A Model for Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines to the Members of the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church

Steve Willsey
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A model for introducing the spiritual disciplines to the members of the Capital Memorial Seventh-day Adventist Church

Willsey, Steve Alan, D.Min.
Andrews University, 1991

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Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

A MODEL FOR INTRODUCING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CAPITAL MEMORIAL
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A Project Report
Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Steve Willsey
June 1991
ABSTRACT

A MODEL FOR INTRODUCING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CAPITAL MEMORIAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

Steve Willsey

Adviser: C. Raymond Holmes
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation Project

Andrews University
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A MODEL FOR INTRODUCING THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CAPITAL MEMORIAL SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

Name of researcher: Steve Willsey
Name and degree of faculty adviser: C. Raymond Holmes, D. Min.
Date completed: June 1991

This dissertation project developed out of the researcher's own spiritual pilgrimage in a search for greater intimacy with God. An introduction to the ancient spiritual disciplines provided the means for that intimacy to develop and, subsequently, created a desire to share the disciplines in ministry with members of his congregation. A model was envisaged which could become a life-changing event in the life of the individual member. The development and use of this model was the subject of the project.
The model includes an introduction to four basic disciplines: prayer, the devotional use of Scripture, meditation, and journaling. For each discipline, there is also a careful outline presented as to how the discipline may be practiced successfully. A retreat setting, which proved to be very successful, was selected for using the model for the first time. This entire process is carefully described and evaluated in the report with a recommendation that further retreats include more time and that a follow-up plan be in place well in advance.

Included in the project was research into the spiritual formation process—with emphasis on the disciplines, its historical development, its place in Seventh-day Adventist theology, and how it was viewed by Ellen White, one of Adventism's founders. The results from this research were included in the model to provide a background legitimacy for the disciplines as they were introduced. It was discovered that Adventist theologians have had much to say about the holiness God requires from those who are saved, but little practical advice as to how it occurs. In fact, there has been a debate over the years about faith and works with no apparent conclusion. There was convincing evidence, however, that Ellen White understood the spiritual formation process and knew the importance of the spiritual disciplines. Her extensive
writing on the subject provided valuable affirmation for the model.

Survey and evaluation instruments were created to determine the need for using the model and for its effectiveness. The survey results which are reported in the dissertation, confirm the need for assistance in developing intimacy with God among those who responded. Those who participated in the first use of the model gave a high effectiveness rating, although it was apparent that some adjustments would be helpful in order to reinforce the changes which would be required to develop the desired intimacy with God.
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TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CAPITAL MEMORIAL
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

A project report
presented in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Steve Willsey

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May 16, 1991
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Adventism was born out of a movement which had set the date for the Lord's return. The leaders of the movement were mistaken in their prophetic interpretations; nevertheless, because of the interest they developed, a new denomination was organized which was dedicated to the claim that the Lord was coming soon. Preparing for the end became serious business for Adventists, although debating the issue of what constituted readiness frequently consumed more of the time and passions of the faithful than did actually being ready or preaching the gospel.

The new denomination also included in its fundamental tenets, the importance of the law, especially the fourth commandment which they believed required keeping the seventh-day as the holy Sabbath. In time, Sabbath observance took on eschatological significance as the church's Bible students determined that the final test for all human kind would focus around the Sabbath-Sunday issue. The Mark of the Beast, they believed,
would be honoring the first-day above the seventh-day, contrary to God’s command.

Inevitably, a struggle developed over what constituted the gospel. It became a debate over faith and works, argued by Seventh-day Adventists against the backdrop of the imminence of the Second Coming. Among the members who were unaccustomed to theological issues, a tendency developed to fall into a works orientation. Of course, there were occasional revivals of grace consciousness, but it was very difficult to replace thought patterns which had become deeply ingrained. Spirituality was usually interpreted as obedience, regardless of the motivation. Many members became guilt-ridden but afraid to admit that they really were not ready, nor did they know how to develop a meaningful relationship with their Lord.

It was out of this milieu that my own faith system developed. Perhaps the vast majority of Adventists were able to find a healthy balance in their lives, but many others, no doubt, like me, grew up without assurance of salvation and were actually frightened of the Second Advent. Discovering that salvation is by grace and not by works, opened for me the glory of the Christian’s hope. It was then that I desired to have a relationship with God based on love. How to overcome a lifetime fear-
orientation to God became my quest. The spiritual disciplines assisted in making a new relationship possible for me, but I did not find the disciplines in my own church.

Through the programs of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, which has its offices in my own parish community in Washington, D.C., I was formally introduced to a new spiritual lifestyle. Although I had read about the spiritual disciplines, I had not practiced them in any meaningful way until I attended my first spiritual retreat conducted for spiritual leaders by Shalem.

In the chapter which follows, I give my personal testimony of finding the joy of a relationship with Christ made possible through the use of these ancient disciplines such as prayer, meditation, and the formational use of Scripture. Of course, I prayed and read my Bible before, but not for the right reasons. The change in my life produced an excitement about God which I was eager to share with my Adventist friends, hoping that they would be able to discover the same joy in Christ rather than continue to fear Him as I suspected many of them did. There was even the faintest wish that, in fact, an opportunity might present itself for spiritual formation to become more important in
denominational priorities than theological debate and institutionalism which seem to consume the greatest attention now. I naturally wanted to begin with my own congregation. My dream was to share what I discovered as quickly as possible, and the disciplines, I knew, would provide that opening.

The purpose of this project was to develop a model which might help make that dream come true. I found that spirituality was a very important issue among other Christians, and that the disciplines were being widely used. I was skeptical about whether my own denomination would be ready to accept the disciplines because of their association with the monastic system. Since the development of my interest, however, I have been pleased to discover that other Adventist clergy also are reading the same literature that I am, some have joined spiritual formation groups, and a few have developed seminars and classes to share with others what they have found.

The model which I created for introducing the disciplines to my congregation required the development of material which could be used in establishing credibility for the disciplines. Spiritual formation had to be explained, the historical and theological setting had to be established, and the Seventh-day Adventist denomination’s own heritage had to be examined. This
material is presented in the first several chapters of
the project report; it also constituted lectures for use
in introducing the model to the congregation. A series
of sermons preached just prior to the introduction of the
disciplines in a retreat for that purpose was an integral
part of the project. These sermons introduced God as one
who desires relationships with humans. They also
presented the importance of developing a disciplined
lifestyle in order to produce and maintain an openness to
God. The sermons are included in the appendix.

Since my own introduction to spiritual formation is
so closely tied to the Shalem Institute for Spiritual
Formation, I have included a chapter in this report which
gives the history and present programs of the Institute
with my own personal evaluation. This presentation and
analysis follows my personal testimony since the
experiences I had at Shalem are linked so closely to my
own spiritual pilgrimage. The decision to develop a
model for introducing the disciplines to my congregation
was also inspired by my experiences at the Institute. I
am indebted to the Institute for the skills I developed
which made this project easier, and to the encouragement
I received from my spiritual director who is on the
Shalem staff.
It seemed important to determine the present spiritual status of the members of the Capital Memorial Church in order to judge the need for the disciplines. An inventory for this purpose was prepared and administered, and the results were carefully studied. This inventory along with an assessment of its findings are included as chapter 8.

The disciplines selected for introduction to the Capital Memorial congregation are presented in chapter 9 followed by a detailed examination of the retreat where the disciplines were first presented. The final chapters evaluate the results and provide conclusions for the future use of the model at the Capital Memorial Church and in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as a whole.

Doctrine as it relates to spiritual formation was not included in the model or in the project study since it was assumed that Adventists have a strong doctrinal foundation already. Most members have no doubt that they have found a church which is dedicated to truth. Before baptism, they study the 27 Fundamental Beliefs of the church and are carefully examined by the pastor, often in front of the entire congregation. My own experience, however, is that the importance of spirituality is overlooked. How doctrinal truth and spirituality relate could appropriately be included in one of the follow-up
sessions for those who are participating in a program which introduces the spiritual disciplines.

The project report is divided into two parts. Chapters 2 through 7 form Part I and provide a foundation for the introduction of the model which is developed and evaluated in Part II. Part I is theoretical in nature: in fact, it forms lecture material which was used in introducing the disciplines, therefore, it is an integral part of the project. Part II is comprised of chapters 8 through 13 and includes a description of the disciplines chosen to be introduced to my congregation, an account of the retreat which was organized to present the disciplines, follow-up to the retreat, and an evaluation of the entire process.
PART I

PREPARATION MATERIALS FOR INTRODUCING

THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES
CHAPTER II

REFLECTIONS ON A SPIRITUAL JOURNEY

Building a relationship with God has never meant so much to me as in the last few years. Although I have long maintained a devotional regimen, it was more a matter of habit and duty than a practice I enjoyed because of my love for God. I grew up as a highly motivated individual with a keen sense of duty and an overpowering fear of God. God deserved and demanded at least an hour of my time every day whether I wanted to give it or not. I gave it, and when circumstances prevented the fulfillment of that obligation, I suffered extreme guilt. Skepticism and even cynicism about God were beginning to grow, yet I dared not slight Him. My religion was given to me by my parents and teachers. Much of it was cultural; I wore it uneasily but feared changing even an iota.

My parents became Seventh-day Adventists about the time I was ready to enter the first grade. The Second World War was just ending, and people were still traumatized by all that had happened. Tensions never
really eased much because the cold war erupted almost immediately. I can remember attending the evangelistic meetings where my parents made their decision for baptism. Every evening, the theater lights would be lowered except for a spotlight which followed the white-clad evangelist to the podium. In the background was a deep, loud drumming, simulating a clock moving towards the midnight hour of earth's history. Even as a child, I was moved. The sound of that drum still beats in my ear reminding me of the horrible apprehension I had about the future. Our family believed the Lord was coming immediately; that is what made us Seventh-day Adventists. My parents plunged into Adventism without ever looking back: Dad became a colporteur, and we moved to be near the church school and academy, Choplets and Yum took the place of pork chops and ham on our table. Excepting for the first and fifth grades in public school, my education was in church-operated schools; I am a product of the Adventist system.

Before my twelfth birthday, I was baptized and accepted into the church-centered society which had become so important to our family. In time, I was driven by the Adventist psyche. I never questioned going to an Adventist college, even though money was scarce in our home. I knew also that I would work for the church. I
can remember the reinforcement I received for that goal when my father expressed his approval of me after I told someone that I would be a medical missionary when I got big.

Who God was, for me, had everything to do with what I heard in church and school. The image I had in my mind was mostly that of a stern Judge who, in 1844, had begun to investigate the records of everyone who had ever lived on planet earth. He was sorting out the saints from the sinners, preparing to come with the rewards. In order to have one's name in the Book of Life, it was necessary to keep very carefully the commandments, especially the fourth. God was almost ready to look over the records of the living, I was told, and if He should reach my name at a time when I was sinning, even a very small sin, I would be lost forever. Angels were always around watching children to see what they were doing and taking reports back to God. I saw those angels as tattletales, at least, they surely were not on my side.

This God, introduced to me in hundreds of Bible classes and sermons, was no one I liked; rather, He was someone I feared. Trying to please Him so that I would be saved became the passion of my life. I had no relationship with Him. Yet, I desired His favor because I wanted to go to heaven. As I think about it now, I
probably perceived heaven as not much fun either; in fact, I secretly hoped He would delay His coming long enough for me to grow up and have a little enjoyment in life.

During my junior year in college, through the ministry of Elder E. L. Minchin, my understanding of God began to change. I have no count of how many weeks of prayer I attended before his, probably, two or three each year. Most week-of-prayer speakers said about the same thing I had heard for years, and I remained unmoved. Somehow this week was different. Minchin was a good preacher, but I presume the Holy Spirit was also working among the student body, for many lives were touched. Traditionally, the last Friday night of a week of prayer was a long and tiring testimony service—a time for the pious to bare their souls. Most of us students were not religious voyeurs and resented this intrusion; but this Friday night service was unlike anything we had ever seen before. Powerful things were actually happening to those who had never before professed piety, most of us were moved. My own heart was warmed by Jesus as He spoke to me personally as a Savior.

Characterizing the experience now, I expect it was mostly emotional, at least I know it did not change much of my thinking about God. Still, it seemed, a bit of
fresh air blew across my life creating an opening for the Holy Spirit to make some impression on me. The emotion of the moment led me to call the student senate together for a prayer meeting—I was president of the student body that year. I confessed that my leadership had not been very spiritual and that my course was leading me to a confrontation with the school administration. Some laughed, but I was serious. My concern resulted in a cooperative approach to some of the issues threatening to divide the campus. More personally, I was convicted that I should train for the ministry rather than hospital administration. I went to Dr. Thiele, chair of the religion department, and told him I had decided to change my major from business to theology. Thiele, whose excitement was usually over the mysterious numbers of the Hebrew kings, was genuinely pleased; I felt affirmed and began to anticipate what my decision would mean for the future.

My senior year came, and the experience during Minchin's ministry had faded; neither did I follow through with my plan to train for the ministry. During the next week of prayer, I confessed to my roommate that I really did not know Jesus as my personal Savior. He offered to help me, but nothing ever came of it; my soul became dry again.
After graduating, I went to Loma Linda as a business intern, and became totally disillusioned about the world of business. It was boring and too much in the background of where the action in the church really was. I became director of the HiTeen Club at the University Church, while in Loma Linda, and this close work with the church pastors gave me a feel of what ministry is all about. At the end of my internship, I had time to make a decision about my future. Once again, I turned to the ministry: ministers were the ones who ran the church, and that to me, looked adventurous and fulfilling.

After two years at the Seminary and armed with a degree, I was ready to take on the world. I knew quite a bit about theology and thought I had answers for every problem, but I still had no saving relationship with Jesus Christ. That was not a graduation requirement. My early pastoral sermons were about the need to get ready for the Second Coming, about what one should wear and eat, about the importance of faithfulness in tithing, about principles for raising children—though as yet I had none, and how to keep the Sabbath. The sermons were mainly proof texts and Ellen White quotes strung together with a few words of my own. Evangelistic sermons were meant to prove that Adventists are right and that they are the remnant.
Of course, I prayed. My prayers, however, were mainly asking favors from God or pleading for His forgiveness. I read my Bible, but usually followed some Bible-year plan—I wanted to be able, someday, to tell audiences (as did H. M. S. Richards) how many times I had read the Bible through.

Still, I did not know Jesus. I was a minister for my own sake. My goal was to be somebody. I became a workaholic to make it happen. I gave Bible studies, visited members, made out reports, and dreamed up programs. I loved programs and kept my members coming out until they were exhausted.

Twelve years into my ministry, I accepted a call to pastor a church in a university town. Here, the members were discussing issues I knew little about, and questions were being asked which I had ignored before. The righteousness-by-faith debate was an issue into which I quickly was immersed. I had to admit that my self-centered quest for holiness had not worked very well, and it certainly had not produced any personal peace. I began to have a very uneasy feeling about really crucial issues: What is Present Truth? How is success measured? Where should my loyalty be centered? And through all of this, I struggled alone because I did not know God well enough to have confidence in Him. So, here I was,
nearing my fortieth birthday, facing the trauma of mid-life crisis, and wallowing in the despair that began to envelop my soul. Since I had not yet broken with the past, I still jumped erratically from program to program searching for the secret ingredient to success. No success came; and worse than that, I felt no embrace from God.

Acceptance of the biblical doctrine of righteousness by faith was not easy for me considering my cultural background. I found it far easier to believe that God was waiting for a generation of Adventists to achieve character perfection before He would return than to accept the fact that Christ's righteousness alone and not my own would save me. After many hours of study from Scripture and the writings of Ellen White, I had to admit that probably I had misunderstood. Even when I accepted a call to my next pastorate in Washington, D.C., I had no personal assurance of salvation in Christ. During my first year in my new pastorate, the church leaders and I decided we should use small-group strategy to minister to the diverse and scattered congregation.

I went to the West Coast to the Garden Grove Adventist church to be trained, and there my life was changed. At least five of the presenters at the seminar began by describing their own personal spiritual journey
and by noting the assurance they had of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. One retired couple, whom I had known in Loma Linda, were seminar participants, too. They obviously were different from the people I had known fifteen years earlier. Upon inquiry, I discovered that their experience had paralleled my own and that they had found assurance of salvation in the righteousness of Christ.

As I reflected in the church library on what I was hearing, Jesus spoke to me. "I died for you, Steve," He said. "My righteousness is what you need, all of your own will always be stained by sin. You, too, can have the assurance of your friends if you will just trust me." I would like to have remained suspended in that moment for the rest of my life. In a way, I have. The euphoria is not always there, but everyday since, my life has been affected by what happened then. The heavy burden of guilt and despair I carried fell off. With the excitement of a child, I began examining my belief system and measuring it with the gospel. Some things had to be abandoned, others needed to be modified. All this did not clear for me at once; it was a long process to overcome the habit patterns of a lifetime, but the baggage I had been carrying became noticeably lighter.
I discovered I might be completely right about doctrine and still be unsaved. Unless Jesus Christ was my righteousness, I had no chance, and I was guilty of misrepresenting God to my congregation as well. There could be no passion unless I knew Jesus. "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved" (Act 4:12). Whatever passion I had before that time was not for Christ. It may have been passion for the church, for what I saw as truth, or, probably, my desire to be somebody. I used programs, exciting programs, as my strategy. If the programs were successful (usually meaning baptisms), I was elated, and if they were not, I was depressed.

One of the most amazing representations of the pastor I have found comes from Ben Campbell Johnson’s book, Pastoral Spirituality. I was shocked when I read that the minister is a "Christ-bearer," and that "a Christ-bearer’s life becomes an incarnation of Christ, a bearer of the presence of God." I shudder to think what kind of bearer I was in those days before I knew

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1The New International Version is used in this paper unless otherwise indicated.

Jesus. Johnson says that who we are is far more important than what we do. It is far better to be known as a godly pastor or a praying pastor than as one who is successful at tasks. What difference does it make if I am good at managing or singing or organizing a worship service if I do not represent God as I should?

When the right foundations were in place, I began to sense a desire to be close to God. Assurance of salvation brought great joy, but I wanted to know Jesus better—really know Him. I wanted to be close enough to touch Him and sense His presence throughout the day. The legacy I had from the past did not make it easy to develop a relationship with Him. The cold Judge I had known as God kept His distance from humans, and that is how I reconciled the usual silence I got from God when I prayed. Desperation had sent me to my knees, but always there had been silence. Assuming that God was not about to interfere, especially on my account, I had learned to survive on my own. Now I did not want to be alone, but I was still a little too suspicious of God to let down my guard.

In time, all of the barriers to God that had been haunting me dissolved. Help came first from authors whose books I had not read before. I was introduced to the Quaker, Thomas Kelly, and the Trappist monk, Thomas
Merton. Kelly’s book, *A Testament of Devotion*, was the first one written about spirituality that I owned personally. In it, I underlined this paragraph:

> How, then, shall we lay hold of that Life and Power, and live the life of prayer without ceasing? By quiet, persistent practice in turning of all our being, day and night, in prayer and inward worship and surrender, toward Him who calls in the deeps of our souls. Mental habits of inward orientation must be established. An inner, secret turning to God can be made fairly steady, after weeks and months and years of practice and lapses and failures and returns.¹

Many others followedKelly and Merton, like Henri Nouwen, who is one of my favorites now, Merton Kelsey, Richard Foster, Maxie Dunnam, and Eugene Peterson—who is the pastor I take as a model.² These authors nudged loose the anger and suspicion I still harbored toward God. I sensed a freedom to allow a relationship between God and me to develop, still just tentative, but the bud was beginning to open. Most of all, these authors helped

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me to see that in order to satisfy the craving I was experiencing, I needed to live a life of discipline—a relationship now characterized best by love. This was confirmed to me by the counsel of Ellen White.

Christians should be careful that they keep the heart with all diligence. They should cultivate a love for meditation, and cherish a spirit of devotion. Many seem to begrudge moments spent in meditation, and the searching of the Scriptures, and prayer, as though the time thus occupied was lost. I wish you could all view these things in the light God would have you; for you would then make the kingdom of heaven of the first importance. To keep your heart in heaven, will give vigor to all your graces, and put life into all your duties. To discipline the mind to dwell upon heavenly things, will put life and earnestness into all our endeavors.¹

Not far from the Capital Memorial Church in Washington, D.C., where I pastor is the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation. I had received announcements of the Institute’s programs on a regular basis but had never mustered the courage to attend. The desire to have a better understanding of spiritual formation finally gave me the courage to take the risk, and I registered for a "Spiritual Retreat for Spiritual Leaders." It was a seventy-two-hour retreat which became one of those life-changing experiences that serve as beacons for all that comes after.

About thirty clergy and laity met together for guided prayer, meditation, and silence. Half of the time was spent in absolute silence; we did not even speak to one another at meal times. I entered the silent period with apprehension but soon reached out for companionship with God and found great comfort. I came very close to God during those days. Knowing very little about meditation or the other spiritual disciplines, I went away with many new openings to intimacy with God.

On the last evening of the retreat, I wrote: "The evening has been powerful but simple; we were given time to consider the implications of what has happened here. I went outside and sat on the cold ground with a tree at my back and looked through the barren limbs up to the heavens and was overjoyed with a sense of the presence of God." God had been waiting for me, of course, but I had only now allowed myself to be open to Him.

During the retreat, participants had been introduced to the ancient discipline of spiritual direction, something I knew little about. Meeting with one of the retreat directors, I received the names of three individuals, one of whom might serve as my own spiritual friend. Expecting my courage to evaporate quickly, I contacted the one who seemed right to me. We met for three preliminary sessions before setting up a
permanent, monthly appointment. My director is a Christian clergywoman many years my senior, who, in her retirement years, works closely with Shalem. When we meet, I share with her the story of my journey during the month just passed. She listens, affirms, offers suggestions, provides insights, and encourages me to keep focusing on the relationship I so much desire. She keeps me accountable and provides a safe place for me to talk freely about my spiritual needs.

Many spiritual disciplines were introduced at the retreat. I had already been keeping a journal for several years, I was encouraged to focus more on my spiritual journey, even writing out prayers to God. The journal has become very important to my spiritual development. It is a very private record of my journey and, as I look back at my entries, serves as a reminder of the way the Lord has led. Journaling is sometimes spiritual therapy for me; it often consumes a major share of my devotional time. God sees all my feelings in that journal, including anger, depression, and great joy. I often write out a text or an insight from a spiritual author, and thus it is permanently recorded for future use.

Christian meditation has also become important for my spiritual formation. Suspicion of meditation because
of its association with eastern religions and the religions of the new age had prevented me from experiencing its Christian richness. I learned of its roots in Christianity and was encouraged by the many references in the writings of Ellen White about the place of meditation as a spiritual discipline. I also noted about Jesus that "the early morning often found Him in some secluded place, meditating, searching the Scriptures, or in prayer."¹ Now meditation is an integral part of my devotional time. Usually I spend several minutes of quiet meditation focusing on God's presence and listening for Him to speak. Often I meditate on a scripture passage savoring it as I would a morsel of tasty food, making sure I understand and enjoy every facet of the text. Many times I imagine myself as one of the characters in a Bible story sensing either healing or forgiveness from Jesus.

I have learned how to read the Bible devotionally as well as to discover truth or to prove a point of doctrine. The Psalms had never held much interest for me; now I eagerly anticipate seeing the psalmist's pilgrimage unfold. His gyrating feelings often mimic my own, and I am encouraged to hold on during the days of

darkness and praise Him when joy is intense. I am also attracted to the Gospel of John and find myself reading it over and over, focusing especially on promises such as "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). I have also placed myself often in Peter's place as Jesus walked with him by the Sea of Tiberias and hear Him say to me, "Do you love me? Feed my sheep. Do you love me? Follow me!" (John 21:17-19). It is true, I am no longer able to say I am reading the Bible through every year, but the Bible is coming alive and increasing my faith.

Prayer is another spiritual discipline which is crucial to my spiritual formation. I used to follow a ritual in which I prayed for myself and the needs of others dear to me. It was repetitious and boring. Now prayer has become the opening of my heart to my friend Jesus. As I begin, I acknowledge His presence and sometimes have been startled at how present He really is. We talk together about feelings and about the things that are happening in my life. I tell Him often what I think about Him, even when I do not like something which I have attributed to Him. Even being upset with Him does not break our relationship, although there have been times
when that relationship has been strained. I always include intercessory prayer as part of my devotional time, going through my prayer request book with God. Learning to struggle with God over certain individuals has not come easily—neither has expecting answers. My confidence grows every time I am able to write beside a name the answer which has come from God.

Participation in a long-term spiritual formation group at Shalem introduced me to many other relationship-building practices and offered support for my spiritual journey. Each week we met for two hours for instruction, guided meditation and prayer, and small-group interaction. My group included a contractor, a secretary, and a computer analyst. It is amazing how close we became to each other as we shared our journey each week.

I have decided that I must take being a Christ-bearer seriously. The people I meet in my ministry need Christ much more than anything else I am prepared to give them. Ben Campbell Johnson says: "To embrace your role as a Christ-bearer is perhaps the most difficult and the most urgent task of one called by God. A Christ-bearer's life becomes an incarnation of Christ, a bearer of the presence of God."¹ Taking that seriously means that my

¹Johnson, *Pastoral Spirituality*, 78.
priorities in ministry have to be completely reordered. Spiritual formation, or as Maxie Dunnam says, "Interiorizing the Incarnation,"¹ must be the first order of business.

The spiritual disciplines, spiritual direction, retreats, and days of solitude are the means by which one can cultivate intimacy with God. They can provide a means for being more open to God, helping to clear the mind and allowing it to be more focused. As one author says: "We use these things to clean our windows."² My experience is that they have transformed my pilgrimage. It all takes time, of course, and how does one fit such a devotional life into an already overloaded schedule? I am trying to find the answer to that question, and so far I have met with some frustration. I have always wanted to keep very busy doing the Lord's work; I do not want to give the impression that the pastor has nothing to do. However, something Eugene Peterson says has called a halt to frantic busyness for me. "The adjective busy set as a modifier to pastor should sound to our ears like adulterous to characterize a wife or embezzling to describe a banker. It is an outrageous scandal, a

¹Dunnam, Alive in Christ, 43.

blasphemous affront."¹ He adds that pastors' busyness is because they are vain; they want others to notice and acknowledge their significance, or they are lazy and allow others to decide what they will do. A pastor's first responsibility is to have a life of intimacy with God. That does not mean they have nothing to do but pray. In fact, people will want to engage them more often, but for different reasons. Instead of expecting pastors to have the bulletin ready and the grass mowed, people will come to them to request prayer.

That is the kind of minister I want to be. I am finding it a struggle to change habits and reestablish priorities, but I cannot return to those task-oriented days; there is no turning back for me now. My desire is to help my congregation discover the joy of intimacy with Jesus. I want them to be as excited as I am when they discover that God is real and that He is really near each of us. Ellen White makes it sound very enticing.

Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ; we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us

¹Peterson, The Contemplative Pastor, 27.
personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch.¹

My own experience suggests that the development of intimacy with Jesus needs to have more emphasis in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I believe it is only in the security of such a growing relationship that the Christian can have true peace, assurance of salvation, and hope in the soon return of the Lord. The spiritual disciplines provide the only way that this relationship can be fostered. It seems to me that the church as a whole should give first priority to these matters, at least I will do so in my own ministry.

My intention is that the model I am proposing for introducing the disciplines, or some very similar approach, will be a regular feature of my ministry. I know for sure that my ministry goals have changed as a result of the change in my spiritual pilgrimage. That will definitely be reflected in the way I do ministry. The spiritual growth of the members of my congregation will be far more important to me than numerical growth or programs of whatever kind. This project has grown out of my own personal experience. I am convicted that it has

implications that go far beyond me or my own congregation.
CHAPTER III

THE SHALEM INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Purpose and Organization of the Institute

The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation was organized to help people like me discover joy in a relationship with God. I made contact with the Institute at a critical time in my own spiritual development and was greatly rewarded. My doctoral project was inspired by all that I experienced at Shalem, and the skills I developed as a result of the modeling done by the Institute’s leaders prepared me for leading my own congregation into similar experiences. This chapter is being included in the project report because of the important influence of the Institute in my life story and on the project development.

The story of the Institute is closely tied to the spiritual journey of its executive director, Tilden Edwards, an Episcopal priest whose ministry began in Washington, D.C., as an assistant at The Church of St. Stephen and the Incarnation. St. Stephen’s was an inner-city parish which became a center for social-justice
issues during Edwards’ ministry with Bill Wendt in the 1960s.\textsuperscript{1} By the early 1970s, after years of relying on his background in the behavioral sciences, Edwards sensed the need to be more present with God. Something was missing from both his life and his ministry, an "intimate presence that I had not sensed very often, but that now seemed to beckon me."\textsuperscript{2}

An important experience helped to direct his search. The principle feature of a meeting he attended in the summer of 1972 was a presentation on various forms of meditation, both Christian and Eastern. After the Conference, he was led to seek out similar experiences and found himself beginning a journey which was somehow beyond his control.\textsuperscript{3} The following summer he arranged for a sabbatical hoping to increase his awareness of God by continuing the exploration which had begun for him through meditation. Flying to San Francisco with several books under his arm but with no definite plan in mind


\textsuperscript{2}Ibid., 93.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., 95, 96.
seems rather foolhardy, but he was rewarded in an unusual way.¹

He discovered that a Tibetan high lama was about to begin a two-month program for people in the helping professions. A provision was open for some to spend two weeks with the program whose schedule did not permit the full two months. Edwards entered the program expecting to spend only two weeks, but he soon found himself willingly committed to two months. Maintaining his own Christian foundation was encouraged by the lama, and Edwards did this by ending each twelve-hour day of meditation, lecture, and dialogue with the reading of the gospels which took on a meaning he had not known before. His normal style of studying Scripture for information and analysis was unintentionally exchanged for an attentiveness to the still small voice of God.²

Following the two months of meditation, Edwards spent a week of transition in a Christian retreat setting, reading works of some of the great Christian contemplatives. He writes: "I returned from that summer feeling like someone returning from another planet."³

²Ibid., 14-28.
³Ibid., 32.
Wishing to share what he had experienced, he found several clergy friends who were willing to work with him in exploring spiritual development. This experience with his friends ultimately led to the organization of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in 1975.¹

The Articles of Incorporation of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation spell out its purpose.

A. To enrich the resources of congregations, religious systems and individuals for their spiritual development.

B. To be concerned with the spiritual development of the whole person and the communities to which he or she relates.

C. To explore contemplative Christian spirituality in order to reclaim the teachings and practices of our tradition.

D. To be open to the action of the Holy Spirit moving to form a contemplative spirituality which engages us in dialogue with other traditions and disciplines.

E. To be concerned both with the inward journey of faith and its implications for the outward struggle toward a just and loving society.

F. To initiate and/or participate in programs of mission which may be identified in pursuing any of the foregoing purposes.²

Shalem began its ministry on Mount St. Alban in Washington, D.C., on the grounds of the National

¹Ibid., 32-35.

²Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Articles of Incorporation of Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Inc. (Washington, DC, n.d.), 1, 2.
Episcopal Cathedral of Washington. When their space was required for the Cathedral School, Shalem moved two blocks away to space provided in the Cleveland Park Congregational Church at 34th and Lowell Streets, NW, where it continues today. Tilden Edwards, Ph.D., is Executive Director; Gerald May, M.D., a psychiatrist, is Director for Research & Program Development; and Rose Mary Dougherty, S.S.N.D., a Roman Catholic nun, is Director for Spiritual Guidance.

The name Shalem "is a Hebrew word related to shalom, the familiar greeting of peace. Shalem speaks of wholeness: to be complete, full, sound. Scripture tells us to worship God with a 'lev shalem,' a whole heart."¹ In the brochure announcing its spiritual formation programs for 1990-1991, the Institute says its "essential ministry is to call forth a deeper spiritual life in both person and community. We draw especially upon the rich resources of contemplative traditions and disciplines as they come alive for the active people in today's world. We are particularly concerned about integrating contemplative insight with compassion, discernment and action--responsive to God's call for a world of

shalom."¹ The brochure also states its commitment to the Christian tradition while welcoming participation from those of other backgrounds. "Shalem is committed to the Christian path, seeking increasingly profound realization of God's Truth and Love through Jesus Christ. We have been enriched by the grace present in other traditions, however, and welcome with respect anyone, regardless of tradition, who would seek to learn from the Christian contemplative way."²

Shalem's Programs

The Institute offers a full range of programs, as described in its program brochure, to interest both clergy and laity who are interested either in enhancing their own spiritual journey or becoming professionally trained to assist others. Two professional programs may be taken for graduate academic credit through the Washington Theological Union. One of these is designed to train leaders of spiritual formation groups and retreats and is a one-year program, the other trains spiritual directors and involves a two-year commitment. Non-academic offerings include groups, retreats, workshops, and quiet days and fasts. In addition, there

¹Ibid.
²Ibid.
are two offerings in covenant with the Washington Cathedral, a healing service and eucharist each Thursday and a week celebrating the life and work of John of the Cross.

Groups

During 1990-91, three long-term and one short-term spiritual formation groups are offered. All four are designed to explore contemplative spiritual formation including "weekly disciplines of guided meditation, silence, shared reflection, physical relaxation, journal keeping and prayer." The long-term groups meet two hours once per week for five months. The short-term groups meet four times for two hours each time.

Retreats and Residential Workshop

Four offerings, are available in the retreats and workshop category: a four-day Willingness Prayer Retreat, an Annual Spring Retreat which begins on a Friday and continues through Sunday, the three-day Spiritual Life of Spiritual Leaders Retreat/Conference, and the three-day workshop for Group Spiritual Direction.

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1Ibid.
Workshops

Several workshops are offered throughout the year as days of reflection related to the specific topic. All but one is scheduled for approximately six hours, the other is for four hours. A workshop on Contemplative Spiritual Formation is an introduction to long-term groups. On Being Present to God develops the relationship between psychology and spirituality. The four-hour workshop is titled Social Consciousness and is for spiritual-guidance fellowship. Together on the Way explores one's yearning for spiritual community. The Crucible of Compassion is a workshop for caregivers. For those who wish to explore the area of direction and group leadership, there is On Being a Spiritual Guide. The Heart of Romantic Love is another workshop designed to show the relationship between psychology and spirituality. Those who are desirous of discovering how to make God-centered choices in daily life may register for Praying Through Decisions.

Quiet Days and Fasts

The quiet days and fasts are usually related to the church calendar and include two quiet days and a fast day in Advent, Ash Wednesday as a quiet day, a quiet day and fast day in Holy Week, a special quiet day on the arts and spirituality, and a final quiet day in May.
Personal Impressions of Shalem

My first acquaintance with Shalem was only a very casual glance at program brochures which regularly crossed my desk. As my own craving for a more vivid sense of God's presence grew, I began to look over the materials more carefully, wishing to explore what Shalem offered but not quite sure where it might lead. It was one thing to attend an occasional workshop or seminar by non-Adventist church-growth experts, but to place trust in one who does not share the same faith background with something so personal as spiritual formation seemed a little risky. During one of the most serious personal crises I can remember, I finally was led to register for The Spiritual Life of Spiritual Leaders Retreat. That introduction was rewarding and disarming. Since that first program, I have become a regular participant at Shalem and even have a spiritual director whom I see monthly from the Shalem staff. While I have not sampled all that Shalem has to offer, I have enough experience to assure me that I am being blessed through its ministry.

Not all that I saw and experienced harmonized with my own faith and theology. For instance, in an attempt to not offend those who may not have shared a Christian orientation, little reference is made to Jesus. Often the direction was given to get in touch with the ground
of our being, or whoever it was that we worshiped. I was able to translate that into my own faith in God and Jesus Christ, but I would have preferred a more evangelical approach. There were also definite Eastern overtones, and, in fact, the Shalem staff does not hide its indebtedness to Eastern teachers and techniques. I did not feel comfortable with these references and believe the program would have been strong enough without them. Nor did the retreat appeal to Scripture as a source of truth and direction. I was able to evaluate what I experienced with my own theological and faith tradition and use that which proved to harmonize. Not every church member would be able to do that.

The Spiritual Life of Spiritual Leaders Retreat/Conference

Very little detail was provided in the brochure announcement of The Spiritual Life of Spiritual Leaders Retreat, but the idea was inviting, especially considering my great spiritual need at the time. I was a spiritual leader who was feeling very much in need of a retreat time to have my own wounds healed. As I traveled to the Catholic retreat center being used for this occasion, I went with a heavy heart but with a willingness to let God bring healing.
Two books written by Shalem’s directors who were also leaders of the retreat had been recommended reading for those who were newcomers to Shalem. Care of Mind/Care of Spirit\(^1\) by the psychiatrist, Jerry May, and Spiritual Friend\(^2\) by Tilden Edwards introduced me to these men with whom I would spend most of the next seventy-two hours. The third leader was Sister Rose Mary Dougherty who became the one to whom I felt most drawn.

A letter from Tilden Edwards a month before the retreat briefly outlined what we were to expect.

On Tuesday, after introductions at 2:30 P.M., we will look at selected issues of spiritual leadership. Tuesday evening and Wednesday morning we will focus on the ministry of spiritual guidance for others. . . . On Wednesday afternoon we will begin a guided silent retreat lasting through Eucharist on Friday morning. This period will include a number of sessions aimed at assisting our deeper open presence through particular forms of meditation and prayer. Following the Eucharist we will look at ongoing resources and at the implications of our time together for our lives and ministries.\(^3\)

Thirty of us gathered in the large comfortable room as we began the retreat at about 2:30 on a Tuesday

\(^1\)Gerald May, Care of Mind/Care of Spirit: Psychiatric Dimensions of Spiritual Guidance (New York: Harper & Row, 1982).


afternoon in January. About half the group were women, all but four or five were clergy, some were already friends, many had already participated in previous Shalem programs, but some, like me, were novices and still feeling tentative. A large lighted candle stood on a small table in the center of the circle where we sat. Its purpose was to symbolize God’s presence, and it is part of almost every Shalem program. After introductions, a format was followed which became very familiar as the three days progressed. To release tension, body exercise almost always came first; a prayer, usually read, followed; and then came a long period of silence—for personal meditation—ending with a chant. The chant I enjoyed most was a simple Latin phrase set to a beautiful haunting melody from Taize, the ecumenical religious community in France.

Tuesday afternoon we also separated into groups of two for spiritual direction after receiving careful instruction. We were to act as if God Himself were our director, being open and speaking as we were moved, releasing all pre-conceptions of God’s representative in order to feel totally free. I found it very difficult to follow these directions and was comforted when I was informed by one of the other retreat members that she had been a director herself for ten years and that it often
takes years to develop the presence which allows the openness which was requested. Nevertheless, I was benefitted by the experience and determined to find a permanent spiritual director for myself after the retreat.

One of the most meaningful features of the retreat, but which I dreaded most, was a long period of silence broken only by short periods when the group came together for directed prayer. I spent much of my time reading and meditating on Scripture, reflecting on my spiritual journey, and writing in my journal. It became a particularly graced time for me as I attempted to give my burdens over to the Lord and listen to Him speak to my heart. There had been times, as the retreat began, when grief was very present, but especially during the silent time, relief came as I felt the presence of God. During the quiet time, I walked through the woods around Bon Secours, the retreat center, and was refreshed as I saw evidences of God even in the barrenness of winter.

A considerable amount of time during group sessions was reserved for meditation. One of these times that was especially helpful for me was when Scripture was used as the basis. Another time, when an icon was used, I elected not to participate. We were given complete freedom to be selective if the group activities
interfered with the goals we had set for ourselves. We had each taken a personal examen in one of the first sessions in which we had looked at our relationship to God and identified problem areas where prayer from the group would be appreciated. Sharing this with a partner provided a sharper focus and a sense of accountability.

My evaluation score for the leadership given by the Shalem staff was excellent. A variety of approaches, including a reflection of the personalities of the three leaders, was available. Each of the leaders evidenced skill and understanding as well as a sensitivity to the transcendent nature of what was taking place. They had a carefully planned schedule which was maintained, with an emphasis on those practices which would help give attention for a change to being rather than doing. As an unplanned-for benefit, I was able to observe a retreat model which for the most part would bless and nurture a group from my own church.

Four-Week Beginning Spiritual Formation Group

According to Shalem's brochure, "the short group is offered to provide the opportunity for a beginning experience of contemplative presence, including attention to such things as sitting posture, breathing, simple contemplative practices, and silence. There will be time for personal reflection through journal keeping and
optional sharing." The leader of the group I attended was a psychologist who was a part-time member of Shalem's staff.

As the short group meetings began, we were introduced to a Shalem ritual which begins all of their activities. It consists of a chant of the one word "Shalom." Participants, with hands together in an attitude of prayer, give a short bow to the burning candle in the center. I felt uncomfortable participating in this ritual and never joined in. No one seemed to notice, or at least no one asked why. Body prayer also was introduced at the first session, and although it seems to be very important to Shalem's program, I never could understand how it related to prayer. It was a tension-releasing exercise for me but never anything more, involving, as it did, the intentional relaxing of various parts of the body.

Small groups were formed where we could share how we felt as the various disciplines were introduced and practiced. We were taught various forms of prayer and meditation, given time to practice what we heard, and then told to explore the meaning of what happened with our small group. At the last session, we were asked to

share what we might need to support what had been begun by God during the time we had been together. I said that I needed to maintain the support I felt God was giving and that I needed to be more committed to Him as well. I also wrote in my journal that there had been too much focus on self and not enough on God and His character.

Long-Term Spiritual Formation Group

The long-term group involved activities similar to those experienced in the short-term group. The difference for me was with the support groups which were formed. Meeting in the same group of four over a period of five months gave me the opportunity to get well acquainted and to share on a meaningful level. Being able to express my own feelings about what was happening with people whom I had learned to trust helped to sort through a few of the barriers which had prevented my full appreciation of what we were experiencing. Body prayer was emphasized again, but just as before, I saw little relationship between exercise and prayer except that, as my body relaxed, I was better able to center my thoughts on God. Each night a new practice was introduced with the goal of placing us more fully in God's presence. The announcement about the group had stated its intent as "corporate space and means for attending God's subtle presence and developing confidence in that liberating
presence, with all of its fruits for our deepening communion and compassionate living."\(^1\) That is more mystical than I am comfortable with, but my own goals were met in that I was part of a community that provided a weekly opportunity for a guided devotional experience.

On Being a Spiritual Guide Workshop

The "Spiritual Guide Workshop" was a day-long event with about fifty individuals participating. Our objective was to gain an introduction to spiritual direction and group guidance. Most who attended had some interest in being a spiritual guide. Shalem’s desire was to give us a feel for what it is like to be a spiritual guide. Tilden Edwards and Jerry May, the directors, explained what spiritual direction is and what the process is like for both the director and the one seeking direction. The most helpful part of the day was to observe Edwards as a director and May receiving direction. Later, some volunteers from the group also acted as directors.

In summary, most of what I experienced at Shalem proved beneficial for my own spiritual pilgrimage: in fact, it filled a need my soul was craving. Opportunity was given for me to discover many new disciplines and

\(^1\)Ibid.
practice them under the guidance and encouragement of leaders who had years of previous experience and training. Contributions to this project included being able to observe how the disciplines could be presented in a very practical manner and how helpful the retreat process could be for introducing and encouraging the use of the disciplines. My project inspiration came through my contacts with Shalem.

I believe the Adventist church might wish to develop an institute similar to Shalem with the charge of encouraging spiritual development among both laity and clergy among Seventh-day Adventists. The major goals of an Adventist institute could be to build spirituality-consciousness and to show how the spiritual disciplines contribute to building intimacy with God. A specifically Adventist-oriented institute could use language and traditions which would be entirely acceptable to the Adventist-Christian culture, totally excluding any influence from Eastern religions with no reservations about references to the Christian God.
CHAPTER IV

SPIRITUAL FORMATION

For each individual God has a goal which, in Ellen White's words, is "higher than the highest human thought can reach"; she calls it godliness or godlikeness.¹ Godliness is the restoration within humans of the divine image which nearly has been obliterated by sin. Those who accept God's goal, allowing the restoration to take place, "live in accordance with the Spirit"; while those who refuse "live according to the sinful nature" (Rom 8:5, 6). Living in accordance with the Spirit is to be a spiritual person; it is a relationship with Jesus mediated by the Holy Spirit. Through the relationship, the character of Jesus is taken on as a component of the process referred to as spiritual formation. Maxie Dunnam's definition of spiritual formation is helpful.

Spiritual formation is that dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action, the living Christ into our own life to the end that our life

will conform to, and manifest the reality of Christ's presence in the world.\textsuperscript{1}

The process begins at conversion. After a protracted wooing by the Holy Spirit and a confrontation with a holy God, the individual admits an innate sinfulness and a helplessness to change. Repentance follows, and God gives forgiveness and removes guilt. The individual is then in a position of full acceptance, on the basis of Christ's atonement, as a child of God. The grace transaction includes heavenly justification, and also the implantation of a new desire to serve God as Lord. Jesus called this the new birth when He spoke to Nicodemus: "I tell you the truth, unless a man is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:3).

Following conversion, there is a new life in Christ where the Christian begins to reach towards that goal of godlikeness. It cannot be reached by concentrating on the goal; instead, all personal efforts must be directed towards knowing Christ. Paul had this in mind when he sent his testimony to the Philippians:

\begin{quote}
I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them all rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ--the righteousness
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1}Dunnam, \textit{Alive in Christ}, 26.
that comes from God and is by faith. (Phil 3:8, 9)

Often what begins as a decisive act on the part of the Christian soon fizzes out into half-hearted lip-service characterized by a quick prayer, a short reading of Scripture, and weekly attendance at a worship service. Growth becomes stunted, and a relationship with God is almost non-existent. Excepting when there is a crisis, few attempts are made to really enjoy the privilege of being in Christ, and God’s goal loses the high priority it had at conversion. The Christian is not entirely to blame, for often there has been a misunderstanding of how to build a relationship with Christ, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit has not been fully discerned. But scripture says that what happened at conversion must be continued: "just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (Col 2:6, 7).

An Action Plan Required

Jesus said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). This is the secret of the restoration process: "No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). Those who make remaining
the highest priority of their lives receive rich rewards. An intentional plan for knowing God and relating to Him as a friend provides the occasion for God's continual acts of grace to occur.

Jesus' own life is a spiritual model. His union with His heavenly Father was carefully cultivated. The Gospel record speaks over and over of His practice of getting away to a quiet place, often at night, to commune with His Father. He often claimed to be in the Father and the Father in Him, and then on the night of His betrayal, He prayed that He and His disciples might be one "just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 17:21). That such unity may take place is one of the great mysteries of redemption, it is the blessing lost by sin and is now God's magnificent goal for His children.

Following Jesus' example means making a conscious decision to live in union with Him and to act on that decision according to a regular rhythm. A commitment making Jesus Lord of life is a pivotal event which takes the form of a solemn covenant similar to those of record in Scripture between God and His people. On the strength of this covenant, an action plan is developed which involves one-to-one engagement with God, just as in Jesus' model. The Lord told Peter and the other disciples to "watch and pray so that you will not fall
into temptation" (Matt 26:41). Christians today must also watch and pray, plus use other relationship-building practices which will prevent a fall into temptation. These practices are termed spiritual disciplines.

The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself, as we "yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God," as Romans 6:13 puts it.¹

The disciplines such as prayer, scripture study, meditation, etc., are never ends themselves; instead, they place the individual in a position where grace may occur. The Christian grows ever more intimate with God resulting in more and more freedom to be what God intended in the beginning. The association with God over a long period of time gradually leads to replacement of all the old habits and desires which are so much a part of the human dilemma. A lifestyle of cooperation with God as this process takes place is what is meant by spirituality.

Relationships require commitment and nurturing actions in order for them to develop and be maintained; should either of these ingredients be missing, a meaningful relationship cannot be sustained. The old adage that absence makes the heart grow fonder for someone else is true, especially if actions are not taken during the absence to keep the bond alive and well. True friends and lovers correspond with each other, make use of the telephone, and send tokens of friendship and love when they are away. Never are these acts of duty; instead, they represent the deep feelings of the heart. Even when both parties are present, even living in the same house, communication must be cultivated and expressions of fondness have to be exchanged on a regular basis if the relationship is to survive.

Relationship actions are as varied as people. Communication in which each party of the relationship becomes vulnerable in the sharing of the deepest thoughts and feelings is uppermost. There are times when little is spoken but simply being quietly together demonstrates a feeling of comfortableness with the other. Active participation in events of different kinds produces mutual enjoyment and pleasure; such events may include worship as well as entertaining activities. For the
married couple, the sex act is the ultimate expression of love and devotion.

The plan of redemption was devised to restore the relationship between God and humanity lost by sin, for God created the human race for the pleasure of sharing the universe with intelligent beings like Himself. God is active in initiating and sustaining relationships, but His actions must be reciprocated or He is forced to turn away as would a spurned lover. The actions we use to respond to His overtures are called spiritual disciplines.

The necessity for such disciplines comes from the very nature of the self in the image of God. . . . Once the individual has through divine initiative become alive to God and his Kingdom, the extent of integration of his or her total being into that Kingdom order significantly depends upon the individual's initiative.1

Discipline as a label for relationship-building actions with God may seem by some to be a functional term unworthy of a friendship. Of course, it is possible that these disciplines may become ends in themselves so that a relationship does not result. Discipline, if viewed rightly, however, is not a negative term. "Discipline is not slavish rigidity but an ordering of life that enables you to control your circumstances rather than being

1Ibid., 68.
controlled by them."¹ In the context of a relationship with God, discipline refers to intentional action taken on a regular basis to remain in God as He has urged us to do.

Analogy between a human relationship and a relationship with God can never be entirely adequate since there can never be an equal partnership. As the Christian goes to God, there is always the recognition of God's perfect holiness as opposed to the Christian's utter sinfulness. However, there is also the assurance that God has provided a pardon making it possible to come boldly. It is a love relationship made even more profound because of the grace so freely given.

The absence of a face-to-face relationship often develops a barrier. Faith is the ingredient which lifts the Christian above that initial obstacle. Experiences where God is evident eventually create a bond of trust which may cry out like Moses, "Now show me your glory" (Exod 33:18). The veil that separates the visible from the invisible will seem very thin indeed.

Spiritual discipline places the Christian in a position of openness to God so that all of the noise and

confusion of the life is quieted and God’s voice can be heard.

Discipline in the spiritual life means a gradual process of coming home to where we belong and listening there to the voice which desires our attention. It is the voice of the "first love." St. John writes: "We are to love . . . because God loved us first" (1 John 4:19). It is this first love which offers us the intimate place where we can dwell in safety.1

The main disciplines of the spiritual life are prayer, Scripture study, and meditation, but there are many others. Richard Foster has written a book in which he identifies inward disciplines, outward disciplines, and corporate disciplines. As he concludes his book he provides the setting for the use of all he has presented: "The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life beckon us to the Himalayas of the Spirit. Now we stand at timber line awed by the snowy peaks before us. We step out in confidence with our Guide who has blazed the trail and conquered the highest summit."2 On this summit there is space for each Christian to enjoy the view in a way that best suits the personality.

A warning is ever appropriate that the disciplines lead only to God, placing the Christian in a position to


2Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 201.
enjoy His presence and receive the blessings of His love. They must never become laws in themselves in which there is a rigid practice that leads nowhere except barrenness and frustrating legalism.

The Disciplines are for the purpose of realizing a greater good. In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek. The liberation is the end; the Disciplines are merely the means. They are not the Answer; they only lead us to the Answer. We must clearly understand this limitation of the Disciplines if we are to avoid bondage. Not only must we understand, but we need to underscore it to ourselves again and again so severe is our temptation to center on the Disciplines. Let us forever center on Christ and view the Spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.¹

Monasticism originally arose out of devotion to God but degenerated into a system devoid of God because inordinate attention was placed on the process until it became more important than God. Works-centered attempts to attain righteousness are always a threat to the Christian. It is a deception of the devil as old as sin itself. The disciplines, however, should not be avoided because they can be misused; instead, motives should be constantly tested. The chief goal is always to keep one’s eyes focused on Jesus.

¹Ibid., 110, 111.
The Holy Spirit: The Active Agent

The Holy Spirit continues throughout the relationship to be God’s agent present with the Christian. Jesus told the disciples that it was important for Him to leave so that the Holy Spirit could come (John 16:7). Our understanding is that He was referring to the Spirit’s capacity to be with each of God’s children at the same time. Jesus had surrendered that quality of His nature when He took on the human form. The Spirit was the active agent at creation; He is now the active agent in the recreation of humans back into God’s image. Were it not for the Spirit, there would have been a vacuum, with God calling for individuals to remain in Him but without there actually being any divine representative as a participant. But the Spirit is present with every son and daughter of God. His work involves more than just being there, He is active as a comforter, counselor, guide, and protector.

The development of piety lies in an openness to the work of the Holy Spirit. The cultivation of God’s presence is renewed every day. The Spirit is like the wind, blowing everywhere, alternately still and gusty. The gentle breeze comforts; the gale cannot be contained. So humans, daring to call upon the Spirit, must be ready to accept whatever manifestations are given. It is important to recognize that this aspect of God is unswayed by the desires of human creatures. One is formed through a process of spiritual growth that includes communities, individuals, scripture
and other writings, and the action of God, who is both transcendent and immanent.¹

The evidence that the Spirit is present is the change which takes place in the Christian's life. These changes are called, in Scripture, the fruits of the Spirit and are in stark contrast to the acts of the sinful nature. Paul lists the fruits as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22, 23). He is unequivocal in his claim that these fruits develop as a result of life in the Spirit, which life is in direct conflict with the life lived in obedience to the sinful nature. If the fruit is in evidence, there is a surety that the Spirit is at work.

Formation is not complete in this lifetime, but is a dynamic process which continues even into eternity. The individual becomes more mature as intimacy becomes more profound. Such an intimate relationship is not easy to achieve because of the impact of the Christian's past. Trusting God enough to be entirely transparent with Him depends on experiences that prove Him trustworthy and which overpower experiences with parents and significant others from the time of birth to the present which may have been unsatisfactory.

¹Iris V. Cully, Education for Spiritual Growth (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 43.
Spiritual development also ties in to the successful completion of each of the developmental stages of growth, though it is not dependent on that success. God meets individuals where they are, and loves just as deeply whether there are psychological scars or there has been perfect development. However, the individual’s ability to respond may be made difficult because of a developmental inadequacy. Adults are more likely to respond spiritually inasmuch as they have normally progressed through the developmental stages to where they have become self-determinate and are able to integrate internal and external reality.¹

Openness to the dynamism of the self-transcending human spirit is a condition for the possibility of adult development. Adult development is a process of self-determination, a process of deliberate self-constitution. Then spiritual development is as well.²

Faith is a crucial factor in spiritual formation, just as it is in the conversion experience. James Fowler has shown that faith development passes through stages roughly parallel to the stages of growth developed by


²Ibid., 83.
Erickson and others. He defines faith as "the person's or group's way of responding to transcendent value and power as perceived and grasped through the forms of the cumulative tradition." His sixth and last stage called universalizing faith sees the individual being lost in God, "the self is no longer the prime reference point from which the knowing and valuing of faith are carried out."

Fowler believes only rare individuals reach the sixth stage of faith development, people like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mother Teresa, Dag Hammarskjold, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Abraham Heschel, and Thomas Merton. Of course, Fowler's theory is not accepted by all scholars. His observations are not God's nor does his determination of what constitutes the highest stage necessarily represent the biblical point of view. Thankfully, God reads the heart and knows those who have come closest to a full faith development. The writer of Hebrews speaks of a large host of biblical worthies who

1Ibid., 72.
4Idem, Stages of Faith, 201.
were filled with faith and then presents the challenge that everything that hinders should be thrown off and the eyes fixed on Jesus in order to be included among the faithful (Heb 11:1-12:3).

Many have misunderstood faith according to the Hebrews definition: "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see" (Heb 11:1). Such a definition leaves them with a rather abstract concept based on truth as it was defined by their particular faith community, sometimes also requiring a so-called leap in the dark. But faith is much more than that. Fowler places it in a higher perspective: "Faith is an orientation of the total person, giving purpose and goal to one's hopes and strivings, thoughts and actions."¹ Gary Chamberlain develops Fowler's perspective further when he says:

Faith emerges as an expression of knowing which animates the infant as thoroughly as the sage, providing the basis for our very interaction with all the various environments of our lives. And so this kind of knowing is primarily relational, passionate, and participatory.²

It is the relational dimension of faith which best satisfies spiritual formation, for it is out of

¹Ibid., 14.

experiences with God that the individual is led to return more and more often until there is a remaining with Him. These experiences form trust which builds a bond. In this bonded relationship, real character transformation occurs. Sadly, such bonding is influenced by experiences with others who stand in for God during the early years. However, God comes wooing as the Holy Spirit at every stage of life, inviting the individual to make a break with life in the flesh and put in its place a new faith orientation. Those who respond and repent, though weakened by a difficult past, are born again with a new orientation that includes faith as a gift. If the individual gives attention to the new relationship with the Lord, faith grows and the Holy Spirit's power is available to face adversity with confidence.

Spirituality Is a Relationship

It is important to underscore that spiritual formation is not the result of the application of a tried and tested technique. The spiritual disciplines themselves may "become a form, a very subtle and destructive form, of works righteousness. They become a means by which we either attempt to transform ourselves into the image of God or attempt to gain God’s favor."\(^1\)

\(^1\)M. Robert Mulholland, *Shaped by the Word* (Nashville, TN: The Upper Room, 1985), 92.
Spirituality grows out of a relationship with God where attention is given to being rather than doing.

The first and continuing question of spiritual formation is: Are we operating on a functional basis, somehow trying to get ourselves closer to God or to what we think God wants us to be; or are we operating on a relational basis, where, in responsiveness to God, we are allowing God to draw us into genuine spiritual formation?¹

Paul, the great apostle who wrote so much which has helped people to understand the spiritual formation process, summed up his own philosophy of life in a testimony which should shape the experience of every true Christian: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20).

Summary

The goal for every individual who professes Christianity is to have the image of God, lost by sin, restored. It is a process which begins with new birth and which my never be complete, for growth will surely continue even when sin has been destroyed. A Christian whose life is not taking on new-kingdom characteristics is not genuine. Spirituality is the term used to speak of the life which is centered on God rather than on

¹Ibid., 93.
worldly interests. An individual cannot become spiritual by doing good things. Spirituality is the product of carefully cultivated intimacy with God, based on an acknowledgment that Jesus is not only Savior but Lord.

Experience proves that, at least for most Christians, spirituality must be intentionally cultivated. Without commitment or a plan which includes actions designed to provide openness to God, the relationship begun at conversion in a decisive act of the will fizzes out and continues in name only. The model in this project was developed to introduce the use of spiritual actions as disciplines for maintaining and encouraging intimacy and openness to God.
CHAPTER V

AN HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF SPIRITUALITY
AND THE SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES

New Testament Spirituality

It is not difficult to determine the world view of the New Testament writers. Their world had been hopelessly doomed by sin, and death reigned because of the sin of one man (Rom 5:17); the entire creation groaned to be delivered from its bondage (Rom 6:22, 23). How to be delivered from this fate was the question posed by every philosophical system. The Judeo belief was that the God Yahweh would intervene to set up an eternal kingdom, yet the Jews’ relationship to Yahweh was on-again-off-again. At the time of the New Testament period, the relationship had become very formal and legalistic. Religious leaders taught that perfect obedience to the law would produce national favor with God and would lead to the establishment of Israel as the center of the world’s economy.

The New Testament opens with the visit of an angel to Joseph who is told that the woman to whom he is
engaged is pregnant by a miracle of the Holy Spirit. The child to be born is to be given the name Jesus, "because he will save his people from their sins" (Matt 1:21). Jewish leaders rejected this baby born to a humble family as the Messiah; He did not fit the image they had expected. Regardless of His acceptance by His own people, Jesus proceeded to carry out His mission—the building of a kingdom which He said was not of this world (John 18:36). There was a sense, however, in which the kingdom was not all future, for Jesus said: "The kingdom of God does not come visibly, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). The Apostle Paul developed what is now called inaugurated theology. He said, "For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and approved by men" (Rom 14:17, 18). This was to be a spiritual kingdom whose members would be characterized by spirituality.

Membership in the kingdom was offered to all on the basis of the atonement made at the cross (Rom 5:18, 19). Humans were unworthy on their own to merit a position in the kingdom, nor could the position be earned, for the requirement was holiness which had been lost when sin
entered (Rom 3:20-26). In a significant interview with the Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus outlined the plan that would open the kingdom to humanity. God’s love sent Jesus to make the atonement, providing a way for anyone to be saved. Belief in Jesus would permit God to give the supplicant a new birth into the kingdom. Nicodemus had difficulty conceiving this new-birth experience; Jesus explained that it was a mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, likening it to wind which can be heard but not seen (John 3:1-18).

Accepting membership in this spiritual kingdom, one was to experience the fullness of life (John 10:10), but not without personal sacrifice. A young ruler once came to Jesus and asked what he could do to inherit the kingdom. At first the Lord told him that he must keep the commandments, but when he claimed to have kept them all since he was very young, the Lord made an even greater demand which the ruler refused. "Sell everything you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me," said the Lord (Luke 18:18-22). This was an important requirement for those who would be disciples; it was a total renunciation of their self-centered life. Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24).
Spiritual life is the opposite of the self-centered life which needed to be abandoned. It was also called "a holy life" by the Apostle Paul (2 Tim 1:9). Once born into this new life, holiness would result from maintaining a relationship with Jesus. Jesus likened it to eating His flesh and drinking His blood (John 6:53-57) in an obvious reference to the devotional life. He also used the analogy of the relationship between a vine and its branches to describe how close His disciples needed to stay to Him. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). Paul identified this fruit as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control" (Gal 5:22, 23).

For the New Testament, spirituality is taking on the characteristics of the kingdom described as the fruits of the Spirit. This spirituality is formed by remaining in Jesus under the direct care of the Holy Spirit. God’s people were to become His temple in which God’s Spirit would live (1 Cor 3:16). One New Testament writer called attention to many who kept the faith and who now waited to be made perfect. He called these a "great cloud of witnesses" and urged his readers to run the race with as much perseverance as these witnesses by
fixing their "eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith" (Heb 11:39, 40; 12:1-3).

Prayer is the discipline most often encouraged. Jesus demonstrated its importance for spirituality when He said to His disciples: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation" (Matt 26:41). In his final instructions to the Christians at Thessalonica, Paul counseled among other things that they should "pray continually" (1 Thess 5:17). Jesus provided an example for His disciples, often going away from the crowds to lonely places in order to pray. Other disciplines were not discussed, but Paul showed his understanding of what was expected.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Rom 12:1, 2)

Disciplines Misused during the Dark Ages

It is well known from church history that the Emperor Constantine’s conversion to Christianity in the early years of the fourth century created very favorable conditions for the practice of the Christian faith. Persecution was a purifier before the fourth century, keeping worldliness and compromise to a minimum.
Thousands of martyrs were a witness of the cost of being a Christian during those awful days when the Roman Emperors demanded worship. Not long after the Edicts of Toleration were announced by Constantine, it was judged advantageous to become a Christian. Compromise and the general lowering of standards accompanied the sudden influx of new members. Honest, spiritually sensitive Christians deplored the new state of affairs.

In an attempt to separate themselves from the general worldliness which was developing, some serious Christians, usually from the peasant classes, left civilized areas and went into the desert where they could live more devoutly. Sometimes they lived in solitude, but often small groups joined together in a common bond with a rule that governed their spiritual life. It would be difficult to quarrel with the objectives of these early monastics, but their legacy created the suspicion that still haunts modern Christian spirituality.

It should go without saying that much of the motivation that gave rise to monasticism was praiseworthy, that many great Christians have served within the monastic orders, and many good things were accomplished by these great men. . . . It is equally true, however, that within those orders spiritual discipline came over the years to be identified with confused, pointless, and even destructive excesses. These excesses were supported upon attitudes of body hatred and the belief that forgiveness or merit can be gained by sufferings, whether self-inflicted or imposed by
a religious superior—all of which are now universally and rightly condemned.¹

During the centuries that followed monasticism’s humble beginnings, the system became institutionalized within the church, and its influence became pervasive. Benedict, known as the father of Western Monasticism, founded a number of monasteries and established a rule of order which attempted to restrain some of the more degrading practices from the East.² The Benedictine Rule "contained nothing of the more violent methods of penance and ‘discipline,’ such as self-flagellation, wearing the hair shirt, or inclusion (lengthy confinement of monks to very narrow cells, caves, or huts)."³ Later, other orders such as the Carthusians and Cistercians, legitimized the more reclusive lifestyle.⁴

Through the Medieval period, various reforms were instituted largely in an attempt to preserve the Benedictine Rule which centered spirituality on "the living of the perfect Christian life in a regular

¹Willard, 139.


³James M. Clark, Meister Eckhart: An Introduction to the Study of His Works with an Anthology of His Sermons (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1957), 93, 94.

⁴Cully, 56.
balanced cycle of meditative reading of the sacred scripture interspersed with work and the whole life regulated by the chanting of the Divine Office in choir."¹ A revival of interest in mysticism came in the fourteenth century, producing men such as Meister Eckhart of the Rhineland whose extant writings give a good idea of the philosophy which prevailed at the time.²

Typical of Eckhart is this paragraph from one of his earliest works of which we have a record, his *Talks of Instruction*.

Man should seize God in all things and train his mind to have God always present in his intelligence and in his striving and in his love. Pay attention how you mind your God. When you are in the church or in your cell: preserve this same attitude and take it with you among the crowd, into the unrest and into the uneveness.³

In the traditional style of the mystic, Eckhart did not outline the various steps of the process by which one could reach the ideal to which he called Christians. Did he believe a particular practice of prayer or meditation could lift one into the experience of ecstasy or could

¹Lane, 25.
²Ibid., 34.
habitual union of the soul with God be maintained by spiritual discipline? Eckhart had nothing to suggest. He made the goal seem possible and emphasized the rewards which would be experienced, but left those frustrated who may have wished for an easy how-to-do-it manual.¹

By the end of the Middle Ages, popular religion did not have much in common with the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles. Spirituality had deteriorated to include a heavy emphasis on the meritorious nature of works, taking joy away and leaving guilt and doubt in its place. Penance had become the central sacrament and "was experienced by the faithful as more oppressive than liberating, not least because the spiritual benefits offered by the church were so often bound up with money matters and political purposes."²

Reformers Return to Biblical Spirituality

Martin Luther's attempts to find peace for his guilty soul through the works of penance led only to greater distress. His discovery of Paul's assertion that justification is by grace through faith finally calmed his soul and sent him on a journey of confrontation with

¹Willard, 143.

the church. From the beginning, his intention was not to divide but only to reform. His 95 Theses attack on the abuses of the indulgences which were offered by Tetzel for contributions to the building of St. Peters in Rome ignited a flame which Luther did not anticipate. However, he did not shrink from the responsibility and the challenge; he determined to stand on the Bible and the Bible alone as the final authority for religious teachings and practices.

Luther's momentous discovery led him and his followers to the abandonment of all works-oriented spirituality; faith was now to be the all-important factor. "Luther's struggle for an authentic Christian spirituality is the struggle for true faith. This . . . is always defined by the attachment of a person to the word of God (and, through it, to Christ)."¹ He believed faith itself to be a gift and always struggled against any attempts to make it dependent on any human effort.² Protestants have been naturally deeply suspicious of the spiritual disciplines, especially because of their abuses


²Ibid.
in Monasticism, and have given little attention to spiritual formation.

A Protestant spiritual movement which came much later and still flourishes is the Quakers. They refuse to appoint clergy, believing that every member could receive the guidance of the Spirit which was the Inner Light. Their worship services center around waiting for the Holy Spirit to direct a member to present the scripture lesson, prayer, or sermon. Quakers such as George Fox, John Woolman, Thomas Kelly, and Richard Foster have made important contributions to spirituality literature.¹

Current Revival of Interest in Spirituality

Today, one need only to visit a Christian bookstore to confirm a revival of interest in spirituality. Scores of books and magazine articles are being written which explain the process and outline various disciplines which may bring satisfaction. Could it be that one of the forces promoting this phenomenon is the same which began the search in the first place, a dissatisfaction with the fixation on self-gratification. Humanism is clearly the most pervasive religion of the late twentieth century. Those whose souls are sensitive to the Holy Spirit

¹Cully, 60, 61.
recognize that happiness is more than the accumulation of
material possessions. There is a craving to have the
peace that God alone can give, and when the assurance of
His acceptance has been received, there is also a longing
to be constantly in His presence.

The decade of the sixties probably produced the
greatest interest in things of the Spirit. It was a time
of hippies, communes, and involvement with Eastern gurus.
The charismatic movement jumped from the traditionally
pentecostal churches to mainline churches. The emphasis
was on emotions and feelings rather than the
understanding of biblical truth. These trends have taken
Catholics and Protestants alike back to a rediscovery of
the spiritual disciplines. It may be appropriate that
Quaker Richard Foster has been so influential in this
movement since it is the Quakers who have always been
identified by their devotion to spiritual enlightenment.
But, by now, Foster is not the only one who has attempted
to bring the ancient disciplines into prominence. Many
others have joined him, so a wide choice of manuals
exists.

The movement is gaining momentum as spiritual-
formation institutes are organized and opened for the
public and as seminaries offer training to prospective
clergy. Spiritual psychologies have been written, and
Lawrence Richards has added to his theologies, *A Practical Theology of Spirituality*. Richards' conclusion provides a personal perspective which can enlighten the earnest twentieth-century seeker:

In everything, I have been guided by the conviction that true spirituality is, in its very essence, living a human life in union with God. As we submit all that we are as human beings to Christ, as we respond to the Scripture's vision of a transformed humanity, and as we practice the disciplines that lead to growth, we will know by personal experience the joys and triumphs of true spirituality.¹

**A Fresh Look at the Disciplines**

Those who are in the forefront of calling for a return to the disciplines warn of the risk of allowing the quest for spirituality to degenerate again into the abuses of meritorious works. Foster's warning is typical.

The Disciplines are for the purpose of realizing a greater good. In and of themselves they are of no value whatever. They have value only as a means of setting us before God so that he can give us the liberation we seek. The liberation is the end; the Disciplines are merely the means. They are not the Answer; they on lead us to the Answer. We must clearly understand the limitation of the Disciplines if we are to avoid bondage. Not only must we understand, but we need to underscore it to ourselves again and again, so severe is our temptation to center on the Disciplines. Let us forever center on Christ

and view the Spiritual Disciplines as a way of drawing us closer to his heart.¹

The purpose of the disciplines is to place the individual in a position where the central focus is on God enabling lives to be transformed. They are relationship-building practices similar to the actions one would take to maintain a friendship with another human. Intimacy requires time and commitment and contact in many different situations. The disciplines are open doors into intimacy. Like in any relationship, there must be desire and initiative, our’s and God’s. God has placed His own position on record and has acted in His Son. Our participation is demonstrated in the spiritual discipline we maintain.

The disciplines are activities of mind and body purposefully undertaken, to bring our personality and total being into effective cooperation with the divine order. They enable us more and more to live in a power that is, strictly speaking, beyond us, deriving from the spiritual realm itself, as we ‘yield ourselves to God, as those that are alive from the dead, and our members as instruments of righteousness unto God,’ as Romans 6:13 puts it.²

There are many actions which can become spiritual disciplines, Foster has three different categories: inward, outward, and corporate disciplines. He includes meditation, prayer, fasting, and study as the inward

¹Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 110, 111.
²Willard, 68.
disciplines which are the four best known and most widely practiced. Journaling could be added as a helpful inward discipline. Conservative Christians would have little trouble practicing these disciplines, in fact, most have already had some experiences with each of them. The outward disciplines which Foster mentions include simplicity, solitude, submission, and service. There might be some discomfort for Adventist Christians with all but the fourth of these. The corporate disciplines for Foster are confession, worship, guidance, and celebration.¹

Summary

Peter, the Apostle, presents a well-developed statement of the New Testament view of spirituality:

Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:13-16)

This spirituality results when the individual remains always in Christ--always open to God’s will. Jesus’ life

¹Foster, Celebration of Discipline, v.
and His teaching indicate that this state of openness requires a disciplined lifestyle: watching and prayer.

During the Middle Ages, the church turned away from New Testament spirituality to emphasize, instead, good works. Luther and the other reformers directed Christians back to the importance of faith and grace. Protestantism did not quickly renew interest in the disciplines as a means to intimacy with God because of their association with the excesses in Roman Catholic monasticism. Mainline Protestant churches now are experiencing a renewal of interest in spiritual formation and have discovered that the disciplines have much to offer. Even some Adventists have made this same discovery. When used properly, as open windows to God, they are scriptural and valuable.
CHAPTER VI

SPIRITUALITY BELIEFS AND PRACTICES
AMONG SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

Spirituality in the 27 Fundamental Beliefs

One of the most important theological events in recent years among Seventh-day Adventists is the preparation and publication of the book Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . . A Biblical Exposition of 27 Fundamental Doctrines. Published in 1988 by the Ministerial Association of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, it is "representative of 'the truth . . . in Jesus' (Eph. 4:21) that Seventh-day Adventists around the globe cherish and proclaim."¹ The book is based on the twenty-seven statements of fundamental belief approved by the 1980 General Conference session in Dallas, Texas, and is as close to a creed as one can find among Adventists. The Association says: "We have written this book to assist those who are interested in knowing why we believe what we believe.

¹Washington, DC: Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988, iv.
This study, written by Adventists themselves, is not just window dressing. Carefully researched, it represents an authentic exposition of Adventist beliefs.\(^1\)

Chapter 10, titled "The Experience of Salvation," is an exposition of the tenth fundamental belief which expresses the church's understanding of repentance, justification, and sanctification. It is in the last few sentences of this belief statement that the church outlines its understanding of spiritual formation.

In infinite love and mercy God made Christ, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that in Him we might be made the righteousness of God. Led by the Holy Spirit we sense our need, acknowledge our sinfulness, repent of our transgressions, and exercise faith in Jesus as Lord and Christ, as Substitute and Example. This faith which receives salvation comes through the divine power of the Word and is the gift of God's grace. Through Christ we are justified, adopted as God's sons and daughters, and delivered from the lordship of sin. Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God's law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.\(^2\)

The church takes a thoroughly evangelical position as it affirms the individual's lost condition and total dependence on Christ, the Substitute, for salvation. Christ is the One who provides the rescue from sin and in

\(^1\)Ibid., viii.

\(^2\)Ibid., 118.
Him is saving righteousness. The third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, according to this statement of belief, acts within the lives of repentant sinners giving new birth and sanctification. This sanctification process includes writing God’s laws within the heart and empowering the individual to live a holy life. The Holy Spirit begins the process by acting on the heart of the sinner, the sinner’s part is to repent and exercise faith, although these too are divine gifts. The ongoing participation of the newborn Christian, according to the church’s statement, is "abiding in Him." It is during this time of abiding that spiritual formation occurs, and thus "we become partakers of the divine nature."\(^1\) This final sentence in Fundamental Belief 10 is the only allusion to spiritual formation to be found in the entire twenty-seven statements, even though it is well known that Adventists have long emphasized the character preparation of those who will be saved. Nevertheless, it is a significant statement and the choice of words is appropriate. The focus is on Christ while admitting that the individual has a part, that of abiding. A short description of the process of abiding would have been very enlightening, especially for those who carefully study the twenty-seven statements searching for clarity.

\(^1\)Ibid.
on the Adventist's position of what it means to be a Christian.

Admittedly, the statement of twenty-seven beliefs is not intended to be an exhaustive description, this is why the book prepared by the Ministerial Association is making such an important contribution. Chapter 10 is divided into four sections: "The Experience of Salvation and the Past," "The Experience of Salvation and the Present," "The Experience of Salvation and the Future," and "The Ground of Our Acceptance with God." It is in the second section where one would expect to find a fairly comprehensive outline of the process of spiritual formation, including the place of the spiritual disciplines for positioning the individual in God's abiding presence.

The section under investigation has four subheadings: "A Call to a Life of Sanctification," "The Internal Change," "The Perfection of Christ," and "Daily Justification." In "The Internal Change," the Ministerial Association affirms that the work of change can only be accomplished by the Creator Himself, but not without our participation. "We must place ourselves in the channel of the Spirit's working, which we can do by beholding Christ. As we meditate on Christ's life, the Holy Spirit restores the physical, mental, and spiritual
Here is the clearest statement to be found in the entire book of what is expected of the Christian in order to enable spiritual formation to take place. Two related statements follow: "Sanctification is progressive. By prayer and study of the Word we constantly grow in fellowship with God. . .. Character is composed of what the mind 'eats and drinks.' When we digest the bread of life, we become transformed into the likeness of Christ."

Under the subhead, "The Perfection of Christ," a technical explanation of biblical perfection is presented, along with the assurance that this perfection is a gift of God. Then the question is asked, "What role do we, as believers, play in all of this?" and the answer comes, "Through the indwelling Christ we grow up to spiritual maturity." Becoming even more specific, it is asked, "What does this mean in human terms?" and the answer: "Continual prayer is the indispensable for living a sanctified life that is perfect at every stage of its development."

While one might wish for a more comprehensive outline and description of the methods available to the

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1Ibid., 125.
2Ibid., 126.
3Ibid., 128, 129.
believer for developing the relationship with Christ which allows for the assimilation of His character, still there is a good general development of the subject. The Ministerial Association keeps its discussion more theological in nature as it addresses the issue of sanctification. A good foundation is provided for the more practical aspects of spirituality with some occasional glimpses into what is required of the Christian, but much is left to one's own imagination.

The fourth and last section of the chapter, which is titled "The Ground of Our Acceptance with God," is a warning to those who might tend to place too much value on their part in the experience of salvation. "Neither Christlike character traits nor faultless behavior is the ground of our acceptance with God. Saving righteousness comes from the one righteous Man, Jesus, and is conveyed to us by the Holy Spirit." For those who might endow the spiritual disciplines with some magical ingredient, there is this corrective: "Even what we do in response to Christ's saving love cannot form the basis of our acceptance with God. That acceptance is identified with the work of Christ."¹

¹Ibid., 131.
Importance of Spirituality in Adventist Theology

In an editorial, the editor of the Adventist Review, who is also one of the church’s leading theologians, placed spirituality in the perspective he felt it deserved among Adventists. "People expect spirituality of Seventh-day Adventists more than they do of other Christians," wrote William Johnsson, "We are a people who proclaim that Jesus Christ is soon to return personally to this earth; we claim to worship Him as Creator of heaven and earth."1 He then defined spirituality as he understands it:

It is a life founded on prayer—not in public for show, but in private. It is a life that seeks to walk ever more surely in the path of the divine will. It is a life that is ever giving, ever caring, but paradoxically, ever filling, ever growing. Though the outward person is wearing away, the inner person is constantly renewed by the Spirit of God. In a word, the spiritual man or woman knows God personally and grows more like Him every day.2

Johnsson believes that spirituality is crucial for Adventists because of the church’s emphasis on Christ as Creator and soon-to-return Lord. He does not refer to a carefully crafted belief statement on spirituality, for there is none. That there is no such statement does not mean that it can be ignored, however, for he sees

2Ibid.
important implications in other doctrines which preserve the central role of spirituality. A survey of Adventist literature of recent years shows that there has been little of consequence written about spirituality, yet there are overtones of spirituality in almost every doctrinal or devotional book published because of the very nature of the church’s understanding of God.

Adventists believe that God created the earth in seven literal days and that His purpose was to share His love with creatures like Himself, made in His own image, with the ability to enjoy the glories of creation and share their pleasure with Him. They see the seventh-day sabbath as a perpetual reminder of the kind of person God really is. Sin broke the beautiful relationship which God had established with the first man and woman. The plan of salvation was devised to restore that relationship which was so important to God that He was willing to give His One and only Son as an atonement for sin. The incarnate God, Jesus Christ, was not only a sacrifice of atonement but an expression of God’s love. Jesus revealed in His life and death just how much God loved humans and how far He was willing to go to restore the relationship which had been broken. The promise of Jesus’ return to remove the final barrier between God and humankind is the hope that burned within the hearts of
the Adventist pioneers and which still forms the reason to be for the Adventist church.

This theological belief system is full of relational overtones. Unhappily, few Adventist theologians or pastors have given attention to what it could mean for their people if they were to teach them how to enjoy the relationship which the Lord desires. Much of the energy of the church is consumed in a debate over righteousness by faith. Each side in the argument entrenches itself with biblical passages and quotations from the writings of Ellen White with little hope for a consensus. As long as there is no harmony on this doctrine which is basic to the faith, there is likely an inability for the church to meet the needs of its people who are often unaware of how to live each day in God’s presence.

In the 1980s, Morris Venden, an Adventist pastor, came the closest to articulating the practical process of spiritual formation. His books, magazine articles, and tapes have been duplicated and reduplicated so that only a few Adventists could have escaped some encounter with his theology. Venden writes: "It is only through continuing fellowship and communion with Christ that
spiritual life continues." Three spiritual disciplines are advocated by Venden: Bible study, prayer, and Christian service. In one of his most recent books, he outlines his personal ninety-five theses on righteousness by faith which include numbers 51 and 52 that demonstrate his understanding of spirituality.

Thesis 51 The primary purpose of prayer is not to get answers but to know Jesus.

Thesis 52 The primary purpose of Bible study is not to get information but to know Jesus.

Venden was a very popular preacher during the 1980s and in great demand at campmeetings and college weeks of prayer. Those who were exposed to his preaching could not help but be impressed with his call to a more relational religious orientation. It was a deeply spiritual message which found a ready response in the hearts of many who came to hear. In one of his books, he describes the situation which has developed in the years since the pioneers formed the church.

In the early days of the advent church, our forefathers had an experience with the Lord Jesus that was deep and certain. They also hammered out doctrinal understandings that formed the basis for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. With


3Idem, 95 Theses on Righteousness by Faith, 167, 171.
the passing of time and a new generation taking the place of the founders of our church, often the new generation settled for the doctrinal truth only and did not seek the personal experience of faith that their parents had known. Thus formalism set in and the problem of salvation by works, leaving the church as dry as the hills of Gilboa.¹

The Adventist debate centers around the question of the character preparation of the saints. Venden asks the question, "What part of the work does God expect us to do? What part does He do for us through the Holy's Spirit's cleansing work?" His answer: "Our part is to seek the Lord and be converted every day. Our part is to spend that thoughtful hour in contemplation of the life of Christ, especially the closing scenes, that by beholding Him we may become changed."²

Hopefully, Venden's attempts to bring joy and peace into the lives of weary Adventists will bear fruit. His voice is nearly stilled now and no other has arisen to continue his call to make knowing Jesus the center of Adventist religion. The church shows signs of becoming weary at the delay in Jesus' return with blame distributed in many directions. Could it be that the crucial issue is not so much what the saints know as it is who they know? Sin has broken the relationship

²Ibid., 45.
between God and humankind. Jesus has restored the broken link. Not only Adventists but the world need to know the joy of living in union with Him again.

**Spirituality and the Works versus Faith Debate**

At the mention of the date 1888, Adventist theologians and historians can begin a discussion, even a debate, which could weary the uninitiated. The year 1888 witnessed one of the most important General Conference sessions ever held. A controversy erupted at the session held in Minneapolis, and that debate, for many, still is not settled. The issue concerns law and grace, but at Minneapolis, personalities were also very much involved as delegates chose sides. In the end, Ellen White saved the day, but as the battle lines have been renewed, her statements are used by both sides to defend their position. The debate has left the membership in confusion and without a practical sense of spirituality.

Those among Adventists who emphasize the changes required in the lives of the saints seem to be tense and fearful of God—their lives usually do not demonstrate joy and rest. On the other side, those who hold to the objective act at the cross without any regard to the Lordship issue tend to be ignorant of the spiritual life. Discussion of the issues became especially intense during the 1970s. Many books and articles were published
showing the importance of victory over sin. Harvest theology was the term used to describe the belief that there would come a generation of Adventists who would be totally sinless, and then the Lord would come.

The emphasis in much of this material was on performance rather than relationship. In one book, How to Be a Victorious Christian, the author introduced his subject by saying that it was to be a "how-to" book, yet he denied that he would describe a "do-it-yourself" religion. Religion, he claimed, is to be a partnership, but he was rarely practical. The closest he came to being practical was in a chapter on prayer where he said, "Prayer is talking to God with the heart. Its source must be deep in the heart. It springs from an experience with God".

Herbert Douglass, the most articulate spokesperson for the harvest theology during those years, stated: "Our first duty to God and man is self-development." His burden was on being ready for the second advent and helping to prepare others as well, but for him it was primarily a concern with lifestyle issues by which he

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meant keeping the commandments plus self-development rather than spirituality produced by a relationship with God. He did not totally ignore practices which build the relationship, but he was not able to allow the relationship for its own sake.

Such people know that daily contemplation of Jesus Christ through Bible study and prayer, listening and submitting to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and personal Christian witness are the only ways God’s will can be known and His work of transforming their characters accomplished.¹

Edward Heppenstall was a prominent figure on the opposite side of the issue; he saw himself and those of his persuasion in the reformation mainstream. He spoke of spirituality by contrasting the natural man with the spiritual. He wrote: "The spiritual man is entirely different. His sufficiency is in God. His inner life is possessed and motivated by the Holy Spirit."² In the same chapter, which discusses the work of the Holy Spirit, he showed the importance he attaches to spirituality.

Spirituality does not require the Christian to be isolated from the world. Neither does it condemn the marvelous riches and advancements of modern civilization. But it places all these things in proper perspective. Our faith does not exclude

¹Ibid., 153.

the best in science, painting, sculpture, architecture, music, and literature. We are free to appreciate the highest culture as is any man. But we insist upon the supremacy of the spiritual. We affirm that we can only possess and enjoy all these things as we are truly Christian and heavenly minded.¹

In this context, it would have been helpful for Heppenstall to have described how the individual is involved in the process of spiritual formation. He wrote movingly of the Holy Spirit's work and placed love at the heart of the process. He wrote, "The primary thing, the essential, spiritual thing in Christian experience, is the ability to love as Christ loved. This is the test by which God seeks to present Himself to the world and to the universe."² But it is left for another occasion to mention the human part in the spiritual relationship.

In experiencing the saving power of Christ our righteousness, we see the powerlessness of our resolvs and the need to realize our frailty, trusting fully and depending entirely upon the power of redeeming grace. There is a perseverance in the things of God and in one's relationship to God through prayer and the study of His Word. We center our loyalty and hope in Christ regardless of what the cost may be and the weakness we

¹Ibid.
²Ibid., 206.
have in ourselves. Through this attitude and by Christian growth, the mature Christian life emerges.

Morris Venden's contribution to the righteousness by faith debate was much more practical. While Douglass and Heppenstall were fighting the theological battles, the pastoral Venden spoke directly to the hearts of the average Adventist in the pew who might have had difficulty in understanding the issues but who were told that they were crucial to salvation. This quote from Venden is typical.

There are two vital things for a successful Christian life. One is to get with Jesus, and the other is to stay with Him. The first is no good without the latter, and obviously, you can't remain with Him unless you have come to Him in the first place. Here we encounter one of the problems in the popular Christian world. People have labored under the delusion that if they once got with Jesus at some point in time, that took care of everything from then on. But that does nothing of the sort. Only keeping in union with Him will solve the sin problem. And how do we do that? In the same way we first went to Him! "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in Him" (Col. 2:6). It is all by faith, and the ingredients that result in faith—communication with Him.¹

Spiritual Disciplines among Adventists

Bible study and prayer are the disciplines most often encouraged by Adventist authors and spiritual leaders. A 1989 survey completed by forty-three members

¹Morris Venden, Obedience of Faith (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1983), 82.
of the Capital Memorial Church in Washington, D.C., showed that they agreed with their leaders. The survey asked members to rank twelve practices according to how they believed they fostered spirituality. Thirty-nine placed prayer among their top four choices; seventeen said it was the most important. Thirty-five placed Bible study among their top four selections; nine believed it was the most important. These were the practices which received the highest scores of the twelve.

The church has encouraged prayer through its regular weeks of prayer, days of fasting and prayer, weekly prayer meetings, and specific calls to pray for special needs. Some pastors have developed prayer-training programs and have traveled widely because of the great demand of people to learn how to receive answers to their prayer requests. The emphasis has been on petitioning God for personal and corporate needs rather than on prayer as sharing the life journey with God. Venden perceives this.

One of the usual ideas of prayer is that its primary purpose is to get answers. I would like to take the position that if your primary purpose in praying is to get answers, it won’t be long until you will stop praying. To have life eternal is to be involved in knowing God. And the primary purpose of prayer is to know God. It
is primarily for relationship, for communication—not to get answers.¹

Bible study has been treated in much the same manner through the daily Morning Watch project in which members are encouraged to memorize a text each day and then compete at a weekly meeting to show who has succeeded. The Bible-year plan has also encouraged Bible study. In this plan, members are given a guide that selects scripture portions each day in a manner that guarantees completion of the entire Bible by the end of the year. Older members remember hearing Elder H. M. S. Richards tell how many times he had read the Bible through as he came to campmeeting year after year. Many dreamed of being able to stand before large audiences and give a similar testimony. Adventists have long been known as people of the Book. They pride themselves on the details of Bible stories they have learned, even to the point of staging competitions on Sabbath afternoons where minute details are chosen to stump the contestants.

Venden also attempts to show that Bible study has a purpose other than that of learning facts or proving doctrine.

The primary purpose of Bible study is to enter into communion and fellowship with Jesus. As you invite His presence when you open His Word and

seek to put yourself in the picture, to understand what He is saying to you day by day, you will come to know Him better and to trust Him more.¹

At the 1990 World Ministers Council of Seventh-day Adventists in Indianapolis, Indiana, Ben Maxon presented a workshop for pastors in which methods were explored for helping pastors to grow spiritually. Maxon’s own personal testimony was appealing, especially as he described his discovery of the spiritual disciplines. His syllabus included the disciplines of celebration, solitude, scripture reading, prayer, meditation, fasting, and journaling. Since at least 300 attended his workshop, no opportunity was given for the participants to practice the disciplines, but the enthusiasm with which Maxon’s presentation was received indicated that a need was being met.

Courses are now being offered by the religion departments of two Adventist colleges in the U.S.—Walla Walla College and Southern College. These present the spiritual disciplines as vital to the spiritual formation process. A few pastors throughout the North American Division also practice the disciplines and some are now developing an interest within their congregations. The SDA Theological Seminary also is enriching its curriculum

¹Ibid., 56, 57.
with courses and colloquiums on spirituality. Though Adventists have been slow to follow the lead of other Protestants, their interest in having an intimate relationship with God has led them to overcome the suspicion which has prevented an openness at an earlier time.

**Summary**

On a very limited basis, Adventists are beginning to hear about the spiritual disciplines. As has been shown, there has always been an interest in selected disciplines such as prayer and Bible study, but practicing them for the purpose of relationship building has not been the primary objective. If the desire for deeper spiritual satisfaction becomes as keen among the church’s members as it is among other Christians, then the time will be right for a full-scale introduction of the disciplines as a way for intimacy with God to occur. This project was developed to meet just such a need.

For years Adventists have talked about readiness for the Lord to come but have dwelt on good works rather than the spirituality which produces good works. Righteousness by faith versus righteousness by works has been debated decade after decade without much success in reaching a consensus. Perhaps it is time to leave the debating platform and focus on Jesus and His desire to
have us restored to the type of intimate relationship we were created for from the beginning. The Spiritual disciplines can help to make this happen.
CHAPTER VII

ELLEN WHITE'S VIEWS ON SPIRITUALITY

The Importance of Spirituality

What Ellen White had to say about the importance of spirituality and how spirituality is to be achieved has an important influence on the acceptance of any practices that are considered new and different. Adventists believe that White had the prophetic gift and that the Lord gave her specific counsel to guide the church. Spiritual-formation practices, which include the use of the ancient disciplines, have been suspect largely because of their identification with the Roman Catholic monastic system. The current Protestant interest in the disciplines and the experience of a few Adventists has developed a certain reluctant openness to investigation. If it can be shown that Ellen White supported the use of the disciplines and that she understood their contribution to the spiritual formation process, much of the suspicion will be allayed and the crack in the door could well be widened.
That Ellen White understood and counseled the church on the importance of spirituality there can be no question. Using the definition of spirituality as the restoration within the individual of the image of God as a result of the Christian’s life in union with God, it is fairly easy to find massive amounts of support for the importance of spirituality. In one quotation memorized by almost every minister and teacher-in-training in an Adventist school, she states: "To restore in man the image of his Maker, to bring him back to the perfection in which he was created, to promote the development of body, mind, and soul, that the divine purpose in creation might be realized—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life."¹ How is this accomplished? White writes, "All that is written concerning the spiritual life . . . may be attained through uniting yourself to Jesus."²

In an article concerning the importance of country living, White urged Adventists "to make it their lifework to seek for spirituality."³ The article contended that in the country the individual may be molded by the

¹White, Education, 15, 16.


evidences of God in nature. In a letter to Brother E. concerning suitable reading for children, she spoke of the work of the great day of atonement which was in progress and that the work taking place in the heavenly sanctuary should be carefully studied and should lead the saints to action.

You need ever to cultivate spirituality, because it is not natural for you to be heavenly-minded. The great work is before us of leading the people away from worldly customs and practices, up higher and higher, to spirituality, piety, and earnest work for God.¹

Ellen White took the classical view of sin, that it is wrong doing, rebellion against God, and that it is sin which has defaced the image of God within humans. Removing this sinful condition and reproducing within individuals the image of God is the goal. She did not stray from the reformation perspective on salvation that it is by grace through faith, but taught that the work of grace will change the life. It is possible to misunderstand her because of what seems, in some of her counsel, to be a preoccupation with behavior. Some have accused her of being legalistic; however, those who take time to read, in context and from the broad spectrum, what she has written will come away from the effort with

the conclusion that she was absolutely devoted to the New Testament teaching of salvation by grace through faith.

**Spiritual Formation**

What is the process which Ellen White urged for the development of spirituality? How is the image of God to be restored? She definitely was not a legalist. Writing about Jesus' encounter with Nicodemus, she shows the futility of works and identifies the starting point for spirituality as the miraculous work of the Holy Spirit in the new birth experience.

The fountain of the heart must be purified before the streams can become pure. He who is trying to reach heaven by his own works in keeping the law is attempting an impossibility. There is no safety for one who has merely a legal religion, a form of godliness. The Christian's life is not a modification or improvement of the old, but a transformation of nature. There is a death to self and sin, and a new life altogether. This change can be brought about only by the effectual working of the Holy Spirit.¹

For her, the Holy Spirit's role is crucial, both in the conversion process which begins as the Spirit woos the individual and in the life that follows. "In order to serve Him aright, we must be born of the divine Spirit. This will purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God."²

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¹Idem, *Desire of Ages*, 172.

²Ibid., 189.
Here she affirms the Holy Spirit as the one who takes charge of the conversion process. The result of this, she says is "a willing obedience to all His requirements. This is true worship. It is the fruit of the working of the Holy Spirit." Her position was well established from the godward side, but is not the individual a participant, too? For Ellen White, the individual was not to be simply a bystander.

All who received Him would partake of His nature, and be conformed to His character. This involved the relinquishment of their cherished ambitions. It required the complete surrender of themselves to Jesus. They were called to become self-sacrificing, meek and lowly in heart. They must walk in the narrow path traveled by the Man of Calvary, if they would share in the gift of life and the glory of heaven.

In various places in her writings, Ellen White repeated a simple phrase which probably best sums up her position on the process of spiritual formation: "By beholding we become changed." This is in harmony with the spiritual writers through the ages, and this places her in the mainstream as a reliable guide to spiritual development. Adventists have the tradition in place through the influence of one who carries considerable authority. Nothing is more basic and more appealing in

1Ibid.

2Ibid., 391.

any of the literature than this sentence from her story of Jesus' life. "Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon 'the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29); and by beholding, he becomes changed."¹

This act of beholding must be a code for a very intentional involvement with God. She explained herself in a commentary on the meaning of prayer.

As we make Christ our daily companion we shall feel that the powers of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image. By beholding we become changed. The character is softened, refined, and ennobled for the heavenly kingdom. The sure result of our intercourse and fellowship with our Lord will be to increase piety, purity, and fervor. There will be a growing intelligence in prayer. We are receiving a divine education, and this is illustrated in a life of diligence and zeal.²

She compared spirituality to physical health and counseled that the food taken into the mind is that which provides spiritual nourishment. Spiritual food is eating the flesh and drinking the blood of Jesus.³ Using this same analogy, she says that "it is what we meditate upon that will give tone and strength to our spiritual

¹Ibid., 439.


³Idem, Testimonies for the Church, 8:169.
Christ's passion as a theme for such activity, she says, is especially efficacious: "As faith contemplates our Lord's great sacrifice, the soul assimilates the spiritual life of Christ."²

There is nothing more important for Ellen White for spiritual development than attention to the devotional life. "Continual devotion establishes so close a relation between Jesus and His disciple that the Christian becomes like Him in mind and character. Through a connection with Christ he will have clearer and broader views."³ This position affirms the involvement of the individual and confirms that it results in a graced work of God through His Holy Spirit. This is the basis of all true spiritual development. It can be corrupted when the individual is driven to the forms of devotion in order to produce spirituality. True spiritual formation results from a passion to know God, a passion created and sustained by love. White describes this passion in her most popular book: "We long to bear

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³Ibid., 251.
His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things."¹

**Spiritual Disciplines**

Ellen White encouraged the use of the classic disciplines of the Christian faith often referring to them together.

Educate your mind to love the Bible, to love the prayer meeting, to love the hour of meditation, and, above all, the hour when the soul communes with God. Become heavenly-minded if you would unite with the heavenly choir in the mansions above.²

She apparently knew of many professed believers who only had a head knowledge of God, their religion had little or no effect on the way they lived their lives. She condemned their self-centered attitude and implored them to the necessary disciplines of the spiritual life.

They do not realize that in order to be a savor of life unto life they must be under spiritual discipline and training, learning in the school of Christ. Without this spiritual discipline, they become inefficient, ignorant, and undeveloped, and see no necessity for the spiritual training and knowledge which would qualify them to hold positions of influence and usefulness. If they do not consecrate themselves wholly to God, becoming learners in His school, they will do haphazard work that will result in injury to the church.³

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Every Adventist has heard her classic definition for prayer: "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary, in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him."¹ How many members actually open their hearts to God as to a friend would be revealing of the kind of spirituality most practice. The impression received from the public prayers of most members is that God is mainly approached for the sake of performing miracles. Mrs. White shared with the church how the prayer life could foster the relational orientation: "If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life—our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend."²

Prayer appears to be the most important of all the disciplines for White. She calls it "the breath of the soul. It is the secret of spiritual power. No other means of grace can be substituted, and the health of the

¹Idem, Steps to Christ, 93.
²Idem, Christ’s Object Lessons, 129.
soul be preserved."¹ This quotation is taken from a chapter titled "Secret Prayer" in her book, *Gospel Workers*. Her intention is to show that individual spirituality depends on prayer offered in private. Prayer does not need to be in any classical form, nor does it need to be offered in a closet. Prayer can be sent constantly heavenward even as the individual is going about the everyday affairs of life. Such a practice fixes the heart on God and preserves spirituality. But prayer in the secret place is at the heart of the soul’s life.²

Bible study is another of the disciplines which Ellen White commended. She wrote: "The soul dwelling in the pure atmosphere of holy thought will be transformed by communion with God through the study of Scriptures."³ Study for her was not just reading in order to find truth or develop biblical literacy, not that such an endeavor is unhelpful but that reading for formational purposes is often ignored today. She wrote: "Merely to hear or to read the Word is not enough. He who desires to be profited by the Scriptures must meditate upon the truth


²Ibid., 254-258.

³Idem, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, 60.
that has been presented to him."\textsuperscript{1} She outlined this devotional reading of the Scripture in a manner very similar to spiritual writers of our own era.

We should carefully study the Bible, asking God for the aid of the Holy Spirit, that we may understand His word. We should take one verse, and concentrate the mind on the task of ascertaining the thought which God has put in that verse for us. We should dwell upon the thought until it becomes our own, and we know "what saith the Lord."\textsuperscript{2}

It might come as a surprise to many Adventists that Ellen White included meditation as an important spiritual discipline, since there is so much objection to its use by many in the church today. On several occasions she wrote of meditation, including it with prayer and Bible study as important for the spiritual life. In fact, she said that it was necessary to a growth in grace.\textsuperscript{3} The subjects upon which she recommended individuals to meditate included the meaning of salvation, the infinite mercy and love of Jesus, the sacrifice of Jesus, and the character of the Redeemer.\textsuperscript{4} Many early Adventists devoted considerable time in study in order to be prepared to debate with opponents to their beliefs. She

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{1}Ibid., 59, 60.
\item \textsuperscript{2}Idem, \textit{Desire of Ages}, 390.
\item \textsuperscript{3}Idem, \textit{Testimonies for the Church}, 2:187.
\end{itemize}}
warned that an hour in meditation every day was worth much more than spending many hours in that type of study.¹

Hints of two other disciplines should be mentioned. She spoke of Jesus' habit of seeking quiet retreats away from the busy activities of His life and said that this was a need for us as well. "We must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God."² Practicing His presence is a discipline suggested in this counsel: "It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly--by abiding in Him--that we are to grow in grace."³

Example of Jesus

In Mrs. White's book, The Desire of Ages, written as the story of Jesus' life, she often described Jesus' spiritual life as an example of how our own spirituality could be formed. As He began His ministry in the wilderness, she said He went there purposely to be alone in order to be with the Father in preparation for His life work. The disciplines He used were contemplation,

¹Idem, Testimonies for the Church, 1:433, 434.
³Idem, Steps to Christ, 69.
prayer, and fasting. During His ministry, when the demands on His time and energy were very great, He often found it necessary to seek solitude where He could commune with the Father, sometimes spending entire nights in prayer.

In Christ the cry of humanity reached the Father of infinite pity. As a man He supplicated the throne of God till His humanity was charged with a heavenly current that should connect humanity with divinity. Through continual communion He received life from God, that He might impart life to the world. His experience is to be ours.

Summary

It has been demonstrated that Ellen White understood the importance of the spiritual disciplines in the process of spiritual development. She wrote extensively and beautifully about many of the aspects of spiritual formation which have been the subject of current authors. Some of her most loved statements, such as the definition of prayer, have been memorized by generations of Adventists who may not have been influenced by them in the way she had hoped, but the foundations have been laid. Any pastor who wishes to develop credibility for the spiritual disciplines should

1Idem, Desire of Ages, 114.
2Ibid., 260.
3Ibid., 363.
appeal to this wonderful heritage in the church. But,
beyond seeking credibility, her writings may also be used
as devotional literature on which to feed the spirit. In
a long-term project of spiritual development in the local
church, assigned readings from the Ellen White writings
would enhance and support the process.
PART II

THE MODEL AND ITS EVALUATION
CHAPTER VIII

THE NEED FOR EMPHASIS ON THE DISCIPLINES

A spiritual inventory was designed in order to determine the level of spiritual development among members of the Capital Memorial Church. One of the most important objectives of the inventory was to discover devotional attitudes and practices. It was expected that the results of the inventory would show a general dissatisfaction with the devotional life, little real use and understanding of the spiritual disciplines, and an openness to have assistance in developing the relationship with God. The inventory had questions to be answered using the Likert scale which gives five possibilities: very definitely agree, agree, not sure, disagree, and very definitely disagree.

Five sections made up the inventory, all relating to spirituality: beliefs about God, relationship with God, devotional practices, and relationship with the world. Of the fifty questions, twenty-five were related to devotional practices—the area which would be most critical to the study.
Seventy-five individuals completed the inventory which was distributed during a worship service at the Capital Memorial Church. A short explanation was given for the purpose of the inventory, and the participants were asked to return the inventory no later than the end of the service. The inventories were anonymous, but individuals were asked to state their age; only five failed to comply.

The Survey

SPIRITUAL INVENTORY

Directions: Please answer each of the following questions according to your beliefs and practices at the present time by circling the number which best reflects your thinking. When the term God is used, it may refer to any member of the Godhead or the entire Trinity.

1 = very definitely agree, 2 = agree, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree, 5 = very definitely disagree

MY BELIEFS ABOUT GOD

1. I believe in a personal God. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I often have a problem believing that God unites Himself with me. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I believe that God cares what happens to me and often intervenes in my behalf. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I believe that my assurance of salvation depends on how good I am. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I do not understand the work of the Holy Spirit and have difficulty in believing He is with me right now. 1 2 3 4 5
MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD

6. I am a born again Christian. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I struggle with the idea that I can have assurance of salvation at this moment. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I have accepted by faith Christ's sacrifice as the atonement for my sins. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I don't often feel that God is present with me. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I sometimes doubt whether God accepts me. 1 2 3 4 5

11. I normally feel guilty even after I have confessed my sins. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I am often angry with God. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I feel God does not answer my prayers. 1 2 3 4 5

14. I feel God does not care about me. 1 2 3 4 5

15. I find it difficult to make Jesus not only Savior but also Lord of my life. 1 2 3 4 5

16. I am not yet able to give God first priority in my life. 1 2 3 4 5

17. I am afraid of God. 1 2 3 4 5

18. I sometimes feel that God has left me all alone. 1 2 3 4 5

19. I feel freedom to share my deepest thoughts with God. 1 2 3 4 5

20. I have a deep craving to know God better. 1 2 3 4 5

MY DEVOTIONAL PRACTICES

21. I am not satisfied with my devotional life. 1 2 3 4 5

22. I pray often and find great enjoyment in speaking with God. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I usually pray in order to present my requests to God—prayer is mostly for requesting favors from God.  

24. I use many different forms of prayer in my own devotional times (petition, praise, confession, etc.).  

25. I find my prayer life often getting into a rut.  

26. I usually include meditation in my devotions.  

27. I do not know how to meditate.  

28. I am suspicious of meditation practices.  

29. I usually find Bible reading to be uninteresting.  

30. I read the Bible in order to increase my knowledge of truth.  

31. I memorize scripture and often think of these verses when I'm discouraged.  

32. I do not know how to read the Bible devotionally.  

33. I keep a spiritual journal.  

34. I think I would find it difficult to keep a written record of my spiritual journey.  

35. I have a definite time and place each day for my personal devotions.  

36. I don't often have a spontaneous feeling to praise God.  

37. I often find the weekly worship service to be uninteresting and irrelevant.  

38. I struggle to find any personal meaning in the quarterly communion service.
39. I find the sabbath to be too long; it's hard to find appropriate things to keep myself occupied.  
   1 2 3 4 5

40. I don't often sense God communicating with me even when I am quietly listening.  
   1 2 3 4 5

41. I meet regularly with a friend or small group for spiritual support.  
   1 2 3 4 5

42. I would like to meet regularly with a mature Christian or small group for spiritual support.  
   1 2 3 4 5

43. I would like to have assistance in developing a meaningful devotional life.  
   1 2 3 4 5

44. I don't believe I am growing spiritually as I would like to.  
   1 2 3 4 5

45. I am willing to commit myself to a specific amount of time for my personal devotions.  
   1 2 3 4 5

**MY RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD**

46. I believe that living in union with God can transform my relationships with people and I need that to happen.  
   1 2 3 4 5

47. I normally give two hours or more each week in using my spiritual gifts in some service for God to people who have some need either physical or spiritual.  
   1 2 3 4 5

48. We have family devotions in our home.  
   1 2 3 4 5

49. I find it difficult to tell others about what God has done for me.  
   1 2 3 4 5

50. I don't feel comfortable in opening my inner feelings in a small group.  
   1 2 3 4 5

**The Results**

The score for each item on the inventory is presented below in Table 1. A few of those who completed
the inventory did not express an opinion on every item, but most appear to have taken the assignment seriously. Twelve of those who completed the inventory attended the retreat where the disciplines were introduced; the other sixty-three who turned in the inventory were individuals in attendance at the worship service on the day of the retreat. Instructions were given for ages to be written on the top of each inventory, however, not everyone chose to comply, so the results are not categorized according to age.

What the Results Say

It is possible to assign a numerical value on a scale of one to five for each answer with five points for the best possible answer and one for the answer which shows the least spiritual maturity, in order to achieve an overall spiritual maturity score. Table 2 shows these scores for the entire survey and for each section of the survey. Since there is no other group with which to compare the members of the Capital Memorial Church, the results have been interpreted in relationship to the highest possible score.

Since Seventh-day Adventists often claim to be more serious than many other Christians about their religion, one would expect a high spiritual maturity. However, the
Table 1.—Survey Results

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Table 2.—Spiritual Maturity Scores

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<td>59.71</td>
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Interpretation Key

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A score of 178.73 indicated that the spiritual confidence is, in fact, low. It would have been interesting to have scores on a general religion survey of values and Biblical groundedness for comparison with the spirituality inventory. Probably the scores on the general survey would have been very high.

Scores on the section of the spiritual inventory which surveyed beliefs about God, as expected, were higher than for the other sections. In fact, there might have been an higher score on this section had the
questions been less subjective. Most troubling of all the scores was on the section which surveyed the relationship with God. A score of just under passive on this section identified the critical problem the model was designed to correct.

The results for three specific questions on the survey revealed that those who completed the survey recognized their problem, and were open for assistance. To the statement: "I am not satisfied with my devotional life," with a possible score of 5, the congregational response was 3.92. The score of 4.2 for those who responded to the invitation to attend the retreat (hereinafter called retreatants) where the model developed in this project was used expressed even greater dissatisfaction than the total group. Considering this high level of dissatisfaction, it was gratifying to discover a score of 3.7 for the entire group and 4.36 for the retreatants alone in response to the statement: "I would like assistance in developing a meaningful devotional life." There was also a willingness to make the required commitment for change. The statement which appeared in the inventory was: "I am willing to commit myself to a specific amount of time for my personal devotions." The total group response was 4.11. For only the retreatants, the score was 4.64.
The retreat group expressed a much greater willingness for assistance in their spiritual development than did the remainder of the congregation. Removing the retreatants from the scoring on the statement which determined the willingness for assistance, left the group score at 3.57 compared with 4.36 for the retreatants. Retreatants also evidenced much greater openness for ongoing support. For the statement, "I would like to meet regularly with a mature Christian or small group for spiritual support," the retreatants scored 4.55; the remainder of the group scored just 3.53. The conclusion is that a more subtle approach may be necessary for some of the members who apparently view their spiritual development as a private matter. The retreat setting would have been considered too risky for these individuals who value privacy.

Out of seventy-three respondents to the statement, "I have a deep craving to know God better," only three very definitely disagreed and four were not sure. Forty-seven very definitely agreed and nineteen definitely agreed, producing an overall score of 4.47. The retreatants by themselves had a perfect score of 5. Such a deep craving for knowing God better was a valuable demonstration that my own pastoral ministry must give attention to being a Christian rather than simply doing
the things Christians are expected to do. It also encouraged the development of the model for introducing the spiritual disciplines as the pathway for knowing God better.

Summary

Surveying the congregation at the Capital Memorial Church confirmed my belief that there was a great deal of insecurity among the members about their own spirituality. It was encouraging to know that there was confidence about their beliefs; this reflects well on the Adventist emphasis of endoctrinating its members. However, just as I expected because of my own experience, there is not a corresponding satisfaction in the relationship with God. This is a serious problem which apparently has not been adequately addressed by the church.

I believe the church can be faulted for not giving just as much attention to building spirituality as to teaching doctrine. My project was to provide an answer to this problem; at least for my own ministry. I want to be sure that I offer a balanced program to the members for whom I am spiritually responsible. The survey helped to confirm for me that the need is actually there. Spirituality does not just happen, it must be cultivated. As a pastor, I see it as my responsibility to give
leadership that can meet this critical need. This project was initiated for the purpose of providing an important ministry opportunity which I had overlooked in the past.
CHAPTER IX

FOUR DISCIPLINES SELECTED FOR USE

The heart of the spiritual formation process is the use of the spiritual disciplines. In order to encourage the use of the disciplines by the members of my congregation, I knew I would need to select disciplines with which they were relatively familiar. My experience also taught me that they had a very short interest span and that they were suspicious of new programs. I was convinced, however, that many of them were not satisfied with the state of their relationship with the Lord.

For many years, my preaching had emphasized the assurance we have in Christ's atoning sacrifice. It was a gospel free of the works orientation of my earlier years. Not everyone responded, but I was aware that many found greater joy in Christ than they had known before. These especially were craving a deeper relationship with the Lord. As their pastor, I wanted to help them find what I had found.

The disciplines I selected were those encouraged by Ellen White and having a long tradition in the church.
Their use in the church had not been for devotional purposes, so a new orientation would be required, but an understanding of their importance had been learned already. Church members influenced by Morris Venden, already had an impression that there was a devotional element which needed to be explored. This was in my favor.

Prayer

Prayer is the most important discipline in the life of a Christian. In fact, the claim may be made that without prayer it is impossible to maintain spirituality. Prayer is always central in the stories of great Christians, for it is through prayer that faith is forged and courage developed that enables great deeds. The other disciplines help to develop specific spiritual sensitivities, "but it is the Discipline of prayer that brings us into the deepest and highest work of the human spirit. Real prayer is life creating and life changing."¹ Not only is it speaking freely from the heart, as one would to a friend, but it is also setting out the deepest desires and struggles of the soul to the majestic Creator God.

Prayer in the end is about this all-consuming love relation between God and us. It is a

¹Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 33.
conscious realization of the union that is already effected between our souls and God by grace. The immediate end of prayer may be to consider some mystery of Christ’s life, to resolve a problem, to seek guidance for a practical course of action. But the ultimate end of prayer is always communion with God. It is receptivity to his self-communication in silence and in the course of life situations. It is continually discovering God at the center of our being so that we can carry him into the midst of our doing.¹

Devotional Prayer

I chose the term "devotional prayer" deliberately for the form of prayer which borrows very heavily from contemplative prayer. It was a temptation not to use the term "contemplative prayer," but I realized that in the end I might prejudice the use of a prayer form which, though new, might prove to be very meaningful. My adaptations prevent it from entirely resembling the more mystical form used widely in monasteries and often called "centering prayer." Donald Bloesch’s book, The Struggle of Prayer, was a helpful tool in maintaining the evangelical perspective which is so important to my faith.

In delineating the two types of spirituality we should first recognize that in mysticism the emphasis is on the experience of unity with the divine presence, which is the ground of the self as well as of the world. Man is taken up beyond himself into a blissful union with the One or the Absolute or the World Soul. . . .In the so-called

¹Susan Annette Muto, Pathways of Spiritual Living (Petersham, MA: St. Bede’s Publications, 1984), 123.
evangelical experience or experience of encounter, the person of faith is conscious of his individuality, of the Creator-creator distinction. He is aware only of his unworthiness before God (Isa. 6), not of any essential unity with God.¹

What I have called devotional prayer borrows from the contemplative style, but maintains the integrity of the evangelical faith system. It is removing the clutter of thoughts which have consumed the mind, focusing on God's presence, and then waiting patiently for His still, small voice. The approach is always from the position of a sinner who is wholly dependent on the mediation of the Lord Jesus, in humble gratitude for the invitation to come boldly. Bloesch rightly wants to keep us reminded that "as the omnipotent and omniscient God he hears and knows all prayer, but as the holy One who detests all sin and iniquity he will not give an open ear to prayers that arise out of human arrogance and give glory only to man."²

Richard Foster terms this type of prayer, "meditative prayer," and says its purpose "is to create the emotional and spiritual space that allows Christ to


²Ibid., 47.
construct an inner sanctuary in the heart.\textsuperscript{1} Lawrence Richards prefers the term "prayer of the heart" and says that its "goal is to see the Lord."

This experience is prayer of the heart—Eden in the cool of our evening, communion with God for his sake and for ours. We come to the Lord, not because we want something from him or even because we have something we need to share with him, but simply because we want to be with him and with him alone.\textsuperscript{2}

To begin this form of prayer, one should select a time when the mind is as fresh and as uncluttered as possible. Choosing a space which is private and quiet is also helpful. Both the time and space can be committed on a regular basis so that both become sacred. The prayer begins by a conscious relaxing of the body; simple relaxing exercises may be used so that there is little tenseness to cause distraction. In order to give full attention to the experience of being in the presence of God, which is the purpose of this form of prayer, it may be helpful to use a word or picture image to focus the thoughts. I often use the name, Jesus, repeated softly over and over, especially when my mind wanders; or I allow my mind to see a picture of the Lord which best portrays for me who Jesus was. This process is often


\textsuperscript{2}Richards, Practical Theology of Spirituality, 106.
called "centering down," the idea being to be fully present with the Lord.

The Lord promised to remain in us if we remain in Him (John 15:4); this prayer takes Him at His Word, by faith grasping that promise and enjoying being there with Him. The second step, according to Foster, is beholding which is "the inward steady gaze of the heart upon the divine Center. We bask in the warmth of His presence. Worship and adoration, praise and thanksgiving well up from the inner sanctuary of the soul."¹ Foster's third step of listening is just as important as the first two, but the one which may be the most awkward for those who are just beginning. Some will think it a little presumptuous to wait for God to speak. Of course, seldom is there an audible voice, but God does send impressions, and why not expect God to be actively involved? Ellen White claimed that "we must individually hear Him speaking to the heart. When every other voice is hushed, and in quietness we wait before Him, the silence of the soul makes more distinct the voice of God."²

When I began using this form of prayer, I became restless and even felt a bit ridiculous. Then it occurred to me that the Lord did promise to remain with

¹Foster, "Meditative Prayer."

²White, Mount of Blessing, 58.
us if we remained with Him. I was not sure in what manner that happened, perhaps through the agency of the Holy Spirit; but I decided that if the Lord made the promise, it is so. All of my life I had missed the privilege of acknowledging and enjoying simply being there with Him. By faith I then allowed myself to be with Him and was greatly blessed by a sense of His presence. Now I find myself using this form of prayer more often than any other. I believe it is possible for a less formal form of this prayer to become an attitude of one's life—a kind of prayer without ceasing.

The devotional prayer discipline used in the model for the Capital Memorial Church included the following practices.

1. Choose a time when the mind is as fresh and uncluttered as possible.
2. Set aside a space at home or in another convenient location which can be quiet and fairly secluded from other family members. This space may be dedicated as your own prayer chapel.
3. Find a comfortable position such as kneeling, laying on the back or sitting in a chair with good support.
4. Consciously relax the body so that there is as little physical tension as possible. Simple forms of exercise
which do not include vigorous disruptive movements may be used.

5. Focus the mind on God by using a picture or a word repeated over and over such as the name of Jesus. As thoughts enter to cause distraction, the word may be repeated to refocus the mind.

6. Wait in silence until there is a sense of being in God's presence. It may be helpful to allow the imagination to create a scene where you and God are alone such as in a beautiful garden or in God's throne room. Enjoy being alone with God.

7. Listen quietly for God to speak. This may occur in the form of an impression or by a scripture passage being flashed across the mind or perhaps an image which would make an appropriate suggestion.

8. When it is time you may softly enter into one of the other prayer disciplines while maintaining the focus on God's presence.

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**Prayer of Adoration and Thanksgiving**

The prayer of adoration and thanksgiving is another form of prayer that is fairly familiar and is practiced by most Christians. It may arise out of any other form of prayer or be a spontaneous expression at any time of the day. Harold Lindsell says it is "the first and
highest form of prayer."¹ As adoration, it is an expression of praise to God for who He is, as a lover might adore the one being loved. Thanksgiving is a variation in that it grows out of a desire to express appreciation for a specific act of God. A helpful practice is to select one of the Psalms which expresses adoration or thanksgiving and let it speak for the heart. If this is to be more than simply a ritual, a Psalm should be found that expresses the individual’s true feelings.

Tilden Edwards suggests a thanksgiving prayer practice which might well become a regular spiritual discipline and which could include adoration as well. It was introduced as a discipline in the model for the Capital Memorial Church.

Remain in silence for about ten minutes. As anything comes to mind, simply say, "thank you, God (or Lord)", and gently release it. Let this be your response to absolutely everything that appears to your consciousness. . . . Do not try for anything to come. Just be present in open appreciation of God in all that does come.²


Prayer of Supplication

In the prayer of supplication, I have included confession, petition, and intercession, because they all are based on our own felt need for a specific action from God. Bloesch believes this is "the essence of true prayer."\(^1\) He also calls it "the most authentic type of prayer" because it is humble supplication, the pouring out of the heart before God. Such prayer reveals our absolute dependence on God, our total helplessness apart from God. It also attests the incontrovertible fact that only those who actively seek help from the living God, only those who cast themselves on his mercy, can be used by God as instruments of his redemptive will and purpose.\(^2\)

The prayer of supplication is most often used by Adventist Christians, most of whom would agree with Bloesch that it is what real prayer is all about. These same Adventist Christians would likely admit, however, that this prayer form has become so routine that there is little power in it or expectation of action by God. They may not understand that "Christian prayer arises out of love and not exclusively out of need, want or fear."\(^3\)

\(^{1}\)Bloesch, 67.
\(^{2}\)Ibid., 75.
\(^{3}\)Ibid.
It is also a fact that God loves us and wants to act in our lives, so, in a sense, intercession takes place continually. "God holds me and every other son and daughter of Adam in a longing gaze, seeking to wake each of us out of our drowse of preoccupation and self-absorption that we might realize who it is that loves us."\(^1\)

Confession of responsibility for wronging the relationship with God in some way "is at the heart of all prayer," because "prayer is relationship with God, communion."\(^2\) Prayers of petition present to God one's own specific needs, while intercessory prayer is in behalf of someone other than one's self. Steere says intercessory prayer is "caring for another or for a human situation in the presence of God."\(^3\) It is a much greater investment than only presenting a list of needs for our friends. Maxie Dunnam's *Workbook of Living Prayer* attempts to show those who may attend a workshop or prayer retreat where his material is used that "praying for people will bring you to love them. Loving them will lead you to serve them. Serving them will be


\(^3\)Steere, 21.
the open door through which God can move in to save, heal, and make whole."¹

Tilden Edwards offers a prayer form which he has designed for intercession, but which may be adapted to include confession and petition as well. This was the discipline used for the Capital Memorial Church model.

1. Ask for your own openness to God's Spirit.

2. If you want to include petitions for yourself at this point before moving to intercession for others, let them be just as honest as you can. Let your true desires surface and be offered into your deepest desire for God's will to be done.

3. Let people and situations spontaneously rise to your awareness. With or without particular words, offer them to God, remembering the partiality of your understanding and your ultimate hope for God's loving will to be done, whatever that may be. Be open for the inclusion of enemies, ethnic and racial groups, nations, and the natural environment. Be especially open for victims of various kinds of oppression and your sense of God's and your unity with them.

4. Remain a while with an open presence, inviting the Spirit to pray through you beyond your conscious intercessions, "with sighs too deep for words."

5. Ask that you be made aware of any particular called-for actions on behalf of those for whom you have prayed.

6. Say the Lord's Prayer (silently or aloud) very slowly, pausing between each phrase.

Devotional Use of Scripture

Most of my own reading of the Bible in the past has been for the purpose of increasing the pool of information I had about God and religion. Sometimes it had less noble motives, as when I wanted to impress friends with the number of times I had read the Bible through. I probably expected to have some vague spiritual benefit, but little of that was ever achieved. Then, I did not understand the difference between the formational and informational use of Scripture. Mulholland identifies six characteristics which differentiate the two styles of reading. (See fig. 1.)

The devotional use of Scripture makes use of the formational style of reading and is based on the understanding that God’s purpose in giving Scripture in the first place was not only to record stories, even His own story, or provide theological meaning; it was also to speak to us personally. This is not to say that there is no place for careful study of Scripture in order to discern truth, nor should the devotional use of Scripture ignore trustworthy interpretations. Listening to God speak through His Word to a present life situation is a process which allows the Holy Spirit to reuse the

### Informational
- Reads for quantity and speed
- Moves through parts in a linear fashion
- Seeks to control, test and justify and defend personal interpretation
- Text is an object out there" for control and manipulation
- Analytical, critical and judgmental
- Uses problem-solving mentality

### Formational
- Reads for meaning, concerned with small portions
- Reading is for multiple layers of meaning
- Comes with openness to hear, receive and respond
- Text is subject of reading relationship
- Humble, detached, willing and loving
- Openness to mystery

**Figure 1. Comparison between informational and formational use of Scripture. Source: M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Shaped by the Word*, 49-57.**

Recorded experiences to continue to change lives. It is obvious that the higher priority in this form of Scripture study is on the application for the student's own life—placing oneself in the situation as though actually present.

We want to be inside their [the biblical authors] liberating awareness of God firsthand, through which we can receive the Word that is meant for us, rather than forever being outsiders hammering at the door, guessing at the personal or corporate relevance of the author's words. We want to be in the mind of Christ! That is why we lay our constricted outside ego image on the page and let God "read" us into firsthand awareness.¹

Scripture is one of the prime resources for encountering God in an effort to rebuild the relationship broken when sin entered. Its study provides an opportunity for the mind to be fed with the spiritual food which can replace the self-centered thoughts and habits developed through sinful indulgence. Belief among conservative Christians that the source of Scripture is the Holy Spirit gives it a special status beyond other study materials. When the Holy Spirit completes the inspiration process, as the reader approaches Scripture with an openness to His guidance, a miraculously awesome transaction takes place.

Mulholland has outlined a process for devotional reading of scripture which intentionally prepares the reader for the transforming miracle to occur. His suggestions guided the practice presented as a discipline for the model used at the Capital Memorial Church.

1. **Silence.** A time and place should be chosen where you will not be interrupted and where you will be comfortable. Wait there in silence until the tensions are gone and you sense a deep relinquishment of yourself to God.

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2. **Reading.** There is no attempt to gain control of the text; the text is considered to be an address from God. A prayer may be breathed inwardly while reading, "Lord, what are you saying to me?" This reading is "characterized by an intentional openness and listening for God in, through, and around our encounter with the text."¹

3. **Meditation.** This is mental chewing where you wrestle with God's message. You allow it to do its work even when it is challenging that which may be dear but which needs to be surrendered.

4. **Responding.** Here you pour out your heart to God.

   It may be a cry of joy and exaltation. It may be a cry of pain. It may be penitent or petulant, releasing or resistant, responsive or rejecting. . . . Whatever form it takes . . . [it] is characterized by integrity. It is the honest expression of our thought, feeling and desire to God, the outpouring of deep speaking unto deep.²

5. **Contemplation.** This is simply waiting before God in a condition of yieldedness to whatever God wishes.

6. **Incarnation.** You go out into life and begin "to be shaped by openness and obedience to God."³

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¹Ibid., 30.
²Ibid., 31.
³Ibid., 32.
The memorization of scripture was also recommended in the model as a means of permanently recording in the mind words from God which have been especially meaningful. It was suggested that important texts be written on small cards and referred to throughout the day until they become part of the one’s life, to be recalled when appropriate. Memorizing scripture in this way gives a sense of God’s continuing presence; it also replaces negative influences which may have been cultivated over a lifetime. The model advised that recall of memorized scripture can be especially helpful during times of extreme temptation or discouragement. At such times, a special text can provide the subject for meditation with the likely result that the temptation or discouragement will be shut out.

Christian Meditation

Meditation is considered with the deepest suspicion by conservative Christians because of its important role in Eastern religions. However, if Christian meditation were to be examined on its own merits, the discovery would quickly be made that there are few similarities between the two, and that Christian meditation has a very important place in spiritual formation. Foster has a simple definition for Christian meditation: "The ability
to hear God's voice and obey his word."\textsuperscript{1} Cully provides some additional elaboration: "Meditation is a technique in which words and images (frequently from the Bible) form a basis for thoughts from which the mind seeks to deepen the understanding of God, the relationship to God, and a cultivation of love for God."\textsuperscript{2}

Morton Kelsey has been in the forefront of restoring credibility to meditation among Christians. His popular book, \textit{The Other Side of Silence}, has been useful in many quarters, although not entirely acceptable to some conservatives. He presents meditation as the individual's preparation to meet God who is seeking us. It removes the obstacles so that God can break through and enter our lives as He says, in Rev 3:20, He would like to do.

\textit{[It] is a way for us to unlock the door and come out from the places where most of us have been hiding. It is the process of opening ourselves to the realm of nonphysical reality in which God can touch us far more directly than in the physical world. It is that kind of prayer in which we seek relationship with God, and in this sense meditation is the preparation and foundation for prayer.}\textsuperscript{3}

The basic difference between Christian meditation and Eastern meditation is that the goal of Eastern

\textsuperscript{1}\textit{Foster, Celebration of Discipline}, 17.

\textsuperscript{2}\textit{Cully}, 58, 59.

\textsuperscript{3}\textit{Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence}, 8.
meditation is the emptying of the mind and detachment from the world in an effort to merge with the Cosmic Mind. For Christians the goal is attachment to Christ. This does mean detachment, but it is detachment from all the ungodly voices in the world calling our attention away from God.¹ A helpful comparison between Eastern and Western meditation appeared in a 1987 article in Ministry magazine. It was included in the model to assist in the removal of any misconceptions. (See fig. 2.)

Meditation can be used in prayer and Bible study or as a discipline distinct from them. Foster says that "meditation upon Scripture is the central reference point by which all other forms of meditation are kept in proper perspective."² He also speaks of three other forms of meditation: re-collection or centering down, in which the fragmentation of the mind is allowed to become centered; meditation upon the creation by giving attention to the created order such as trees, flowers, etc.; and "meditation upon the events of our time and to seek to perceive their significance."³

¹Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 21.
²Ibid., 29.
³Ibid., 30-32.
A sanctified imagination is an integral part of the meditation process. It may be a biblical story or some other situation which is used in meditation to provide the opportunity for interaction with God. The mind visualizes the individual in a position where God is present. Every facet of the circumstance is investigated in complete

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eastern</th>
<th>Western</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Down plays reason, intellect and doctrine as impediments.</td>
<td>Emphasizes reason, and doctrine as adjuncts to success.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If concentration is used the mind is monotonously directed toward a single object or word. Attention is often given to one’s breathing.</td>
<td>The mind, through prayer, is directed toward communion with God or thoughtful consideration of truths of Scripture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The &quot;path to zero&quot;: goal to empty the mind of thought to find fulfillment.</td>
<td>The &quot;path to One&quot;: goal is union with God to find fulfillment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Passive volition: opening the mind and the spirit to undirected, nonrational thought.</td>
<td>Active volition: opening the mind and the spirit to be filled with God’s spirit; unlocking the affections and directing them Godward.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A state of higher consciousness, or heightened inner awareness, beginning with the near cessation of all mental activity and spilling over into the life-style</td>
<td>A state of higher consciousness, or heightened inner awareness of God, self, and others, spilling over into the life-style and behavior of the practitioner.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
and behavior of the practitioner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A state of detachment from the world; escapism from the misery of existence.</th>
<th>A state of detachment from the confusion of the world, but attachment to God and others facing life's stresses with new spiritual strength.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Losing individual personhood to merge with the &quot;cosmic mind of the universe.&quot;</td>
<td>Intensely personal communion with God, as spirit with Spirit and mind with Mind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separation of soul and spirit from the body.</td>
<td>Wholeness; oneness of body, soul, and spirit.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditator is urged on by his own potential for understanding and peace, i.e., his &quot;nature.&quot;</td>
<td>Meditator is drawn along from lower to higher stages in his experience by God's activity, i.e., &quot;grace.&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. A Comparison of Eastern and Western forms of meditation. Source: Jim Florence and Gunter Reiss, "Meditation for Christians?" Ministry, October 1987, 27.

openness to whatever God wills. Imagination builds the encounter, but it is imagination sanctified by the presence of the Holy Spirit who has been invited to be the guide. Susan Muto refers to this imagination process as formative reflection which may be a more acceptable designation. Her description is also helpful.

Formative thinking is full of examples, stories, symbols, images, metaphors, parables. This is the "stuff" real meditation is made of because it contains much more than any word or concept could express. Experience can never be exhausted by informative thought; there is always more to be
said. That is why we can read the same text several times and still derive inspiration and new insights from it.1

The discipline used in the model begins, as do the other disciplines, with a quiet place where no interruptions will occur as well as the dedication of sufficient time to allow the process to proceed in an unhurried fashion. A comfortable position must also be found so that there will be no distractions which might take away from the process once it has begun. The meditation discipline may require fifteen to twenty minutes, according to individual need. Other steps are as follows:

1. Sit in complete silence while both body and mind relax. Give no attention to thoughts which present themselves. Allow them to go as easily as they have come.

This kind of silence cannot be hurried or forced; it does not come through effort. Instead, it must be allowed to happen. This is like eating an artichoke. It must be done a leaf at a time, down to the heart. If one tries to take it in a single bite, all he gets is a mouthful of thistles. One has to set aside time for silence and then turn toward it with composure, letting go of immediate things a little at a time in order to enter a world where dreams and also the energy for life are born.2

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1Muto, 85.

2Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence, 104.
2. When the mind is free and the body is relaxed a decision must be made as to the object of meditation. It may be a portion of scripture, some object in nature, an aspect of God's character, the person of God, or a spiritual idea.

3. The imagination is allowed to build the scene and to brood on it and then become an active participant.

Suppose we want to meditate on Jesus' staggering statement, "My peace I give to you" (John 14:27). Our task is not so much to study the passage as it is to be initiated into the reality of which the passage speaks. We brood on the truth that he is now filling us with his peace. The heart, the mind, and the spirit are awakened to his inflowing peace. We sense all motions of fear stilled and overcome by "power and love and self-control" (2 Tim. 1:7). Rather than dissecting peace we are entering into it. We are enveloped, absorbed, gathered into his peace. And the wonderful thing about such an experience is that the self is quite forgotten. We are no longer worried about how we can make ourselves more at peace, for we are attending to the impartation of peace within our hearts. No longer do we laboriously think up ways to act peacefully, for acts of peace spring spontaneously from within.¹

4. When it seems right, the meditation ends with a quiet prayer of praise, and with a time to determine what new meaning has come to the life. If an action is required, a covenant is made with God as to how the action will occur.

Evangelical meditation is centered on the words and acts of God not only in creation but also and preeminently in Jesus Christ. Such meditation is

¹Foster, Celebration of Discipline, 30.
intended to bear fruit in loving action and service. In meditation we are convicted of our sins and then spurred to action.¹

**Journaling**

Journals and diaries have been kept for centuries, but they have not necessarily been spiritual journals nor could the experience be termed a spiritual discipline.

Journaling becomes spiritual discipline when we use pen and paper to strengthen our faith in God. We can use journaling as a companion to prayer, Bible study, fasting, or any other spiritual discipline that is already part of our life in God. Journaling can be a significant tool in deepening our spiritual lives because by its nature it leads us to further revelation of who we are and who God is in our lives.²

Great varieties of styles are acceptable for writing in a journal, and almost any subject is acceptable, as long as it impacts the spiritual journey. A record of one’s activities for any given day is not, however, a spiritual journal. That is more the objective of a diary. An entry in a spiritual journal reflects on the actions of the day and attempts to find spiritual meaning. The entry may become a prayer of thanksgiving for protection, or a cry to God for help, or a confession of some sin. There may be a description of an encounter with an individual or something of beauty such as a

¹Bloesch, 21.

flower, in an attempt to find the spiritual impact of that moment. A scripture passage may be recorded because it spoke of a meaningful moment during the day.

A journal becomes an aid in decision making as all the issues are written out and analyzed. It may also be a healing mechanism: "We can bring many problems and fears into the open and deal with them face to face in honest combat."¹ If written honestly, it may also reveal much about one's fears and about faith which has been hidden from view. Reading over these records at various intervals provides helpful insights as well as encouragement for the future. Richard Hauser has four main purposes for his own journal-keeping practice.

My journal contains varieties of entries impossible to categorize. But for me the four main purposes are: first, recording my blessings; second, discernment of my moods; third, planning my service; fourth, recording my theological and psychological insights on life. To better understand how I am relating to the Lord I regularly reflect on the date of these daily entries. Each weekend I spend several hours with the journal to see the patterns of the week.²

Hesitancy to maintain a spiritual journal often reflects a fear of writing something which is very private and having it discovered. Guarding against this


may not be easy if one has a large family. Desires for privacy may need to be discussed with the family and arrangements made for a secure place where the journal can be kept. Instructions may need to be given as to how the journal is to be disposed of in the event of the death of the journal keeper.

Some also hesitate because they believe they lack writing skills. One has to remember, however, that the journal is not being written for publication. The literary and grammatical style is not on trial since no one else need ever see the journal. It is being written purely for one’s own pleasure and spiritual development. It is most authentic as it properly reflects the character and personality of its author caught up in the struggles of the daily journey.

It is always easy to begin a journal, but at first it may be difficult to make it a regular practice. This is where discipline enters. A determination must be made that it will become a habit. When it is forgotten or purposely neglected, a commitment may be made again and again until finally the discipline becomes permanent. My own experience was that the first year had large gaps in writing, but after that, regularity developed more and more until now there is an entry for almost every day. I do not feel compelled to write each day, but the
experience has become so important that I rarely want to skip.

Journaling also requires establishing a regular time and place where it can occur. The time commitment is most important for making it habitual, so that when that time arrives each day, the journal calls. A private place for writing can prevent interruptions that take away from the line of thought. Using the same location each time contributes to the habit and keeps the attention focused on writing. Thoughts may arise which have nothing to do with the journal entry. These may be jotted on a paper kept handy so they are not forgotten and so they do not continue to interfere.

Paper or notebook should be chosen which feels right for the individual. Some may wish to use a loose-leaf notebook, but loose pages can be easily torn out and lost. I prefer a bound, ruled composition book, 9 3/4" by 7 1/2" in size. Ink or ball point pen should be used in order to make the record permanent. Some may prefer to keep the journal on their computer using a floppy disk for permanent storage.

Journal keeping includes the following steps.

1. Sit quietly and comfortably for several minutes while the mind and body relax and become focused.
2. Allow the events of the past day to come quietly to mind. Ask yourself how God revealed Himself. How close were you to God? How did it feel? What happened? Were there times when you acted on your own? Was there a scripture text or a hymn or poem or other thought which grabbed your attention? Reflect for a moment on these significant occurrences.

3. Date the entry and begin writing, allowing your thoughts to flow as seems right. Do not give much attention to grammar or handwriting style. What you write is for your own eyes only. You may wish to write in the form of a prayer. Express exactly how you feel whether it is anger with God or joy.

4. Write until you have said all that flows naturally from your mind. Do not force yourself even if there are only a few sentences, tomorrow you may have several paragraphs. Five to fifteen minutes is usually sufficient for each entry.

5. Return to the journal to read your entries at regular intervals.

Formative events selected out of the wider stream of life are like stepping-stones in the midst of a pond. Recording them helps us to get in touch with the patterns of our life as a whole, with those key situations that constitute our place in God's plan. Looking back on these entries, we may see the threads of our experience tying together and forming a meaningful mosaic. This influential person, that significant period of
transition—all make more sense when we see the whole tapestry.¹

Reading the published journals of others may be a helpful practice, especially as one begins keeping his/her own journal. It provides an example of what the journal may become; however, one should beware the temptation to become discouraged because their own journal does not resemble that of another. Journals which may be helpful include Henri Nouwen’s Genesee Diary, Dag Hammarskjold’s Markings, May Sarton’s Journal of a Solitude, and the several journals of Anne Morrow Lindbergh.

Summary

Four disciplines were selected for use in this model project; there are many others as well as variations on these four. It would have been impossible, because of time limitations, to have even described others, and too many would likely overwhelm those who joined the first retreat group. In a follow-up time for enrichment, there may be opportunity to use these other disciplines. Of the four chosen for this model, prayer is the most important, followed very closely by the formational use of Scripture. Meditation can be included

¹Muto, 107.
in both these exercises rather than being considered a separate discipline, although it is given a special place here because some Adventists have suspicions that it is not quite Christian. Keeping a journal will be difficult for most at first, but the rewards will be great as it is incorporated into the daily spiritual exercises.
CHAPTER X

INTRODUCING THE DISCIPLINES

After considering several possible methods for introducing the disciplines, the retreat process was chosen because it provided an opportunity to keep a group together for a period long enough to both learn and practice the disciplines. Experience had demonstrated that people who live in urban areas with many activities demanding their attention are easily distracted when a program is continued over several weeks. It also seemed likely that a spiritual retreat would be an attractive break in the routine for most members, attractive enough to cause them to set aside other plans and allow this to be a priority. It was also helpful that members of the Capital Memorial Church have very positive associations with retreats because of the annual church weekend retreat where the emphasis is on fellowship and community building. (This retreat has always been one of the high points of the church calendar.)

The retreat process itself was ideally suited for the objectives of the project in that it would take the
retreatants away from their normal routine. At a
retreat, they could give their total attention for a
period of time sufficient to cover the material. If a
retreat center with the appropriate atmosphere could be
located, the location itself could contribute to the
retreat goals. Developing a sense of community among
those in the group also could support the process, and
this could best be facilitated with the group in
seclusion.

The search for a retreat center led to the
conclusion that many other Christians also have found the
benefits in the retreat process. The several retreat
centers in the greater Washington area and even in
outlying areas were booked well into the next year.
Finally, a center available after noon on Saturday,
September 7, 1990, was located about thirty minutes from
the church. Since it would have been impossible for most
members to take off from their work on a week day, the
retreat was scheduled to begin at the church on Saturday
morning with a short break for lunch before meeting at
the retreat center. The retreat ended at about 4:00 p.m.
on the following day (Sunday), which gave sufficient time
for any preparations which had to be made at home before
the work week began.
The Wellspring Center used for the retreat is operated by the Church of Our Saviour of Washington, D.C., and is available for use by adult groups whose objectives are compatible with the purpose of the center. It is located on a 220-acre farm about twenty-five miles from the heart of Washington. Three cabins are each equipped to provide space for mini-conferences and retreats. Large groups can meet in a central building, separate from the living quarters, for meetings and dining. We used the largest cabin which has overnight facilities for up to twenty individuals. Since another group was also on the campus, all of our activities had to be limited to our cabin. We were comfortable, but a more spacious building would have been helpful.

We chose to prepare our own meals in the small kitchen adjacent to our meeting/dining room. Some kitchen noise was inevitable, but it was rarely disruptive, and any inconvenience was more than compensated by the good food prepared and served by my wife. Retreat participants were charged $55.00 for room, three meals, and all retreat materials. Three individuals chose not to remain overnight at the Center, but they were present for all sessions.
Marketing the Retreat

About eight weeks before the scheduled beginning of the retreat, the first announcement that a retreat was being planned appeared as a full-page article in the church’s weekly newsletter, CMC Family Journal.\(^1\) The purpose of the article was to plant an idea in the minds of those members who might be spiritually attentive. No action was anticipated since it was still two months before the retreat would be held. However, it was hoped that some would begin asking questions and that interest would begin to build.

Five sermons, presented during the summer prior to the retreat, were to be an integral part of the project and of the spiritual formation process. Hopefully, they would develop interest in the retreat.\(^2\) In the first sermon, God was presented as One who is very much involved in relating to His people. The sermon’s appeal was to an openness to enjoy the intimacy which God desires with each of His sons and daughters. The second sermon presented Jesus as the ultimate evidence of God’s love for humankind. In the Scripture passage (John 1:14, 18), the Apostle speaks of the Word becoming flesh and

\(^1\)An edited version of the article appears in appendix 1.

\(^2\)All five sermons are presented in appendix 2.
making the Father known. Sermon three presented the Holy Spirit as the member of the Godhead who is especially designated to remain with God’s children as their companion on the spiritual journey.

How to live in God’s presence was the subject of the fourth sermon. It gave a practical approach to the human side of the relationship-with-God equation. In this sermon, the spiritual disciplines were mentioned as practices which become integral to the rhythm built into the daily life, enabling the relationship with the Lord to thrive. The four disciplines chosen to be presented at the retreat were very briefly described, and it was indicated that the upcoming retreat would provide an opportunity to learn them in depth.

The place of faith in spiritual formation was presented as the fifth sermon in the series. Much of the sermon was given to a narrative of individuals who demonstrated what it means to have a strong faith as a foundational structure in place compared to one who is faithless. Faith was shown as the root from which spirituality must grow; much more than belief in a set of doctrinal statements, it was shown to be trust which grows from experiences with God. The text used was Gal 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the
body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

After the article in the church newsletter appeared, an attractive announcement about the retreat was printed on the back page of the worship bulletin each week to serve as a re-enforcement to what was being said from the pulpit.¹ By the fourth week after the first announcement, a letter with full details concerning the retreat and its cost was sent to most of the active members of the church.²

Three weeks before the retreat, letters were sent to pastors of other Adventist churches in the Washington, D.C., area requesting that they place an announcement about the retreat in their bulletins. Finally, a letter was sent to all the elders of the Capital Memorial Church urging them especially, as spiritual leaders of the church, to take advantage of the retreat.

Who Attended

Fifteen individuals made up the final retreat group. Four were not members of Capital Memorial Church, but they had close connections with the church. The invitations to other Washington-area churches met with no

¹See appendix 3.
²An edited version of the letter appears in appendix 4.
response. Three of the fifteen participants were men, half the group were fifty-five years old or over, and six different national backgrounds were represented. Three of the retreatants were elders of the church, one being the assistant head elder. Six had been Adventists for less than five years—four being very recent converts. One recent convert from the Moslem religion seemed very suspicious at first. She was born in Guyana, and feared at first that she might be misled in a way similar to those who had been involved with Jim Jones.

The spiritual inventory referred to above was useful in understanding the characteristics of the retreatants. Sixty-three members of the congregation completed the inventory, twelve of the retreat group participated. The small size of the retreat group makes a comparison very difficult, since each member represents such a large statistical variation. Nevertheless, some differences between the two groups were illuminating.

Five possible choices were given in the survey: very definitely agree, agree, not sure, disagree, very definitely disagree. In comparing the differences, "not sure" was added to agree and very definitely agree or disagree and very definitely disagree; "not sure" was an indication that a problem likely existed. Differences of 10 percent or less were not considered significant. The
first section of the survey was designed to determine beliefs about God. The statistical variations there were less than 10 percent except the question concerning the work of the Holy Spirit. Thirteen percent more of the congregation had a problem than among the retreatants. Both the retreat group and the congregational respondents scored 80 percent or more in all the questions of this section, evidencing a strong belief in favor of God as a relational being.

To survey the individual’s relationship with God was the intent of the second section. It showed that 15 percent more of the retreatants struggled with the idea that they could have assurance of salvation at this moment than the congregational respondents. However, 23 percent more of the congregation often did not feel that God was present with them, 20 percent more sometimes doubted whether God even accepts them, and 15 percent indicated that they were afraid of God. Eleven percent more of the retreatants experienced guilt even after confessing their sins, and 22 percent doubted that God answered their prayers. Nineteen percent of the congregational respondents had difficulty making Jesus the Lord of their lives, and 21 percent were not able as yet to give God first priority. The overall positive percentage for both groups showed only the slightest
variation: 74 percent for the retreatants and 72 percent for the congregation.

Section three of the inventory was to determine devotional attitudes and practices. It seems significant that the retreatants had a total positive response of 55 percent, whereas the congregational response was 47 percent. The 8 percent difference between the two showed, at the least, more openness on the part of the retreatants to the objectives of the retreat. Some very wide variations existed on specific questions regarding devotional practices—perhaps the most important being that 90 percent of the retreatants were not satisfied with their devotional life versus 73 percent of the congregational respondents who were dissatisfied. Sixty-three percent of the retreatants believed they were not growing spiritually as they would like, while 52 percent of the congregational respondents noted the same concern.

Those who attended the retreat also expressed more specific frustration with their devotional practices than the congregational respondents. Only 55 percent of the retreatants pray often and find great enjoyment in speaking to God—23 percent less than the congregational respondents. Fifty percent of retreatants did not know how to read the Bible devotionally, while 22 percent of the congregational respondents experienced the same
difficulty. Thirty-six percent of the retreatants have struggled to find personal meaning in the quarterly communion service; 12 percent more than admitted to such a problem among the congregational respondents.

The survey showed that the retreat group was more open to some of those practices which might be considered by Adventists to be less common or different from those most often deemed acceptable. Fifty-four percent, among the retreatants, did not feel it would be difficult to maintain a spiritual journal, but only 26 percent of congregational respondents felt the practice would be comfortable for them. All of the retreatants were open to meeting regularly with a mature Christian or a small group for spiritual support, but only slightly more than half (54%) of the congregational respondents agreed. Eighty-three percent of the retreatants wanted help in developing their devotional life, 55 percent of the others expressed that desire. All of the retreatants were willing to commit to a specific amount of time for their personal devotions, 77 percent of the congregational respondents would make such a commitment.

Retreat Outline

The retreat outline which appears below would have better suited a longer time period (an entire weekend) such as was originally intended. The little opportunity
included for interruptions or for debriefing and reflecting should have been longer, but the original goal was not unduly compromised.

**Saturday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9:00 AM</td>
<td>Retreat begins in church parlor</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal testimony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introductions—&quot;What do you hope to get from this retreat?&quot;</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Retreat outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relaxing exercises</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imaging and prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Introduction to journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Distribution and explanation of afternoon assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:00</td>
<td>Worship service/&quot;How to Live with Jesus When He Is at Home with You.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:30 PM</td>
<td>Break for lunch and homework</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spiritual life exam</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Construction of spiritual journey</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading materials on historical and theological perspective and spiritual formation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5:00</td>
<td>Arrival at Wellspring Retreat Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:00</td>
<td>Review and reaction to sermon</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Imaging and prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sharing best experiences of God</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Review of home reading assignment</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00</td>
<td>Supper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:00</td>
<td>Introduction to spiritual disciplines</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Devotional prayer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reaction with partners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:00</td>
<td>Break for night</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Sunday**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7:30 AM</td>
<td>Relaxing exercises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Devotional and prayer

8:00  Breakfast

9:30  Prayer of adoration and thanksgiving
      Prayer of supplication
      Reaction with partners
      Journaling

10:30  Scripture as formation
       Reaction with partners
       Journaling

11:15  Break

11:30  Meditation
       Reaction with partners

12:30 PM  Lunch

1:30  Prayer and looking to the future
      Personal spiritual planning
      Sharing plan with partners
      Making of a covenant
      Follow up plans
      Retreat evaluation

3:00  Closure with communion

What Happened

Not until 9:30 a.m. did the entire group actually assemble in the church parlor for the beginning of the retreat. Since the remaining time was not sufficient to accomplish all that had been intended, the lectures planned as background information were omitted. Some of this material was copied and given to each retreatant to read during free time.¹ My own testimony was given to

¹The intended lecture material was based on the materials presented in Part 1 of this report.
introduce myself and my interest in spirituality and to share some of my enthusiasm about the spiritual disciplines.

One of the most important features of the first session was the time given for getting acquainted and building community. Retreatants were asked to identify themselves and explain what they hoped to receive from the retreat. This proved to be extremely valuable since several in the group were strangers to each other. A bit of tentativeness was present, but the initial tension was released and a feeling of confidence and anticipation began to build.

Omitting the scheduled lectures at the first session made it possible to include a prayer exercise which established the tone for the entire retreat. After sharing their expectations, retreatants were instructed to close their eyes and focus their minds on an image which reflected their expectancy and then to imagine what it would be like to be successful in achieving it. They were then to share this image with God and ask Him to make it possible, closing the prayer session with a humble waiting in silence for God to speak. This exercise was an introduction to one of the prayer forms which would be explained more fully later; it provided participants with an indication of what to expect after
the long break before arrival at the retreat center six hours later.

Journaling was briefly introduced just before dismissal from the morning session to prepare retreatants for some serious journaling during the afternoon free time. The group was also asked to prepare, in the afternoon, a time line of their spiritual journey up to that point and to evaluate their spiritual journey using seven questions.

1. Describe your journey right now. How does it feel? What prevents you from experiencing the growth you desire for yourself?
2. What kind of person is God for you? What do you think shaped this image?
3. Describe your conversion experience.
4. What devotional practices seem most helpful to you.
5. What spiritual characteristics are most difficult for you to develop? Which seem the easiest?
6. How much assurance do you have right now? On what is it based?
7. How important is your relationship with God?

This first session ended with a brief introduction to the sermon which would immediately follow. Had the retreat been scheduled for forty-eight or more hours at a center, the subject presented in the sermon would have
been presented in one of the sessions. In the format required, because of the unavailability of a center for a longer period of time, the worship experience became an integral part of the retreat with the sermon directed primarily for the retreatants. This hybrid arrangement proved successful in developing the message intended. The sermon presented the idea of practicing the presence of God as one of the most important of spiritual disciplines.¹ When the group assembled at Wellspring after the long break, the sermon was the first topic of discussion. After determining that the message had been received as intended, the retreatants were asked to imagine that Christ was actually with them through every minute of the day and then to reflect on what that would mean for them.

Many of the retreatants arrived at Wellspring early to get settled in their rooms and enjoy a walk in the surrounding wooded area. All but one was present at the scheduled time to continue the retreat. (That one missed her ride but was able to find other transportation, arriving after the first afternoon session was well under way but causing little disruption.) A spirit of warmth and eagerness was exhibited as the retreatants began, though nearly all confessed that there had not been

¹See appendix 5.
opportunity to complete the homework assigned for the afternoon session. In fact, it was soon evident that the prepared schedule would have to be relaxed and altered if the spirit of the retreat was to be maintained. It was important that the various presentations and exercises not be rushed, and that the atmosphere be without tension to give the Holy Spirit full opportunity to operate. Most of the lecturing and some small-group work was omitted so most emphasis was given to the actual practice of the disciplines after they were explained.

During the first session at Wellspring, as part of the follow-up to the sermon, the retreatants were asked to think of a time when they especially experienced the presence of God, and to share that experience with the group. This was one of the most moving experiences of the entire retreat. One retreatant described his experience of over twelve years earlier when doctors gave him just a few months to live after the discovery of cancer. He explained how he felt God in the hospital room giving him assurance and hope. A young Burmese woman described her attempt at suicide by drinking bleach, but that she survived with no ill effects, giving her confidence that God had rescued her. A recent convert from Hinduism described her conversion and how she sensed the hand of God leading her step by step through the
process. This section ended with a brief time for making
journal entries.

After a hearty supper of sandwiches and fruit, the
first of the disciplines was introduced, prefaced with an
explanation of the concept of spiritual discipline.¹
Devotional prayer was the discipline chosen to be
presented first, since prayer is probably the most
important of all the disciplines, and devotional prayer
is the basic beginning form. The process chosen for
experiencing the disciplines was (1) to explain and
answer questions, (2) to practice, (3) to reflect with
partners, (4) to make a journal entry describing the
experience, and (5) to conclude with group interaction as
to what it was like. Interacting with partners and with
the group helped to clear any misgivings or other
difficulties, and the journal entry made a permanent
record of the experience.

The first day ended just a little after nine in the
evening. All retreatants were requested to get to bed
early so they would be refreshed and ready for the first
session before breakfast the next morning. Several woke
early for walks on the campus or visiting with friends in
the common room. A few late risers delayed the beginning
of the devotional period. The shortened devotional was

¹This material appears in chapter IV.
personal meditative reflection on two quotations from *Steps to Christ* by Ellen White.

If we are Christ's our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breathe His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things.¹

Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we are to grow in grace.²

Following breakfast, the other prayer forms were presented and practiced with one adaptation in the supplication prayer form described in the model. Also suggested was prayer of confession which uses the repetition of the Jesus prayer (Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me a sinner) for several minutes followed by a period of silence in which the mind and heart are allowed to respond as it seems right, including the recalling and confessing of specific sins which may be brought to mind.³ The prayer of intercession was used as a group experience with each one mentioning specific requests during a pause in the prayer. One very sincere and earnest retreatant found it difficult to limit her requests, choosing to mention nearly everyone

¹White, *Steps to Christ*, 58.

²Ibid., p. 69.

and everything she could call to mind. She was moved by the events of the retreat, and the others were patient and loving towards her concerns.

Extra care was taken to present the devotional use of scripture so each one in the group could understand the difference between studying for information and studying for formation. Luke's account of the journey of two disciples to Emmaus following the crucifixion was chosen for this exercise. After time for quiet reflection on the passage, the story was read aloud, prepared with much more imagination and attention to detail. As the retreatants reflected on the experience with their partners, it was discovered that one woman was having difficulty experiencing God because of some negative interactions with her father and the male-domineered work place. When the entire group was back together, the Scripture story of a woman who had been healed by Jesus was presented for quiet formational reflection. The retreatant was visibly moved as she saw herself as that woman receiving understanding from a compassionate Lord.

The final discipline presented was Christian meditation. By this time, the concept was not difficult

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1 Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence, 257-261.

2 Mark 5:25-34.
to understand since meditation practices had already been used in prayer and the use of scripture. The contrast between the eastern and western forms of meditation was carefully defined to disarm those who might be apprehensive about meditation. Support was pointed out from the writings of Ellen White, an important authority for all of the retreatants. Group meditation was used to assist in the building of a full understanding of how the imagination assists in the practice. A meditation was presented which took the group on an imaginary journey from the busy marketplace to the sanctuary and back again.¹

The period following lunch was dedicated to facilitating the development of a new devotional plan to be practiced at home. It began with reflection on the story of an oriental princess who made a plan to discover the handsomest man in her kingdom to become her husband. A very ugly, hardened criminal tricked the princess into selecting him by wearing a very handsome mask. Actually, he only wanted to see the inside of the palace and never expected his plan to be so successful. Knowing that he would be discovered, he asked for a year to make his decision. During the year he wore the mask, he had to act the part of the well-bred, kind-mannered man in the

¹Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence, 242-246.
mask. At the end of the year, he confessed his treachery to the princess, and when the mask had been removed, his own face had become just like the mask and his character had been changed as well.¹

Two quotations by Ellen White were read in support of the concept of change coming through interaction with God.

As we make Christ our daily companion we shall feel that the powers of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image. By beholding we become changed. The character is softened, refined, and ennobled for the heavenly kingdom. The sure result of our intercourse and fellowship with our Lord will be increased piety, purity, and fervor. There will be a growing intelligence in prayer. We are receiving a divine education, and this is illustrated in a life of diligence and zeal.²

Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed.³

Each retreatant was invited to picture him or herself as God intended him or her to be and to imagine him or herself with Jesus and the angels in this new image. After quiet reflection, retreatants were asked to listen for God to speak, especially with an invitation to become what He had intended from the beginning. Then

¹Ibid., 267-269.
²White, Mount of Blessing, 85.
they were asked to reflect on what it might take for this to happen, to ask God to make it possible, and to covenant with Him to allow it to happen.

The meditation was designed to prepare the retreatants to develop a personal plan for spiritual formation which would be practiced after the retreat back in their own world. Ten questions (shown below) were copied and distributed to assist in this development. Some time was allowed for personal work, and this was followed by another sharing-with-partners experience to receive feedback from a friend and to assist in developing accountability.

1. Which of the disciplines seem best for you? Why?
2. What needs to happen to make it possible for you to practice these disciplines on a regular basis?
3. What time do you think would be best for you? Why? How much time can you regularly invest?
4. What can you do to prevent other urgent matters to steal your devotional time?
5. Describe the place you will set aside for your devotional time? How can you keep from being interrupted?
6. Who is there to help keep you accountable? How do you think you will be able to engage this person?
7. How important is it for you that you grow spiritually?

8. What priorities are going to have to change for you? How will you make the change?

9. If you have a spouse who does not know about these plans, how will you share them with him/her?

10. How can your pastor support you in your plans?

When the group was back together, there was some discussion concerning how the pastor might help. Spiritual direction was described and encouraged, and information to be read at a later time was distributed to give further background. In order to encourage retreatants to carry out their own spiritual plans, I suggested that a simple group covenant be developed which might help to keep each one accountable. A three-point covenant was agreed on by each retreatant:

1. To spend at least one-half hour five times each week in my own personal devotions.

2. To pray for the members of the group regularly until we meet again.

3. To meet together in retreat six months from now.

The closure began with a guided meditation on the experience of the disciples as they experienced the first Eucharist meal with the Lord in the Upper Room.¹

¹Kelsey, The Other Side of Silence, 251-254.
Following prayer, bread was broken and the elements were served. The group stood together and sang "Bless Be the Tie That Binds." In the final act, as the retreatants joined hands in a circle, first one and then the next, turned to the person to his/her right, called him/her by name, and said, "I surround you with the Love of God in the name of Jesus Christ."

**Personal Reaction**

It was gratifying to see the interest and openness of the group to material which was quite new and even challenging. Those who may have been even a little apprehensive at first entered into the spirit of the retreat, displaying an eagerness to grow in their understanding of how to build a relationship with God. No one attempted to control the group or to divert attention away from the planned program. As closing time came nearer, almost everyone obviously wished there could be more.

I found myself making adjustments in the program to suit one or two individuals who might find it difficult. One couple in particular, I knew, did not enjoy small-group work where the requirement was to share feelings. They preferred to keep private. To meet their needs, I limited the small-group work. In another retreat, I would encourage more small-group interaction. This same
couple presented other challenges because they rarely participate in church activities other than those related to the worship service. I was so eager to make the retreat a rewarding experience for them that at times I found myself being overly concerned. In the end, however, I was rewarded by the appreciation they expressed.

It became evident from the first session that the schedule was far too ambitious. I was able to make the necessary adjustments; however, some important material was omitted and other activities were hurried. A full forty-eight hours for the retreat would have given enough time for every item to be covered in an unhurried fashion. The difficulty of locating a retreat center available for a full weekend when it was required created a hardship, although the retreatants themselves probably were not aware of it.

It would have been helpful to discover through a testing device just how much of the material was understood. I was fearful that the language and cultural differences among the group might lead to some reception difficulties. This factor was not considered before the retreat, so no testing device was prepared.
CHAPTER XI

RETREAT FOLLOW-UP

Human nature is such that regular reinforcement is required to produce the lifestyle change envisioned in the spiritual formation model developed for this project. The model itself was designed to introduce practices which, if used consistently, could assist in the development of a satisfying relationship with God, which is at the heart of spirituality and what it means to be a Christian. Determining the effectiveness of the model was important to the project; therefore, it was necessary to develop a follow-up strategy which would encourage each participant to use the personal spiritual plan developed by the participants during the last hour of the retreat.

Much more attention should have been given to the follow-up strategy before the retreat in order to have it ready as soon as the retreat ended. I knew that my work would not be over when the retreat concluded, but I had only vague notions of what might be required. One of the questions on the personal spiritual plan retreatants were
to prepare and share with a partner, asked for a list of things the pastor might do to be of assistance. Because I felt the retreat should be completed early on Sunday afternoon in order to allow for personal time at home, I rushed through the final exercises without taking time for an open discussion. It would have been helpful if some concrete proposals were made at that time and some agreement reached on what the follow-up should include. The next retreat will include that provision.

The Group Covenant

As noted above, a group covenant was drawn up and agreed upon as the retreat ended. This covenant was to establish a method of accountability and support within the group. A short presentation outlined the function of a covenant and the importance of making a commitment with a group of other Christians. Rueben Job develops this idea in a retreat leader's guide. Several of his ideas were shared with the group including this description of what it means to make a group covenant:

To be in covenant with one another is to be pledged to one another in openness and honesty. It is to be committed to each other. It is to be responsible for one another and accountable to one another. It is to be concerned not only with our own spirituality but with the growth and nurture of each of our brothers and sisters within the covenant. It is to offer control of a
portion of our lives and of our group into the hands of others.¹

An extensive fifteen-point covenant from Job was distributed to demonstrate what a covenant could involve. I suggested, however, that our covenant be simple so each one would feel free to participate. The result was a three-point covenant which included a personal pledge to make a regular weekly time commitment for personal devotions plus a commitment to pray for the others and to meet together for a second retreat in six months time. Each retreatant agreed to the terms of the covenant. We ended the covenant-making time with a solemn prayer that God would make it possible for each to remain loyal to the commitment.

All agreed that the covenant should be typed and mailed to each of the retreatants along with a list of the names and addresses of each one who agreed to its terms (all of the retreatants). This was done during the week following the retreat; a note of appreciation and encouragement to keep the terms of the covenant was also included.

Accountability Support Group

When the covenant was being prepared, we should have included a commitment to meet on a regular basis in a support group. Even though spirituality is an intensely intimate relationship with Jesus Christ, it can hardly grow in isolation from the fellowship of other believers who constitute the body of Christ. The original intent of the church was not simply for mission, it was also designed to help each one of its members grow. The Apostle Paul surely meant this when he wrote to the church at Ephesus.

Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. (Eph 4:14-16)

A degree of support is derived from the normal activities of the congregation; however, a small covenant group within the larger body is far more meaningful for the growth envisioned for this group. An article in Weavings, written by the magazine’s editor, John S. Mogabgab, describes the covenant group.

A covenant group is a gathering of eight to twelve Christians who have agreed upon a covenant with one another. The covenant includes fellowship, study, and mutual encouragement in faith. The conviction here is that such
covenanted relationships can contribute to the spiritual growth of the members and the spiritual vigor of their local church.¹

In a small group which meets regularly, it is possible to introduce other disciplines. "With the group's support they (the member's of the group) can test and choose which ones seem most right for them to practice regularly."² Along with the possibility of learning other disciplines, it is also important to practice the principle disciplines again and again to develop confidence in their use.

Four weeks after the retreat, invitations were sent to the group to meet on a Sabbath morning during the regular Sabbath School time for encouragement and refreshment. Less than half the original group attended the session, but those who came felt the time together was beneficial enough that they determined to make it a regular, monthly occurrence. The format of the group meeting was simple. It included time for debriefing and at least fifteen minutes for devotional prayer. Few of the elements of the covenant group specified in


Mogabgab's article were present; however, the intent of
the group was to offer the type of support he envisioned.

The second meeting of the group was held four weeks
later, again, during the Sabbath School hour. This time
only three were missing including the couple who were
members of another congregation, and, who, at the time of
the retreat, were planning to move their membership to
Capital Memorial Church. Since the retreat, they have
decided to remain with their previous congregation and
have terminated most of their involvement with Capital.
The third missing retreatant was simply late in arriving
for services that day.

One hour is not adequate time to accomplish all
that would be helpful, but we made time for prayer and
the sharing of burdens as well as encouragement. In our
situation, it is very difficult to schedule meetings
other than at the Sabbath School hour, though it would be
preferable to meet two hours for the support group more
often than once each month.

Our group is enthusiastic about what has happened
to them. In fact, they are inviting friends to join
them. The presence of these new individuals means that
some instruction must take place, so we are not moving as
quickly as we might. However, the exposure of more
members of the congregation to the disciplines could be
helpful in gathering greater participation in the next retreat.

**Spiritual Direction**

It is only in recent years that spiritual direction has resurfaced as an important aspect of ministry after years when pastoral counseling and other more up-to-date practices were considered more relevant to modern society. The roots of spiritual direction, however, are deep in Christian soil, first having been practiced in the fourth and fifth centuries when disciples went to the so-called holy men of the desert for guidance. These holy men, often referred to as the desert fathers, left their homes in the cities and villages to go out into the desert to be alone with God. As their reputations developed, devout Christians sought them out because they were believed to have special spiritual insights.

Disciples would seek out the advice and guidance of these holy men of the desert. They looked to them for holiness and purity of heart more than for teaching, and the central concept was that of spiritual fatherhood. By the fourth century, the term *pneumatikos pater* was well established in patristic writing. The disciples also looked to these men for discretion. This virtue was seen as the essential feature of the true spiritual master from the time of St. Anthony the Great onwards. The spiritual director was not simply someone who taught a spiritual technique, but he was a father who helped to shape the inner life
of his sons through his prayer, concern and pastoral care.\textsuperscript{1}

Spiritual direction has had a long history in Roman Catholic circles, though it has not been used as extensively by them in the last couple of centuries. Since the Second Vatican Council, however, a strong interest has developed once again.\textsuperscript{2} Protestants have been suspicious of the movement because it "seemed to undermine the place of Christ as the one Mediator."\textsuperscript{3} Some Protestant exceptions have existed through the years. "Mutual direction has been common . . . among Quakers, in Methodist bands and class meetings, and in Presbyterian zone meetings gathered preceding the observance of the Lord's Supper."\textsuperscript{4}

In recent years, spiritual direction has become more and more acceptable among Protestants—as is evidenced in the large number of magazine articles, books, and courses offered on the subject. In fact, in his study for The Alban Institute on readiness for

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{2}Forster Freeman, \textit{Readiness for Ministry Through Spiritual Direction} (Washington, DC: Alban Institute, 1986), 5.
  \item \textsuperscript{3}Leech, \textit{Soul Friend}, 84.
  \item \textsuperscript{4}Freeman, 6.
\end{itemize}
ministry through spiritual direction, Forster Freeman reported "that a number of Protestant schools have been making bold or tentative moves toward the field of spiritual direction for students and faculty."¹

My own personal experience with spiritual direction, which began with my association with the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, has become very meaningful and important for my spiritual development. Monthly meetings with my spiritual director help to develop spiritual accountability as well as provide insights which would otherwise be unavailable. It is also very gratifying to know that, on my behalf, my director is interceding in prayer on a regular basis.

Spiritual direction is not the same as pastoral counseling. It focuses specifically on the spiritual journey and on the individual’s relationship with God. Leech’s description helps to differentiate between the two.

Spiritual direction basically means a way of establishing a person-to-person relationship of guidance in which there is companionship and supportive help given by one to the other on his or her spiritual path. The relationship is an intimate and continuing one. It is not problem-centered, nor is it an alternative to therapy or counseling. It is a friendship of souls, and so

¹Ibid., 31.
the spiritual director has been called a 'soul friend.'

This does not mean the director is disinterested in other aspects of the person's life excepting the relationship with God. Often, in fact, the relationship with God is influenced by some emotional difficulty. The director is sympathetic and prays with the directee concerning other problems but, usually, no attempt is made to deal with it as a therapist.

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. The focus of this type of spiritual direction is on experience, not ideas, and specifically on religious experience, i.e., any experience of the mysterious Other whom we call God. Moreover, this experience is viewed, not as an isolated event, but as an expression of the ongoing personal relationship God has established with each one of us.

Direction does not mean control, which is one of the first fears of individuals who entertain the idea of seeking a spiritual director. "Spiritual direction is more likely to be quiet, gentle, and unassertive. One of

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the characteristics of spiritual direction is to 'get out of the way,' to be unimportant."¹ I have discovered this to be true in the relationship I have with my own director. My director most often listens, questions, and encourages. Suggestions are made, but I am never told what I should do. The most important function of my director is to help me develop a deeper trust in the leading of God.

Peterson has identified three specific results from his own relationship with a director.

1. My spontaneity has increased.

2. I have become aware of subjects I rarely, if ever, discuss with other people in my life that I regularly bring to my director.

3. I have been struck by the difference of being in touch with an oral tradition as compared to a written one.²

I believe being a spiritual director, whether formal or informal, should be one of the major ministry goals of pastors. For this to occur, especially in the Adventist ministry, a major re-ordering of priorities would have to take place. I believe any sacrifice of cherished goals, in the end, would provide much greater satisfaction for both pastor and congregation. I have


established the priority in my own ministry but have not yet found the method of fully implementing it.

Offering spiritual direction as a follow-up for the individuals who participated in the retreat and to the congregation as a whole, provides, I believe, the most important means of supporting the individual's relationship with God. Spiritual formation is far more important than raising funds or any of a myriad of other goals in church life. A retreat to introduce the spiritual disciplines is the first step, small groups are helpful, but these must be fostered over the long-term by spiritual direction given by the pastor.

Spiritual Worship Orientation

The weekly worship service can also provide an ongoing supportive atmosphere for the retreat group as well as others who are serious about their relationship with God. Opportunities may even be developed for the spontaneous sharing of experiences which can serve to encourage others to experiment with the disciplines or to attend a subsequent retreat where the disciplines will be presented.

We have recently added to our service a short time for spontaneous praising and for sharing experiences. The usual size of our worshiping congregation is 150-175, making it easy to ask individuals to stand as they are
moved and share what is on their hearts. My hope is to develop an openness which permits individuals to share some aspects of their spiritual journey, including disappointments as well as victories. This is a perfect time for giving public support to those who are just beginning to use the spiritual disciplines.

The worship ritual, itself, may also be constructed to emphasize the disciplines and other aspects of spiritual formation. Hymns and anthems may be selected which refer to the spiritual journey; other forms of music also may be used effectively to establish a graced moment when God's presence is especially near. Prayer is best suited to this emphasis and may include forms which are similar to those ordinarily used only in private, especially with a smaller congregation. The prayer of praise and thanksgiving from the model may easily be used in the worship setting, as can some forms of the prayer of petition. A simple meditation practice may be used from time to time which can assist in breaking down barriers that have prevented meditation from being as useful as it should be.

Of course, the sermon is a crucial aspect of the worship experience for supporting spiritual growth. Sermon topics and the preaching style should be chosen to support the retreatants and others who desire growth in
Christ. My preaching style and sermon topics have been noticeably different to many of my more discerning members since my involvement with the Shalem Institute and attention to spiritual formation.

**Summary**

For the model to be effective, it is clear that follow-up must take place; this does not mean new information. Any pastor knows that spiritual care for each member is a continual responsibility. In introducing a new emphasis, however, follow-up is even more critical. Encouragement has to be given, assurances of God’s love must be presented, and the benefits of the new way of life must be continually described.

The follow-up strategy for this project should have been developed before the retreat ever began. This first group of members may have difficulty in maintaining the covenant commitment because of my own failure to give them the support I now know they should have had. In order to make the fullest impact, when this model is used, full attention must be given to working very closely with those who are participating to be sure the new lifestyle is fully in place.
CHAPTER XII

EVALUATION OF THE MODEL

The Retreat Process

An inventory was prepared to determine the effectiveness of the retreat process including the physical arrangements, the preparation and delivery of the material, understanding of the disciplines, and general impressions.¹ Sufficient time was allowed for the completion of the inventory just prior to closure; all of the retreatants completed the inventory, but not all fifteen retreatants answered all the questions. The results are presented in table 3.

By assigning a score for each answer, with five points for the best answer and one point for the least desirable answer, it is possible to determine the reaction of the group. Out of a possible positive score of 2250 for the entire survey, the retreatants gave an evaluation of 1861 which is just above very good (2250 =

¹See appendix 6.
excellent, 1800 = very good, 1350 = good, 900 = fair, 450 = poor).

It is possible to separate the questions into six categories: facilities, process, presentations, understanding and acceptance, action contemplated, and recommendations to the church as a whole. The categorized results are presented in table 4.

Table 3.—Retreat Process Evaluation Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 5 1</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>5 8 1 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>15</td>
<td>5 8 1 1</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10 4 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These scores indicate that the retreat was well received and that each part of the process was judged as helpful. All scores were clustered around the "very good" range with the scores for the presentations
receiving the highest ratings of all. The most pointed question in the presentations category was number 5 which involved making a judgment of my preparation and presentations. The response was a positive score of 71 out of a possible 75. This was especially gratifying since I had no previous experience as a guide.

Evaluation of Change in Retreatants Devotional Practices

An evaluation instrument was designed and administered eight weeks following the retreat to determine what changes may have been made in the retreatant’s devotional practices as a result of the retreat.¹ Twelve of the original retreatants completed the follow-up inventory. Table 5 presents the results.

By assigning points for each answer with five points being the highest possible score, it is possible to discover the level of progress among the retreatant group. The total score is 1171 out of a possible 1430, which is just above very good (excellent = 1430, very good = 1144, good = 858, fair = 572, poor = 286). The progress shown indicates that the retreat has produced significant growth over the short-term.

¹See Appendix 7.
Table 4.— Retreat Process Evaluation Survey Results by Categories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Possible Score</th>
<th>Actual Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilities</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excellent = 75, Very good = 60, Good = 45, Fair = 30, Poor = 15)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentations</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>322</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excellent = 375, Very good = 300, Good = 225, Fair = 150, Poor = 75)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding and Acceptance</td>
<td>750</td>
<td>601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excellent = 750, Very good = 600, Good = 450, Fair = 300, Poor = 150)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Action contemplated</td>
<td>525</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excellent = 525, Very good = 420, Good = 315, Fair = 210, Poor = 105)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations to the Church as a whole</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Excellent = 150, Very good = 120, Good = 90, Fair = 60, Poor = 30)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Some specific questions produced dramatic results, such as the first question which asked about satisfaction with the devotional life. The satisfaction score before the retreat was 40 percent as compared to the much more satisfied score of 87 percent since the retreat. The highest score of all was for the statement, "I feel more freedom to share intimately with God." All twelve of the retreatants who completed the survey choose to answer with either very definitely agree or agree for a total score of 55 out of a possible 60, well above the "very good" mark which would have been a score of 48. The second highest score, 53, was for the statement, "I am giving God greater priority in my life."
Questions having to do with the practice of the disciplines produced an overall score of 435 out of a possible 565 (565 = excellent, very good = 452, good = 339, fair = 226, poor = 113). The two questions related to journaling received low scores bringing down the other discipline-related scores. If these two were removed, the overall score would be 370 out of a possible 460, which is just above "very good," 368.

Forty-three out of a possible 60 was the score for the statement related to the keeping of the group covenant (question 10). Forty-eight is very good, 36 is good, showing that there was some difficulty in maintaining the covenant. Only one specific point of the covenant was covered in the evaluation. The score was exactly the same as for the question on keeping the covenant.

The most satisfying result on the evaluation was for the last question which asked about growth as a Christian. All eleven of the respondents indicated that they believe they are growing. Eight very definitely agreed, and the other three agreed.

Comments from Retreatants

Some of the retreatants were interviewed a few weeks after the retreat to determine how the retreat had influenced their lives. In addition, one individual took
the time to write out her personal reaction. This member had also spoken to some of the others and shared some of their feelings when she wrote:

I have talked to several group members, and we continue to struggle with freeing ourselves from the stress and fatigue of this working world. I hope we will grow and develop a oneness with God through practicing the spiritual disciplines. I am speaking from my own opinion, but I sensed a seriousness in the entire group, which I am sure will continue.

Her own personal testimony showed how helpful the experience had been.

I am very thankful for the opportunity to be part of this continuing, caring, and sharing retreat group. I received spiritual healing and felt that my burdens had been lightened. I am putting into practice the spiritual disciplines we learned. New habits and purposeful self-discipline are not easy to establish, but I know the Holy Spirit will lead. It is really worthwhile for my personal growth.

The interviews indicated that keeping the covenant had not been easy. Life-style changes were required which take more time than was at first expected. When the question was asked, "What has been the most difficult part of the covenant for you to keep?" one individual said, "It has been the attempt to adjust my style. I'm very active, I can't keep up with things, and I'm not consistent."

Questions about the use of the disciplines revealed that keeping a spiritual journal has been the most difficult of all. One said she misplaces her journal.
Another said, "I'm a perfectionist. When I write, I must use a final version style." That the presentation on journaling may have been inadequate can be deduced from the answer of one retreatant who said, "I don't know why journaling has been so difficult. I plan to obtain some of the journals suggested in the handout, perhaps then I'll understand why keeping a journal is so important."

A woman professional who attended the retreat believed that the most important legacy of the retreat for her was reassurance of God's love for women. Though that emphasis was not actually planned as part of the retreat experience, it was gratifying that the message was clear that God is no respecter of persons. It might be helpful in the future to include in the model, disciplines which may be of specific interest to women. At least a sensitivity to women's special needs will be of value.

Summary

The process used in presenting the disciplines was received very favorably, and the changes in spiritual satisfaction and devotional practices indicates that there was a significant impact made. One retreatant continues to speak of the dramatic change in her own life several months after the retreat. She also has asked for a similar retreat to be presented for the choir which she
directs. Her enthusiasm and that of others whose lives are effected for the good will be able to influence other members of the congregation to register for the next retreat.

Keeping the covenant appears to be a bit of a problem. When the model is presented again, more time should be given to the covenant process as well as to describing the importance of supporting one another to keep the covenant. Covenant keeping is a discipline just as much as praying. It is obvious that it takes time to become accustomed to a disciplined lifestyle.
CHAPTER XIII

PROJECT REPORT

Conclusions

1. The spiritual disciplines do provide a means for building a meaningful relationship with God, in fact, there is no other way for this to happen; they are similar to actions we take which maintain human relationships. However, they can be easily misused and misunderstood. It is possible to pray and read the Bible for years without growing spiritually. The key is not only the manner in which prayer and Bible study are done but also their purpose. As has been demonstrated in the report, devotional or formational practices are very different from information practices. When prayer, Bible study, meditation, and journaling are used in a devotional or relationship-building manner, they provide openings for enjoying God's presence. They can be used for other reasons, as well, including attempting to gain favor with God so that they completely miss the goal of knowing God.
Discipline seems to be a very mechanical term to describe an experience which is actually very enjoyable and at times even exhilarating. But discipline is required because there must be regularity in order for the relationship to be maintained and grow. Seldom do we describe relationship actions in a human friendship as disciplines, but, of course, the relationship with a God who is not visibly present introduces a different dimension. In time, even that barrier is not a burden; it is then that the issue of what constitutes discipline is no longer important.

The four disciplines selected for the model are basic and the most widely used, but many others not discussed here could have been added as the relationship with God matured. Variations of the four presented could be practiced in order to keep the relationship vibrant and exciting. Journaling appears to be the one discipline of the four which is the most difficult to adopt, probably because it is less familiar than the others. Because of this factor, more time needs to be given for explaining and actually doing journaling when it is introduced to individuals who are unaccustomed to its use.

2. Seventh-day Adventists have emphasized lifestyle practices perhaps even more than have other
Christians. Throughout the church’s history, there has been an ongoing debate concerning the importance of sanctification and how it is achieved. Caught in the middle of theological debate, members have received a sense that they should be spiritual, but they are confused as to how and why. This situation provides a window of opportunity for introducing the spiritual disciplines as a means of opening one’s self to God in a relationship where spirituality results.

3. Ellen White, who was one of Adventism’s founders and who is believed to be a messenger of God, demonstrated a sensitivity to spirituality in her writings which is far more advanced than that of most pastors and theologians in the church. Evidence has been produced in this report which shows that she understood the way in which prayer, scripture study, and meditation are to be used in the development of the Christian’s relationship with God. This was one of the most gratifying aspects of the project, because it assisted in developing credibility for the disciplines when they were presented to members. In retrospect, insufficient time was reserved during the retreat for presenting background material from Ellen White. When the retreat is repeated, more background support from White might well be included.
4. The project also concluded, on the basis of a survey, that there is a longing for spirituality, at least among the members of the Capital Memorial Church. These same members reported disappointment with their present devotional life, showing an openness for help to achieve their goal of knowing God better. My own experience was similar to theirs, leading me to the disciplines for satisfaction. Their longing for God created the opportunity for the effectiveness of the model.

5. The model for introducing the disciplines to the Capital Memorial Church proved to be very effective. Using the retreat setting was extremely helpful, but there is no reason to believe it could not have been just as effective had there been a series of two-hour sessions scheduled over a period of weeks, or even another similar arrangement. Some adjustments are advisable such as allowing more time for small-group interaction and for questions and answers in plenary sessions.

6. One aspect which needs much greater development is follow-up support. On-going support should include regular group meetings once per week, at least for the first six weeks after the retreat. Regular calls and visits from the pastor or retreat leader with each retreatant for encouragement on a one-to-one basis should
begin immediately following the retreat and continue until no longer needed.

**Personal Reactions**

The most important personal dividend from the project was the confirmation of the new direction the Lord is encouraging for my ministry. Until very recently, my ministry was affirmed by successful projects and growth in numbers. Spiritual growth in parishioners was a goal with a low priority, mostly because it was too difficult to measure and was not as important to Conference officials who were responsible for judging my performance. The joy being experienced in a relationship with God by those who attended the retreat has shown me that success in this area of members' lives could be the ingredient which would produce other growth as well. In fact, the conviction I have received is that spirituality should have the highest ministry priority of all.

Should the opportunity present itself, I would be pleased to specialize in this new area of ministry. It would be a pioneering position among Adventists and would probably be most effective either with a large congregation where I could be an associate pastor or in a position where the ministry could be targeted almost exclusively to pastors or to students.
Another influence on my personal life from the project which has been profound: the deepening of the conviction that my greatest fulfillment in life is in a maturing relationship with God. It goes without saying that it would have been impossible to have made any impact on the lives of those who participated in the project from my congregation without my own personal spirituality having first priority. I had to be practicing the disciplines myself in order to be authentic and to speak from experience. It was important that what I said belonged to me and not to a textbook.

Additional Opportunities for Using the Model

Already an invitation has come for me to present the model as part of a seminar series to be offered for members of the Potomac Conference of Seventh-day Adventists at their annual convention. A section will be added to the model to conform to the theme for the conference which centers on family issues, but the basic outline will change only very slightly. I also intend to maintain the practical nature of the model which means that my presentation will be more like a retreat than a seminar.

Ministers of the Potomac Conference also have requested that a retreat be conducted specifically for them during which the disciplines will be introduced.
Again, only minor adjustments will be made to the model to include spirituality issues which are of interest to pastors. I see this as a very important opportunity to call the attention of clergy to giving much more priority to being than to doing. I especially hope to influence young ministers whose ministry style may not have been already fully established.

Of course, I will offer the retreat experience again and again for my own parishioners so that the entire congregation will have the privilege of knowing God better. New disciplines may be added each time the retreat is repeated for the same congregation so that those who wish to attend again and again will have some new material to help them grow.

I have also received an invitation to speak for a meeting for a group of singles from the Adventist churches in the Greater Washington area. My presentation will use an abbreviated form of the model in an effort to introduce the group to the disciplines. I plan to invite the singles to attend the next retreat offered by the Capital Memorial Church, or propose a retreat just for them, if they prefer.

Hopefully, other opportunities will develop. I especially wish, sometime, to be able to offer a course at the Adventist college near my parish where young men
and women may be influenced before they begin their careers, or for the opportunity to teach a class where pre-seminary ministerial students can have their own spiritual pilgrimage challenged with the possibilities of a deeper relationship with Christ than they may have experienced before.
APPENDIX 1

CMC FAMILY JOURNAL ARTICLE

SPIRITUAL RETREAT PLANNED FOR THIS FALL

Pastor Willsey is planning a spiritual retreat for church members to be scheduled for sometime this fall (probably early September or October) at a local retreat center. The purpose of the retreat is to give members an opportunity to spend some quiet time focusing on their relationship with God. As the retreat is presently conceived, there will be teaching as well as time for small-group interaction and personal reflection. All who attend will be given time to prepare a long-term spiritual formation plan. Author Maxie Dunnam describes spiritual formation as "that dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action, the living Christ into our own life to the end that our life will conform to, and manifest the reality of Christ's presence in the world."¹

¹Dunnam, Alive in Christ, 26.
Currently taking a three-week sabbatical from his regular pastoral duties for the purpose of beginning the writing of his doctoral dissertation, Pastor Willsey is planning the retreat to test a model for introducing spiritual formation practices which forms the core of his doctoral project. His own interest in spiritual formation developed after a personal renewal experience he has often shared with the congregation. His earlier life, including much of his ministry, had centered on what the individual must do for salvation. Personal assurance in Christ was foreign to his theology. His renewal came when God spoke to him at a seminar he attended in California early in his pastorate at CMC telling him that his salvation was based on what Jesus had already done and not on his own works of righteousness. The peace and joy he experienced led him in a search to discover how he could develop a personally satisfying relationship with God, one in which there could be a constant awareness of God's presence.

His search has turned up some practices which have brought him the satisfaction he was desiring. These practices or spiritual disciplines will be taught in the spiritual retreat which will also include several hours of solitude so that participants can be alone with God. In talking about the retreat, Pastor Willsey says, "I
"believe most of us are caught up in the busyness of the many tasks that bring the success we crave. Few have discovered how to simply 'be' the person God intended in relationship to Him. Ellen White describes that in a few beautiful sentences in the book Christ's Object Lessons, page 129.

Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ: we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch."

The retreat will begin on Friday evening and conclude at noon on Sunday. There will be a charge for room and board. Those wishing to make reservations to attend should contact the pastor. This retreat is in addition to the regular church retreat which focuses primarily on fellowship planned now for the last week of September.
APPENDIX 2

FIVE SERMONS PREACHED ABOUT SPIRITUAL FORMATION

SERMON 1, OUR MYSTERIOUS RELATING GOD

Years ago my opinions about God were formed, not as a result of any systematic process, but subconsciously, in interactions with my father and other authority figures and through information imprinted in my brain from what others said. The concept which this process created for me was of a cold and demanding God who kept His distance, leaving me to my own devices, but who recorded every thought and action even to the minutest detail in order to prove to me that I was unworthy of any favors, including eternal life.

You can see why it was impossible for me to have any kind of relationship with Him. In fact, the idea that God might possibly be interested in an intimate friendship did not even occur to me. He was the Creator; for me that meant power and aloofness. He was much too grand and holy to bother with anyone so insignificant as me.
This God concept I harbored was challenged by the Gospel. I have told the story before of how freedom came to my life. The Gospel of grace did not find easy access to my heart, but when it finally made sense, an enormously dark and heavy weight was removed. Still, I did not give in easily to God’s advances. He wanted to be my friend, someone in whom I would find joy and fulfillment, but I was wary.

Ever so gradually, my resistance to His advances are being eliminated. Permitting myself to be fully open to Him and then living always with this openness is the struggle going on for me right now. The discovery that He desires such a relationship with me has been tremendously liberating. While I am not always available, knowing that He is there for me when I turn to Him is giving me confidence to remain with Him for longer periods of time.

My intention in this sermon is to help you see the kind of person God is. I doubt I am misjudging when I say that few are accustomed to thinking about God as desiring or even capable of having an intimate relationship with us sinful humans. You will be surprised at what I am going to share with you. I suspect you have overlooked the experiences that are really quite common in Scripture. The Scripture passage
which is the basis for my message is Isa 43:1-7 where the prophet is giving a direct quote from God. This must be one of the most sublime love messages ever delivered.

Here is intimate language, typical of a caring father or mother. I can easily imagine parents saying this to their children, especially when they are small and just before they are about to go through a new and frightening experience. I remember one occasion when our family was visiting us in St. Croix; we all wanted to go out in a glass-bottom boat to see the beautiful coral formations in America’s only underwater national monument. Angie was only a few years old, I can see her still with her little sunsuit, bright eyes, and pony tail flapping in the breeze, full of innocence, but she was frightened. Truth is, I was not feeling very brave myself, but we reassured her that we would be with her, there was nothing to be afraid of. Later, I remained in the boat with Angie while the others jumped in the water for a guided tour.

God said to Israel, through the prophet, "I will be with you through the difficult and frightening experiences because you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you. I know you, you have my name, I created you for my glory, I formed you and made you, you are mine." This is a much different picture of
God from the One I knew, and it is made even more awesome when one remembers that Israel had been very rebellious; they were not people who were terribly trustworthy or obedient. They can be compared to teenagers who think their parents do not know very much, and who assert their own independence. Yet the Lord said, "I gave Egypt for your ransom, Cush and Seba in your stead" (Isa 43:1-3 paraphrase).

Here is a God who is telling us something about how He relates to sinful human beings, never abandoning His creatures even though they have proven to be unstable. It is very much like a father or mother: solicitous but not over-protective, being there but not inhibiting, allowing freedom but aching all the time. He has claims, "I am the Lord your God; I made you." And He has strong feelings, "You are precious and honored in my sight, I love you." This is a God who is not off in some remote universe reveling in the love of holy beings. It is not a God who is ignoring the sons and daughters who have rebelled on this little speck of a planet. What I see here is a God who will not let go, who is longing for the intimacy which is so often spurned.

The relationship between God and His human sons and daughters began in holy tranquility and intimate fulfillment. The Creator allowed Adam and Eve space to
enjoy themselves, but in the evening He joined them for a long walk and for the sharing of intimacies. Of all the pain caused to God by the rebellion of that holy couple, the deepest hurt must have been the inability to enjoy any longer, face-to-face communion with them. Nevertheless, God continued to communicate through various means to those who were open and listening until there were apparently few if any who knew Him.

In the course of time, the Lord began a wonderful relationship with Abraham. Abraham's call to leave his country and family and go to a new land could not have been his first intimate contact with God. His confidence in the directions he received is an indication that he and God were already on good terms. It was a long and rewarding relationship with at least two really magnificent highpoints. The first was the Lord's visit in disguise to Abraham's tent. Though His glory was hidden by the human form He had taken in order to make this visit, God did not hide His identity. It was during this visit that the Lord promised a son to Sarah, causing her to laugh to herself as if mocking God.

As God got up to leave to carry out His second mission, that of destroying the cities of the plain, He said to Himself, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, after all, I have chosen and blessed him"
(Gen 18:16-19). So the Lord told him of His intentions. Then began that wonderful bargaining session between Jehovah God and Abraham. It is hard for me to imagine this scenario, but try, if you can, to see Abraham pleading with God, first for fifty and finally for ten. And God listened to Abraham, accepting his pleas, for this was someone He loved very much. Abraham went back to his tent knowing that his relationship with God had met a significant test.

The second incident which says so much about their relationship was the offering of Isaac at Moriah. It was a test for Abraham but for God, too, for it proved that in spite of sin and in spite of the veil that now must always separate God and humans, God could make His love known. It was the supreme test for Abraham. He won and God won because they had proven trustworthy to each other. When it was over, I imagine tears were shed by both of them, but there was also a much deeper confidence in their relationship.

God’s goal is the restoration of the full face-to-face relationship broken by sin. John was given a view into the future when that goal will have been fulfilled. He saw the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven and heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men and women, and he will live
with them. They will be his people and God himself will be with them and be their God" (Rev 21:3). That is a moment of intense anticipation by God when again He can walk arm in arm with us. The song says that it is the blessed hope that buoys up those who recognize they are only pilgrims here. I suspect God is also buoyed up through the heartache of sin He must endure by the knowledge that it will soon be over.

The most powerful demonstration of all of God's desire for an intimate relationship with us was the gift of His Son. Jesus came to be Emmanuel, God with us. He was God's unveiling. It was impossible for us to see God face to face in His glory and live to tell it, but God could set aside His glory and take on Himself the form of a man and come and live among us. "The Word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

The twelve disciples were unable to comprehend it all. During those last days Jesus was with them, He said plainly, "If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." But Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a
long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work" (John 14:7-10).

Jesus' death on the cross was a sacrifice of atonement for our sins, literally He was taking away the separation which sin made. His cry, "It is finished!" was a guarantee that the face-to-face relationship will be restored, but it was also our assurance that He has never forsaken us and is near to each one even now.

Denis Edwards writes,

What the Gospel proclaims . . . is that the whole of life is upheld and encompassed by a God who loves us passionately. . . . In the face of both the pain and the joy of our lives the New Testament challenges us with its good news. It claims that the source and goal of the mystery in our lives is not cold and distant but is warm and gracious, and turns to us with a love that knows no conditions or reservations. The only barrier to this love is sin, our own choice to reject it.1

Edwards asks, "Is our God distant and unavailable to us or is He close and seeking relationship with us?"

The answer is given in Jesus.2 Jesus came to show that


2Ibid., 41.
God loves us and longs to be found out by us. He says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will go in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20), and He also says, "If you will remain in Me, I will remain in you" (John 15:4).

Why are we so reluctant to let Him in? Why does He continue standing outside hoping to get in when opening the door would bring so much joy? The answer may be because of our unwillingness to admit that we cannot get what we need by ourselves. We are self-centered, that is what sin has done to us, and we are in a very humanistic age—we think we do not need God anymore. Many even claim that God is dead, meaning that the God of the Scriptures who desires relationships with us is no longer necessary. We have learned to depend on technology and psychiatrists. Who needs God?

Israel rejected God’s mission to make Himself known just as is happening today. Jesus must have been weeping as He said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing" (Matt 23:37). The prophet Hosea much earlier had recorded another sorrowful appeal: "How can I give you
up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? How can I treat you like Admah? How can I make you like Zeboiim? My heart is changed within me; all my compassion is aroused" (Hos 11:8). Not everyone responds, and that breaks the heart of God.

He is unwilling to admit that some choose to spurn His love. Jesus spoke of God as a Shepherd who comes in at night and finds one sheep missing. He has ninety-nine others, but He cannot rest until He has found that one that has been lost. He goes out into the night until He has found it, and then bathes it with oil and carries it in His arms back to the place of safety (Luke 15:3-7). O, if only every sheep would be found and receive that tender care. The privileges of being in Christ even now during this time when we wait for the veil to be removed are far more than most of us realize.

Just before His death, Jesus was comforting His disciples in preparation for what would be a heavy test of their faith. They did not understand, but it was becoming very evident that they would soon be separated from their Master. "It is for your good that I am going away," said Jesus (John 16:7), for "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever" (John 14:16). Then Jesus said, "I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:18).
He was speaking of a special relationship He would have with those who loved Him. Then the other Judas said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:15, 18, 22, 23).

You and I have this special privileged position as sons and daughters. God is with us, in some mysterious sense, He makes His home with us. Someday it will be a face-to-face relationship, but until that day, we may confidently acknowledge His presence and enjoy the intimacy He desires for each one of us.
Before my own children were born, I listened with considerable boredom as couples described to me the latest antics of their children. It was hard to imagine what enjoyment they got out of this competition to make out that their own children were better looking, more intelligent, more creative, and caused more laughs than any of the others. I could not understand, because it was very obvious to me that the whole bunch of those kids were nothing but ugly brats. Of course, you know what has happened to me now; plenty of you have had to nurse your own boredom as I have told you about my three. I will tell you, it is true; if you touch one of my kids, you have touched the apple of my eye. I will fight like a bear to protect them, and I will give them everything I have if that is what it takes to help them succeed. And mine are the best looking, the most intelligent, and the most creative of all yours combined!

I can remember how we began wishing for children after a year or two of our marriage. I cannot really explain that instinct, but I know it happened. We began to feel the need to hold and nurture a baby. We wanted to share our home and our love with a human being whom we had created, who could come into our lives and receive all the attention we could lavish. I remember our
excitement when my wife came from the mission hospital with the news that she was pregnant. I watched her grow and saw to it that she got protection and nourishment so our baby would be perfect.

I do not ordinarily show much emotion, but you would have known something very extraordinary had happened had you seen me on December 14, 1966, November 5, 1968, or January 15, 1970. I was able to go with my wife into the delivery room for Mark's birth; that experience is forever etched in my memory. To see a new baby enter the world is a thrill of a lifetime, and when it is your own, it is a triple thrill. I guess I must have let out a howl of joy as loud as Mark's instinctive cry of freedom. I was very proud of each one of them and felt the whole world should join in our celebration.

God felt like that, too, as He breathed life into Adam and Eve. It may be just a little difficult to imagine God as having feelings. We have an idea that God is the eternally stoic one; He knows and sees everything and has all power, so He just sits there in all His holiness and majesty, always the same, never moved by anything. Well, forget, that. God created the human race for His own pleasure. Because of His great love, He wanted to share the universe with beings made in His own image who would be His companions and love Him in return.
God has feelings, they are described in many places in the Scriptures. I am sure He expressed His greatest joy that day in Eden as Adam and Eve opened their eyes and took their first deep breath of the pure unpolluted air of a crisp new world.

This may sound a little maudlin, but I believe God had some difficulty leaving Adam and Eve alone that first day of their lives. He probably kept showing them more and more of the Garden and telling them more and more about the universe, while they wished for a little privacy so they could get to know each other. It was not that they did not love God or that they were not grateful, it was just that they were so deeply in love with each other. God did leave them alone, but He came back each day to walk with them and talk with them and watch their pleasure and amazement grow.

The relationship which grew between the Creator and the first couple was very much like that of parents and their children. It was Adam and Eve’s pleasure to be near God where they felt warmly loved. They went to Him to find the answers to their many questions, to share new discoveries, and receive the training necessary to maintain the Garden. Imagine how it would be to see them there together in Eden: the Creator with the couple He had created. Was God really like a proud parent? Did He
feel like boasting to the universe? Did He envision what it would be like to see them mature and have their own children? Of this there is no doubt, God loved Adam and Eve with a love so great that it defies our own understanding. The pleasure which He received from creation is as infinite as He is Himself.

As deep as was the pleasure of His creation, so intense also was His grief when Adam and Eve rebelled. Ellen White says:

The fall of . . . [Adam and Eve] filled all heaven with sorrow. The world that God had made was blighted with the curse of sin and inhabited by beings doomed to misery and death. There appeared no escape for those who had transgressed the law. Angels ceased their songs of praise. Throughout the heavenly courts there was mourning for the ruin that sin had wrought.1

She writes mostly from the perspective of how the angels were affected. God’s own reaction can be discerned from the extreme sacrifice He was willing to make to restore the relationship.

Mrs. White speaks of that mysterious communing, "the counsel of peace," when God the Father and the Son planned their reaction. It was a very long counsel with the angels watching and waiting quietly and anxiously for some sign of what would happen. When the plan of

redemption was described and the angels learned that their commander, the Son of God, would take humanity upon Himself and then die in place of Adam and Eve, "the angels prostrated themselves" at His feet and begged to take His place. But the death of an angel or all the angels of heaven could never provide a satisfactory atonement. It would have to be the Creator Himself, the Son of God.¹

It is impossible for us to fully understand the sorrow caused by sin. A look at the cross tells us something of what it was like, but we can hardly imagine what was lost for Adam and Eve. Here they were reveling in the attention of the Creator, every day full of new discoveries, enjoying a perfect relationship with one another. Think, for instance, what it would have meant to have a face-to-face relationship with God. They had absolutely no fear; maybe a little awe, but no fear. There was a mutual openness: they shared with God, He shared with them. For Adam and Eve, there was always more and more to learn, and they thrived on His care. For God there was an increasing satisfaction as the

¹Ibid., 63, 64.
relationship grew. This had been His intention, this was how it was designed.

When they sinned, Adam and Eve knew immediately that a change had taken place. Guilt almost overwhelmed them. No longer did they anticipate the visit of the Creator, instead, they were afraid and hoped He would not come. They hid themselves so they would not have to face the One they knew they had wronged. God came that day with an immensely heavy heart to confront them. It was the last time He would face them openly; the relationship had been broken. Deep sadness and dark foreboding enveloped the couple as they left the Garden to make their way in a vastly different world from that they had experienced so far.

God had expected to be there when their children were born. He had planned to hold them in His arms, and as they grew, He would share the secrets of the universe with them just as He had with their parents. Their children would have grown up knowing God as a friend: the ruler of the universe would not have been someone to fear but One whom they knew intimately and loved with deep feeling. It could not be that way after sin. No sinner could see God's face and live. Sin brought such a drastic change, that humankind would have been consumed except for God's loving mercy.
The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23); it is also separation from God. God's intentions had always been to have a face-to-face relationship with us, we were to know Him and enjoy ceaseless, perfect communion. Instead, in a world of sin, we shut ourselves away from Him hoping not to be caught in our own selfish pleasures. Many totally ignore Him as if He were an old man who is out of touch with reality. Most do not want to be bothered. They do not see God, maybe He does not even exist.

If you were to place Adam and Eve, before sin, beside a typical man and woman born two or three thousand years later, you would see a startling comparison. You might wonder if they belonged to the same species; the image of God within humankind was so nearly obliterated by sin.

When the fullness of time had come, God interrupted in that mysterious act which brought heaven and earth close again. Listen to the Apostle John's description of that event; it is my text for my sermon.

The word became flesh and lived for a while among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known. (John 1:14, 18)

God had used various means before this to communicate to humankind: through dreams and visions and
angels He went in disguise to Abraham and spoke from Mt. Sinai to Israel. Now it was time for the most open revelation He could devise. The Son of God would take human flesh and live with us. It was a tremendous risk, and this spoke louder than any words of God’s love and mercy. He was not willing for the estrangement to go on forever. The prodigal son parable taught God’s forgiveness, but it also spoke of his great longing to see his son again, he was spending his days watching the road from the veranda hoping against hope that his son would return. God wanted to be with His sons and daughters again. It was time for the act of redemption.

Can we be sure of what God is like? One day Philip, one of the twelve, said, "'Lord show us the Father and that will be enough for us.'" Jesus answered: "'Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me?'" (John 14:8-10). When He prayed for the last time with His disciples, He prayed that they and all who believed because of their message might be one, "Father, just as you are in me and I am in you" (John 14:6-9).
What is God like? He is like Jesus, His Son.
Follow the Son to the villages and seashores of Palestine and you will see God. Sit by His side at the well in Samaria and you will hear Him talking to a woman who deserved to be shunned. Walk beside the woman of Nain as she goes to bury her only son, and you will see God give life to that son. Walk with Peter and John and the other disciples, hear Jesus teach, and you will hear instruction from God. "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him . . . Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:10-12). See Him on the cross and you will confess with the Roman guard, "Surely he was the Son of God" (Matt 27:54).

With this revelation came an invitation, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28, 29). It was an invitation to return to the relationship, still not face to face, but as close to that as is possible. "I'll be with you always," He said, "even until the end" (Matt 28:20, paraphrase). Some had enjoyed intimacy with God before Christ came. Think of David, for instance, whose prayers
and songs speak of an intimacy few have ever duplicated. But, now we have seen God in Jesus, there has never been so much evidence of God before, it is time to give God the pleasure He craves, the pleasure of our undivided attention.

What does that mean? Jesus said, "Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit of itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me" (John 15:4). Remaining in Him means being as intimate with Jesus, the Creator, as were Adam and Eve in the Garden. Jesus will give just as much to such a relationship as He did with them, He loves us just as much and wants to enjoy our company just as much. Read through the Gospel of John and discover the longing of God’s heart. "I am the bread of life," He said, "He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty" (John 6:35).

On the last and greatest day of the Feast of Tabernacles, He stood up and said in a loud voice, "If a man is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me . . . streams of living water will flow from within him" (John 7:37, 38).

The Word became flesh because God wanted to enjoy the pleasure of our company again. He showed the fullest extent of His love in the act of atonement on Calvary’s
cross. His call to enter the kingdom begins when we accept His invitation to come, it is the inaugurated kingdom, where we may begin to experience the restoration of intimacy. Few Christians ever know God as He wishes to be known by us, and they miss out on great joy and tremendous satisfaction. Ask Adam and Eve, they will tell you what it is like to have the Companionship of the Creator. God extends the invitation to join Him in this beautiful intimacy and then He waits, hoping that we will come.

It is through such a relationship that we begin to take on again the characteristics which distinguish kingdom people from those who hold on to their citizenship in this world. The image of God is restored, you see, by beholding Jesus. Hear Ellen White explain it:

As we make Christ our daily companion we shall feel that the powers of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image. By beholding we become changed. . . . The sure result of our intercourse and fellowship with our Lord will be to increase piety, purity, and fervor.¹

Our growth in grace, our joy, our usefulness,—all depend upon our union with Christ. It is by communion with Him, daily, hourly,—by abiding in Him,—that we grow in grace.²

¹White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 85.
²Steps to Christ, 69.
I suppose I have been a typical Christian; I accepted Jesus as my Savior and had the assurance of salvation in Him. It was an emotional experience to finally have the burden of guilt lifted, especially as I understood that my Savior had paid the only price that would ever be sufficient for my salvation. After that first feeling of joy passed, however, I began to settle into a routine which was not a lot different from before. I craved something more from God, but I did not understand how to get it. My religion was all centered in a cerebral-based knowledge about God. I went in search of something else and discovered in the lives of the great saints of the past, a relationship with God which was real and very personal. That was what I wanted and began to experience as I committed myself to building my own intimacy with God.

There is another dimension to the Christian life that most are missing, that is what I am commending to you today. We speak often about accepting Christ as our Savior, and that is the gospel, that we are justified by grace through faith. But when we are born again, God "then lives in us through the power of the Holy Spirit as the indwelling Christ."¹ That is the dimension which most of us have missed. Maxie Dunnam says:

the most desperate need of the Christian community is the discovery of this powerful reality, the astounding possibility of Christians being in Christ. Not only is the presence of God in Jesus Christ to be experienced occasionally, the indwelling Christ is to become the shaping power of our lives. This is the dynamic of our spiritual formation.¹

When the Word became flesh, He showed us an aspect of God's character which Adam and Eve knew about, but which might have been forever hidden had He not come. Our God is a very personal being. He craves the love which He expressed to be reciprocated. He wants to come and be with us, to develop the intimacy that a father deserves. If you have not understood that yet, look at Jesus. Meditate on the life of Jesus as written by the beloved apostle, John, and you will see God as Adam and Eve saw Him. It is true, "No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son, who is at the Father's side, has made him known" (John 1:18).

I invite you to make this discovery and begin to experience the joy that God intends for your life. You can even come to the point in your life where you are constantly aware of God's presence; you will sense His presence, your thoughts will turn to Him often. Ellen

¹Ibid.
White says, that is what it is like to be a Christian:
"Our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breath His spirit, do His will, and please Him in all things."¹

¹Steps to Christ, 58.
SERMON 3, IN HIS SPIRIT

Two summers ago I spent three weeks in Europe. Our Conference grants a six-week sabbatical for ministers after six consecutive years of service. I had more than qualified for that provision, so I left the second weekend of July on a pilgrimage to see some of the museums and Cathedrals of the great cities of Europe as well as a few of the places in Greece which figured prominently in the life of the Apostle Paul.

I saw most of what I had intended. The Louvre in Paris is so vast that I had to limit myself to the main attractions, including some archeological discoveries which have provided confirmation for the biblical record. I stopped in Florence to see Michelangelo’s masterpiece, David, and then went on to Rome to see the Coliseum where many Christians gave their lives in the terrible persecutions which erupted during the early centuries of the church. At St. Peter’s I saw the magnificence of the Roman church, and stood in awe in that great basilica as I imagined the pageantry it has witnessed through the centuries.

It was a powerful experience, too, to walk through the ruins of old Corinth and trace the footsteps of Paul. The Apostle lived there a while with Aquila and Priscilla working as a tentmaker when he was not preaching the
gospel. I may well have walked through the very house where Paul lived; I may have stood in the same synagogue where he preached until the Jews became abusive and he had to go next door to the home of the synagogue ruler where he was more welcome. I followed Paul to Athens where I stood on the Acropolis and saw there the same pagan temples which inspired him to preach of a God who does not live in temples built by human hands. I climbed up Mars hill just a few feet away and imagined myself preaching as Paul did to the crowd who gathered to hear about this new God.

Many times in the past I had dreamed of roaming across the European continent, seeing those places which I had only read about in history books: Paris, the Riviera, Florence, Rome, Athens, Vienna and Switzerland, beautiful, beautiful Switzerland. I saw them all during that summer in what became a whirlwind tour. Into the third week I arrived in a quiet village in the Alps and decided I simply could not go on. It was all very lovely, but I was not really enjoying myself as I had expected. You see, I was alone. I had no one with whom I could share the excitement of what I was seeing. I missed home, I needed my wife. So I cut my trip short and came home. I am glad I saw it all, but I am dreaming
now of going back with my wife to retrace my journey and really enjoying myself.

I was reminded of that experience as I studied this week. I was reading from John’s Gospel where Jesus tells the disciples that He will not be with them very much longer. The twelve had been with Him for three and a half years in much more than a teacher-pupil relationship. They had spent nearly every moment of their lives with Him: sleeping, eating, praying, walking the roads of Palestine, watching Him heal the sick and forgive sinners. It appears that they became very dependent on Him, in fact, they had sacrificed their livelihood in a cause which they believed was going to soon challenge the Roman occupation forces. They had a patriotic zeal because they believed He was the Jewish Messiah; there was also an emotional dependency after three years which they may have had difficulty in explaining, adults that they were.

The disciples did not understand what He was talking about when He said He would soon be leaving them. Where was He going? Why was He going? What would it be like not to have Him as their leader any longer? How could He leave now when they were so close to their objective? They would be alone; there must be nothing worse in all the world than being lonely. It was that
feeling coupled with a profound fear that began to grip them as Jesus was taken away by the authorities on Friday evening. Jesus' warning had come so unexpectantly, and now it had happened. They were alone. In little more than twenty-four hours, their lives had disintegrated. There was no beauty, no excitement, no longer any joy; life had become bitter for they were all alone.

It was not easy for Jesus either to anticipate leaving the Apostles. He certainly felt the loss of their companionship during the hours of His abuse at the hands of the authorities, but neither was He entirely easy about being physically separated from them after the resurrection. Of course, He wanted to resume His place with the Father and the angels in heaven; it was absolutely vital that it happen as it had been planned from the foundations of the world. But, I expect the Son of Man experienced much heaviness of heart as He told them He would be going back to the Father. Jesus had enjoyed the companionship of these twelve men. He had felt the warmth and fulfillment that can only come from the kind of intimacy He had enjoyed with them. It would be lonely without them.

As I read this week, I was startled by a concept developed by the Mennonite preacher and scholar, Myron
Augsburger, a concept which I had not seen as clearly articulated before.

The goal of history is God in the midst of his people. Creation, redemption, discipleship, and resurrection all focus on God’s purpose in creating people to share fellowship with him. In fact, from the moment God created humankind everything changed for God—forever. He will always be dealing with humanity, relating to humanity.\(^1\)

It is true. God’s purpose in creation was to have beings in His own image whose company He could enjoy. Augsburger completes the picture in another sentence where he says that the kingdom of God is made of a people who enjoy His presence. We think it is difficult to wait for Jesus’ return. I saw that reaction a few weeks ago when I was with my father who was obviously not looking forward to his death. He kept talking over and over about how close we are to the end. I became a little impatient with him, but I suppose there is that kind of franticness when one begins to look death in the face. But God is also longing for the complete union to take place. You may ask, when then will He do something about, and I answer, "He is waiting for many more to accept Him for He is not willing for any to miss out."

As difficult as it was for Jesus, it was essential for Him to return to Paradise in order for the plan for redeeming this earth to proceed. As He told the disciples about leaving them, He sensed that they were full of grief, but, He said, "It is for your good that I am going away" (John 16:7), and they must have wondered how that could possibly be. But Jesus was looking to the future and not just the present. When Jesus had come to earth, He had taken upon Himself for all time the human form. He could not personally be in every place with each one of His disciples or those thousands and millions of others who would become His disciples through their ministry. Imagine what it would have been had He remained for all time on planet earth. Even had He traveled from place to place, there would have been unbelievable demands.

Jesus had come to reveal the Father, and to make the atoning sacrifice for humankind. When that was accomplished, He would become our Mediator before the Father. He would bear forever before the Father and heavenly beings the form of humanity as a demonstration of God’s love and mercy. Resuming His position at the right hand of the Father, He would receive the petitions of His people and dispense grace according to their
needs. The Apostle described Jesus' superior ministry as he wrote to the Hebrews and then he said:

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Heb 4:14-16)

As Jesus spoke to the disciples on that sorrow-filled evening, through their grief they heard Him saying, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you" (John 14:16-18). Apparently they were too stunned that night to understand much of what Jesus said about the Holy Spirit, at least it would seem so by their lack of questions. He reminded them of His promise just before His ascension to heaven and told them to wait in the city until the promise had been fulfilled. "Do not leave Jerusalem," He said, "but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4, 5).
When Jesus came to this earth disguised as an infant, there was no fanfare. Excepting for the few shepherds on the hills, no one knew it was a night different from any other. Not so on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came. The disciples were still in the city as they had been instructed, and a much energized group it was too. They now understood what the kingdom was all about and were waiting only for the command to go, so they could prepare for Christ's return. His return was an event that consumed their thoughts and their conversations. If they could speed it up, they would go without sleep so it could come sooner.

"Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them" (Acts 2:2, 3). Had you been in Jerusalem that day you would have run with the rest of the city to see what was happening. What they saw and heard was amazing and perplexing, "What does this mean" (Acts 2:12)? they asked one another. Peter stood up and told them what it meant. Three thousand were baptized as a result of what they heard.

It is almost two thousand years since that day when the Spirit came; there are still lots of people,
including Christians, for whom it means nothing. Ellen White places this ignorance in proper perspective.

If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is not appreciated as it should be. If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death.¹

This morning I will admit to you some ignorance on my own part of the Spirit and His work. He has always been so mysterious for me that I have found it easier to ignore Him than to experience Him.

My personal desire right now to have deeper intimacy with God has caused more openness about the Spirit and His work than I have known before. What I have discovered is breathtaking. Here is how Augsburger describes it:

We are called by the Holy Spirit, we are converted by the Spirit, we are regenerated by the Spirit, we are indwelled by the Spirit, we are infilled with the Spirit’s presence, we are to have the fruit of the Spirit, the Holy Spirit gives gifts to perform the work of Christ, and we are given the discernment and illumination of the Spirit.²

In other words, the Holy Spirit presides over the entire scope of the Christian life.

²Augsburger, 45.
But above all else, for me at least, is the fact that the Holy Spirit indwells every Christian, and I mean He literally makes His home with us. When Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:2), He was speaking of the action of the Holy Spirit. When Paul said, "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col 1:27), he also was referring to the Spirit. Everyone of those promises of God’s indwelling or Jesus’ indwelling are speaking of the Holy Spirit. This is His assignment after Jesus left.

This makes the Holy Spirit a relational being. As Adventists, we pride ourselves in knowing what we refer to as the truth. We have studied our Bibles very thoroughly and carefully and have systematized all that it says. No one could possibly win a debate with us because we have things so well sorted out. This characteristic of Adventists has left us with an information-based religion; in fact, we are a little dubious about experiences with God and are horrified by anyone who would express any spiritual emotion. I know, it is possible to give too much prominence to emotions, but I must tell you that when we become Christians we are called to a relationship with Christ, not just to acceptance of concepts about Him. That is the real heart
of Christianity, reconciliation with Him, the repairing of the relationship and not just a pronouncement that we are justified, for we are justified in relationship with Him. The Holy Spirit is the personal representative of the Trinity in that process in an on-going relationship.

Because that is so, our response should be one of reaching out to the Spirit in an intentional effort of cooperation with Him. The text I most want you to remember this morning, and which is the basis for my challenge is from the Scripture lesson of the morning, Rom 8:9-11.

You are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ. But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you.

Study the life of Christ as it is presented in the Gospels, and you will discover that His constant goal was to do the will of His Father, but you will also discover that it was always in union with the Holy Spirit. He was anointed by the Spirit after His baptism, and then was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to prepare for His ministry. When He returned, it was in the power of the Spirit. Going to the synagogue in Nazareth, He stood up
and read from the scroll of Isaiah, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me," and claimed fulfillment in Himself (Luke 4:16-21). He performed miracles in the power of the Holy Spirit and encouraged those He taught to ask for the Holy Spirit from the Father in heaven for themselves. As He left the disciples, He commended to them the Holy Spirit as their own companion just as He had been for Himself.

This same Holy Spirit is our companion as Christians. In fact, we are told that our bodies become His temple (1 Cor 6:19). Because He is there, in some mysterious manner, Jesus and the Father are also there. It is for this very reason that Paul is able to say at the end of Rom 8 that nothing at all can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation" (Rom 8:38, 39).

To have this profound relationship places us in a much different situation than other people. In our Scripture lesson this morning, two possibilities are described. The most popular is to follow our natural sinful instincts in a lifestyle which ends in eternal death because the sinful mind is hostile to God. But, if we live in the Spirit, allowing the Spirit to control our minds, we have life and peace. The fruit of the Spirit—
led life is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control. We are no longer under the bondage of sin; Paul says, in fact, that "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor 3:17 18).

There are some practical challenges for us in this relationship which include building into our daily lives rhythms that permit us to live in harmony with the Spirit. That will be the subject of our message next Sabbath. What I want you to understand today is that we are not alone. The Holy Spirit has been sent as our Comforter, Counselor, Guide, and Friend. Through Him, Jesus and the Father also are with us. The disciples did not understand what Jesus meant in the Upper Room when He promised this powerful friend as a gift, but when the promise was fulfilled and the Holy Spirit came to each of them, their lives were never the same. They had a heavenly companion who was always with them; in His power they went from Jerusalem and conquered the world for Christ.

Is it any wonder that Ellen White writes: "Why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why
do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it?"¹ You may have heard the story of the missionary who was trying to describe the Holy Spirit to a group of natives, but she was having difficulty in translation. She explained how He encourages, exhorts, admonishes, protects, comforts and guides the Christian. Finally, they exclaimed, "Oh, if anyone would do all that for us, we would say, 'He is the one who falls down beside us.'" The Holy Spirit would like to fall down beside you, will you invite Him right now?

SERMON 4, LIVING IN THE PRESENCE

My purpose in the last three sermons was to show you the extent of God's involvement in our lives. I wanted you to see that God is committed to a personal relationship with each one of us. First, we spoke of God as one who made human beings for His own pleasure. His desire was to have beings like Himself who could be companions. He was eminently successful in what He created, but the risk He took in creating humans with freedom backfired. The open friendship God had enjoyed with Adam and Eve could not be sustained after they had sinned. God had to go undercover, so to speak. He did not give up, but He had to use means other than the face-to-face relationship used before. In fact, enticement was often necessary now, because humans strayed so far from the ideal in which they were first created.

I shared with you earlier a concept that helped me understand God's involvement which I had not thought of before reading it from a book by Myron Augsburger.\(^1\) When God created human beings, everything changed for Him forever; He could not go back. Now He would always be involved in relating to humans. Jesus came to make it possible for people to be free again. Now all creation

\(^1\)Augsburger, 57.
waits for the day when all things will be restored as they were at the beginning.

Last Sabbath we spoke of the assignment of the Holy Spirit. He is God's representative, sent to be with us until we see God face to face. This Holy Spirit is another example of the commitment God has made to a relationship with us. I have personally ignored the Spirit most of my life and have missed an opportunity for God's involvement in my life. Now I am trying to make up for it, it is not easy to build openness to this representative of God after building for so long habit patterns that have not included Him. Thankfully, the Holy Spirit puts even more into building relationships than I do, so that it is beginning to happen. The barriers which were there are being removed.

You have noticed that most of my sermons the last few months have had a similar theme. I have been speaking out of my own experience hoping to share with you some of the excitement I have found for myself. This excitement is about God and how real He has become. He is no longer just a concept in my mind. I have learned plenty of things about Him since I was a child. At first, I saw Him as a tyrant, then more, recently, I was able to understand how He saves. Now I am beginning to know Him; I am learning how to live in His presence. I
am convinced that most Christians do not know any more about living in His presence than I did. That is why I am sharing what I have found, and that is the purpose of the spiritual retreat we have scheduled for September 8 and 9.

My text for today is from God's own heart. It is part of Jesus' farewell instructions to His disciples. Several chapters from John say more about God's feelings than any texts I know in Scripture. Over and over Jesus speaks about God's desire to be with the disciples. "I am going away," He says in chapter 14, "but all the while I am gone I will be preparing for you to be with me and I will be back to get you. I do not have any intention of leaving you as orphans while I am away, so I am sending the Holy Spirit as another Comforter to be with you."

In the first half of chapter 15, where my text is found, Jesus is telling His disciples to remain as close to Him after He leaves as they have been while He was with them. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you" (John 15:4). It was a promise that if they would maintain a relationship with the Holy Spirit, it would be the same as a continuation of Jesus' own friendship. My text follows:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a
branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is to my Father’s glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. (John 15:5-8)

What Jesus means is that the quality of life we were made to enjoy is impossible except through Him. Sin and its results are so powerful that our strongest resolves will never break its hold, allowing us to live as God intended. But if we choose to place ourselves back in relationship to God. (Jesus called it remaining in Him), then we will experience real life. Listen to Maxie Dunnam’s explanation.

Living "by faith in the Son of God" is to live in the realm of the Spirit, not to have the norms and values of our life shaped by the frail, vulnerable, transient nature of flesh, but to be in a new realm, the kingdom of Spirit, where power is ours from the indwelling Christ.¹

Few of us would quarrel with Jesus’ claim that we cannot produce the quality of life He describes on our own. In fact, the perfection to which God calls us is so out of reach that many do not even bother to consider it as an alternative. We are hopelessly bogged down in the mire of sin. Some do try on their own to make themselves good, but in the process, they become almost worse than those who do not try at all because their lifestyle

¹Dunnam, Alive in Christ, 56.
becomes forced and unnatural. People have even become so frantic about achieving holiness that they have beaten themselves or denied some of life's necessities hoping to force out the bad. It has not ever worked.

Jesus said holiness is possible only by remaining in Him. As I understand it, all life as it is meant to be comes from God and is maintained in God. When I was in Indianapolis a few weeks ago with my parents, we reminisced about things that happened when my brothers and sisters and I were children. I do not know how it came up, but my father remembered the time he and mother were planning to be baptized as Seventh-day Adventists at the end of an evangelistic series. At that time, we were living in a small town about twenty miles away from the Adventist church. We had an old-fashioned car. It may not have been all that old at the time, but you children here would think it was old were I to describe to you the running boards, the black finish, and the tarred roof.

On the morning that the baptism was scheduled, my brother and I were playing out by the car and discovered how much fun it was to fill the gas tank opening with gravel and chicken feed. I do not remember how much we put in, but I do remember how much fun it was. Of course, that car, even though it was old, was never meant to operate on gravel and chicken feed. Perhaps the devil
did not want my parents to be baptized that day and put the idea into the minds of two little boys to provide the obstruction.

Just as automobiles are built to operate on gasoline, so are humans created to operate in God. Remaining in relationship with Him, people could have lived throughout eternity perfectly healthy, perfectly happy and perfectly in harmony with one another. The gravel in the gas tank was when Adam and Eve made the decision to disobey. They were free to do as they pleased, but in doing as they pleased, they really surrendered their freedom, and separated themselves from God. Life immediately took on a much different character. In their children and generations to follow, the results were perpetuated so that the image of God in which humans were created was nearly destroyed.

The Gospel is all about God's action to bring people back into this relationship where they can again be where life was meant to be. Jesus provided the necessary atonement by His death at Calvary; we accept His offer of forgiveness and are forgiven and declared righteous. Then the relationship is re-established, the Holy Spirit joins with us, and we are home again. In 2 Cor 3:17, 18, the Apostle Paul describes what happens:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom [from the old
life of the flesh]. And we, who with unveiled
faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being
transformed into his likeness with ever-
increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who
is the Spirit.

A bit of a tension appears in all of this which
sometimes confuses people. There is instant salvation in
Christ, for when we accept Him as our Savior, we are
declared righteous and immediately become a son or
daughter of God, proper citizens once again of His
kingdom. But our characters are not suddenly erased
clean. There is a new center to our life, that is true,
and God covers us with His righteousness, but there are
still lots of changes to be made. Where do they come
from? In our text, Jesus says, "Remain in me and you
will bear fruit" (John 15:4, paraphrase). The fruit
which He speaks of is the refinement of the character or
holiness of character. Ellen White says when we "make
Christ our daily companion we shall feel that the powers
of an unseen world are all around us; and by looking unto
Jesus we shall become assimilated to His image."¹

You see, this image of God in which we were first
created is to be restored. That image is a different way
of thinking and acting and interacting with people. Love
is its chief characteristic, and it most resembles Jesus.
God's objective and ideal for each of us is that we

¹White, Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing, 85.
experience this fullness of life as it was meant to be. It happens in relationship to God, for to experience humanity to its fullest is to walk with God in the cool of the evening as Adam and Eve did. When we speak of spirituality, that is what we mean, living life to the fullest in Christ.

In His prayer for His disciples, Jesus asked that they be one with Him just as He was One with the Father. His claims to intimacy with the Father are numerous in Scripture. As they appear chronologically in the book of John, He says in chapter 5 that He can do only what He sees His Father doing. In chapter 6, He notes that He came down, not to do His own will, but the will of Him who sent Him. The eighth chapter adds, "I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me." In chapter 12 He makes a very bold claim: "When a man believes in me, he does not believe in me only, but in the one who sent me. When he looks at me, he sees the one who sent me." Finally, in chapter 14, the claim made there must have been hard for the disciples to understand, "Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me."

Do you think Jesus' prayer for you to be as close to Him as He was to His Father will ever be answered? It is His will for us. I do not want to discourage anyone,
but please listen to this text from John in his first epistle. Hear it as a possibility and not an impossibility. "This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6). He is talking of obedience, but I am sure He also means Jesus' total identity with the Father. We are to have that same identity with Jesus.

If you are in despair, listen to something further from John which will help to drive despair away. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God. . . . This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:1, 4). I think this means that when we accept Christ as our Savior a real union takes place between us and Jesus, and that union forms the basis of the experience of being one with Christ which begins from that moment.

I have found that the most important factor in my relationship with God is faith. I had all kinds of information about God and about the Christian life, but until I was able to accept by faith that God was really with me through the Holy Spirit, as He claimed to be, I could not make any progress at all in my spiritual life. I felt alone. God was off in heaven tending to the business of the universe, neither knowing me nor caring much to know me. It just seemed impossible for me to
accept that He was with at that very moment. I struggled with this until finally God gave me the faith to believe that since He said it, it is so. I said to myself, "If I cannot trust God on this one, I cannot trust Him on anything else," and I was able to rest in confidence.

When I knew He was with me, it was much easier for me to remain in Him. But there is a practical challenge of this remaining, and here is the most crucial point of my message: rhythms have to be built into our daily lives which enable us to live in His presence. By rhythms, I mean a regular pattern of relationship practices which constantly keep us open and in tune with God. God's initiative is to give us new life, our initiative must be to establish the rhythms for maintaining that life. These rhythms are a range of practices in which we cooperatively interact with God. It is only in this regular interaction with God that we can expect spiritual growth to take place.

The practices become disciplines of the spiritual life because they are intentional and must be regular. Any kind of discipline requires an act of the will plus the use of our energy reserves; spiritual discipline is not an exception to this rule. It is possible, even, to say that there may be a little pain involved, at least at first, because some other priority may need to be
replaced. But it certainly is not like losing weight. Rather, it is more like the discipline required to maintain a relationship with a lover, you really do not know it as discipline because you are enjoying it so much. Nouwen says: "Discipline in the spiritual life means a gradual process of coming home to where we belong, listening there to the voice which desires our attention. It is the voice of the 'first love.'"¹

In Rom 6:13, the Apostle Paul counsels, "Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life." The disciplines allow that to happen, we are literally offering ourselves to God by moving into a position where we are open to Him and can be changed by Him or, as Maxie Dunnam, says, we are "giving expression to the indwelling Christ."²

The disciplines I use most include devotional prayer, formational use of Scripture, meditation, and journaling, but many other disciplines are available to suit one's own personality and needs. Devotional prayer and the formational use of Scripture are much different from the kind of prayer and Bible study I had been used

¹Henri Nouwen, Lifesigns, 39.
²Dunnam, Alive in Christ, 113.
to. My praying used to be mainly from a sense of duty and always to ask for something, either forgiveness or some kind of miracle. Talking to God as a friend means doing a lot of listening and deep sharing. My study of Scripture used to focus on content; I wanted to get more and more information or be able to boast about how many times I read the Bible through. Formational reading of the Bible allows the message to work in the life. One meditates on the passage until he/she becomes part of the story and feels the same action from God as was felt by the Bible character.

At the retreat, we will be learning and practicing the disciplines and then sharing that experience with each other. I wish everyone of you could attend. You could experience so much joy in your life when you are able to know God as a friend and understand how to cultivate that friendship. "If anyone remains in me and I in them," said Jesus in our text, "they will bear much fruit: apart from me you can do nothing. . . . If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. This is my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples" (John 15:5, 7,8). Jesus is speaking of the intimate relationship He desires with each of us.
If you are dissatisfied with how little real intimacy you have with God, now is the time to do something about it. Think of what you are missing. There is no need to continue experiencing such little joy when a really satisfying companionship with Him is His greatest desire for you. To walk in the cool of the evening sharing the deepest intimacies was the greatest thrill and privilege of the first couple. It is possible for all of us to experience that thrill, not only possible, but God longs for it to happen.
SERMON 5, THE STRUGGLE OF FAITH

If you were to stand at the end of your life and look back with clear vision, you would discover that life is a series of stages, each one built upon the other. How you develop as a person in each new stage depends upon how successfully you have completed the stage before. Crises are usually responsible for providing the trigger that catapults you into the next stage. Your reaction to these crises tells the story of what foundational structure undergirds your life. This foundational structure is the philosophy or force which integrates life for you. It becomes a habitual orientation which takes charge without a lot of deliberation when it becomes necessary.

I have done some examining of my own life from my present vantage point—which my son identifies as the "geezer" stage—and I have been able to find many transition points. Often a great deal of pain is associated with those passages from stage to stage, especially in the early days when the foundational structure was still in question. I have also identified the force which kept my life on target, pulling me from one stage to another. Like everyone else, I am engaged
in "a quest for meaning," attempting to invest my life "to achieve the greatest return."¹

My children make fun of their mother and me because we enjoy a more settled lifestyle and rely on experiences of the past as guides in decision making. They think we should be more daring and throw caution to the wind. I like their risky bravado and romanticism, and even some of their unconventional lifestyle, but I must admit that I much prefer having all those struggles of youth behind me. I must not leave the impression that all is smooth sailing these days. Ask those who know me best and you will discover there are times even now when the waves come close to sinking my ship, but the rudder always catches me before it is too late and directs me back to the course I have chosen for my life.

Pastors have the privilege of accompanying lots of people through the passages of life. I have had my share in my twenty-six years of ministry, and there has been tragedy as well as triumph. It is easy to rejoice with those who rejoice, but as I think about the tragedies, I feel like weeping all over again. Tragedies were not easy to bear at the time they happened, and I find some are very difficult to bear even after years have passed.

I thought I was good at keeping myself somewhat detached from the heartache of others, but I see now that I was only hiding my own sorrow. Henri Nouwen has written a little volume for pastors called *The Wounded Healer*. It helps to place the pastor's vulnerability in perspective and that vulnerability does take its toll, often leading to early burnout.

I remember one young man who came searching for help in developing the foundational structure for his life. Karl had lots of promise, I thought. He was gentle and warm-hearted and open, even after a difficult childhood. He still needed to go back and complete the education which had been aborted in a period of confusion, but he was young and it would be fairly painless. Without the stability of a good home, it had been easy for him to get involved in the drug culture. He eventually saw that life was more than a drug-high, and he wanted out. We talked and prayed and studied the Bible together, and I baptized him. For a while Karl seemed excited about what he had found. In fact, he seemed eager to catch up on what he had missed.

I kept close to Karl, as did his friends in the church, but all his good resolves were abandoned one by one. While he wavered, he lost the beautiful young woman he had expected to marry—she found someone whose
foundations were settled. He found a good job where he expected to be promoted. I can remember hearing him describe what the future would be, but then he lost the job, too. When I went to find him to give support and encouragement, I discovered him with his old friends, and with the smell of drugs in the air. The last time I saw Karl, he made no pretence of a Christian life. He was living with a young woman who was not his wife, and the agitation and confusion of the past had once more taken control to overcome the short time of peace he had experienced.

Karl's attempts to change his foundational structure were heroic, but, in the end, the pull of the old commitment was too great. He retreated to the old way of life with which he was more familiar, a security system centered in himself. Of course, Karl rejoined most of his contemporaries which was the much easier course. The most natural foundational structure for life is a self-centered philosophy where eternal values are ignored. What makes "me" feel good right now is the most popular life force.

The prodigal son is another example of where such a life leads. He made a conscious decision to reject the orientation of his father; that lifestyle had no excitement or personal pleasure in it as far as he could
see. He wanted to be free to enjoy life out in the real world where he could buy enjoyment and indulge his sexual fantasies. Likely that young man was passing through the developmental stage which questions the values of home and seeks independence from parents and other authority figures. That is an exciting time of life where a sound foundational structure is even more crucial than ever before.

Some of you may have watched the first season of "Twin Peaks;" my wife and I are seeing the Saturday night repeats. I am certainly not recommending it. It is a make-believe town, perhaps more real than fiction, where everyone portrayed seems to have made the same choice as the prodigal son.

But there came another crisis in the life of the prodigal when all his money and friends were gone. He did not even have food to eat. That was a crisis of the first magnitude. So he had to fight the battle over the basic direction of his life—which in the end was not a real contest. He had experienced first hand what the world had to offer, Scripture calls it the way of sinful nature. He knew its results. He was finished with it. Solomon came to the same conclusion after he had seen it all; he wrote: "I have seen all the things that are done
under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind" (Eccl 1:14).

When I told the story of Karl, I mentioned the beautiful young women whom he had intended to marry. Karl and Kathy had gone together for several years, had even lived together, by the time I met them. Kathy was gentle and warm hearted, one of the loveliest young women I have ever known. She had come from a fine home, but had rejected her parent’s values and had also become involved with drugs. She had become a single parent, and this may have given her more reason than Karl to search for a better life. When I began studying with her, she eagerly drank in the truths of Scripture and accepted Christ as her personal Savior. Kathy’s decision was rock solid, she began to grow, and when she discovered that Karl was not going to offer the strength she needed, she chose another young man to share her affections.

Ron had also come through a difficult passage in his life, but he was determined and settled. What a joy it was to study and pray with Ron and Kathy as they prepared for marriage. Their’s was a marriage made in heaven, of that I have no question. They had a lovely wedding, followed not long after with the dedication of Kathy’s little girl whom Ron loved, too. Shannon was a picture of beauty, but was as wild as a March hare.
Those of us who loved that family saw Shannon's disposition change. She became happy and well-behaved, and finally came to me one day and told me she wanted to be baptized—I suppose she was all of four years old.

Ron and Kathy planned their future with their life structure locked in place, it would have been a splendid future, I believe that with all my heart. They were driving home from campmeeting one Sabbath when they were killed instantly in a collision with a tractor trailer. Our hearts were broken by the tragedy; I will carry my own sorrow as long as I live, but there was also a celebration as we left the three coffins in that little Iowa cemetery. It was a celebration of the lives of Ron and Kathy and Shannon, three whose destiny had been fixed, for as surely as there is a God, so surely I know that I will see them again.

Saul of Tarsus, who became Paul the greatest exponent of Christianity the world has ever known, began his professional career after obtaining the most sophisticated training his world could offer. His life structure was built on the Pharisaical belief that strict obedience to the law would produce all the good that life could offer, as well as provide a guarantee for the life hereafter. In his zeal he even hunted out Christians who
challenged his system; he intended to bring them to justice and stamp out their impertinence.

While traveling to Damascus under the spell of his personal vendetta, he was confronted by the Lord Jesus. God speaks to each one as He did to Paul, and offers the same invitation. Those who respond as Paul did are born again through repentance. That new birth experience which makes necessary the radical change for the installation of the only lasting foundational structure. Paul's change was profound; he became just as zealous for Christ as he had been for the law. No one has articulated the gospel and what it means to be a Christian as did Paul. There has never been a greater missionary. His impact on Christianity is second only to that of the Lord Jesus.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul gave a testimony which reveals the only foundational structure which can ever give true meaning and safe passage for life: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Gal 2:20). "I live by faith in the Son of God," said Paul. Faith in Jesus was the force which gave meaning to his life; that faith carried him through all of the crises of his life. It was an
orientation which almost instinctively guided his every decision, and every action was generated by its power.

My last four sermons were designed to show you the ingredients for spirituality. Today's message is to assure you that spirituality grows from a root, which I have also called a foundational structure for life—faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If your experience has been anything like mine, you have understood faith to be an intellectual acceptance of what you have been told is truth, often requiring you to make a kind of leap in the dark. In my study this week a book by Gary Chamberlain helped me to understand what I already knew—that faith is much more than an intellectual process, "it is primarily relational, passionate, and participatory."¹

We are told that faith is a gift, but that gift is experienced in a relationship with Jesus Christ begun at conversion and growing on and on into intimate experiences with Him. I appreciate the metaphor used by James Cobble. He describes faith as a cube which has six sides but, since only three sides are visible at one time, an element of mystery is always present.²

He found five aspects of faith: belief in God's Word, obedience—which is a commitment to the new way of

¹Chamberlain, 9.
²Cobble, 30.
life, trust or confidence that He will do what He says, faithfulness or trustworthiness, and hope in the future.¹ "Yet," he writes, "faith cannot be reduced to these dimensions alone. . . . Faith characterizes the fabric of one's existence. For the Christian, faith is a manifestation of one's relationship with God. It is not simply an aspect of one's life structure; faith becomes the foundational structure of life."²

Cobble also helped me to understand that faith always includes the gift of the Holy Spirit: "one cannot exist without the other,"³ and that means that there is a supranatural power source at the Christian's disposal. "It is power over death; power over the demonic; power to heal; power to love; power to endure; power to serve; power to live free from the cares of life; power to be content in any circumstance."⁴ No wonder the Lord told the disciples, "If you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain. 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you" (Matt 17:20). Not by the disciples own power could

¹Ibid., 30-33.
²Ibid., 33.
³Ibid., 45.
⁴'Tbid.
anything like that happen. The supranatural power which accompanies faith is the power which made the universe. With that same power, God could perform that which seems impossible to us, if it were necessary.

When the Apostle Paul came to the end of his life, things were not very comfortable. He was not able to retire to a quiet place and enjoy a leisurely pace as he so richly deserved. Most of his last months were spent in prison. Anyone looking on would probably question the choices he made that provided him such an ignominious end. Paul wrote to young Timothy to give him encouragement, lest possibly he might be tempted to change his life's direction before it delivered him also to prison. In Paul's letter to Timothy, this powerful testimony which only come from one who had experienced the power of faith: "I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day" (2 Tim 1:12).

I want to come to the end of my life with that same confidence and with the hope of eternal life. That hope made it possible for Paul to place in perspective his imprisonment and death. He was not worried. Listen to this testimony: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the
Lord, the righteous Judge will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim 4:7, 8). Here is an example of what it means to have faith as the foundational structure of your life.

Probably some here, maybe some of our youth, are wrestling with these very issues right now. They may not even understand that they are making those choices as they try to develop independence for themselves. Probably many adults have a foundation structure that has become very weak from inattention. One that could collapse in a crisis—producing despair and confusion.

The only foundation which is really satisfying, the only foundation which gives hope, the only foundation which produces eternal life in the end is "faith in the Son of God" (Gal 2:20). Not just intellectual belief, but faith that is experienced in a relationship that grows sweeter and stronger each day of your life.
APPENDIX 3

CHURCH BULLETIN ANNOUNCEMENT

A GUIDED RETREAT IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Is your spiritual journey growing stale? Do you have a craving for God which is not being met? Be part of a special group retreat designed to strengthen your relationship with Jesus.

Spiritual disciplines will be explained and practiced. Time will also be available for relaxation and personal solitude.

Two days of spiritual refreshment. Adults only. Space will be limited. Pre-registration is required.

Please contact Pastor Willsey today or call him during the week in order to register.

Date: September 9 & 10 (Sabbath & Sunday)
Retreat Center near Gaithersburg.

"Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." John 4:13, 14
APPENDIX 4

LETTER TO CHURCH MEMBERS

Dear Friends:

This is my personal invitation to you to participate in the spiritual retreat being planned for Sabbath and Sunday, September 8 and 9. Suggestions have been made through the years that we have a retreat separately from our annual church fellowship retreat which would focus more on spiritual matters. Now we are able to offer that retreat; I hope you can attend. Please contact me personally to make your reservation.

The retreat will begin at 9:00 a.m., Sabbath morning, September 8, in the church parlor. There will be a break at 11:00 a.m. for the regular worship service and lunch. You may return to your home for your lunch and to complete an assignment which will be given in the morning session. At 5:00 p.m. on Sabbath afternoon, you will arrive at the Wellspring Retreat Center near Gaithersburg where the remainder of the retreat will be conducted. Completion time is scheduled for 6:00 p.m. Sunday afternoon. Double occupancy rooms will be used at 285
the retreat center, and all meals will be served there. The cost is $55, which includes room, board, and all materials for each participant.

Just as soon as you make a firm reservation with me, you will receive your own copy of the book *Alive in Christ* by Maxie Dunnam which you will want to read before the retreat begins. Dunnam explains in his book the dynamic process of spiritual formation and introduces many of the concepts which will be used during the retreat.

The retreat will consist of an explanation of the spiritual formation process as well as actual practice of some of the spiritual disciplines. There will also be time for personal solitude and relaxation. If you have craved a deeper relationship with Jesus and need some direction to help that happen, or if your spirit simply needs to be revived, this retreat will be for you. Ellen White explains, in the book *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 129, just what Christians may expect that relationship to be.

Our life is to be bound up with the life of Christ: we are to draw constantly from Him, partaking of Him, the living Bread that came down from heaven, drawing from a fountain ever fresh, ever giving forth its abundant treasures. If we keep the Lord ever before us, allowing our hearts to go out in thanksgiving and praise to Him, we shall have a continual freshness in our religious life. Our prayers will take the form of a conversation with God as we would talk with
a friend. He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Often there will come to us a sweet joyful sense of the presence of Jesus. Often our hearts will burn within us as He draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch.

It is essential that you make your reservations now. Also, please call if you have questions or special needs.
APPENDIX 5

SERMON PRESENTED DURING THE RETREAT
FOR THE CHURCH’S WORSHIP SERVICE

HOW TO LIVE WITH JESUS WHEN HE IS AT HOME WITH YOU

Sunday is normally my day off. I try to sleep in for at least a few minutes more than normal, and after my devotions, I go to the Seven Eleven and get the Sunday Post to catch up on the week’s happenings. Then I work in the yard or garden a bit and do a few other chores around the house. My intention is not to get overly involved in anything. I want to relax and let the tensions fall away so when Monday comes, I will be able to face the world refreshed. Sunday has always been a family day, too, except that now the children are grown, they prefer doing their own things by themselves.

One Sunday when the children were still very young and we were well into family things, the telephone rang. It was Jean with a message that sent my adrenalin soaring: "Pastor," she said, "I’ve just shot Tom." I knew it was no accident. I had been trying to hold their marriage together for months without much success. There
had been threats of violence before, but so far, nothing so drastic as this had happened. So much for a quiet Sunday. I got over to their home as quickly as possible, not knowing for sure what I would find or what I should do about it. Tom had only been slightly injured, the police had not been called, and the attack had shocked Jean as much as Tom so that the incident actually gave them both a little space for some serious consideration of their relationship. It was only a temporary reprieve, however, for eventually the marriage failed.

That experience came to my mind when I was thinking this week about relationships. Relationships are really not that easy, at least that is what I have discovered. No matter how many billions of us there are, we are all absolutely unique, made from very different patterns. Put us together and those differences make it difficult for all of us to get along. Even little things such as what we like to eat or how we squeeze the toothpaste tube can create seemingly irreconcilable differences. One of the first memories I have of how fickle relationships can be was as an adolescent when I had a crush on a girl in church school. She was just a little older than myself.

One Saturday night we sat together during a movie in the church dining hall; I held her hand for a while and got goose bumps. Probably I was deeply in
love. Discovering that her birthday was the next week, I went to the corner drug store and picked out a card and sent it with all my warmest affections. She went home for lunch and found my card and came back to school laughing in my face, making fun in front of all my friends, including the older guys who were my heroes. She had only sat with me during the movie in order to make jealous someone else whom she really liked. I was deeply hurt and embarrassed because I had been prepared for a really meaningful relationship with that girl.

All these thoughts came to my mind as I was considering the kind of companion I make for the Lord. As with you, I was created for God’s pleasure, to be His friend. That was the purpose for the creation of all human beings. Of course, sin broke the relationship, but I was thinking about myself as a born-again Christian, one accepted back into the family as His son. My purpose this morning is to explore this relationship to learn how to live with the Lord when He is at home with us. My text is the one in John 14:21-23, where Jesus makes the promise that He and the Father will come and live with us.

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him." Then Judas (not Judas Iscariot) said, "But, Lord, why do you intend to show yourself to us and not to the world?"
Jesus replied, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.

I have lived for years knowing about this text and many others just like it where Jesus speaks of the intimacy He plans for each of His children, but I really did not give the idea much thought. I figured it was just something Jesus said to comfort His disciples. After all, He was busy in heaven with much more important business. I guess I also saw this whole concept of companionship with God as mystical, and, so, beyond reality. I have always been a practical sort of person. I never really enjoyed poetry, emotional things were for weaklings, not for me, the mystical was beyond my ability to comprehend.

Now, I am changing, as you have discovered. That change has come out of a search for a more stable ground than my old religion was able to provide. In my study, I have come across so many Scripture passages that speak of God’s actual presence with His children, that I have had to admit that God is different from what I had thought. I still wish I could see Him, but I have now had enough experience to testify that He is with me in some mysterious way that I do not understand. He says that it is through the agency of the Holy Spirit. I do not much understand that either, but I believe it is so.
In the chapter immediately following the one where my text is found, Jesus uses that familiar analogy of the vine and the branch to describe the relationship between His children and Himself. "Remain in me, and I will remain in you," He promised, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit" (John 15:4, 5). To be that close, as closely tied together as a branch is to its vine, is a very intimate relationship. That cannot be empty words or even all mystical; it is more than simple acknowledgement that Jesus is Lord.

The Psalms are becoming more precious to me than almost any other section of Scripture, and that is a complete switch for one who did not enjoy them earlier. I enjoy them now because they are mostly prayers which open up to view the experiences of others in their relationship with the Lord. I want to share a portion of Ps 139 where David speaks of how intimately he is known by God. He evidently has found this out from his own experience, it was not something just told him by his father.

O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;

0 Lord, you have searched me
and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
you perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. You hem me in, behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. When can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?

If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there.

If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.

David likely first became aware of God’s presence during the long lonely days he spent away from home with his father’s sheep on the high plateaus outside Bethlehem. Probably days, maybe even weeks were spent there during the summer months when he saw no other human. During those quiet, lonely days, I suspect David discovered the closeness of God. I am sure his relationship was forged there. My evidence is the courage with which he went out against Goliath. He knew the Lord was with him and had absolutely no doubt that the Philistine would be delivered into his hands. He was still only a very young man, too young to have been conscripted into the army.

Maybe it was easier for David than it is for us to be at home with God. After all, he did not have much
else to do out on the grazing lands besides think about God. For you and me, it is much different. There is very little time when we are alone or at least without something calling out for our attention. We all work or study under high pressure where lots of people are also working or studying. There are expectations which keep us producing even past normal hours so that when we come home in the evening, we are ready to collapse from exhaustion. We have chores at home plus a few TV programs that we cannot miss. David would not have survived any better in our culture, we reason.

Most of us could describe our relationship with God in a short sentence: "I pray before I go to bed and at meals, I study my Sabbath School lesson once each week and I go to worship services on Sabbath." We may even be a little ashamed that we cannot say more, and we hope the time will come when our lives will slow down and we can give God more time. For now, there just is not much hope for much more. Besides, we really do not know what to do with God. We are like Mrs. Creal who did not know what to do with me a few years ago when I dropped in for a visit and found her being given a permanent. Those of you who remember Mrs. Creal know that she was greatly embarrassed that I had seen her with her hair in curlers.
The next time I visited she read me a poem she wrote about the occasion.

Joel Goldsmith, in his book *Practicing the Presence*, shares his own experience of discovering what life can be like with a constant acknowledgement of God’s presence. His testimony is similar to mine. He says:

Gradually, it dawned on me that all scripture was revealing to the world that "man, whose breath is in his nostrils," man separate and apart from God, is not to be accounted of, for he is nothing. I began to understand why Christ Jesus could say, "I can of mine own self do nothing" — of mine own self I am nothing; "the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works." I could understand St. Paul when he said, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me," and then I knew what the missing factor was in my life. I had been and was living an ordinary, everyday life. All that God meant to me was an occasional reading of the Bible and an occasional attendance at church. Now I saw that the principle of life, the secret of all successful living, was making God a part of my very consciousness, something which Paul describes as praying without ceasing.¹

Some of you have heard about Brother Lawrence who was born Nicholas Herman in French Lorraine in 1611, and who at 55 entered a Carmelite monastery where he served in the kitchen. What is so noteworthy about Brother Lawrence is that in his work in the kitchen he learned to practice the presence of God. Both lay persons and clergy were drawn to this quiet contented soul and wrote

asking for instruction as to how they could live in constant acknowledgment of God's presence.  

Another Christian who was scarcely known until middle age, then became one of the best loved men of our century because he began the practice of abiding in Christ, is Frank Laubach, missionary to the Philippines, but better known as the Apostle of Literacy. This great man who died in 1970 was once given the "Man of the Year" award; his response was: "The Lord will not wish to count my trophies but my scars."  

Laubach's letters written to folks at home, have been published as Letters by a Modern Mystic. On January 20, 1930, he wrote about his dissatisfaction for not having lived an entire day in conscious presence of God and of his determination to begin the new year differently. "I have started out," he wrote, "trying to live all my waking moments in conscious listening to the inner voice, asking without ceasing, "What, Father, do you desire said? What, Father, do you desire done this

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2 Ibid., xiii, xiv.
minute?"¹ Several weeks later he wrote as his experience was growing.

The sense of being led by an unseen hand which takes mine while another hand reaches ahead and prepares the way, grows upon me daily. I do not need to strain at all to find opportunity. It piles in upon me as the waves roll over the beach, and yet there is time to do something about each opportunity.²

Another six weeks and Laubach wrote:

I have tasted a thrill in fellowship with God which has made anything discordant with God disgusting. This afternoon the possession of God has caught me up with such sheer joy that I thought I never had known anything like it. God was so close and so amazingly lovely that I felt like melting all over with a strange blissful contentment. Having had this experience, which comes to me now several times a week, the thrill of filth repels me, for I know its power to drag me from God. And after an hour of close friendship with God my soul feels as clean as new-fallen snow.³

Laubach's experience required discipline, but its rewards far outweighed anything that at first he might have felt was a hardship. As time progressed, and the joy of God's constant companionship became sweeter, it became easier and easier to be at home with the Lord; the practice of His presence became a lifestyle. In October of that year he wrote:

²Ibid., 15.
³Ibid., 21, 22.
Worries have faded away like ugly clouds and my soul rests in the sunshine of perpetual peace. I can lie down anywhere in this universe, bathed around by my own Father’s Spirit. The very universe has come to seem so homey! I know only a little more about it than before, but that little is all! It is vibrant with the electric ecstasy of God! I know what it means to be "God-intoxicated."¹

The discipline that allows this to happen begins with a covenant with God, it is helpful to have at least one other individual, or better yet, a group to support you. Then a conscious effort is made to include God in all that you do. You say to yourself, "God is here with me, what would He do, how would He solve this problem, what answer would He give?" A constant prayer of openness to God is on the heart, and there is an attentiveness to what He may wish to say. It may be that you can sustain such an effort for only fifteen minutes at first, then thirty, and maybe even an entire morning. You may break the discipline for some reason, but it can be easily resumed until it becomes a habit of your life.

I believe God is calling all of His children to such a relationship. He longs for the day when we are completely attentive to His presence. Ellen White gives the impression that it will be the Christian’s experience. She writes: "If we are Christ’s, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of

¹Ibid., 46.
Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him. We long to bear His image, breath His spirit, do His will and please Him in all things."¹

Unbelievable peace results for those who know the Lord as He wishes to be known. Isaiah wrote: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord, the Lord, is the Rock eternal" ( Isa 26:3, 4).

Do you want that peace? Why wander around in the lowlands of life when so much more is so easily available? Our Scripture gives the invitation I extend to you this afternoon: "You who love me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love you and show myself to you, we will come to you and make our home with you" (John 14:21, 23, paraphrase).

¹White, Steps to Christ, 58.
APPENDIX 6

RETREAT EVALUATION

Directions: Please answer each of the following questions by circling the number which best reflects your opinion.

1 = very definitely agree, 2 = agree, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree, 5 = very definitely disagree

1. My room was comfortable and satisfactory. 1 2 3 4 5
2. I understood the explanations and presentations without any difficulty. 1 2 3 4 5
3. The schedule fitted my needs; it was not too crowded. 1 2 3 4 5
4. The retreat was well planned. 1 2 3 4 5
5. The pastor seemed to know his material and presented it in an attractive manner. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I liked the process of practice followed by sharing the experience with a spiritual partner. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I think a different spiritual partner would have made it easier for me. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I understand what is meant by spiritual discipline. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I see the importance of the spiritual disciplines for my own development. 1 2 3 4 5
10. I have chosen the disciplines I will incorporate into my own devotional life. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I do not think I will have any difficulty in keeping the disciplines from becoming legalistic works.

12. I had difficulty with tenseness especially in the group setting.

13. The body exercises helped me to relax.

14. The exercise of devotional prayer was very meaningful for me.

15. I found the prayer of adoration and thanksgiving came very naturally for me.

16. I received a new understanding of supplication and will definitely incorporate it into my prayer life.

17. I couldn't keep stray thoughts from interrupting my prayers and silent time.

18. I understand the difference between informational and formational reading.

19. Scripture study will be much more meaningful now that I have learned how to enjoy it formationally.

20. I am going to begin memorizing Scripture; I didn't understand its power before.

21. I now see the importance of Christian meditation and will not be afraid to use it as a discipline.

22. I had difficulty understanding some of the key concepts which were presented.

23. I enjoyed sharing my experience with my partner and with the group.

24. Journal keeping seems easy to me. I will make it a practice from now on.

25. I intend to find a friend who can support me in my spiritual journey.

26. I would be open to participating in a small group for spiritual accountability.
27. I believe the pastor should be a spiritual director. Members should have no problem in sharing their spiritual journey with him.

28. I am supporting the covenant we prepared as a group.

29. I would recommend that this retreat be repeated on a regular basis for other members. (Please list on the reverse side any changes you would recommend.)

30. I would like to have the church sponsor a one-day retreat for spiritual refreshment at least once each quarter.
APPENDIX 7

RETREAT FOLLOW-UP INVENTORY

Directions: Please circle the number for each of the following questions which best reflects your thinking according to your beliefs and practices since the retreat.

1 = very definitely agree, 2 = agree, 3 = not sure, 4 = disagree, 5 = very definitely disagree.

1. I feel much more satisfied with my devotional life now than I did before the retreat. 1 2 3 4 5

2. I find it easier to sense God's presence with me. 1 2 3 4 5

3. I am not as often angry with God. 1 2 3 4 5

4. I feel more sure about God's answers to my prayers. 1 2 3 4 5

5. I feel more sure that God cares about me. 1 2 3 4 5

6. It is much easier to acknowledge God's Lordship of my life. 1 2 3 4 5

7. I am giving God greater priority in my life than before. 1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel more freedom to share intimately with God. 1 2 3 4 5

9. I have a deeper craving to know God better. 1 2 3 4 5

10. I have done fairly well at keeping the terms of the group covenant. 1 2 3 4 5

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11. I am spending at least one-half hour each day in my personal devotions. 1 2 3 4 5

12. I use the devotional prayer form on a regular basis. 1 2 3 4 5

13. I am finding it easier than at first to quietly focus my attention on God and enjoy being with Him in prayer without having to say anything. 1 2 3 4 5

14. I have been able to develop some confidence that God speaks to me or impresses me with His will during prayer. 1 2 3 4 5

15. I am spending more time during prayer thanking and praising God than before the retreat. 1 2 3 4 5

16. I am using the practice of meditation in my own devotions and have found it to be very rewarding. 1 2 3 4 5

17. I still don’t understand the differences between Christian and Eastern meditation. 1 2 3 4 5

18. My use of Scripture in my devotions has changed since I learned the difference between the formational and informational use of Scripture. 1 2 3 4 5

19. I have been able to see myself in the action being portrayed in Scripture so that the message seems much more relevant. 1 2 3 4 5

20. I have begun memorizing Scripture. 1 2 3 4 5

21. I am now keeping a spiritual journal. 1 2 3 4 5

22. I am growing in my appreciation of the journaling process. 1 2 3 4 5

23. I have a definite time and place each day for my personal devotions. 1 2 3 4 5

24. I often have a spontaneous feeling to praise God. 1 2 3 4 5

25. I believe I am growing as a Christian. 1 2 3 4 5


_______. *Letter to Participants in the January 17-20, 1989, Retreat-Conference*.


________. "Spiritual Reading of Scripture." Weavings, November/December 1988, 26-32.


VITA

Steven Alan Willsey began his ministry in 1964 as a high school Bible teacher in Southern California. After one year, he was called as a missionary to British Guiana where he was ordained to the gospel ministry in 1970. He has served as pastor to congregations in St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands; Columbus, Georgia; Cedar Rapids, Iowa; and Washington, D.C. He completed his undergraduate degree in 1961, and his M.A. in 1964 from Andrews University. He is married to Alice Rachel Fowler who presently serves as director of student finance at Columbia Union College in Takoma Park, Maryland. He has three children: Amy, Angela, and Mark.