their teachers as Abba Moses declared, “Go, sit in your cell, and your cell will teach you everything.”10

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8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
10 Ibid., 139.
What began as a bold, decisive act of departure from society led to the even more radical passivities of austere solitude, dedicated silence, and constant prayer. Their activities and passivities vindicated the words of Abba Isidore, “if you desire salvation, do everything that leads you to it.”\(^\text{11}\) They had clarity of vision and strength of intention, but their great contribution is in their demonstration of and participation in the means of grace leading to transformation.

The tradition and model of desert spirituality was codified in the *Philokalia*, which was viewed as “the foremost and best manual of contemplative spiritual life."\(^\text{12}\) In *The Way of a Pilgrim*, the Russian pilgrim states, “I was getting knowledge and wisdom from [the *Philokalia*] and my heart was becoming kindled toward union with God by means of the interior prayer I was learning.”\(^\text{13}\) This “union with God” is the goal of desert spirituality as Abba Moses said, “The end (*telos*) of our profession is the kingdom of God or the kingdom of heaven; but the goal or *scopos* is purity of heart, without which it is impossible for anyone to reach the kingdom of heaven.”\(^\text{14}\) With this goal before them every day, the desert dwellers were impelled toward “the pursuit of an unbridled life with God, a severe intimacy”\(^\text{15}\) that was fueled by the disciplines and practices that ordered their lives—the means of grace to life in the kingdom of God.


Focus

The eastern Christian doctrine of \textit{theosis} is rooted in 2 Peter 1:4, particularly in the phrase “partakers of the divine nature,” and the “Greek fathers place [it] at the heart of salvation itself.”\footnote{Jason Byassee, \textit{An Introduction to the Desert Fathers, Cascade Companions} (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2007), 2.} Since volumes have been written exploring the theology and spirituality of \textit{theosis} it might be best to offer a saying and then an image to illustrate how this foundation of ancient spirituality was understood.

First the saying, “Abba Lot went to see Abba Joseph and said to him, ‘Abba, as far as I can I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can, I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?’ Then the old man stood up and stretched out his hands towards heaven. His fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, ‘If you will, you can become all flame.’”\footnote{Christopher A. Hall, \textit{Worshiping with the Church Fathers} (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 189.} The heart of desert spirituality is not in the ascetic practices, but in the encounters with God they facilitate—be they dramatic, as in this case, or ordinary.

Now the image:

Several early patristic writers make much use of the image of an iron sword in a fire to illustrate the transformative nature of \textit{theosis}. The iron remains what it is by nature, but its attributes are transformed through participation in the fire. It remains iron and cuts as a sword, but it now glows red and burns. This metaphor illustrates \textit{theosis}: just as the iron does not cease to be iron, humans do not cease to be humans. But by participating in the fire, the iron sword is transformed,

\footnote{Ward, \textit{The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection}, 103.}
becoming like the fire. It too becomes hot and glows. Similarly, in the process of deification believers are united to God and become like him, experiencing his life and holiness.\(^\text{18}\)

As this image aptly demonstrates, the core of *theosis* is participation in the life of God, just as the sword participates in the fire and takes on the characteristics of fire. *Theosis* then is another term for the participatory process of sanctification or Christian spiritual formation.

Virtues are the components of *theosis*, which is a burning flame that is largely unapproachable. The virtues are like individual red-hot coals, which, though dangerous, can be arranged for a useful purpose. Virtues are foundational qualities of moral goodness that promote personal and communal flourishing.

Cassian reflects a deep understanding of how the virtues interact with each other, “With every effort, then, the good of discretion must be acquired by the virtue of humility, which can keep both extremes from hurting us. …For the extreme of fasting comes to the same end as overeating does, and the excessive prolongation of a vigil is as detrimental to a monk as the torpor of a heavy sleep is.”\(^\text{19}\) Abba Poemen’s thoughts on moderation when practicing a discipline concur with Cassian’s, “[The Fathers] have shown us that this is the king’s highway, for it is easy and light,”\(^\text{20}\) and are an echo of Jesus’ words in Matthew 11:28-30 concerning the easy yoke and the promise of rest.

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Methods

In contrast to today’s preferred mode of biblical interpretation is the hermeneutic of the desert, which was a hermeneutic of practice. Interpretation for the early monks was an act of embodiment, of attempting to appropriate in themselves the words of Scripture by putting them into practice, to the extent that they were recognized as “bearers of the word.”\[21\] This method, which involved many practices such as meditation and recitation along with straightforward obedience to the particular injunction in question, yielded the truest interpretation of Scripture.

In fact, doing what Scripture said was believed to be the only way to understand it.\[22\] Reading, understanding, and obeying could hardly be separated. Bishop Epiphanius saw both the safety of knowing Scripture and the catastrophe of ignoring it; “reading the Scriptures is a great safeguard against sin,” but “Ignorance of the Scriptures is a precipice and a deep abyss.”\[23\] Theirs was most certainly a biblical spirituality, as well as a lived spirituality. These two aspects of desert spirituality are among its greatest strengths.

The hermeneutic of practice for the desert dwellers meant that the virtuous life depended on the wise implementation of disciplines contained in their ascetic toolbox. The tool of silence is one such example according to Antony; “he who sits alone and is quiet has escaped from three wars: hearing, speaking, seeing: but there is one thing


\[22\] Ibid.

against which he must continually fight: that is, his own heart.” 

Herein, lies a potential weakness of desert spirituality: the illusion that spiritual disciplines alone can produce virtue. The stark reality is that the passions of the heart must be continually transformed. However, little progress could be made without silence and stillness, for this hesychia is the “mother of prayer” according to John of the Ladder, “the beginning of the soul’s perfection” according to Basil the Great, and “in it the soul finds life” according to Isaac the Syrian.

The Continuity Between Ignatian Spiritual Direction and Discipleship

All of Ignatian spirituality is permeated with holy intention, the desire for God. The “Soul of Christ” prayer that begins the Spiritual Exercises bursts with a passionate expression of intention in the first line, “Jesus, may all that is you flow into me,” or the traditional translation, “Soul of Christ, sanctify me.” This deep intention continues throughout the prayer, throughout the Exercises, and throughout Ignatian spirituality.

Goals

The Principle and Foundation begins the first week of the Spiritual Exercises and is to be read frequently during the “retreat.” The reason is, as Fleming points out, that the

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26 Coniaris, *A Beginner’s Introduction to the Philokalia*, 47.
27 Ibid, 44.
Principle and Foundation contains the Ignatian vision and goal for life. The logic and attraction of this goal is almost irresistible to an open heart. It begins with the idea that all is gift from the hands and heart of a loving God who wants to be known and loved. All the created gifts are given that we might know and love God more easily. With that, however, the danger exists that we may grow attached to the gifts above the Giver. As a result, humans are to remain “indifferent” or at equilibrium before these gifts, willing to receive them or let them go solely on the basis of whether or not they help us toward our life purpose of knowing and loving God. It concludes with one of Ignatius’ big words: desire; “our only desire and our one choice should be this: I want and choose what better leads to God’s deepening life in me.”

Martin highlights an additional benefit of the Principle and Foundation that is a natural result for the person whose desire is for a deepening life with God. That person would not only accept suffering as it comes, but may also choose it in order to more fully love God and follow Jesus. This desire for interior freedom and detachment from all created things, including personal preferences, seems to be the animating spirit of Ignatian spirituality.

Focus

Since all things were created to enable us to know God more easily, then the obvious response is to endeavor to find God in all things. This is exactly what Ignatian

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30 Ibid.

spirituality does as Fleming states “Ignatian spirituality seeks God’s voice in all the things of this world. It is the difference between a drab black and white silent movie and a feature film in full sound and color.”  

32 Martin concurs by saying, “If asked to define Ignatian spirituality, the first thing out of their mouths would most likely be “finding God in all things.”  

33 He continues by explaining what this means, “Ignatian spirituality considers everything an important element of your life. That includes religious services, sacred Scriptures, prayer, and charitable works, to be sure, but it also includes friends, family, work, relationships, sex, suffering, and joy, as well as nature, music, and pop culture.”  

34 Everything means everything. Nothing is left out of our knowing, loving, and serving God.

Methods

The gift of discernment is one of the treasures of Ignatian spirituality. There are two dimensions to discernment. The first is simply a result of being in conversation with God, meditation on Scripture, responding to God in prayer, and engaging others and the world on behalf of Jesus. In a word, it is a lifestyle, or in Ignatian language, our “way of proceeding.” This lifestyle involves healthy physical rhythms of rest, diet, and exercise; engagement in community; and emotional stability. Living this way automatically answers many of the questions life brings before they are even asked because it produces

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34 Ibid.
growth in knowledge of God and ourselves. This knowledge provides the wisdom and courage to act.

The second dimension of discernment is the one that interests most sincere followers of Jesus because they are looking for God’s will in certain situations. Many of these questions get answered if one is living with the intention reflected in the Principle and Foundation. But when they do not, Ignatius has provided a brilliant set of Rules for Discernment. However, the Rules are only effective in the second dimension of discernment if the first dimension of discernment is being lived.

Basic to Ignatian discernment is Ignatius’ own experience of consolations and desolations. He noticed in himself and his friends that a right choice led to a sense of peace, joy, rightness, and greater love for God, others, and self. In contrast, the wrong choice led to restlessness, listlessness, and hopelessness. These are more conditions of soul than ephemeral emotions. They are accurate in the one whose desire and intention is God’s will above all since in following that path, “Things will feel in synch because they are in synch.”

The first and indispensable way of praying introduced in the Exercises is the examen. Fleming observes, “…Ignatius deliberately put the examen at the beginning. The examen is an indispensable tool to realize the purpose of the Spiritual Exercises—to detect God’s presence and to discern his will through close attention to the subtle interior movements of God’s spirit. It is the cornerstone of Ignatian prayer.” Ignatius expected all those in the Society to make the examen a daily habit that was not to be missed.

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The general pattern of the *examen* is: 1) gratitude for the blessings of the day; 2) request for grace and help to see; 3) review of the day looking for signs of God’s presence and my response or lack thereof; 4) confess and repent; 5) resolve to by grace to be more present to God tomorrow. The full name of this prayer is the examination of conscience, but the moralistic overtones of that name miss the point of the prayer. Martin points out that in other languages one word encompasses both “conscience” and “consciousness” and that the purpose of the prayer is to examine the day for signs of God’s presence.37

The discipline of *examen* is the ideal way of noticing and responding to God that leads to the Ignatian ideal of “finding God in all things.” The statement of Jesus after feeding the five thousand in John 6 instructing the disciples to “gather the fragments so that nothing is wasted” is an apt image of this prayer. Jesus has provided abundant bread for each day, but the immediate and recurring question is whether that bread has been received. The *examen* is the opportunity at the end of the day to gather the fragments of what Jesus has said and done so that none of it is wasted. It is the staple practice of Ignatian discipleship and a daily way to consider whether one’s singular purpose is to know and love Jesus.

American culture has produced generations whose minds are bloated with information, whose appetites are over-stimulated by advertising, whose hearts are numbed by unlimited choice, and whose eyes are bombarded by images, but whose

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imaginations are stunted and starved. Enter Ignatius, whose remarkable imagination fueled his life with God, his companions, and his mission. His hallmark strength meets our glaring weakness.

The human faculty of imagination desperately needs to be reawakened in twenty-first century western Christians because it is the nearest ally to the virtue of faith. “Faith is the conviction of things not seen” (Heb 11:1); “For we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor 4:7); “so that, with the eyes of your heart enlightened, you may know…” (Eph 1:18); and every parable of Jesus, all require the readers/hearers to engage their imaginations if they are to have any comprehension of what is being said. Ignatius does this by the use of what has been called “the application of the senses” which is introduced during the second week of the Exercises. According to Martin it is simply the process of asking the questions: What do I see? What do I hear? What do I feel? What do I smell? What do I taste? This provides a way of engaging our senses in our encounter with Scripture, in prayer, or with an event, in order to more fully and deeply experience God.

Fleming describes an accompanying contemplative use of the imagination that involves placing ourselves as a participant or onlooker in a story from the Gospels. In Prayer, von Balthasar, a former Jesuit, describes the contemporary directness of the word of God that happens in imaginative meditation,

To be sure, Jesus addresses a particular Samaritan woman at the well, but, at the same time, in her, he also addresses every sinner, woman or man. When Jesus

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sits, tired, at the well’s edge, it is not for this one person alone. Therefore it is not a mere “pious exercise” when, in spirit, I put myself beside this woman and enter into her role. Not only may I play this part: I must play it, for I have long been involved in this dialogue without being consulted. I am this dried-up soul, running after the earthly water every day because it has lost its grasp of the heavenly water it is really seeking.  

Experiencing Jesus directly through this form of meditative prayer with Scripture can produce conversions in life. The role of the imagination in meditating on Scripture, particularly the Gospel stories, can permanently shape the reader’s approach to the text. It allows the opportunity to experience the reality of the risen Jesus and to hear him speaking directly and personally with words of “spirit and life.” It can also be a valuable tool for spiritual direction in helping a person to connect or reconnect with the reality of Jesus in their life. Barry and Connolly share the fruit of this experience: as people focus on Jesus in the Gospels their focus is, at least temporarily, taken off themselves ushering in a new freedom to love God and others.

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41 Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Prayer* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1986), 17. He continues: “Like her I give the same obtuse, groping response to the offer of the eternal wellspring; in the end, like her, I have to be pierced by the Word as it wrings from me the confession of sin. ...So it is not at all enough to see the dialogues and encounters presented in the gospel as mere “examples”, like the instances of valor in a heroic tale, which a boy reads and feels inspired to emulate. For the Word which became flesh at that particular point in order to speak to us, on whatever particular occasion he addresses us, is concerned with every particular, unique occasion; in addressing this repentant sinner he addresses every sinner: in speaking to this woman listening at his feet he is speaking to every listener. Since it is God who is speaking, there can be no historical distance from his word; hence, our attitude to it cannot be merely historical. Instead there is that utter directness which confronted those who met him on the roads of Palestine: ‘Follow me!’, ‘Go and sin no more!’, ‘Peace be with you!’”

42 Barry and Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction*, 49.
Components of Contemplative Discipleship

Reclaiming the Teaching Method of “Conferences”

The nature of the Praxis retreats will be experiential rather than instructional, but there will be some content directed toward repealing and replacing the passions with the virtues of life with God. The teaching style will be invitational rather than instructional. Referring to John Cassian, Leech observes, “The tradition of conferences, or extended discourses on spiritual problems, dates from the rule of Pachomius, and by the end of the fourth century it was the standard method of spiritual direction.”

The Institutes by John Cassian are an example of such extended discourses, particularly the Fifth through the Twelfth Books, which treat “the eight principle vices” and how to counter them. In profound ways it integrates psychology, spirituality, and theology for the purposes of growth in virtue.

Given the nature of the retreats it is not desirable for conferences to be the primary method of spiritual direction, nor will it be possible to cover in depth the combatting of the passions. However, the struggle toward love and humility will be in the minds of the spiritual directors as content is offered and spiritual direction is provided. Space will be given for participants to come to terms with their passions, compulsions, and false notions of themselves through silence and solitude, through engagement with Scripture, and through both group and individual spiritual direction. This wrestling must happen if communion with God is to deepen for “at root our kinship with God is a kind of


character originally stamped on our very being by God’s intention for us, a pattern of seeing, understanding, feeling, and acting toward God, ourselves, and others. The early monastics often speak of the pattern of this character in terms of the ‘virtues.’ Changing the deepest patterns of living and relating requires the image-bearer’s best effort accompanied by the grace of God.

Establishing Daily Prayer Practices

The comments of pastors in Chapter 2 regarding a desire for deeper connection with God and for greater consistency in prayer reveal the need for encouragement, practice, and guidance in establishing personal prayer rhythms. To that end, each participant will receive a monthly prayer guide based on the retreat theme for the month which will expand and deepen the content presented at the retreat. The daily prayer practices will give participants the opportunity to experience directly what they are learning from the teaching team, their small group, and their spiritual director. It will also train them in new modes of prayer which can sustain them long after the nine-month experience has ended.

Facilitating Authentic Community

Another component of the Praxis will be the experience of community within the cohort of twenty to twenty-five and in a small group of four to five. For many pastor/leaders a safe place to share their journeys and to unburden their hearts is nonexistent. With deep hospitality, the aim is to provide a space where these pastor/leaders

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can connect with brothers and sisters who can understand and encourage. As Dorotheus explains,

> Suppose we were to take a compass and insert the point and draw the outline of a circle. The center point is the same distance from any point on the circumference ... Let us suppose that this circle is the world and that God is the center; the straight lines drawn from the circumference to the center are the lives of [human beings] ... But at the same time, the closer they are to God, the closer they become to one another; and the closer they are to one another, the closer they become to God.  

Isidore of Pelusia says it more succinctly, “Virtue ... leads to God and unites us with each other.” Love of God and love of neighbor are both part of the great commandment and cannot be separated.

The nine-month journey together provides a context and the conditions for authentic neighbor love to grow. Learning together, praying together, eating together, and experiencing God together will provide new visions of the image of God to love in one another. The mystical reality is experienced: when we love one another, we love God and when we love God, we love one another.

Encouraging Friendship with God

Jesus addresses what is perhaps the “greatest competitor to devotion to Jesus” when he told the first disciples, “I no longer call you servants, I call you friends” (Jn 15:15. It is not an overstatement to say that the appropriation of friendship with God

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46 Ibid., 14.

47 Quoted by Chris Hall, SP 726 course lecture, September 2016.

through Jesus changes everything for those in the heavy yoke of doing for God instead of working with God. Indeed, it can be something of a second conversion when one turns from the idol of ministry success to a life of being with Jesus to become like him. Jesus becomes the loving friend with whom all of life is shared rather than a demanding taskmaster who is rarely satisfied.

The Praxis will direct participants to the freedom of friendship with God that was experienced by Abraham and Moses, who were identified as friends of God. What seemed to be the exception under the Old Covenant, was made universal by Jesus for all of His followers.

Contemplative Friendship with a Guide

While each of the above are expressions of spiritual direction, formal direction will also occur. Just as the desert mothers and fathers were both teachers and guides, so the members of the Praxis teaching team will serve as spiritual directors to the participants, though none would accept the role of spiritual mother or father. The purpose of the entire endeavor is soul care for pastor/leaders. Care, *cura* in Latin, implies some level of cure. The cure is the help given by a director to move the person from passions to virtues, from a self-focus to a Christ-focus. Cure simply says that transformation is possible. It is the good news that *incurvatus in se* (curved in on self) need not be permanent.

Leech points out that the idea of spiritual direction emerged from desert monasticism.49 From his excellent treatment of the history of spiritual direction he

49 Leech, *Soul Friend*, 41.
identifies five marks of the spiritual director from the tradition: possessed by the Spirit (who they are); a person of experience (where they’ve been); a person of learning (what they know); a person of discernment (how they see and hear); a person who gives way to the Spirit (how they point to God).\textsuperscript{50} These are the qualities we will seek in the directors for the Praxis.

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 88-89.
PART THREE
MINISTRY PLAN
CHAPTER 6:
MINISTRY PLAN

The vision for this ministry incubated for some fifteen years before it was birthed. A variety of factors converged to produce the right time and right place for a ministry of spiritual renewal to pastors and leaders through a process of contemplative discipleship. The almost spontaneous combustion of a team coming together with shared heart and values was perhaps the single most generative factor. Another factor was the obvious need among pastors and leaders for depth in relationship to God, community with other leaders, and healthy work/life rhythms. The plan calls for a cohort of around twenty leaders who will journey together toward spiritual renewal and depth.

Origins of the Ministry

Research and extensive personal experience demonstrate that the overall greatest challenge facing pastoral leaders is maintaining an authentic connection with God from which all of life—professional and personal—flows. As pastors advance in their careers, their influence increases and the associated pressures, responsibilities, expectations, and isolation rise proportionately. The crucible of pastoral ministry causes many leaders to lose their abiding connection with the God who invited them to serve with Him in the
first place, leaving them increasingly exhausted and depleted as their careers continue. High-level, mid-career pastors are often hungry for an intimate experience of deepening life with God that can be cultivated in the midst of their ministry and in the context of authentic connection with peers and experienced guides. Personal revitalization and supportive peer connections can catalyze a renewal of calling as well as genuine thriving in ministry for mid-career pastors, grounding them as they lead, mentor, and guide their staff, congregations, families, and communities to the true flourishing found only through authentic abiding in Christ.

Disconnection from God and themselves can lead executive-level pastoral leaders to run on fumes, much to the detriment of everyone they influence. The Barna Group’s recent findings show this hazard of separation from God, self, and others, and the dangers of fragmentation and isolation. Nearly 43 percent of pastors face some sort of relational risk and more than one-third of pastors are at high (11 percent) or medium risk (26 percent) of burnout. While pastors often recognize the importance of abiding in Christ at a theoretical level, the demands and realities of ministry can make this extremely difficult in practice.

Ancient Christian spiritual practices like silence and solitude provide a powerful opportunity for mid-career pastors to confront the professional and personal challenges of isolation and disconnection from the true Shepherd. Activities which invite pastors to personally experience a deepening life with God need to be expanded. Research revealed

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2 Ibid., 20.
many of the more vulnerable leaders—those at both a high risk of burnout (62 percent) and a high relationship risk (55 percent)—also find it hard to make time for spiritual nourishment.³

Christ-dependent leaders who thrive in ministry and invite their congregations to transformative life with God are anchored by a deeply personal abiding relationship with God. Yet many pastors are unable to lead their congregations into true flourishing because they are far from this reality themselves. As Pastor Pete Scazzero, founder of New Life Fellowship Church in New York, states, “Being a leader for Christ without practicing spiritual disciplines that enable us to abide with him is a contradiction. …How can we offer the life-transforming message of Jesus if he is not continually transforming us? …Our roles and our souls must remain connected: This is our primary work and the greatest gift we can give to others.”⁴

Dr. Matt Bloom’s findings from the ongoing Flourishing in Ministry research project at the University of Notre Dame support the power of pastors practicing disciplines that cultivate an abiding relationship with God. Bloom’s initial data shows “contemplative and meditative practices might have very positive benefits, both in terms of reducing burnout and increasing well-being (these practices seem to boost both happiness and thriving).”⁵ Although this is likely not new information for pastors, many are unsure how to arrange their daily life in a way for this to become an ongoing reality

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³ Ibid., 27.

⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁵ Matt Bloom, *Flourishing in Ministry: Emerging Research Insights on the Well-Being of Pastors* (South Bend, IN: Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame, 2013), 23.
amid the complexities of high-level pastoring and leadership. The Praxis was developed to come alongside local pastoral leaders as they reestablish and maintain a life-giving, meaningful relationship with God.

The other major barrier to thriving in ministry for executive-level pastors is cultivating genuine, supportive community among peers. Bloom’s research highlights the significance of peer relationships among pastors: “the degree to which a pastor experiences a sense of belongingness—community, fidelity, and mutuality—with other pastors appears to be one of the most important determinants of that pastor’s flourishing.”6 In speaking with numerous pastoral leaders, Bloom and his team concluded: “…pastors can offer each other the unique kinds of social support that are needed to deal with the challenges and endure the stresses and strains that typify a life in ministry….”7

While activities supporting peer connection among these executive-level pastors should certainly be expanded, Bloom’s research emphasized friendship among pastors cannot be forced. Instead, efforts to encourage pastoral peer connection must recognize the need for a shared experience and commonalities among diverse peers, which is exactly what the Praxis provides. Leaders engaged in the Praxis experience bond over their shared desires for a deeper life with God and to thrive in ministry. As participants are local, these connections can truly provide support and grounding throughout a pastor’s career, especially during times of transition. These relationships are ecumenical.

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6 Ibid., 37.
7 Ibid., 39.
and dynamic as a result of the diverse array of leaders the Praxis attracts, a characteristic Bloom found to be another important aspect of pastoral peer relationships.

Vision of the Ministry

The image of a shepherd best portrays the theological understanding of pastoral leadership. King David was a literal shepherd who became the shepherd of Israel and “shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (Ps 78:72). However, Israel was not always so fortunate as is seen in the prophet Ezekiel lambasting the unworthy and wicked shepherds for taking care of themselves and neglecting their flocks (Ez 34). Since the shepherds failed, the Lord declared, “I myself will tend my sheep,” ultimately doing so as the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ. The early church adopted this image for pastoral leadership as Peter encouraged the elders to be “shepherds of God’s flock” under the direction of the Chief Shepherd (1 Pt 5:1-4). Pastoral leadership is a stewardship of “God’s flock,” not a means of building a following, accruing wealth, or exercising brute power. Shepherds are to be an example to the flock, just as God as Shepherd, is an example for them. The theology of pastoral leadership flows directly from the nature of God as Shepherd.

As shepherds caring for God’s sheep, pastors must authentically depend on and follow the true Shepherd who is God. While few pastors would argue with this theology, many practically identify with the successful pastor described by Jamin Goggin and Kyle Strobel. This pastor was disturbed by the fact that he could “lead confidently, think strategically, and cast an exciting vision for his church—and none of this required that he even be a Christian... More disturbing was that his view of ministry didn’t depend on God
even existing for things to work well.” The source of a pastor’s sustainability in ministry, especially as an executive-level leader and during key professional transitions, is deep abiding in Christ. Matthew the Poor explains the depth of transformative ministry and flourishing that comes from a pastoral leader acting as a spiritual servant:

…we need to understand the significant difference between a religious teacher and a spiritual servant. The first relays information; the second builds souls. The first extracts knowledge from books and places it before the student on paper. The second feeds the ones he serves from his own fullness; he shares the inner riches of his faith, his love, his self-sacrifice, and his humility. . . The first transmits words and concept that he has heard externally. The second brings forth words and concepts from within, an outpouring that rises from his depths, like lava erupting from the depths of the earth. The first prepares a lesson to convince his listeners; the second labors to birth children in Christ.

This traditional and historical image of the pastoral leader is in marked contrast to many of the contemporary pastoral models such as CEO, Bible teacher, or program director.

Drawing on this understanding of pastoral ministry and leadership (and mindful that pastoral leaders include both men and women), some of the marks of thriving pastors include leaders who: 1) allow God to meet their needs for esteem, belonging, and acceptance, so that leadership is not for their own gratification; 2) exercise humility because they acknowledge that all authority belongs to Jesus Christ; 3) operate with the power, fruit, and gifting of the Holy Spirit rather than depending on the power of personality, the fruit of education, and the gifting of natural abilities; 4) are able to be full of joy even in the midst of tribulation, suffering, and the pressures of ministry; and 5) can

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access appropriate practices and postures to sustain vitality in their relationships with God, themselves, and others.

The development of leaders who can thrive personally and lead flourishing congregations effectively requires opportunities to which many leaders are not instinctively drawn. Due to the immense pressure pastors face, they often resort to how-to seminars for a quick-fix to an acute problem, conferences featuring the best and brightest that provide fleeting motivation, or continuing education courses that allow them to expand their cognitive knowledge while escaping deeper spiritual issues. All of these can be profitable, but none have the authentic, long-term thriving of the pastor as their goal. This aim requires: 1) a safe environment where pastors are free to be themselves, can share honestly without fear of being judged, and can let go of comparison and competition; 2) a place for physical, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and vocational rest, the need for which cannot be overstated; 3) a community of peers with whom they can connect for years to come; 4) content designed to support pastors’ soul health and offered with brevity, compassion, and care; 5) guided practices allowing pastors to experience God, themselves, and others in fresh, deep, and renewing ways; and 6) seasoned spiritual directors/mentors to companion pastors through personal joys and struggles, spiritual journey movements, and ministry transitions.

**Characteristics of Potential Participants**

The fulfillment of the vision of the ministry requires a careful discernment process in the selection of participants. It is not a process whereby any leader can simply sign up, pay a fee, and be accepted. The primary qualification for participation is a
spiritual hunger for a deepening relationship with God. However, the ministry is not designed for leaders in crisis, so those who exhibit symptoms of personal, familial, faith, or relational crises will be referred to other caregivers. Leaders who are experiencing over-busyness, too many demands, deep weariness, or a lack of support systems, all of which contribute to a palatable hunger for a deeper and more authentic life, will be welcomed.

The ministry will occur in a cohort of peers who are actively engaged in senior level leadership roles. In order for genuine community to develop leaders need to have a sense of mutuality with the person next to them. This does not mean sameness, but rather commonality in the level of responsibility they carry. Some may be pastors. Others may be non-profit executives. All will occupy significant positions of influence, but this is not limited to their title or their role. For example, the Women’s Ministry Director of a large church could be the most influential leader in the organization, but reside in the lower level of the authority hierarchy.

Leaders who give themselves sacrificially to the work of the kingdom are often the ones who neglect their own relationship with God and fail to maintain healthy personal rhythms. What is needed is an opportunity to connect with their deeper longings for wholeness and health. The Praxis aims to offer these burdened leaders just that. The lack of healthy life rhythms is what the ministry aims to address and to help restore.

The goal is to have participants that represent the beautiful diversity of the kingdom of God. This means a healthy balance between men and women; between denominational affiliation; and between life stages—within a preferred age range from thirties to fifties. Racial and ethnic diversity will be pursued, but will no doubt require far
more effort to achieve than the other kinds of diversity. The demographics and culture of the Denver metro area, as described in Chapter 1, partially account for the challenge in fulfilling this goal.

**Core Values of the Ministry**

The Praxis process will focus on the experience of God rather than on teaching about God. Since the cohort will be comprised of pastors and leaders who have had formal or informal theological education and who teach others the truths of the faith, their primary need is not more information about God, but a deeper experience of God. The content that is delivered will be in an invitational manner. This means that the teaching opens the listeners to God's invitation to ponder, interact, and receive at a soul level what is being offered.

Experience will be aided by an emphasis on reflection over analysis, receptivity over evaluation, and a contemplative rather than judgmental posture. New insights and movements of the Spirit, and therefore growth, are often thwarted by an analytical, judgmental mind that defends the status quo. Reflection will be enhanced through art, music, and tactile projects that, to some degree, bypass the defenses of the intellect by engaging the other aspects of personhood.

For many leaders the sheer pace of life prevents an awareness of God’s voice, presence, and action. Within the retreats there will be a leisurely, rather than hurried, environment. There will be ample time for reflective silence and solitude, relaxed small group conversation, and spontaneous sharing over lingering meals. This ethos will
demonstrate that there is an alternative way of living than the hurry, worry, and flurry to which they have grown accustomed.

The renewal process of The Praxis will have programmatic aspects, but the emphasis will be on the relational dynamics between the leader and God, between the leaders themselves, and between the leaders and their assigned spiritual director. Engagement in these relationships keeps the process from becoming predictable, routine, or stale.

Lastly, the Praxis experience will be communal rather than individualistic. This is the reason the ministry will only be available to those who are local. It will be possible for the community that is developed within the cohort to be extended beyond the planned meeting times. Small groups can continue to meet after the nine months. Individuals can initiate times with each other outside of the designated retreat experiences. Community will be experienced in the large group as the cohort experiences the teaching together and shares meals together. A deeper level of relationship will develop in the small groups as leaders process their experiences with one another. Finally, each leader will have a one-on-one experience of community through meetings with their spiritual director.
CHAPTER 7:
THE IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

A ministry project of this kind requires careful preparation and planning in order for implementation to be effective in fulfilling the goals of the ministry. The process of implementation included these elements which will be described in this chapter: selection of the leadership team; invitation and selection of participants; design of monthly retreats; small groups; daily prayer practices; monthly spiritual direction; assessment.

Selection of the Leadership Team

The genesis of this project was a discernment group of approximately twenty persons who met monthly gain a sense of where God may be moving in the area of soul care in our larger community. The focus of this ministry project is the fruit of that group’s faithful discernment. Among those in the initial group were several graduates of Denver Seminary’s Master of Arts in Christian Formation and Soul Care. As the director of that program who was intimately acquainted with those graduates, it made the selection process rather easy and organic. Out of the original twenty there emerged a group of six who shared more deeply in the vision, values, and ethos of the project. There was also a latent chemistry and unity among the six.
As the planning unfolded, one of the team volunteered to exercise her gifts of hospitality by taking leadership in that area. We were able to secure volunteers to assist her with food preparation, creating an aesthetically pleasing environment, and providing an atmosphere of love and care for participants. For a project that is experience-based, the importance of hospitality cannot be overstated.

The remaining five team members would provide teaching, small group leadership, and spiritual direction. Leech identifies five marks of the spiritual director from the classical tradition: possessed by the Spirit (who they are); a person of experience (where they’ve been); a person of learning (what they know); a person of discernment (how they see and hear); a person who gives way to the Spirit (how they point to God).1 These are the qualities that were identified in each of the team members.

**Invitation and Selection of Participants**

The process of inviting and selecting those who would comprise the cohort of leaders began with the leadership team brainstorming their networks for potential participants. Those people were contacted and invited to an information night. In addition, an announcement was placed in Denver Seminary’s Alumni newsletter.

As a result, there were thirty-five applicants who completed what was named the “Discernment Questionnaire,”2 which assisted both the leadership team and the participant to discern whether The Praxis was right for them and whether this was the right time. For most this also involved an interview with two of our team either in person

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2 This document as well as other materials are proprietary intellectual property and therefore will not be included in this paper or as appendices.
or via Skype. Some who applied realized during the discernment process that this was not the right time for them. Those the team discerned were not an appropriate fit were referred to other resources or to individual spiritual direction. This process was time consuming, but fruitful, in that the twenty-two selected seemed to be ideal prospects for this kind of experience.

**Monthly Retreats**

The design of the monthly retreats was informed by the core values of the ministry, by faithfulness to the soul care mode of contemplative discipleship, and the perception of the needs of the participants. The primary components became: 1) abundant hospitality; 2) invitational teaching; 3) small group processing; 4) significant times of silence and solitude for reflection. Implementing these components required selection of venues, a plan for hospitality, development of teaching content, and construction of retreat schedules.

Selecting venues that could accommodate all of the retreat components proved to be challenging. Hospitality required a kitchen and dining area that was separate from the teaching area. There needed to be rooms for small groups to meet and spaces where participants could relax into times of reflective silence. The opening and closing retreats were overnights requiring a different venue. One of the team members offered her mountain home for the opening retreat and participants were housed in a nearby hotel. The closing retreat was located at a retreat center in the area. The other monthly retreats were held at the Stone House of the Mother Cabrini Shrine just outside of Denver. It met
all of the identified requirements in addition to providing beautiful views of the
mountains and Denver’s skyline.

The most daunting challenge of the project, once the cohort was assembled, was
the provision of abundant and beautiful hospitality in spaces which were institutional and
whose kitchens were limited. Five people comprised the serving team and each one
contributed their unique gifts and ideas to craft the hospitality plan. The plan included
delicious meals, plentiful snacks, aesthetics appropriate to each month’s theme, and
attentive welcoming and serving of the participants.

The teaching content was shared with us by Wellspring, a soul care ministry in
California. They were brought to Denver to train us in teaching the material and
mentored our team as needed throughout the year. A legal document was signed between
Wellspring and our team to protect their intellectual property. The leadership team spent
many hours before the beginning of the project ingesting the material, contextualizing it
for Denver, and fine-tuning the presentations and experiences. Additionally, the team met
monthly to review the past month’s retreat and to carefully plan the next retreat. The
monthly retreat themes in order are:

**September: Desiring a “With God” Life**

This time together in retreat is meant to establish the rhythm of both our times
together as a group and your individual times for rest, reflection, and prayer. We
hope you will experience the gift of times of silence and solitude, of fresh ways
and means for authentic interaction with yourself and with God, of delighting in
getting to know your companions on this particular journey—and discover some
surprises along the way! The central focus of this retreat will be to introduce the
abundant possibilities of caring for our souls as we live into the “With God” life.
There will be ample time to access our true desires—the longings of our souls—
and bring them before God in prayer. Time will be spent looking at the place
desire has in our spiritual formation and attending to that desire will be the
invitation of our prayer this month.
October: Receiving God’s Love
The greatest gift—the foundation of caring for our souls—is to know we are unconditionally loved by God AND that we are sinful, broken, and incomplete. Certainly this is not “new news” for those of us who work in ministry. But living more fully out of our identity as beloved of God—especially as we live and work in an environment that both affirms this truth and sometimes undermines it—is a difficult lifetime journey and will be the invitation of our prayer this month.

November: Knowing God and Knowing Ourselves
The process of spiritual formation—being transformed into the likeness of Jesus—occurs only when we know both God and ourselves as we really are. This transformational knowledge is never purely objective, but is based on personal experience. Our understanding of God is built not only on our theology but also on deeply seated narratives about God and ourselves that have formed in us from our life experiences, mostly without our being aware of them. We may have a theologically correct understanding of God, but our experience tells us that we can live out of damaged narratives. These false narratives determine our behavior and keep us from living the fullness of life that we know God intends for us. This month, our prayer invites us to notice the false narratives about God and ourselves that are keeping us from living the life that we know God desires for us.

December: Encountering Jesus
There is a vast difference between knowing about Jesus and actually encountering Jesus as we spend time in the Scriptures. Certainly we need to know about Jesus: His teaching; His life, His death, and resurrection; how He reveals God to us; and what it means to be a Christ follower. We also believe, however, that the Scriptures are a place for us to encounter Jesus—person to person. This month, we will spend time in one or two passages of Scripture using all of our senses to bring an encounter with Jesus to life, especially what C.S. Lewis called our “baptized imagination.”

January: Developing Interior Freedom
This retreat will focus on developing interior freedom. As we deepen in our knowledge of God’s love AND in our awareness of our false narratives that keep us from experiencing that love, we may begin to notice the ways we have learned to compensate—some that bring us increased freedom and some that hold us in bondage. These movements are sometimes referred to as “ordered” or “disordered” attachments. The invitation of our prayer this month will be to attend to these attachments so that we are able to live with increasing interior freedom in Christ.

February: Journeying Toward & Away from God
This year of the Praxis is about attending to the life and movements of God within us. It is from a deepening confidence in God’s unconditional love for us that we
have the courage (and maybe the desire) to do the courageous work of living and leading more fully from the “inside out.” As we continue to grow in interior freedom, we are enabled to see more clearly how and when we are drawn toward or away from God. These movements take place amidst the various seasons of our everyday lives—seasons that all of us seem to experience periodically, and sometimes even simultaneously. This month our prayer invites us to grow in our awareness of the movements of our spirits toward and away from God, and to know ourselves as both deeply loved and broken.

March: Companioning Jesus in His Suffering
As we seek to journey ever more closely with God, we inevitably find ourselves on the road to the cross. Companionship with Jesus means that we accompany Him as he loves and suffers for our brokenness, and more broadly for a world that is deeply in need of healing and redemption. The invitation of our prayer this month will be to companion Jesus in his suffering not as something to be bravely endured for Jesus’ sake, but as His friend, willingly joining into the pain, frustration, and helplessness that are part of suffering. In so doing, we will also encounter the mystery of the redemptive suffering of Jesus and His invitation to companion Him as he suffers with us and with the hurting people in our lives.

April: Living in Rhythms of Grace
The resurrection proclaims that the power that has tyrannized the old creation has been broken. God’s kingdom is now launched “on earth as in heaven.” Jesus, our companion, now lives both in and through us. Love and grace are the language of the new creation: warm, strong, integrating, life-changing, life-directing. This month, our prayer invites us to ask, “What does it look like to truly live in God’s grace rather than to rely on our own efforts or goodness to sustain us in our Christian journey? How do we live transformed and changed by God’s grace? And, how do we reflect God in the world in the way we were meant to in order that God’s kingdom expands wherever we are?”

May: Sustaining a “With God” Life
The “With God” life that Jesus brings in all its fullness is available to us here and now. God intends for us to live our lives in ongoing intimate union with God, connected and nurtured as we live in the world participating in the work of the Kingdom of Heaven. In our final retreat together, we will revisit the many ways we have lived “With God” over this year, and how God has loved and lived in each one of us individually and as a community. We will give prayerful consideration to the ways we intend to sustain and nurture our “With God” life…and continue to care for our souls. This will be a time of celebration as we recollect the many ways God has blessed us this year.
Each retreat contains similar components but in different proportions and in varying order. There was a need to create a balanced rhythm between large group, small group, and personal times. Normally the above-named retreat themes guided the scheduling decisions. For example, the opening and closing retreats require more self-examination so participants are offered copious amounts of personal time. In contrast, the January retreat theme needs more explanation and discussion, so more time is given in large group sessions such as a question and answer panel discussion. The monthly four-hour retreats are held on Tuesdays which seems to be the best day for a pastor’s schedule.

Small Groups

Before the first retreat participants are placed provisionally in a small group for the year. The group is led by one of the teaching team. Ideally, each group of 4-6 will have at least two women. Based on the questionnaires and interviews the groups are assembled based on what seems to be congenial chemistry blending commonalities and diversity. The groups meet each month during the retreat time with a focus on listening. Praxis small groups practice double confidentiality; this means that everything shared is confidential and no one may bring up a conversation later (or outside the group) that was shared with the group. If the sharer wishes to talk outside of the group about something they brought up, that is their choice. But no listener may revisit a conversation uninvited. The following is an outline of the Praxis small group process:

Silence to Prepare
Rest into prayerful silence.
Create space in your surroundings, mind, and heart to become more attentive to God.
As you become aware of distractions, gently let them go.
Group Sharing and Listening
Each participant will take four to five minutes to share about their experience of prayer over the past weeks. Individuals will share, as they are ready, in any order. Your prayer experience includes all the ways you are relating to and hearing from God in and through your life. We can amplify our attentiveness to God by trying to put words to our experience, even, and especially, when it seems vague.

Here are some suggestions that might prompt your sharing:
What is going on between God and me right now?
In what ways am I resisting prayer? What is making it hard for me to show-up in prayer?
What is happening in me when I pray? (Physically, emotionally, spiritually)
How does God seem to be relating to me?
How am I relating to God?
How is what we are engaging in the Praxis (retreat reflections, monthly prayer invitations, teachings, etc.) impacting my prayer and perspective?
How is my prayer showing itself in my daily experience?

If you find yourself talking about something you had not intended, realize that being in an intentional group can make you aware of things you might not be aware of alone. Even if your prayer has been difficult, or dry, or you don’t have words to express what is happening, this is vital material for you to acknowledge and for the group to share. The group will listen prayerfully through to the end of your sharing, without interruption. If you are taking too long, the facilitator will remind you that you will need to finish soon.

Silence
Allow a moment of silence before the next person shares.

Conclusion
After all have shared, if there is time, take 3 to 5 minutes of silence to journal:
What may God be saying to you in your life, given what was shared today?
The group leader may invite you to share in a simple phrase or two.

Listening Helps
Listen to the members of your small group as they share about their experience of prayer. Listen attentively, hold space for the other to share uninterrupted, and pray silently for them as they speak.
No cross-talk.
When a person finishes sharing, we don’t speak. We don’t move in to fix, help, affirm, comfort, correct, or compare. Give other group members the gift of holding space to hear God.
Listen for how another’s story informs your story. How might God be speaking to you as you listen to the others in your group? If something strikes you, note it in
your journal for your own prayer and contemplation. Ask Jesus how this person’s story speaks into your relationship with Him and your life.

As experienced spiritual directors each of the group leaders is well-trained to facilitate this kind of group process.

**Daily Prayer Invitations**

It is vital that participants integrate their experiences in the monthly retreat into their daily lives. To that end a daily prayer invitation is provided around the monthly theme. The practice is summarized in a small prayer booklet that is distributed and explained at the end of each retreat. The goal is that participants would extend the conversation they have been having with Jesus during the retreat into the days that follow. Some months a specific prayer form is introduced such as the Prayer of Examen or imaginative prayer with scripture passages. Other months the prayer guide simply provided prompts to keep the conversation moving between Jesus and the participants.

The following journaling guide is provided to complement the prayer invitations:

*Journaling as a Spiritual Practice*

Throughout your time in Praxis, we encourage you to journal as a way of exploring more deeply what God is inviting you into especially as you engage the Monthly Prayer Invitation. Like all spiritual practices, journaling is not meant to be an end-in-itself, but rather a to create space and time to encounter God as you open yourself to Him in your journey through this Praxis year.

Journaling is an excellent tool for becoming honest with God and yourself. The practice of journaling helps us:

- Pay attention to God. It is a way of hearing and responding to God.
- Process what is going on inside. It slows us down enough to notice what is happening within.
- Often it is in the process of writing that we discover what we think or feel. We write not only what we know but until we know.
- Listen to and learn about ourselves and God, giving direction and insight to live a more authentic life.
- Understand our unfolding story and discover where God is in that story.
Put feelings into words:
Develop our thinking and discover new thoughts.
Record our own growth into Christlikeness.
Serve as a guidepost of our personal spiritual journey.
Gain perspective, encouragement, and hope, and battle desolation.

Writing a Dialogue or Conversation with God:
Psalm 42 is a great example of this kind of conversation with God.
Don’t worry about “getting it right.” Prayer is self-corrective because God is in the conversation with you. God wants to love you and reveal who God is, to you.
As you journal your prayer you will learn to recognize the true voice of God as well as the voices of your false narratives that serve to subvert or obscure God.

This is not a prayer technique but rather “prayer as relationship,” a way of living communion with God. As we listen, we give God space to speak or even surprise you with something new.
“Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you...” (Matthew 7:7)

Experiment with different ways of journaling:
Write as little or as much as you’d like, but also feel free to draw, paint, or make collages.
Write in crayon with your non-dominant hand
Write prayers
Paraphrase a Scripture passage, possibly inserting your own name in the passage
Write a letter to God
Write a letter from God
Paint
Use clay
The possibilities are endless, so give yourself permission to explore and experiment.
Use this time to simply “play with God.”

All of this is offered with the awareness that journaling is not for everyone. However, conversation with Jesus is for everyone who desires to deepen their relationship with God and that is what is being encouraged.
Monthly Spiritual Direction

The signs of a participant’s level of engagement in the Praxis process surface in monthly spiritual direction. For some this is their first exposure to the ministry of spiritual direction so directors are cognizant that the first meetings may be more coaching than typical spiritual direction as directees learn to pay attention and to notice the movements in their inner life. In spiritual direction participants are able to embrace and process what is happening in them at the retreats and in their daily conversations with Jesus. It provides a touchpoint between retreats for participants to reengage with the month’s theme.

Participants are assigned to directors based on age, gender, and intuitive connections noticed by the leadership team. Freedom is granted for participants to ask for a different director. Such a request might originate in a discomfort of a woman to have a male director or for an older participant to have a younger director.

Each director understands their role in the process of contemplative discipleship. They are offering direction with a purpose—to help their directees engage God around the monthly themes. In monthly leadership team meetings directors are able to experience group supervision both around what is happening in them in the midst of offering direction and around the progress of their directees.

Assessment

The assessment of the project will occur through pre and post project participant surveys; evaluation of participants’ engagement in the Praxis process by their spiritual
directors; and the leadership team’s assessment of contemplative discipleship as a mode of soul care based on the Praxis experience.

The results of the participants’ pre-Praxis and post-praxis surveys:

**2018-19 PRAXIS COHORT SNAPSHOT**

**SURVEY RESPONSE RATE**
- Opening Survey: 100%
- Closing Survey: 85%

**COHORT DEMOGRAPHICS**
- 60% male
- 40% female
- Average Age: 45 years
- Youngest: 30 years
- Oldest: 64 years
- 10% engaged in active pastoral transition

**OVERALL PARTICIPATION**
- Average Retreat Attendance: 95% of participants attended all 9 Praxis retreats
- Average Spiritual Direction Attendance: 93% of participants attended all 8 sessions of monthly individual spiritual direction

Local Churches Represented include: Greenwood Community Church, Denver Community Church, Scum of the Earth Church, All Souls Boulder, Timberline Church (Everyday Joe’s), Highline Community Church, Church Project Greeley

Local Organizations Represented include: Cru, InterVarsity Fellowship, Denver Institute for Faith and Work, Paterson Center, Urban Sky
e

The diversity goals were accomplished except for racial/ethnic diversity. There was only one person of color among the twenty-two participants.
The perception of intimacy seems to reflect a deeper understanding of what is truly involved in authentic intimacy with God. Before the Praxis some assumed that they were experiencing an intimate relationship with God only to discover that genuine intimacy was far more than what they previously knew.
All of the spiritual life indicators reflect a marked improvement.
Perhaps the greatest affirmation of the Praxis experience is the 100 percent rate of recommendation to colleagues.
CLOSING SURVEY COMMENTS

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Praxis Overall (What was your favorite aspect of the Praxis experience?)
- The abundant space created—the table set—for me to be present to and hear from the Lord! The abundance was created by the hospitality team and their thoughtful, behind-the-scenes touches.
- The half-day retreats—they had nice variety (guided reflection groups, teaching, amazing hospitality). And they served as a wonderful set-up for the month’s prayer invitation.
- Being with others who share similar heart and vocabulary. Surprises…food, drink, décor—setting the stage/environment. THANK YOU.
- So much! It was always hard to get there on Tuesdays, but once I was there it was so great and so needed. I loved thinking about things in a way that I hadn’t thought about before, and experiencing the Lord in new ways. And learning how to give myself more grace.
- The Staff (excellent!) / the hospitality (amazing!)—an avenue of grace.

Discernment Process
- It felt Spirit-led, relational, and relaxed.
- Hopes/outcomes nature of application question.
- Phone conversation exploring if Praxis was a fit for me.
- Our group was amazing. It was a great balance of age, gender and experience. The process worked.

Small Groups
- Deeper knowing/connection with other participants.
- I loved meeting with the same people all year and having a safe place to hear from each other.
- Keeping the sharing time-bound kept people from dominating or under-participating.
- Knowing it was a safe space and what I said would be held in prayer and confidentiality.

Spiritual Direction
- It was a great growing and learning process and something that I want to continue. I’m in a deeper place than when I started and it has helped the way that I see the Lord and myself in a different way.
- It was a great element to this process. I needed the one-on-one time to process and be challenged, all bringing greater learning, awareness, and accountability.
The participant comments affirm both the experience in total as well as the component parts. The desire for greater diversity is our goal and desire as well. Given the limits of time at the retreats, it will be difficult to create more opportunities for the cohort to connect or play together, though that idea will be given serious consideration.
Some of the specific suggestions above can be easily incorporated and are helpful changes.

The leadership team, in their roles as spiritual directors, have a unique vantage point from which to assess the overall impact of the Praxis process. Here are their perspectives:

**Team Member #1**
The monthly retreats provided a safe place to breathe again and allow the pressures of work to find their proper place on the shelf of our life. Participants were surprised to experience an environment where they were *not* expected to prove their worth, defend their contribution or lead others forward. The daily prayer invitation integrated concepts from each month’s gatherings and grounded them in the power of the daily examined life. While the monthly gatherings offered an opportunity to connect with co-journeymen and the daily exercises proved to slowly irrigate their conversation with God, monthly direction would remind them of God's absolute affection and delight for them...independent of anything they had done or sought to achieve.

**Team Member #2**
There was an authentic hunger to experience more of God, leading them to thoroughly engage the Praxis process of retreats, daily prayer practice, and spiritual direction. The combination of the Praxis content and experience, especially the work God led us through in spiritual direction opened them to a different interpretation of God’s action (and perception of God’s inaction). This led to concluding the Praxis kinder to self and to God, curious, and more open to
trusting God as the One who initiates and sustains transformation. The Praxis invited them into a relaxed, slow, deeply intimate walk with God that is very different from their fast-paced, results-oriented ministry context. One participant struggled to deeply and personally engage with the material, the daily prayer practice, and the experience of spiritual direction. Her difficulty seemed to be two-fold: her own spiritual maturity and the different tradition she comes from that emphasizes a more communal approach to life with God and often views personal soul care with varying levels of suspicion. She highly valued the community aspect of the retreats as well as the instructional aspects of the teaching.

Team Member #3
My directees and group members were very engaged in the process of the retreats as we were there leading them through the teachings about the themes of the inner life. Sharing was free and relevant while on retreat in the group setting. As for daily prayer practice, it varied depending on the cohort member. Of my four directees, all but one engaged in prayer practice very regularly throughout the nine months. Two of them utilized the specific prayer invitation packets that we gave them, one seemed to follow his own routine of prayer, and one did not follow any regular prayer practice.

Team Member #4
One directee was quiet by nature and began the Praxis with significant reserve. But as the year continued his countenance became brighter, he seemed lighter of heart. Members of his staff commented on how different he was after engaging with the Praxis. Being a member of the cohort gave another participant great support and a safe place to process through her questions, concerns, and come to clarity around some decisions which needed to be made. For another, the community of the cohort offered rich support and the relationships were life-giving. Another had come through a very difficult situation within the senior leadership at her church and the Praxis process, spiritual direction, and the relationships within the cohort served as her support system during this time.

The leadership team was also asked to provide their perspective on contemplative discipleship as an effective form of soul care. Here are their responses:

Team Member #1
Although each participant expressed a longing for deeper intimacy with God prior to the Praxis, we recognized shortly after beginning our cohort that we would first need to reframe the concept of intimacy before we traveled into a deeper sense of it. Theologically, it was common to hear a participant express their relationship with Jesus as friendly. However, in inquiring to the expression of their friendliness we found that operationally it may have been more accurate to
describe it as a very polite or amicable co-working relationship. As the Praxis progressed and participants recalibrated to God's normal, ordinary and everyday posture of pleasure for them through retreats, direction and daily prayer, we began to see a transformation in their understanding of intimacy with Jesus. We were grateful to find at the end of our 9-month journey together that the cohort had received His warmth and extraordinary kindness as permanent and unchanging fixture in life and consequently encountered a voice of Love that is always good, always gentle and always for them.

*Team Member #2*

The Praxis beautifully invites participants to more deeply know (or for more of these high-level pastors and faith leaders than we would have thought, to begin to know) a kind, gentle, present God who cares about and delights in them personally. A surprising statistic that emerged in participant pre-and post-Praxis surveys highlighted how the Praxis experientially introduces leaders into a different and much deeper concept of intimacy with God. For many of these leaders, the Praxis experience powerfully redefined what intimacy with God actually looks like in the midst of full lives and demanding ministry. The Praxis monthly themes and process of traditional spiritual direction also naturally deepen the life of these leaders with God by intentionally and powerfully connecting this personal God with a more realistic, integrated view of self. The important topics addressed by the Praxis—including desire, the false self, attachments, discernment, and the cycle of grace—combined with the contemplative discipleship approach of the Praxis offer leaders a biblical, practical, and transformative experience of life with God.

*Team Member #3*

Throughout the year I felt all cohort members engaged in our conversations. As with all such relationships, each individual was struck by different themes. One directee was engrossed in the true self/false self-conversation and stayed there for several months as he grappled with this concept in his own life. Another diligently followed the curriculum throughout, but when he experienced companioning with Jesus, I felt a real acceleration in his level of intimacy with God. This seemed to be the best example of contemplative discipleship at work. Another directee, though very engaged throughout the year, had difficulty seeing/accepting the fact that all of his communication with God had an outcome attached to it, resulting in an employer/employee relationship. At the six-month mark, I watched as his eyes opened to this fact a little bit. I believe this to be an ongoing realization in his life that will bear much fruit down the road. The outlier was one directee who did not engage the process in any intentional way, other than faithful attendance to the retreats/direction and being willing to converse. Although we had many good, seemingly helpful conversations, I was not able to see the fruit of the themes we were offering during the time of direction. I am praying that seeds were planted that will bear fruit at a different time in his life.
Team Member #4
The Praxis provided a rich soil for one participant to continue her interior journey. It was obvious that significant changes were received which built on the work initiated during her awakening. Another began to comment about the changes taking place in his heart, his family life, and his church. He was pleased to see God working in these areas as well as his own life. At the completion of the Praxis cohort, five cohort members decided to continue to meet monthly in order to review their year in Praxis and to continue their discipleship and transformation together.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary

The purpose of this project was to assist pastors in the Denver area in deepening their relationship with God through an experiential process of nine monthly retreats, spiritual direction, and daily prayer practices. Concurrently, my aim was to contribute constructively to soul care by introducing a way of companioning that I termed contemplative discipleship.

Part One of the paper located the project in the cultural and pastoral ministry contexts out of which the participants were drawn. These contexts revealed some of the sources of the personal and ministry pressures that cut into personal vitality and ministry effectiveness. Thus, the ministry context of the study was the lives of the pastors and ministry leaders who participated in the project. The personal needs of these leaders which arose out of their cultural and ministry contexts are what the project sought to address.

Part Two of the paper provided the biblical, historical, and theological foundations to address the needs identified in Part One. The discontinuity of contemporary spiritual direction with earlier models and with biblical discipleship was shown to account for its weakened ability to provide the soul care ministry leaders needed. By way of contrast, biblical discipleship as presented in the Gospel of John and its continuities with ancient Christian and Ignatian models of spiritual direction coalesced to a new form of soul care: contemplative discipleship. This form recognizes that discipleship and Spiritual formation are two sides of the sanctification coin. In
Philippians 2:12-13 Paul charges his readers to “work out your salvation” because it is “God who is at work in you.” The inworking is Spiritual formation and the outworking is discipleship to Jesus. The disciple of Jesus works out in faith and obedience what the Spirit of God has first worked in by grace. Therefore, throughout this paper Spiritual formation and discipleship were used interchangeably.

Part Three of the paper described the ministry plan and process which included monthly retreats, small groups, daily prayer practices, and monthly spiritual direction between retreats. Assessment of the project was accomplished through a participant self-assessment survey, assessment of participant engagement by the leadership team, quantitative assessments collected by the ministry team, and assessment of the effectiveness of the contemplative discipleship model by the core leadership team.

**Conclusions**

First, there is a readiness and hunger across a wide demographic of pastors and leaders to learn to engage their own discipleship to Jesus in the midst of the demands of ministry leadership. The 95 percent and 93 percent rates of participation in the retreats and in spiritual direction, respectively, support this conclusion.

Second, the totality of the Praxis process validated the old adage attributed to Aristotle that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Based on the post-Praxis survey comments the overall positive impact was the cumulative effect of all of the Praxis components.

Third, among ministry leaders who teach and preach intimate relationship with God, there was a rather significant lack of intimacy in their own relationships with God.
This stems from a lack of experience with God and a lack of awareness of practices that actually lead to the desired intimacy. The variety of experiences and practices within the Praxis helped participants make significant progress toward intimacy with God.

Fourth, the abundant hospitality offered in the Praxis through delicious food, thoughtful décor, and a warmly welcoming serving team set the table for participants’ experience of God. Included in the ethos of hospitality are even the small details such as the quality of paper and fonts used for handouts, provision of blankets on cold days, availability of water, coffee, tea, and soft drinks throughout each retreat, and regular surprises. God is radically hospitable toward all people, so it is reasonable that God is experienced and discipleship advanced through human hospitality.

Fifth, strong leaders desire to be led. This is clearly not true of all strong leaders even within the church, but it was true of those in the Praxis. In private conversations several of the highest capacity leaders mentioned how refreshing it was for them to be led well by our team. In fact, they said the Praxis was the only context where they were not the leader. They lead in their workplaces, in their families, in their churches, and even with their friends. Underneath the “led well” comments is the tacit desire to be assisted in their discipleship to Jesus.

Sixth, participants new to spiritual direction need to be introduced to it gently. It was surprising how difficult it was for so many of the participants to access their inner world in the first few direction sessions. There is some irony here with the reality that these leaders commonly practice listening to the internal struggles of the people they lead, yet have difficulty listening to themselves.
Seventh, joy in the work sprang from being on a loving, humble, servant-hearted, good-humored, and united team. Only a few things went wrong during the course of the year, but when they did the team pulled together in wise problem solving. With so many people and so many moving parts, the potential for conflict was high, but because of the kind dynamics within the team conflict was non-existent.

Eighth, the goal of facilitating formational community within the cohort was accomplished. This was demonstrably clear as the team observed the cohort interacting in small groups, over meals, and in leisure times. Perhaps the strongest evidence that authentic community occurred is that there are groups from the cohort that continue to meet together. One group is recycling through the retreat material and meets every month.

Ninth, discipleship deepened, at least according to two measurements. The pre- and post-Praxis survey reported significant increases in regular engagement in spiritual practices and in healthy work/life rhythms among the participants.

Tenth, and finally, contemplative discipleship as delivered through invitational teaching, guidance in spiritual practices, and one-on-one soul care conversations proved to be an effective mode of soul care and discipleship. The practice of contemplative discipleship is the beneficiary and integration of ancient Christian spirituality, Ignatian spirituality, and biblical discipleship. It is a form of soul care that maintains the listening posture of contemporary spiritual direction without neglecting the process of discipleship to Jesus. It is a powerful combination that can have broad application in twenty-first century Christian contexts—church, parachurch, mission organizations, and faith-based non-profits—as well as in personalized soul care relationships. It is time for those who
name the name of Christ to become whole-life disciples of His—learning from Him how to live, love, and lead—with the vision of their inner lives being transformed into the inner life of Jesus. Contemplative discipleship is a step in this direction.
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