

2015

# A Program for Increasing Personal Reflection from a Biblical Perspective for Spiritual Growth at the Topeka Wanamaker Seventh-day Adventist Church

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ABSTRACT

A PROGRAM FOR INCREASING PERSONAL REFLECTION  
FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR SPIRITUAL  
GROWTH AT THE TOPEKA WANAMAKER  
SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

by

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Adviser: Stanley E. Patterson

## ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Project Document

Andrews University

Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

Title: A PROGRAM FOR INCREASING PERSONAL REFLECTION FROM  
BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT THE TOPEKA  
WANAMAKER SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

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Date completed: March 2015

### Problem

Shortly after arriving as the new pastor of the Wanamaker church I noticed the appearance of spiritual immaturity and disunity among members and stress between members and leaders. People gave time and talent to the church, yet complained about each other's actions. It seemed that misperceptions of self, others, and God among members blocked spiritual development toward the maturity and unity that Christ prayed for (John 17). The root of the problem seemed to be perceptual. A developmental program was needed that would be accessible to people across the broad spectrum of understanding and move them toward Christian maturity and unity.

## Method

Working from a foundation that the Bible is the word of God, and that reflecting on Scripture increases spiritual growth at every stage of Christian maturity (Hawkins, 2011), I developed a pilot study for facilitating reflection on Scripture for spiritual growth. Specifically, my focus was to advance participant understanding of self, God, and others from a biblical perspective, in hopes of increasing maturity and unity in Christ. The pilot study consisted of five weekly units. Each unit included sermon viewing and a class that reflected on the sermon theme using material from the Bible, social sciences, and biographies. Further reflection opportunities were offered through writing awakening narratives that were later condensed into poems. Assessment of the program involved quantitative and qualitative data.

## Results

Ten students signed up for the program and one dropped out after the first class. Poetry writing showed significant cognitive and emotional reflection and transformation in the seven students that turned in a poem. A self-administered questionnaire averaged middle to high levels of change in perception of self, God, and others among participants. A second part of the questionnaire monitored attentiveness to attendance and assignments. Lower scores on attentiveness contrasted with higher scores on perspective transformation indicating the potency of even minimal reflection on personal experience from a biblical perspective for a transformative experience.

## Conclusion

This study supports the thesis that reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective increases understanding of self, God, and others potentially

contributing toward the maturity and unity that Christ desired. Furthermore, the fact that each student experienced an increased desire to read the Bible increases the likelihood that they will continue to reflect on personal life experience from a biblical perspective and continue to grow. It is expected that such an ongoing experience will foster relational maturity and unity in the Wanamaker church with the intent that the intervention process of the project will continue and that observations of the impact on the church will be noted.

Andrews University  
Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary

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A Project Document  
Presented in Partial Fulfillment  
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March 2015

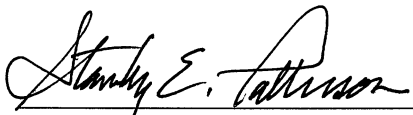
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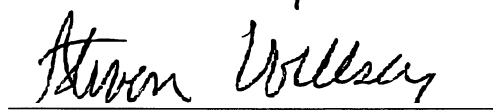
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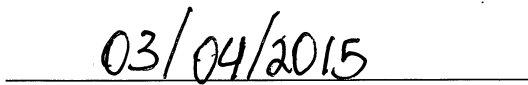
  
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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPT	Biblical Perspective Transformation
PT	Perspective Transformation
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament
TL	Transformational Learning
CR	Critical Reflection
CDC	Center for Disease Control
SBSG	Sermon Based Small Groups

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, my adviser, Dr. Stanley Patterson, has supported my interest in biblical human development since he was one of my seminary professors. During this project he continued to exhibit the rare ability to provide insight and guidance that not only expressed interest in my subject, but in my development as a person.

Dr. Kathy Beagles also fanned the flame of my interest in educational theory early on and came through for me at crunch time. Also, the Doctor of Ministry program director, Dr. Skip Bell, and my cohort director, Dr. Allan Walshe went the extra mile to get me into the program, even before I knew how much I would enjoy it!

Without my mother, Carmeen Hoover, the aforementioned professors would have had little to work with. Her voracious appetite for knowledge overcame unfavorable circumstances in life and gave me an example of looking beyond the immediate experiences life hands you to see the bigger things life holds for you. Persevering with this project through four moves, the birth and early years of two children and pastoring five churches is a testament to her tenacious example.

Thank-you to my class participants for helping me learn with you.

Special thanks to my beautiful wife, Kathy, for allowing me so much time to study. Now my dishes will make it all the way into the dishwasher. I can't wait to spend more time with you, and the kids!

Finally, I thank God for allowing me the experiences in life that made me hungry for the answers I would find in His word, and the further confirmation I would find for those answers in this program, not to mention the help getting me to, and through the program itself.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The Topeka Wanamaker Church is the largest of three Seventh-day Adventist churches in a city of 127,000. The ethnic mix of the congregation reflects that of the city, with Caucasians in the majority. This is largely a middle-class, traditionally conservative group, with the age scale tilting toward retired, but with some representation along the age spectrum. Weekly attendance averages 130, according to church records.

The headquarters for the Kansas-Nebraska Conference of Seventh-day Adventists is located here, with most of the employees attending church here when in town as well as several retired denominational leaders. Surprisingly, even with elders that include former world, union, and local conference leaders, church attendance has dwindled in recent years.

Compared with other churches I had interviewed at, this church was the most reserved. The previous pastor said that this was generally a good church, but it was not open to formal programs promoting reflection for spiritual growth. This could be due to the fact that its leaders had attended the seminary when emphasis was on the quantity of information but reflection for understanding was neglected (Clouzet, 1997; Farley, 1983).

Over the course of my first two weeks as pastor I was occasionally approached by members voicing frustration at the “controlling ways” of the church leaders. One elder reportedly pounded the table at a board meeting, insisting on his way on an issue that

carried no biblical weight, but was simply a matter of personal preference. This leadership style may have been considered appropriate in a previous generation, but at least one of the complaints of “controlling ways” was coming from someone of that generation. My personal observation of the elders revealed hard working, moral leaders who regularly contributed time, talent, and money to the church. But so did most of those who expressed frustration with them.

Another observation I made was that some leaders were pushing for a traditional evangelistic program even though records indicated that few converts remained after the most recent public efforts.

### **Statement of the Problem**

In 2000 eight out of 10 Americans wanted to grow spiritually (Gallup & Jones, 2000, p. 45). But while Gallup and Jones presented compelling evidence of a spiritual awakening in America they also found that church attendance was falling (p. 30). Later research confirmed a trend. Spiritual interest remained high, but American interest in organized religion continued to fall at a rapid pace to the point that “One-fifth of the U.S. public – and a third of adults under 30 – are religiously unaffiliated” (PEW, 2008, 2012). Finley noticed that the percentage had increased by almost 5% in the last five years alone (2014). Disconnection between spiritual desire and church attendance begs the attention of the church.

Gallup and Jones (2000) found that a large percentage of Americans were defining spirituality in very unique ways, with a third making no reference to God or a higher authority in their definition (p. 49). On the surface this may seem to account for some of the disconnection between the church of God, which is supposed to be spiritual,



and those who seem to be spirituality interested without being interested in church. But at the same time, their reason for spiritual interest reveals a potential connection point with the church, as they were found to be reshaping traditional religion to make sense of their lives (p. 35). That is, Gallup and Jones found that the spiritual awakening was closely tied to desire for a sense of meaning (p. 30).

One would think that if the church holds the ultimate meaning-making perspective for personal life in the word of God, then people would flock to her doors. But, as Barna research found, many Christians have not brought the Bible into their lives (Barna, 2003; Viola & Barna, 2007). Markovic (2010) agrees “Christianity is drifting away from its biblical theistic worldview” (2010, p. 20). The implication is that if Christians do not understand their own lives from a biblical perspective as good and meaningful then they cannot help others do so (Campbell, 2014). The drift from a biblical worldview likely precedes the drift from church attendance. The mass exodus from church is a problem, but it does not seem to be the root issue.

The distance between the biblical meaning perspective and the spiritually hungry meaning seekers reflects the distance between the head and heart of *the church members themselves*. They may have heard biblical truth, but if they did not keep it, then they did not understand it to the degree that won whole heart loyalty to its meaning-making perspective (Ps 119:34). Disinterest in, and disenfranchisement from the church can be attributed to a lack of understanding in church members.

Farley’s (1983) research determined that attention to this formative level of understanding had been neglected in church education for many generations (1983, pp. 159, 160). Barna affirmed, “the breakdown in the church was actually based on what we

learned in seminary. We were taught that if you just give people information, that is enough” (Viola & Barna, 2007). Barna is not saying that seminary information was bad, but that it stopped short of impacting individual *formation*. This was seen to be true in a study of my own denominational seminary as late as 1997. “Student spiritual formation is a crying need that is either relegated to a secondary priority or fails in its methodological approach” (Clouzet, 1997, p. 275). My own experience as a graduate in 2010 was that the information was good, but that there was almost no time to mentally process it to the point that it was internalized.

The Wanamaker church reflects these dynamics. On one hand, the elders were schooled in the era that neglected formational understanding beyond fundamental doctrines. They are morally outstanding, but their egocentric demands indicate immaturity in Christ that undermines biblical unity according to the principles of priesthood-of-all-believers (2 Cor 12, 13). On the other hand, these elders are outstanding in a group where a large percentage has yet to understand *how* basic doctrines apply to their daily lives. Many neglect biblical injunctions that they agreed to upon baptism including tithing, abstinence from intoxicants, and Sabbath keeping. Both groups display a need for *transformational* understanding (Ps 119:34). That is, they need change on the level of meaning making that moves the heart. But that would require reflection (Hawkins, 2011; Mezirow, 1990), and that was something that the previous pastor said was not an option.

It could be assumed that the reason for the resistance to reflection amongst leaders at the Wanamaker Church has something to do with the current controversy over the term “spiritual formation.” Since 1997 the seminary had attempted to address the “crying

need” recognized in seminary students (Tasker, 2002), but there was a strong reaction against the term “spiritual formation” (Howard, 2010; Peth & Douglass, 2012). The denomination responded by providing information to help leaders and laity discern between biblical spiritual formation and Eastern spiritual formation (Finley, 2012; Thomas, 2012). However, in a personal conversation with one member, I became aware that the confusion remained. A different member was reported to financially support the ministry of a defrocked minister who was outspoken on the subject, but neglected the balance that Finley and Thomas exhibited in their presentation (Finley, 2012; Thomas, 2012.).

In the church at large common ground between unbiblical and biblical spiritual formation has resulted in some Christians taking part in unbiblical practices while others reject biblical principles, and each side doing so in the name of God (Douglass, 2011). Because unbiblical practices fit under the broad category of Spiritual Formation (Douglass, 2011; Howard, 2010), a biblical pattern of spiritual development has largely been neglected at the expense of the Christian growth and unity Christ prayed for his church (John 17). Disunity and distrust between leaders and laity has been repeatedly verbalized to this pastor as a long-standing condition and the lack of numerical growth of the congregation may indicate the lack of spiritual growth of members individually. Evidence indicates that the lack of appreciation for understanding life from a biblical perspective is the core issue regarding evangelistic success, retention, and ongoing spiritual growth in the church. Therefore, revealing the meaning of life from a biblical perspective could help people across the spectrum from un-churched visitor to church leader.

## Conceptual Model

The biblical model of spiritual development shows the dual construct of human nature as composed of both ego-centered (B), and Christ-centered perspectives (C). Development moves along a continuum of understanding (A), toward increased Christ centered understanding/perspective. Individual placement on the spectrum (see Figure 4 on page 134) is according to the degree of understanding held in common with God (D). Since “understanding” refers to a person’s core worldview, or being, intellectual acceptance of “*an* understanding” without living in accordance with that understanding is not considered to be biblical “understanding.” Furthermore, one may lose the understanding one currently holds (E).

The gap between the ego-centered self, and the understanding continuum (F) reflects the inability of the fallen nature/self to know or understand God. The gap also shows that biblical spiritual development is not a program of ego development. That is, while an unconverted person may have understanding in harmony with God, that understanding is seen to come from God regardless of the person’s awareness of the fact (Gen 3:15; Rom 2:14). Similarly, Christians also may be unconscious of the source of one’s own right thought or action as being of Christ. The understanding that advances in harmony *with* God is empowered *by* God who works in and through people (Phil 2:13), and the entire developmental process is covered by the grace of God (G). This includes the fallen self for some time (B). That is, while understanding is a gift available to all, it is accepted, and held to by few. The goal of this DMin project is to recognize and facilitate that experience within this framework. (See Appendix A for a more extensive explanation of this conceptual model).

## **Statement of the Task**

The task of this project was to develop, implement, and evaluate a biblical program of personal Christian growth through the disciplines of reflection and writing as a pilot study. The program assisted people in reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective to move understanding toward the maturity and unity Christ prayed for (John 17). The project design is to engage and advance the meaning-making perspective of people across a spectrum from those who are not church members to seasoned church elder.

## **Delimitations**

Time limitation imposed on this project does not allow for a longitudinal study, which would likely yield more conclusive evidence of impact on lasting changes. Similarly, time constraints do not allow for assessing impact on numerical church growth as a secondary benefit of this project. Also, statements are used from philosophers, psychologists, and scientists to affirm and enlighten, but not to inform Scripture. Expertise in these various fields and on these authors is not claimed here. Participation in this project was limited to voluntary responses to an open invitation in the local church bulletin for anyone over 20 with Internet access.

## **Expectations of the Project**

The research of Hawkins and Parkinson (2011) shows reflecting on the Bible to be “the most influential personal spiritual practice” for accelerating Christian growth in all stages of Christian maturity (p. 117). At the same time, educational theory, psychological case studies, and neuroscience are among disciplines that provide information on reflection for human transformation. It was expected that employing

current research harmonious with biblical developmental dynamics would result in Christian development toward the unity and maturity Christ prayed for (John 17). That is, teaching people to reflect on personal experience from a biblical perspective would grow them more in harmony with God. Secondly, it would bring them more into harmony with themselves and each other.

The possibility of a wider application of this program is indicated by qualitative and quantitative assessment (chapter 6). Participants experienced significant perceptual changes in how they viewed themselves, others, and God. Furthermore, participants commonly expressed a desire to continue to read Scripture with the intent of reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective. This intervention will continue beyond the scope of this Doctor of Ministry project as a means of determining the long-term impact upon the local congregation.

### **Description of the Project Process**

The theological chapter establishes a basic pattern of biblical spiritual growth as movement through stages from “no understanding” (Isa 27:11) to understanding what it means to be one with God and others (Isa 32:4; John 17). *Sola scriptura* (Bible only) perspective was established as a theological reflection point from which to square one’s thoughts of God, self, and others by and for Christian growth. Christian growth was defined as incremental movement from self-centered to a Bible-centered perspective along a continuum of increased understanding. This chapter resulted in a conceptual model that provided the framework for our program of Christian development.

The literature review identified common worldview development dynamics in history, science, religion, and philosophy while particular attention is given to perspective

transformation in education and psychology. Significantly, while identification of the basic biblical model of worldview transformation includes language, content, and a process from self-centered to Bible-centered perspective, recognition of the same basic transformational pattern is seen to be operative in extra-biblical based schools of thought. This establishes the pattern as General Revelation, and is therefore endorsed by biblical revelation in that it harmonizes with biblical revelation.

Chapter two also considers the “authentic self” as a point of engagement for dialogue with the postmodern mind. The importance of authenticity for engaging people in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is paramount (Bialystok, 2009; Finley, 2014; Markovic, 2010). Therefore, rather than “sell” people on the Bible, we engage philosophy and psychology with the Bible on a basic level in their own terms in order to present the Bible as the most reliable reflection point by which one determines his or her authentic self.

Because of the previous pastor’s comment that the church was not open to a program that promoted reflection, the appeal to even join the program needed to be handled delicately. It was assumed that in their minds “reflection” was associated with “spiritual formation.” And personal conversation with one member provided evidence that the term “spiritual formation” had become emotionally charged to the point that at least some members were not responsive to direct reasoning for discerning the difference between Eastern and biblical spiritual formation. Therefore, it was decided that rather than present the differences, it would be better to proceed with a biblical sermon or two that highlighted the need for reflection on Scripture without mentioning the other words. At the end of the sermon an invitation was made to take part in a biblical program that would help them overcome “presumptuous” sins, and expose “hidden” ways of thinking

that undermined biblical oneness with God and others (Ps 19:12-14). Those that expressed interest would get an outline that clearly marked the program intent by its title: Reflecting on Personal Experience From a Biblical Perspective for Spiritual Growth.”

Facilitation of the biblical perspective development program was divided into a series of six units featuring the writings of the apostle Peter and the Exodus motif. Each unit consisted of a weekly sermon and a class where writing, reading, and an internet assignment would be designed to foster reflection on personal experience from a biblical perspective. While the whole church would gain the benefit of seeing the value of reflecting on personal life from a biblical perspective, class participants would have more opportunity to understand reflection dynamics, and to reflect.

Narrative analysis was used to assess qualitative changes in understanding self, others, God, and life. Quantitative data analysis was used in the form of a self-administered questionnaire. The resulting increase in desire to daily read the Bible with the specific intent of reflecting on and living life from God’s perspective was remarkable.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Authentic:* The condition of being true and accurate... true to one's own personality, spirit, or character

*Authentic self:* Biblically, the individual living self, or soul, is a composition of earth dust (human) and breath (of God) (Gen 2:7). Without both aspects the human ceases to be a living self. To be true to the self involves loyalty to the author of our lives.

*Dual construct of human nature:* Biblically, each human being consists of a carnal nature against the law of God (Rom 8:7) as well as a seed of “enmity” that is in harmony



with God's law (Gen 3:15, Rom 2:14, Gal 5:17). This duality is not to be confused with the Greek concept of duality.

*Epistemology*: The theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope. Epistemology is the investigation of what distinguishes justified belief from opinion.

*Inner logic*: Also known variously as interpretive framework, structuring structure, meaning perspective, *habitus*, understanding, and worldview is a network of assumptions by which one attributes meaning to experiences and observations.

*Metacognition*: Awareness or analysis of one's own learning or thinking processes

*New Exodus motif*: A pattern reflecting that of the literal Exodus of Israel from Egypt. It includes freedom from bondage, a liminal time of trial in a wilderness state of uncertainty, and an arrival in a type of promised-land. It can apply to the ultimate redemption and salvation of the Church by Christ, and/or individual deliverances from the darkness of deception to the light of truth.

*Ontology*: A branch of metaphysics concerned with the nature and relations of being.

*Philosophy*: the study of ideas about knowledge, truth including the nature and meaning of life.

*Prima scriptura*: Scripture as a primary authority among others, such as used in the Wesleyan quadrilateral.

*Reflection point*: The point one judges reality by, including that of self-identity, God, others, as well as one's inner logic, or worldview.

*Sola scriptura*: Scripture alone, or Scripture interpreting itself.

*Tota scriptura:* The totality of Scripture.

*Transformation:* Webster's online dictionary reflects the physical perception of the word as "a complete or major change in someone's or something's appearance, form, etc." However, the term is also used to express a change in existential and spiritual form, or identity. Hence the term *biblical perspective transformation* reflects a shift of ones worldview or being in harmony with a biblical perspective.

*Worldview:* See *Inner Logic*.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BIBLICAL MODEL OF SPIRITUAL GROWTH

This chapter seeks a biblical model of reflecting on personal experience for spiritual growth toward unity in Christ. Though Scripture equates unity in Christ with mature faith, the process that reaches it features an aspect of faith that moves beyond “faith development,” strictly speaking. What is defined in the New Testament as “faith” shares a common dynamic with other terms used throughout Scripture (understanding, judgment, belief, trust, etc.). This commonality, in turn, reveals insights for developing mature faith and unity in Christ.

#### **The Goal: Unity**

Though John 13 and 17 are most commonly referred to regarding Jesus' desire for unity in His church, Ephesians offers developmental insight toward that unity as the culmination of a developmental process: “Till we all come in the unity of the faith... unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). The word “perfect” is rendered from *teleios*, which can be translated either perfect or mature. The context of the verse implies a developmental process of growth toward mature unity in Christ. The connection of unity with faith puts the developmental weight on faith. That is, mature Christian unity is only reached through a process of faith development.

The challenge, as Jones and Wilder rightly recognize, is that: “Scripture provides no explicit step-by-step sequence for this growth” (Estep & Kim, 2010, p. 162). This lack

of an explicitly articulated model of biblical faith development may contribute to the lack of unity of faith in the church today.

Our solution to this lack is to consider an aspect of biblical faith that is, in my opinion, underappreciated. That is, recognizing the perspectival aspect of faith may make a significant contribution to establishing a biblical model of faith development.

### Faith as Perspective

Faith that grows toward unity, as seen in Ephesians 4:13 is associated with thought and life a few verses later: "...therefore... walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart" (Eph 4: 17, 18).

Multiple references to the inner life ("mind," "understanding," "ignorance," and heart,") may lead one to assume that this "walk" is merely a contemplative endeavor. However, the next chapter reverses the emphasis. This chapter begin with an exhortation to follow God by walking in love (vv.1, 2) Paul adds six verses that emphasize external behavior (vv. 2-7) before completing the passage with: "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph 5:8). This implies that the "walk" symbolizes daily life experience in chapters 4, and 5, while the multiple references to the inner life in chapter 4 connect the external walk with the internal thought as the core issue.

The connection between the "walk" and the "mind" are also seen in Romans 8:4-6:4

... walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. <sup>5</sup>For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.

Here the term “mind” is rendered from the Greek *phroneo*. Pauline scholar, James D. G. Dunn, cites multiple verses arguing that what Paul means by the use of *phroneo* is “... not merely ‘think’ but also have a settled way of understanding, hold an opinion, maintain an attitude (cf. particularly Rom. 14:6; 1 Cor 13:11; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2, 5; 3:19; Col 3:2)” (Dunn, 1998, p. 479). That is to say that in this passage of Romans walking according to the Spirit can be associated with settled thinking, or understanding how to live life in harmony with the Spirit.

With the understanding that to walk in the Spirit is to live life in harmony with the Spirit we can begin to appreciate the perspectival aspect of faith when Paul states: “We walk by faith and not by sight” (2 Cor 5:7). Here Paul considers both faith and sight as perception options for discerning one’s way through life, with faith as the superior view. Furthermore, “sight” here is translated from the Greek, *eidous*, meaning “form, or outward appearance.” This suggests that faith perceives things more as they are than as they appear to be to one’s senses.

This aspect of faith as perspective, taken back into Ephesians 4:13, makes the “unity of faith” a unity of perspective that perceives things from God’s perspective. Consequently, growing in unity involves growing our perception of reality in harmony with God’s perception.

### Justification, Sanctification, and Perspective

Recognizing faith as a developing perspective may appear to contradict Paul’s statements such as “we are justified by faith” (Rom 3:28; 5:1; Gal 3:24), but Paul also

states that we are “sanctified by faith” (Acts 26:18). The ongoing developmental nature of sanctification lends itself more naturally to faith as a developing perspective than justification, but both verses together reveal a more comprehensive understanding of faith. That is “perspective faith” does not eliminate “justification faith.” On the contrary, faith perceives justification and more. This understanding portrays a fuller meaning of “the just shall live by faith” (Rom 1:17; Gal 3:11; Heb 10:38) than simply justification for being alive.

Protestants have long emphasized salvation by faith in the atoning blood of Christ, but often stopped there. In his contribution to a collection of chapters by leading authorities on spiritual growth, Hull explains: “The problem is that many of us have been taught and believe that we can become a Christian but not a disciple of Jesus” (Andrews, 2010, p. 109). Another member of Hull’s group affirmed, “... we have to get past a view of atonement in which all that matters in salvation is Jesus taking the punishment for our sins” (p. 45). Both men were part of a group of high profile Christian leaders who met twice a year for four years to reach this conclusion. The fact that it took prominent Church leaders four years to recognize the importance of growing in Christ could explain the lack of growth experienced in the church.

Studies found only one out of nine born again Christians were living according to a “biblical worldview” (Barna, 2003, pp. 26, 27). Christian’s lack of a biblical worldview in daily life could be traced to church leaders who tied faith to a single statement: “I believe that Jesus died for my sins.” It’s not that the statement is unfaithful, but thinking that is all there is to faith is incomplete (Platt, 2013; see also 1 John 2:4-6). It seems that the church forgot about sanctification.

The term “sanctify” is rendered from *hagaizo*, and commonly understood in dictionaries and commentaries to mean “set apart,” “holy,” or “consecrated.”

“Sanctification” is the process of growing holiness, or Christ-likeness (1 Thess 5:23).

Theologically speaking, the church had embraced justification by faith, but forgot sanctification by faith.

It was believed that clarifying the perspectival aspect of faith would contribute to the appropriation of sanctification by faith. That is, if Christians understood that living life from God’s perspective was a developmental process they would understand what sanctification by faith is. The lack of attention to the process of sanctification by church members may be traced to their lack of awareness of perspective as an important facet of faith. Attrition, addiction, and infighting attest to a stalled out faith that does not see or live life from God’s perspective.

Thankfully, Hull’s study group exemplifies a trend toward spiritual growth in the church. Another example of attention to the need for growing Christians is Willow Creek’s landmark REVEAL study in 2007 (Hawkins, 2011, p. 270). This trend-setting church found that their members were hungry for growth in Christ and shifted their emphasis to supply the demand.

Though my own denomination espoused the value of sanctification since its inception (White, 1911, p. 560), and promoted justification as well as sanctification by faith (p. 380), I have observed little to no awareness among current church members of the concept of faith as perspective.

While contemporary theologians in my own denomination such as Douglass make appeals for the congregation to take hold of the dual purpose of faith (2010, p. 194),

Osmer echoes Douglass's biblical appeal for sanctification in developmental terminology: "Sanctification encompasses growth in spiritual discernment (2005, p. 235). We believe Douglass would agree with Osmer that, "Discernment is an area that needs greater attention in the teaching ministry of most mainline Protestant congregations today" (Douglass, p. 302).

Emphasizing the perspectival aspect of faith had potential to do more for its development, therefore other terms containing perspective as a constitutional element of their makeup were considered.

#### Perspective as Knowledge, Wisdom, Judgment, and Understanding

Attempting to isolate individual meanings of the terms faith, knowledge, and understanding can be confusing because of commonality between them, yet it precisely that commonality that makes their study so rewarding for our purposes. The Apostle John uses the term "knowledge" (*ginoskein*) interchangeably with "faith" (*pisteu*) in 1 John 4:16, and "sight" in John 14:7-9; 17; 19f; 1 John 3:6; 4:14 (Kittel, 1964, p. 712, Vol. 1). Therefore, to have "faith" and to "know" are both modes of "sight."

Similar overlap of meaning can be found in the Old Testament (OT). The Hebrew *yada* is often translated "knowledge," but can also mean "understanding." And in the Greek version of the OT (LXX) *yada* is often translated *ginoskein* (knowledge) or *eidenai* (know), which shows that "the element of perception is to be maintained" (Kittel, pp. 696, 697). That is, "knowledge" and "understanding" both generally include a perceptual element (pp. 697, 698).

Trauffer (2008) recognized the perceptual element common to various OT terms in his study of discernment in Proverbs. He agrees with our findings when he states that



“the Old Testament uses various synonyms, each with their own or overlapping Hebrew words and cognates to announce the concept [discernment]” (p.133). He adds “wisdom” to the mix, referring to the work of previous scholars, Von Rad, and Curtis: “Von Rad mentioned that the Hebrew words, *tebûnā* and *bînā*, and cognates, translated as understanding, also come from the same root word as *hokmā* [wisdom].” And “Curtis drew attention to *nabon* as “perspective... (p. 122). Thus, perspective and understanding overlap with the concept of wisdom.

Trauffer found that “love for God and each other” was a central component of biblical wisdom (p. 133). Just as Paul connected faith development with unity, Trauffer believes oneness with God and each other requires wisdom. As growing faith increases unity, growing wisdom increases love. Unity and love both involve the “oneness” that Jesus prayed his people would have.

Furthermore, Trauffer sees wisdom as a way to view and react to daily life experiences similar to Paul’s walk of faith (p. 29, 30). And like faith, wisdom discerns its way through life by something other than mere appearance when he says that, “wisdom gives human agency the ability to self-optimize through reflection” (p. 133). The ability to self-optimize through reflection implies a developmental process of living life according to wisdom’s guidance.

Trauffer found that his research on wisdom helped him define the discernment concept, which could provide a guide with which individuals can enhance their decision-making skills for life:

discernment as a system—of beliefs, values, ideologies, and meaning—which helps to organize and control our environment, provides a foundation from which to coordinate interactions with each other, and serves as the equivalent of a pragmatic link from the power and authority of God to that of man. (pp. 133, 134)

Here wisdom is synonymous with discernment for understanding and reacting upon our environment. And like Paul's faith (Eph.), this emphasizes the development of the perceptual capacity in harmony with the wisdom of God.

Paul sees the connection of "the wisdom of God" (1 Cor 2:7) with spiritual discernment that does not come naturally when he says, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned (1 Cor 2:14). That is, people guided by natural senses reject the spiritual interpretation of reality as foolish. Consequently, such a person walks, or lives by worldly wisdom, or discernment rather than spiritual.

The word "wisdom" appears eight times in 1 Corinthians 2, so it is feasible that the entire chapter is a reflection of wisdom literature's presentation of Godly wisdom and understanding as methods of discerning one's walk through life.

Ino (2003) studied the use of wisdom literature in Paul's letters to Rome and Corinth. His research revealed close connections between OT wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, and Paul's metaphoric use of discernment for the walk of faith. He concluded, "Paul's theme in the use of Proverbs is primarily the Christian way of life. Beyond ethics alone, it is also used "to grasp God's omniscience, and judgment" (p. 201). "Judgment" in connection with the "Christian way of life" is here seen as discernment.

The connection between faith and wisdom for perceiving the way of life is perhaps most clearly seen in a verse used at the beginning of this chapter: "See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise" (Eph 5:15). Fowler (2005) in this verse connects "circumspectly" with "see" to emphasize the importance of looking before

walking, and exalts wisdom in relation to its perception. The interplay of words doubly emphasizes the importance of discernment in relation to ones walk through life.

The overlapping meaning of faith, knowledge, wisdom and understanding makes it difficult to articulate distinctiveness between them, but recognizing the perceptual element they hold in common makes a significant contribution to our model of development toward unity.

### Understanding Toward Knowing

Recognizing the perceptual aspect of faith, knowledge, wisdom and understanding prepares us to appreciate Isaiah 32:4a: “The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge...” Taken at face value to “understand knowledge” implies the interpretation of knowledge and is basically true to the Hebrew meaning. However, the original language articulates a richer depth of meaning between the two words. The word “understand” is the *qal* imperfect (*yabin*), which reflects an incomplete, or ongoing state of “understanding.” It is followed by the particle “*Le*” meaning “to, unto, or toward” (omitted in English translations). “*Da’at*” is the *qal* infinitive construct form of “*yada*” which becomes “knowing,” rather than “knowledge.” This translation reads: “The heart of the rash shall [be] understanding toward knowing.”

Though the translation seems awkward in English, the meaning speaks volumes. The use of two different words, “understanding” and “knowing,” may reflect a qualitatively different meaning, but the shared perceptual quality between them alludes to a continuum (appendix). The implication of this translation is that a person may grow in understanding and knowing. These forms of understanding and knowledge communicate

an unending aspect of each; a growth continuum continuing in understanding and knowing.

The larger context of Isaiah reveals that what one comes to know is God. To know someone in biblical terms often refers to sexual intercourse (1 Kgs 1:4; Matt 1:25), but Matt 7:23 involves something else when Jesus associates knowing God with spiritual oneness. Here, in Isaiah 32:4, the connection of understanding with knowing implies a cognitive element to knowing God.

Increasing “understanding” seems to be integral to the process of knowing, or becoming one with God. And, rather than mere intellectual ascent, 32:4 is seen in connection with 29:13 and 32:2 where the understanding that is developed is paralleled with terms that articulate increasing heart connection with God. This indicates that the contact point of “knowing God” involves heart and mind in perceptual terms. Knowing God involves perception development.

The larger passage of Isaiah 25-32 reveals another perceptual term in parallel with “understanding to knowing” to be “judgment” (Isa 28:6; 32:16). Though “judgment” here is rendered from *mishpat* contextually it has much in common with “understanding” (*bina*). In Isaiah 28:6 God determines not to judge his people, but to provide them with judgment “I will be a spirit of judgment to those who sit in judgment, strength to those who bring the battle to the gate.”

The gate is a location where judges discern right and wrong, so this verse can be seen as a double promise in poetic fashion to help His people to discern right from wrong. Archer (1994) says *bina* (“understanding”) connotes the ability to discern intelligently the difference between sham and reality, between truth and error, between

the specious attraction of the moment and the long-range values that govern a truly successful life (p. 517).” This is the type of judgment that God wants to give His people in Isaiah 28:6, which they do not have in 27:11, or 28:7, but will have in 32:4, and 16. Archer goes on to note the “root idea” of *bina* is found in the related preposition *byn*, meaning ‘between’ “hence there is always an analytical or judgmental factor involved...” (p. 517).

While Isaiah’s local context of a gate battle may apply to the physical battle at the gate with the Assyrians, it may also reflect the microcosmic level of individual effort necessary to judge/understand/perceive/know good from evil (27:5, 28:24-29), and the macrocosmic level of the battle for the “whole earth” (28:22).

To judge reality on the level of meaning that discerns good and evil in harmony with God’s perspective and to align oneself is to know Him. If not careful, one might see this as an end point that neglects the fact that one may know God all along the way of understanding. Though justification by faith may be articulated more explicitly in the NT, it reflects a connection between sanctification and justification by faith found in Isaiah 32:4

The *Brown, Driver, and Briggs lexicon* (Gesenius, Brown, Driver, & A., 1906) links Isaiah 32:4 with wisdom literature’s common rendering of “*da’at*” as “discernment, understanding, and wisdom” (p. 395). Though this rendering harmonizes with our emphasis on the cognitively perceptual aspect of these words, theoretically it could also render the meaning of the verse to be “understanding to understanding,” which could be problematic. However, a similar perceptual repetition can be seen in the NT with “faith to

faith” (Rom 1:17), or 2 Corinthians 3:18, “glory to glory.” These terms imply advancing developmental levels within the same domains.

Since the perceptual aspect of faith has already been explored, the exploration of “glory” can be used here to illustrate the value of repetition of a perceptual term within a category.

Considering that the root of glory is “*dokeo*” (“I think, believe) Van Voorst (1990, p. 21). The phrase “glory to glory” may then be rendered “from thinking to thinking.” With this in mind 2 Corinthians 3:18 may be read “But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory [thinking] of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory [thinking] to glory [thinking], even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” That means it is not *only* Christ on the cross that we behold. It is also the thinking of Christ we find on every page of the Bible that we behold.

Both verses (Isa 32:4; 2 Cor 3:18) reflect increasing growth of understanding and knowing God (compare Rom 1:17). They communicate knowing that can grow in understanding and vice-versa. The terms “understanding” and “knowledge” may be qualitatively different yet they can also be substantially the same. That is, knowing and understanding Him is synonymous with beholding His thinking, as available in the Bible, and reflecting it in our lives.

Consequently, Isaiah 32:4a reveals the foundational element of our model of development: a continuum of understanding/perceiving that becomes knowing God on one “end” of the continuum without ceasing to be understanding, while the other direction is away from knowing Him.

## Perspective Implies Relational Position

While Christian development takes place along a continuum of understanding toward knowing, a person's place on that continuum may be seen in relation to one's personal perspective. Scripture equates personal "Being" with personal understanding when it states that "as he thinketh in his heart, so is he" (Prov 23:7). Considering the perceptual aspect of understanding, and the juxtaposition of "heart" with "thought" this verse implies core level thinking, or worldview.

King David implies that there are levels of the heart so deep that they are invisible to the bearer when he asks,

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression. (Ps 19:12, 13)

David also seems to be addressing a universal issue when he asks, "Who can understand his errors?" Significantly, "errors" parallels "secret faults." The original word, *satar*, implies faults hidden from the bearer himself, rather than something purposely kept secret. The additional parallel of "presumptuous sins" seems to affirm this perception. That is, on his own, neither David, nor others recognize their own erroneous presuppositions for what they are. Furthermore, David reaches out to God for help to "understand" and be rid of them because of their generative power over his life.

Psalms 51 alludes to the importance of core level perception: "Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom" (Ps 51:6). Here again the hidden part parallels the inward part where God wants wisdom, which would include its perceptual aspect.

Proverbs 20:5 explicitly addresses deep levels of heart when it states that: "Counsel in the heart of man is like deep water; but a man of understanding will draw it

out.” Considering this verse along with David’s previous texts, the implication is that these thoughts are “deep” in the sense that they are the sources of action, even though they are not readily apparent to the bearer of them. Yet, they are accessible because a “man of understanding” could bring them to light.

A “man of understanding” is someone who understands understanding. That is, a person who understands the dynamics of understanding, which would most likely include its perceptual aspect. The fact that someone understands understanding dynamics implies that those “deep thoughts” not easily understood, are not inaccessible.

Isaiah 29:14 may allude to understanding as a dynamic pattern, or process of mind when it says: “Therefore, behold, I will proceed to do a marvelous work among this people, even a marvelous work and a wonder: for the wisdom of their wise men shall perish, and the understanding of their prudent men shall be hid.” Here, the English translations omit the repetition of *byn* (understanding, or discernment). The translation would read “the understanding (noun) to understand (verb)...” God will provide an experience that their understanding (noun) will not be able to understand (verb). This implies a core interpretive framework (understanding/noun) that is not able to process (understand/verb) God’s action rightly.

Just two verses later reference to interpretive frameworks is explicit when the question is asked “shall the thing framed say of Him that framed it, He had no understanding?” (29:16). Here the interpretive frame is associated with “understanding,” and the proximity of verse 16 to verse 14 supports the idea that the repetition of “understanding” in that verse also refers to interpretive frameworks.



It must be noted that the term “frame” is not explicit in the Hebrew. However the King James version’s “framed” fits the comparison of abilities to account for the meaning of an overwhelming physical experience in the passage. In context, verses 14 and 16 can be seen to compare and contrast interpretive frameworks of creature versus Creator, with that of the creature being vastly inferior to that of Creator. And that the interpretive framework is equated with “understanding” is of vital significance to this study.

Chapter 29 ends with a prophecy that those who erred in Spirit will come to “understanding” (v. 24). Though this verse leaves “understanding” unexplained, the larger context of Isaiah 29 implies that the “understanding” they come to is God’s understanding.

This interpretation of chapter 29 is reflected in the larger context of Isaiah 27 to 32 as it also refers to those of “no understanding” (27:11) coming to an “understanding” (32:4). Additionally, 32:4 is more articulate than 29:24 regarding the nature of “understanding” yet still harmonizes with our interpretation by adding the word “knowledge.” As previously presented this “knowledge” is adequately rendered “knowing,” as part of the phrase “understanding to knowing” (p. 21). The addition of “knowing” qualifies “understanding” in relational terms, biblically speaking, not only in 32:4, but also in the larger passage that reflects it.

Obviously, when God says people have no understanding it could not mean that they did not understand anything or they could not have functioned at all. The understanding they lacked was God’s understanding. As Proverbs 9:10 states “... the knowledge of the holy is understanding.” Therefore, the “understanding” that God’s people will come to in Isaiah 29:24 is His understanding. And if His understanding

equals His interpretation, then the contact point for oneness with God involves interpreting life as He does. And “understanding to knowing,” as described in this study, reflects this dynamic process of developing oneness with God (knowing) in association with increasingly interpreting/perceiving/understanding life from His perspective.

If the oneness that God wants involves us seeing reality from His perspective, then personal “understanding,” or “perspective” of reality, or *a* particular reality, may be seen to reflect relational proximity to God in any area. Consequently, moving someone’s core understanding in line with God understanding is equivalent to moving the person closer to God in that area of interest. These two beliefs provide the foundation for a model of personal biblical spiritual growth: Oneness with God in a given area involves seeing that area from God’s perspective, and secondly, to move one’s understanding in harmony with God’s is to move the person closer to God (1 John 1:20).

#### Two Tendencies to Avoid

The phrase, “understanding toward knowing God” may seem to imply that one works his way up to God, i.e., salvation by works. It is important to re-affirm that growth toward “knowing God” involves sanctification or an ever-growing experience built on justification by grace through faith (Eph 2:8). That means an arc of grace covers our entire developmental continuum. Consequently, one may be growing in understanding toward knowing God more completely, or moving away from Him.

Another possible mis-perception is that “understanding toward knowing” promotes elitism, where the person with more understanding is considered to be superior to others. On the contrary, taking credit for our good works represents a lack of understanding “For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do...” (Phil 2:13).

Consequently, those prideful of advanced understanding not only display their lack of biblical understanding, they undervalue the contribution of God, and by holding loosely to Him and thereby risk falling. Consider here the apostle Peter who resisted Christ's view in favor of his own and suffered a great fall (Matt 26).

Thinking one has all the understanding needed undermines the knowing experience. It is equivalent to thinking that by reaching the great height of a mountain caution is no longer needed to avoid a fall. Knowing is a living, active, ongoing relationship that can be as genuine in spiritual infancy as adulthood, and can develop, or deteriorate according to attentiveness, or the lack thereof.

Galatians 2:20 is a paradigmatic verse for our model as it includes elements of justification, sanctification, Christ in us, and the perceptual aspect of faith while reflecting the vulnerability of human nature.

### **Galatians 2:20**

A superficial reading of Galatians 2:20 may leave one with the simple impression that Paul is referring to justification for life by faith in Christ. However, a closer look reveals far more to this verse.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

Justification is evident when Paul states, "I live" because Jesus "gave himself for me." But Paul clearly shifts from justification for being alive to the life actually lived when he says, "the life which I now live..." And his living of life is now according to the "faith of the Son of God." That is, Paul orders his daily life according to God's perspective of how life should be lived, which is sanctification.

The term “faith of the Son of God” is included in the long debate over the term “faith of Jesus” or “faith of Christ” (Rom 3:22; Gal 2:16; Gal 3:22; Phil 3:9; Rev 14:12). The issue involves the translation of *pisteu Insou* as either objective genitive “faith in Christ”, or subjective genitive, “faith of Christ” (or sometimes “Faithfulness of Christ”). Depending upon one’s interpretation the implication is that one simply believes Jesus covers us and we do not have to trouble ourselves with any further consideration—faith in Christ. Or we mortals have the very faith of he who calmed storms, and healed people available to us—faith of Christ. This implies some responsibility on our part. Though subtle, the interpretation of this phrase carries significant weight.

Based on grammatical considerations alone, Greek scholar, Wallace argues convincingly for the subjective genitive “faith of Christ,” and lists many leading theologians in agreement (1996, p. 116).

Wallace’s rendering supports our understanding that Paul lives daily life according to the “faith of the Son of God.” In regards to Galatians 2:20, this means, 1) the faith is Christ’s, and not Paul’s. 2) The focus is not *just* what Christ has done in the past, but on living “now.” This is not a praise statement for the cross of Christ only, but also a statement of intention to live as Christ would have him, which shifts the focus from receptive justification, to active, intentional, cooperative sanctification. We must choose to live according to it, that is, it is not faithfulness of Christ that he can have without involvement, it must not be neglected or it is not lived from 3) Faith’s utilitarian nature in this context is perceptual, i.e., Paul lives, and walks through life according to the Son of God’s perspective.

The idea of living life according to God's way of seeing is frequently alluded to in the Old Testament. Seventy-nine verses in the Old Testament refer to living life "in the sight of" God. Every person has the potential to see as God sees (Psalm 36:9; Cant 1:15, 4:1) according to his or her "measure of faith" (Rom 12:3; Matt 13:31). Galatians 2:20 draws on this theme in conjunction with an emphasis on the ability to see as a gift of God *in us not of us*. That way there is no room for pride on the one side, or inattentiveness to God's daily guidance on the other. Yet this does not exhaust the contribution to our model of development.

Paul being "crucified," yet living reflects the biblical two-self construct of human nature. Pertinent to our study, Paul addresses the dual nature in Galatians 2:20 in perceptual terms, so far as faith communicates a perceptual aspect. This is an important factor to include in our developmental model.

"I" am crucified yet "I" live, says Paul, reflecting two separate existential "I"s. Significantly, in the original Greek the "I" that is "crucified" is the subjective form, "*ego*," while the "I" that "lives" is in the dative form, "*moi*." Similarly, when Paul lived without regard for Christ he lived according to his egocentric perspective. But the new Paul lives his life in close relationship with Christ and denies his self-centered "I" perspective.

According to Pauline scholar, Dunn, Paul's anthropology is important to his theology (p. 52), and he "repeatedly calls upon Genesis 1-3 to explain his understanding of the human condition" (p. 91).

Genesis 3 records the origin of dual nature in every human being. By listening to Satan the progenitors of the human race disconnected themselves from God (2:17). They

exchanged their godly natures for self-centric natures, hid from God (3:10), and blamed others for their choices (3:12). Their behavior harmonizes with Paul's definition of the fallen nature as described in Romans 8:7, "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Adam had clearly done wrong, but seems unable to even see his part. Paul addressed this perceptual aspect of the fallen nature in his description of spiritual death in 1 Cor 2:14, "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." (emphasis mine)

Paul recognized that the "natural" fallen nature is spiritually blind and unable to respond to God's law. So at the point of the fall, according to Scripture, Adam and Eve have one nature, and that nature is contrary to God.

The origin of the second nature is found in Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed: he shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The obvious implication, in harmony with Paul's understanding, is that human nature is at one with Satan until there is "enmity." Thus God gifts humankind with a seed of enmity, which is something good in each human that is at odds with the fallen nature. This begins the two natures as commonly recognized in multiple schools of thought today (chap. 3). And the relational terminology Paul used to describe his two "I" natures in Galatians, as in or out of relationship with God, reflects this origin. But before returning to Galatians, the debate over Genesis 3:15 must be addressed in order to incorporate its potential contribution to our understanding.

### **Genesis 3:15 Dual Construct of Human Nature**

To say that scholars disagree on the meaning of Genesis 3:15 is an understatement. Much of the disagreement can be traced to the word “seed” having both singular, and collective meaning, which has a direct bearing on the interpretation of the “enmity” due to its close relationship.

By focusing his attention on the word *zera* (seed) and its referents Ojewole (2002) uncovers a progressive parallelism within Gen 3:15. The first level of enmity is between the woman, Eve, and the serpent, Satan (15a). The second level of enmity is between the seed (plural offspring) of Eve, and the seed (plural offspring) of the serpent/Satan (15b). The third level of enmity returns to the singular forms with personal pronouns “he” and “your” (15d) (p. 429).

This “progressive parallelism” allows for the Messianic manifestation of the singular seed enmity, as well as the plural seed enmity against Satan. Ojewole’s study emphasizes the physical manifestation of that enmity in terms of a people for God, in support of our position, and affirms that all “Human beings needed to have the divinely instituted ‘enmity’ against Satan in order for them to have love for God and even adequately respond to God’s love” (Ojewole, p. 391).

Waltke and Yu (2007) also recognize the singular and plural manifestations of the seed regarding Gen 3:15 affirming “God intervenes to change the woman’s religious and ethical affections by putting enmity against the Serpent in the woman’s heart and in her children” (p. 323).

The dual fulfillment of the seed promise is most obvious in Galatians 3:16: “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, and to seeds, as of many;

but as of one, and to thy seed, which is Christ.” That is, the seed/Christ receives the promise, but partakers, seed/people of Christ receive the promise of the seed, as Galatians 3:29 states. “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

McIntosh (2003) did his doctoral work on Galatians 3 and Romans 4, and found that, “Virtually every book on Pauline theology focuses on themes found in Romans 4 and Galatians 3” (p. 1). But where McIntosh sees the promise to bless other nations through Abraham as the beginning of the Gentile inclusion (pp. 170, 193), the promise can be seen as building on the gift of enmity extending back to Genesis 3:15, and a more complete “salvation history.”

The gift of faith may possibly be associated with the seed of enmity, which goes back to the fall in Genesis 3:15, therefore we cannot be prideful when we do see or believe right. To reflect the biblical two-self construct of human nature in our developmental model there must be a gap at one end to represent the detached fallen nature that is not, and cannot be subject to the law of God (Rom 8:7), and therefore cannot grow toward communion with God. It is what we are called to crucify (Gal 2:20). Yet an arc over the continuum will show that it is still covered by grace because we are still learning to resist it, and gladly live from God’s perspective. This means that though we cannot grow the fallen nature, we can grow in the ability to see life as God sees it while resisting the self-centered perspective. Our model reflects that humans are born with dual natures according to biblical anthropology, so we do not begin the growth process with no part of Christ (Gen 3:15; Eccl 3:11; Rom 2:14), though we cannot recognize it as Christ without the word of God (Rom 10:17; 1 Cor 2:14).



Since salvation history began in Genesis 3 before any formal religion existed, we believe that salvation history begins in individual lives before they accept, or understand it, and that our model can provide an interpretive framework that can illuminate these experiences for what they are from a biblical perspective.

That provides an access point for dialogue with non-Christians, or Christians who do not understand the relationship between their personal experiences, and God. Addressing the seed of good as in, but not of man, as a gift of Christ by his sacrifice, can be the beginning point, or growing edge for believers and unbelievers. Though they may keep some commandments, and want to do well, the Bible reveals that nature to do good to be of Christ. Consequently, they can develop the best part of themselves by developing their understanding of that. This brings us to the next part of our developmental model.

### **Three Catalysts for Growth**

Genesis 15:17 can be seen as a paradigmatic verse regarding God's part in developing unity. Contextually, God ratifies a covenant with Abraham regarding Abraham's seed multiplying by passing two objects between the split carcasses: a furnace, and a lamp. Both objects can be seen as symbols of God, since God refers to Himself as a consuming fire (Deut 4:24, 9:3; Heb 12:29), and the word of God is both a "lamp" (Ps 119:105) and God (John 1:1; Rev 19:13). But why would God have two symbols, or manifestations of Himself pass between the animals?

One answer to this question involves the wider application of the term *furnace*. Scholars generally agree that the furnace is a symbol of tribulations. This meaning taken together with the lamp as the word of God can also be seen to represent the catalysts that God will commit to develop Abraham's seed inheritance. That is, a second application of

these manifestations of God's presence in His covenant with Abraham to multiply His seed includes a glimpse of His plan to develop that seed, spiritually speaking, by word and experience. This developmental pattern is seen throughout Scripture.

Multiple verses throughout Scripture allude to the blessing of adversity, from the time the ground was cursed for man's sake (Gen 3:17), to the entrance gates of the New Jerusalem made of pearl (Rev 21:21), the formation of which begins with an irritant. A more explicit example of the covenantal pattern discussed earlier is seen when the same person who said God's word was a "lamp to his feet" says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word" (Ps 119:67). Affliction enlightened David to the value of God's word.

These and many other verses reflect aspects of the developmental pattern found in Genesis 15:17, but the same is true in larger passages, such as Isaiah 27-32 we find something more. The major components that God uses to take people from "no understanding" toward "understanding to knowing" involve "the word" (Isa 30:1,8-10,12,21) and adversity (Isa 30:20-22). In context, adversity illuminates the value of His Word to the point that people adopt it as a trustworthy perspective for living life.

Evidence for perspective transformation as a result of adversity is explicit in Isaiah 30:22, where once cherished idols are seen as trash. And in Isaiah 32: 3, 4 the perceptual element itself is articulated in relation to heart level as, "the eyes of them that see shall not be dim, and the ears of them that hear shall hearken. The heart also of the rash shall understand knowledge [understand to knowing]." They always saw, but now they will "understand," and interpret what they see in harmony with how God

understands. And in that perceiving comes living life according to God's perspective, or at-one-ment of heart and mind.

Earlier an alternative rendering of "understand knowledge" as "understanding toward knowing" was considered as a perceptual repetition, similar to "glory to glory" (2 Cor 3:18), where a person is changed at the core level of thought and feeling by beholding the thoughts and feelings of the Lord. The thoughts and feelings of God are found in His word. Therefore, reflecting on God's word is a catalyst for movement from our way of seeing/understanding life, to His way of seeing/understanding life.

Elsewhere Paul recognizes adversity for the development of glory: "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2 Cor 4:17; compare 1 Pet 4:12, 13). The use of "glory" in 2 Corinthians 3:18 sets "affliction" and "beholding" the word of God in parallel as catalysts for advancement in Christlikeness.

This reflects the developmental pattern seen in Isaiah 30:20-22:

<sup>20</sup>And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity, and the water of affliction, yet shall not thy teachers be removed into a corner any more, but thine eyes shall see thy teachers: <sup>21</sup>And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee, saying, This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left. <sup>22</sup>Ye shall defile also the covering of thy graven images of silver, and the ornament of thy molten images of gold: thou shalt cast them away as a menstruous cloth; thou shalt say unto it, Get thee hence.

Here the result of adverse experience is recognition of teachers, reception of a word for walking a path that is synonymous with rejection of idols not just in action, but also in heart. In the larger context the teachers now heard were God's prophets who had been rejected (30:10), and their word rejected earlier, but now received as God's word (30:12).

Trials do not automatically result in positive change (Isa 42:25). Intentional reflection is important. The biblical history of the Israelites reveals a repeated pattern of word given, word rejected, and adverse experiences as a result of rejecting the word. At such point, some people reflect on their negative experience from biblical perspective provided earlier such as a prophecy, and turn back to God's word as a trustworthy perspective for how to live successful life, and some do not. This educational pattern of understanding transformation goes back to Deuteronomy: "And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee" (Deut 30:1). God allows us to follow our own perception in hope that we will recognize its faultiness compared to His and then trust His view and guidance.

The apostle Peter resisted God's word regarding reality in general, and specifically regarding the future, himself, and God. Peter had opportunities to reflect, and align his thoughts with God's, but not until his catastrophic fall did he yield his perspective of the future, self, and God to God's word. Jesus called Peter's perspective transformation 'conversion' (Luke 22:32).

Peter's subsequent exhortation to others reflects his own perspective conversion in 2 Peter 1:19: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts." Here Peter associates the prophetic "word" with "light," and contrasts it with the heart that does not heed the word as a "dark place." "Until," implies the need of ongoing intentionality.

Ongoing intentionality is also seen in 1 Peter 1:7: “the trial of your faith, ... though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:7). Here Peter, like Paul, extols the virtue of tribulation for developing glory, or Godly way of seeing and thinking about life. These two verses in Peter’s writings then promote the development of the same thing, glory/opinion development in harmony with God via “word” and “fiery trials.” This supports what we presented earlier regarding “furnace” and “lamp” as symbols for “trials” and “word” that God will use to develop Abraham’s seed (Gen 15:17).

Taken together, Peter’s two verses pose a shift from darkness to light as a process of emancipation from self-centered to Christ’s word-centered perception via “fiery” trials, and study of His word. Such an emancipatory interpretation would be in keeping with the context of 1 Peter.

The emancipatory theme has been found to be a controlling metaphor in 1 Peter, as he harnessed Exodus to communicate with his Christian audience. Lai (2009) argued that the Exodus motif was a controlling theme in the book of Isaiah, and used extensively as a paradigm for salvation by Isaiah (p. 100), as well as Peter (p. 138), which is termed a “New Exodus.” The New Exodus motif does involve restoration of Israel to their homeland, but also includes spiritual and moral restoration (p. 110).

The terms "exile" and "Babylon" are transformed from a geographical sense to a status of living in a world away from the heavenly home; "Aliens" is no longer sociological but has an ethical connotation... These terms are given a spiritual dimension oriented toward the Christian faith (p. 135)

This spiritual use of the terms are not seen as allegorical, but as “Type” and “Antitype” (p. 100) involving the same pattern with heightened meaning of heart, spiritual, as well as physical Exodus. Lai covers the pattern in 1 Peter succinctly:

On the one hand, they have already experienced some form of restoration: they have been saved through God's mercy (1:2-4), sanctified, built up into a spiritual house (2:5), and are able to glorify God (4:14). On the other hand, they were awaiting the final salvation to be revealed in the future (1:5, 9), were weak and needed to grow in their faith (2:1-3), and continued to experience hardships and face various trials on a daily basis (1:6; 4:13). (p. 137)

Lai's synopsis reveals an Exodus, which begins with acceptance of Christ, yet a “promised land” remains to be had. The writer of Hebrews also says that a “rest remains” to the people of God (Heb 4:9), and applies it to ongoing development of Christian belief: “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief (v. 11).

Clearly, both Old and New Testament writers used Exodus terminology regarding spiritual growth, with advancement involving cognitive “belief” or “understanding” of God's word amidst wilderness trials.

### **The Word of God as a Perspective**

In the heart of our passage (Isa 27-32) Isaiah exalts what can be considered the hermeneutical rule of *sola scriptura*: “precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little” (Isa 28:10). Though not explicitly mentioning the “word of the LORD” in this verse, it's inclusion here is implicated by its inclusion in verse 13 amidst the same phrase: “But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken” (Isa 28:13). In the context of Isaiah 28, verse 10 presents

the *sola scriptura* method as a way to discern the way of life (vv. 17, 18), while verse 13 addresses a people who mis-apply the same principle to their own hurt.

This contrast is presented as the difference between going forward in understanding God's teaching, and going backwards toward destruction. Verse 9 connects the right use of the word with advancement to a more mature stage of development by asking: "Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand doctrine? Them that are weaned from the milk, and drawn from the breasts." That is, the person who can receive knowledge, and understand God's teachings are not babies. The juxtaposition of the next verse to this one sets full appreciation of the *sola scriptura* principle in a developmentally advanced category, as it answers the question of "who" in verse 9 to be those who get the "how" right: "For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little" (v. 10).

Those "who" do not get the "how" right apparently mix some of the previous stage perceptions, twisting the word so that they misperceive God's direction, and miss the "rest" God has for them as verse 12 elucidates "... This is the rest wherewith ye may cause the weary to rest; and this is the refreshing: yet they would not hear."

This use of "rest" in relation to the "word of the LORD" reflects the New Exodus motif in that they have begun their journey with the word of the Lord, but fall short of a "rest" that is only reached by careful adherence to *sola scriptura* hermeneutics. Isaiah 28 associates understanding of the word of God with developmental stages. And advancement to the promised "rest" is associated with faithful *sola scriptura* hermeneutics for understanding the way there.

Profound advancement of understanding the word can be seen in the conversions of Peter, and Paul. Both attempted to bend the word of the LORD to their own perspectives, but reached a point of humbling their perspectives of the way of life to a more complete understanding of it (2 Cor 5:15-27; 2 Pet 1:19).

Exaltation of the *sola scriptura* principle does not claim complete objectivity in the user. Rather it allows for an ever-increasing understanding of the Bible with the Bible as an objective reference point. That is, the *sola scriptura* principle sets a standard that allows for growth according to that standard. According to the New Exodus motif, we belong to Christ but grow in our relationship with Him according to His word. And, as Isaiah says, he does not immediately reject us if we reject His word, but speaks to us through wilderness experiences (Isa 28:11).

Perspective is integral to the New Exodus motif in that the Israelites left Egypt physically to begin their journey with the word through the wilderness, while we begin our journey with the word through the wilderness of this world as we increase in ability to walk by faith in accordance with the word, and not according to appearance alone (2 Cor 5:7). It is a process of perspective transformation.

The New Exodus transformation can be seen as a developmental process involving a) hearing the word of God regarding reality, b) rejection of that word, c) experience of that reality, d) reflection on that negative experience from the perspective of the word once rejected, and finally return to that word as a trustworthy perspective of reality.



## Summary

Since biblical unity was seen as contingent on faith development (Eph 4), we sought a biblical model of faith development. The perceptual dimension of faith was emphasized as a way to view life that is deeper or truer than appearance. This level of perception is also communicated biblically with other words such as “understanding,” and “judgment.” The word “perspective” was then used to encapsulate what it means for someone to live by faith according to “the sight of God.”

Perceiving life from God’s perspective was seen to imply positional proximity. That is, to see life from the same angle one must look from the same place. In the case of creature and Creator, this is seen to imply spiritual unity concerning the thing viewed.

Perspective transformation was seen as a major biblical theme involving a shift from self-centered to word-centered perspective via word and/or trying experience. This dynamic was encapsulated in the New Exodus motif, which views redemption through the framework of the Exodus. Spiritually speaking, people do not always leave a physical place when they begin their journey with the word of God, but it is always a journey of perspective transformation regarding how they look at that place and everything else in their lives.

This journey of perspective transformation was depicted on a continuum of understanding toward knowing God. Though one may know God in some sense at the beginning of the journey, advancement in understanding and knowing God more intimately can go on forever. This provides the baseline of our model of faith development. Advancement does not occur automatically on this continuum, but involves reflecting on the word of God, and/or experience in the light of that word.

Our model reflects the biblical duality of human nature in that each person is born with both good and bad tendencies, while biblical growth in understanding involves a denial of one “self” and adherence to the second “self” in close connection with seeing, and living life from God’s perspective (Gal 2:20).

This chapter established the basic stages of personal growth in Scripture from having “no understanding” (Isa 27:11) to understanding and knowing self, God and others (Isa 32:4; John 17). *Sola scriptura* hermeneutics are accepted as a reliable theological reflection point by which to square one’s thoughts of God, self, and others for Christian Growth. Christian growth is seen as incremental movement from self-centered to a Bible-centered perspective along a continuum of increased understanding, via reflection on personal experience and God’s word (2 Tim 3:16).

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter seeks extra-biblical insights for engaging and advancing human development in common with the biblical model set forth in chapter 2. Similar to the Bible, the literature in various fields of study refers to human development in terms of movement away from one “self” toward another “self” within the same individual. Therefore, with self-terminology providing a common framework, methods for facilitating advancement within that framework may be gleaned without compromising a commitment to biblical authority.

Findings in chapter 2 included the key premise that changing one’s core perspective, or understanding of reality to be more in harmony with God’s understanding, is to grow in unity with God. Before advancing someone’s understanding we must engage their understanding. Secular research has long studied the constitution and development of “core understanding” under multiple terms including “worldview,” “*habitus*,” and “*thema*,” (Estep & Kim, 2010, p. 65). Therefore, insights into engaging and advancing biblical understanding, or perspective, can be found in these extra-biblical sources. Reflecting on personal experience from a larger perspective was seen to be as beneficial for personal growth in social science as it is in the Bible.

## The Contribution of General Revelation

Because Psalm 19 says that God speaks through observable evidence it is likely that multiple fields studying human development yield developmental insights in line with the *sola scriptura* perspective. And where basic developmental dynamics are found to be in harmony with Scripture, though independent of its use, those insights are considered to be “general revelation.”

Howell juxtaposes Gödel’s theorem of incompleteness with Psalm 19 to argue that, “Our search for knowledge must be interdisciplinary. Neither science nor theology has exclusive access to the truth” (July, 2009, p. 244). White would agree when she says, “So, as far as their teaching is true, do the world’s great thinkers reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness. Every gleam of thought, every flash of the intellect, is from the Light of the world” (White, 1903, p. 14). In other words, people can be outside the biblical camp, yet have thoughts in line with it.

Subsequently, general revelation provides a two-way bridge. Christians can gain insightful truth from other mindsets, and also provide insights to others by building on their insights. Richardson (2005) notes Paul’s use of the Greek’s own poetry, and the altar to the unknown God as an affirmation of their experience with God before advancing their perception of God (Acts 17). Paul’s validation that God was already at work in their lives intrigued the Greeks enough to listen as he placed that experience within a biblical perspective. The result was that some people present accepted the biblical perspective as a valid and more advanced interpretation of their own experience.

This current generation has been considered to be less interested in hearing what Christians have to say than the Greeks were in Paul’s day (Kimball, 2003, p. 177).

However, Paul's affirmation that God can be at work in the thoughts and experiences of non-Christians exemplifies a natural starting point for conversation between those holding a biblical worldview, and those who do not. This affirmation of placing personal experience within the biblical perspective may also be useful for engaging and advancing the understanding of the large percentage of people who research has shown to have accepted Christ, yet lack a biblical worldview (Barna, 2003). They accepted Christ as the first step of a biblical worldview, but do not seem to advance. Is it possible that they do not recognize the relevance of biblical perspective for their daily lives?

Richardson implies that the natural starting point for conversation must be followed up with terminology that is natural in the conversation. He cites the New Testament use of the Greek term *Theos* for supreme God, and *Logos* for Christ as "fulfilling rather than destroying something valid in Greek philosophy" (p.23). Seeing Greek terminology as "fulfilling" something "valid" in Greek philosophy reinforces the point that God has already been present, and then expands that presence to include something of the language and philosophy of the people. In other words, it endorses the use of extra-biblical terminology, as well as insight, without compromising biblical truth.

Using aspects of extra-biblical terminology and philosophy indigenous to a culture in order to communicate biblical truth has its precedent in early church history:

terms and concepts were clearly regarded by Christian emissaries to the Greeks as ordained by God to prepare the Greek mind for the gospel! They found these fortuitous Greek philosophical terms to be just as valid as Old Testament messianic metaphors such as 'Lamb of God' ... and they used both sets of terminology with equal freedom to set the Person of Jesus Christ within the context of both Jewish and Greek culture, respectively. (p. 23)

That is to say, unbiblical terminology from an unbiblical culture may communicate biblical truth, which can then be used to advance biblical vision in that

culture. *Prima scriptura* is the theological term for describing the acceptance of truth from extra-biblical sources while maintaining the “normative role of Scripture” (Canale, 2006, p. 127). Clearly, the Bible endorses the use of nature, history, and science to reveal truth so that God can be perceived (Rom 1:20) (Erickson, 1998, p. 179).

It is clear that where biblical truth is reflected in indigenous terminology, Christians who appreciate that truth as truth have a better chance of advancing understanding of that truth within a biblical perspective. Therefore, rather than thinking the primary goal is to stamp out unbiblical terms as offensive to God, the Christian may harness them to engage and advance biblical understanding of God, self, and others.

The same approach could apply to believers who retain unbiblical views, which inhibit Christian growth. Though God has been at work in their experiences, many Christians have been seen to interpret life experience from unbiblical presuppositions, or perspectives (Viola & Barna, 2007; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 11). Therefore, general revelation truth and terminology may be used to enlighten believers, as well as unbelievers. For this reason we concur with Richardson’s appreciation for general revelation as greater than special revelation “in that it is available to all” (1998, p. 28). Though it does not supersede biblical authority, it is for all of “us.”

Religion, philosophy, psychology, science, and educational theories are among the disciplines appropriate to the study human nature and development. Though our position is that the Bible is authoritative, it is believed that locating biblical dynamics in other systems of human development can provide a double blessing. We become better prepared to engage others in order to advance their understanding of what God has to do with them, but also to gain understanding from others.

## The “Self”

Wells argues that one of the most important changes of the 20th century regarding self-understanding is the shift in terminology from “human nature” to “self-terminology” such as “self-consciousness...self-image... true self... false self... and inner self” (1998). Wells believes that this shift of terminology contributes significantly to the self-centeredness, and disintegration of individuals and societies (p. 120, 121).

Interestingly, Wells sees this disintegration resulting in a lack of peace that is the best Christian “point of contact” in today’s “Areopagus” (p. 194), yet he makes no mention of using self-terminology to do so. That is, Wells rightly identifies a point of contact, but unlike Richardson, he neglects the communicative power of culturally indigenous terminology for the contact.

Self-terminology was shown to be as biblically valid in chapter 2 as it is culturally viable (Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23). Paul’s Areopagus incident exemplifies the use of indigenous terminology in order to affirm biblical truth, which is then placed within a larger biblical framework. The Greek’s acceptance of the biblical interpretation of their experience was concomitantly acceptance of the Bible as a superior interpretive framework (Acts 17:34). The importance of reaching this depth of understanding will be addressed later, while the point here is that “self-terminology” holds Paul’s Areopagus experience potential. By using self-terminology we can place people’s experiences within a biblical framework that simultaneously features that framework as a superior interpretation of God, self, others, etc.

Resistance to our model can be expected since postmodern philosophy rejects the possibility of a unified objective perspective, and objective self (Grenz, 1996, pp. 7, 8).

Yet postmodern philosophy owes its beginnings largely to Heidegger's "revolutionary" reinterpretation of reality from timeless to temporal perspective (Canale, 2005, p. 233). And rather than being contrary to Scripture, aspects of Heidegger's ontological shift actually harmonize with the biblical perspective in ways that Philosophy never allowed before (Canale, 2006).

Unlike previous models, Heidegger's structure of understanding included contributions from an object, as well as the presuppositions, and experiences of the person observing the object (Canale, 2005, p. 79; Heidegger, Macquarrie, & Robinson, 2008). This structure of understanding may reflect our developmental model, in that one's presuppositions and experiences affect one's closeness to God.

Heidegger's student, Hans-Georg Gadamer, focused his career interest on discovering what is common to all modes of understanding. He emphasizes the grounding realm in this relational understanding when he determines that "understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood" (Gadamer, Weinsheimer, & Marshall, 2013, p. xix). In other words, one's thinking must reflect the reality of that which is to be understood to become accurate understanding. This also seems to reflect the model set forth in chapter 2, where the degree of a person's relational oneness with God is reflected by his or her placement on a continuum of understanding according to the degree they understand life in harmony with God's.

Major postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida, who also built on Heidegger's work, was summarized in terms that can be considered supportive of this placement of a person's existential self "all that emerges in the knowing process is the perspective of the self who interprets reality" (Grenz, 1996, p. 6). While Derrida's take on the perspective



of the self may have been meant to be a derogatory limitation, the limit he places on self via perspective in relation to reality reflects our biblical model of development. As we said in chapter 2, personal perspective implies a relational position, not only to an object observed, but applicable to a shared perspective. That is, shared understanding existentially indicates proximal position, closeness, even unity.

It is important to state that Heidegger's presentation of understanding as a "mode of being" may or may not be seen as synonymous with being, strictly speaking (Heidegger et al., 2008, p. 219; Heidegger & Stambaugh, 1969, p. 10). The complexity, and nuances of his *Being and Time* are well attested too, and expertise is not claimed here. However, Ricoeur (2004), a renowned philosopher, affirms our absorption of Heidegger's hermeneutical structure of knowledge into ours when he sees that to Heidegger "understanding is a "mode of being" that exists through understanding" (p. 7). Gullely (2003) concurs with Ricoeur, but notes Ricoeur's rejection of *sola scriptura* hermeneutics (pp. 596, 597).

Taken together these statements support our model of understanding development (chapter 2). A person's ontological identity, or being, is synonymous with their core understanding, and when one seeks to understand God then He who is sought to be understood, determines the path of understanding, and the relational position in knowing. And as one's understanding of God develops, the person simultaneously develops. This ontological terminology reflects biblical human development expressed in chapter 2.

The possibility that restrictions postmodern thinkers place on the "self," could actually reflect aspects of the biblical self, which are useful for identifying where one is on the continuum toward understanding God, brings to mind Paul's interaction at the

Aeropagus. According to this understanding we can endorse postmodern tenets within a larger perspective that, in turn, may be received by postmodern minds because of its endorsement of their truth as truth within its framework.

Postmodern philosophers rightly place objective truth beyond finite-self perspective (Canale, 2006, p. 118). However, insisting that their finite perspective is the total vision available to human beings is not in line with Scripture. The Bible clearly portrays the infinite God interacting in time, space, and words in order to share His objective perspective of reality with people.

It seems that postmodern philosophers offer a perspective of reality that is shortsighted compared to the biblical perspective. Postmodern philosophy does not account for the popularity of spirituality in the postmodern age as anything but illusion, or contain resources to stem the disintegration of society. Why would society hold on to such a philosophy? Moreland (2007) sees the universities, public schools, major news media, movies, television, and music among the major “power centers” of Western culture, all under the influence of postmodern, and naturalistic worldviews, which leaves them without the ability to diagnose and solve the problems in the postmodern age (p. 30).

McGrath would agree with Moreland’s recognition of postmodern tenets supporting disintegration, particularly the equality of all perspectives of reality (McGrath, 1996, p. 187). Ultimately, this equality eliminates the concept of right and wrong. Essentially, if nobody can be more right than anyone else, everyone is a law unto themselves. McGrath goes on to connect the equal merit of all perspectives with the rejection of universal meaning: “Metanarratives – that is, generalizing narratives which

claimed to provide universal frameworks for the discernment of meaning – were to be rejected as authoritarian” (p. 186). This rejection could include our model presented in chapter 2, which exalts the Bible as an authoritative perspective for the “discernment of meaning.”

While postmodern philosophy eliminates the possibility of an authoritative perspective in *sola scriptura* revelation, postmodern experience of cause and effect reality lends itself to the search for something more.

Long (2004) provides a glimpse of postmodern sorrow with research on the lasting effects of divorced parents on children. Aimlessness, inability to trust others, or cope with change still affected a high percentage of 19 to 29 year olds 10 years after the divorce of their parents (p. 44, 45). The whole postmodern era has been seen as one of mistrust, insecurity, and instability, which “is causing many young people to search for stability in the midst” (p. 79). This affirms Wells belief that a good “contact point” for engaging the postmodern mind is its inability to live comfortably in a world without meaning (Wells, 1998, p. 94).

Personal “insecurity and instability” could easily lead one to accept as true a philosophy endorsing that experience as ultimate reality. However, the fact of instability does not seem to automatically negate the desire for something postmodern philosophers reject as possible—ultimate, unshakable dependable truth. Rejecting objective truth simultaneously rejects dependability. In contrast, the Bible offers something better. Though it also endorses unstable experiences as present reality, it incorporates the experiences within a larger framework that eventually leaves instability behind. That is, Scripture explains the allowance of the evil at the root of instability, as well as its end

(Rev 22:3). Therefore, by presenting the biblical perspective as something that can be counted on, something dependable, the postmodern mind may be attracted to what amounts to absolute truth.

Unbelievers are not the only ones rejecting objective truth. Only 32% of Christian adults, and 9% of Christian teens believed in moral absolutes (Long, 2004). This represents a clear lack of biblical understanding among the majority of Christians. Barna (2003); Hawkins (2011); Wilkens and Sanford (2009) all provide substantiated evidence that there is a lack of perceiving, and living according to a biblical perspective within the Christian church. The lack of biblical perspective did not prevent them from accepting the name of Christ, but certainly undermines advancement in Christ-centered living (Barna, 2001, 2003).

Such a lack of biblical perspective could be attributed to the influence of postmodern philosophy. However, because most Americans, church members included, are not likely to have studied philosophy directly, the lack of belief in objective truth is more likely to have been tacitly absorbed through cultural influences (Wilkens & Sanford, 2009), or the lack of *sola scriptura* principles among ministry leaders (Canale, 2006, p. 109; Gulley, 2003). This devastating to Christian growth and unity. In contrast to Wells' argument against self-terminology (1998, pp. 120, 121), the arrested development of church members may be attributed not to the infiltration of self-terminology, but of unbiblical interpretive frameworks for self-development.

Though postmodern philosophy resists self-definition, a brief sampling of disciplines referring to self-development in the context of a dual-self construct will help

us to understand the presuppositions regarding self-development in the contemporary mind.

### Dual-self Construct and Development

Besides philosophy, the dual “self” construct of human nature is explicit or implicit in the literature of various fields including neuroscience (Penfield & Jasper, 1954, p. 132), Jung’s depth psychology (Edinger & EBSCOhost, 1999), Romantic Literature (Abrams, 1971, p. 189), and History (Toynbee, Royal Institute of International Affairs, & Somervell, 1947).

Religious writings too, such as Hinduism’s most ancient and authoritative writings, the Upanishads, are explicit regarding the self: “There are two selves, the apparent self and the real Self” (Prabhavananda, 1948, p. 24). The apparent self is the individual self, and the real Self is the universal Self (p. 19), called a seed (p. 20), in all men (p. 22), of Brahman, the Uncaused Cause (p. 20). The goal is to renounce ego, or selfishness (p. 26), and yoke (yoga) with the universal Self (p. 26), not by studying scriptures, but by meditation (p. 48).

Striking similarities with the Bible exist in general categorization of the two-self nature such as a seed of God (like Brahman), and denial of one’s self for union with the Seed of God as a goal. However drastic differences exist as well; the view of good and evil, reality, and the nature of God just to mention a few. Their authoritative writings define inward and outward reality far different than the Bible. Though both recognize the same general two-nature dynamic, and the second as a “seed,” if it is the same seed, then why are there such fundamentally different understandings concerning it?

As seen in chapter 2, Christians believe that there is a seed of God in each person, but that “fallen human beings misuse what they sense” (Wells, 1998, p. 195). That is, we may sense God, but how we respond is often filtered by cultural perceptions that cloud our vision of what to do with that sense. Where Christianity’s authoritative writing calls man to square his subjective perception by biblical authority, the Upanishads emphasize subjective internal experience in meditation (Prabhavananda, 1948, p. 48).

This subjective two-self shift from one to the other, as articulated in Hindu writings, may be seen as just one of the major contributors to what has become Western spirituality (Barna, 2003). The swing from objective to subjective spirituality in the West was noted in *Christianity Today*: “Westerners, even Christians, are obsessed with what goes on inside, with spiritual experience. We do not usually welcome any external testing of our thoughts or actions” (Marks, 2010, p. 24). Marks, who promotes the importance of doctrine to spiritual formation, traced the internal obsession with Western Christians to Schleiermacher whose system of theology is built on personal experience. “Schleiermacher thought that the essence of Christianity was the spiritual impulse not its doctrine” (2010, p. 24).

Marks rightly sees the problem with reliance on the internal “impulse” in that “Subjectivity takes the ethical and doctrinal teeth out of every religion. Doctrine can help us think” (p. 24).

While comparatively few Americans are likely to have studied the Upanishads, or Schleiermacher’s theology, their frameworks regarding self has permeated the American worldview through popular culture avenues such as music and movies (Greenfield, 2006, p. 365; Turner, 1995; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009, p. 13). Therefore, familiarity with pop

culture idols, and their spiritual influences may provide more immediate access to the minds we seek to reach.

### Nothing is Real?

Turner (1995) chronicled the spiritual interest of the rock stars that brought Eastern religion to the West in *Hungry for Heaven: Rock and Roll and the Search for Redemption*. He records John Lennon asking his guru guide, “How are we to tell if a spiritual master is real or not” (p. 82). The implication is that when you tell me everything is illusion, how do I know you are real? Shortly thereafter, Lennon left Eastern religion, but not before he and his band’s highly publicized dalliance with the East contributed to its popularity in the West (Turner, 2006, p. 12). The small following by a few leaders of pop culture in the 1960s became main stream by the turn of the century largely through their influence.

Lennon’s “real” question may be prototypical of an awakening stage of a generation whose worldview eschews objective reality. That is, Lennon’s need for something real by which to judge reality from may anticipate a parallel sense of need in society, which would result in a mass exodus from postmodern trust in subjective perception. In support of this possibility, Long finds that “For those growing up in this generation, the question is not “Is it true?” but “Is it real?” (2004, p. 221). If this question reflects Lennon’s developmental stage it indicates a generational longing for a real, trustworthy guide for determining reality that may appreciate an absolute truth to hang on to.

In support of this scenario some thought leaders consider postmodern disintegration, chaos, and sense of meaninglessness as a developmental stage of society.

However, in contrast with our “next stage” a true Nihilistic Post Modern sees the next stage not in overcoming meaninglessness, but rather, accepting it as the “essence of reality” (Woodward, 2002, p. 66).

Toynbee, who coined the term “postmodernism” as a historical movement, reveals in his landmark study of the collapse of 21 civilizations throughout history that disintegration, if not overcome, results in total collapse (Toynbee et al., 1947). This evidence suggests that while its leading philosophers systematically reject meta-narratives, the postmodern generation needs an alternative perspective of reality that does more than accept chaos as the essence of reality. To survive it needs a perspective that can take their sense of meaninglessness resulting from experiencing life in a fallen world, and place it within a framework that provides ultimate meaning, as others have noticed (Rasi, 2009).

Another indicator of desire for something absolute in the postmodern era, which more explicitly relates to the two-self construct of human nature, is the quest for the “authentic self” (Heidegger et al., 2008, p. 405). According to Bialystok, “It seems that everyone is trying to achieve the elusive ideal of being authentic, however poorly delimited the concept” (Bialystok, 2009, p. 11). In other words, while finding the authentic self is popular, we are not sure what it is.

To find out why, Bialystok plumbs the philosophical depths of the authentic self with Heidegger, Foucault, and Rousseau, going as far back as the Greeks. Subsequently, Bialystok argues for the need of a “reflective consistency account of authenticity” in order to find the authentic self (p. 255). In other words, there must be a consistent point of reference to reflect on the self from. The lack of which implies that “the most



influential twentieth-century conceptions of authenticity are inadequate” (p. 253). That is, the quest for the authentic self is doomed from the start by frameworks that do not consistently account for it.

In contrast, the *sola scriptura* model offers the reflective consistency, which Bialystok seeks. And it does so in conjunction with Bialystok’s own concept of authenticity as “the relation of the self to itself” (p. 3). But without a personal faith in biblical revelation, Bialystok admits his inability to offer any consistent point from which to reflect (p. 284). Immanuel Kant wrestled with the same lack (Eldridge, 2001, p. 13).

Bialystok’s absence of a trustworthy reflection point mirrors the postmodernist rejection of the modern self (Grenz, 1996, p. 127). Postmodernist lack of an alternative replacement the modern self (other than the “empty self” or “false self” (Moreland, 2007, pp. 24, 25) seems to coincide with their rejection of any consistent reflection point (meta-narrative) that could in turn, define a self. In Exodus terminology, post modernity liberated itself from modern self-centeredness, but without offering a consistent reflection point they could not account for a self to grow toward, *ipso facto* their Promised Land is a void, or nothing.

The Latin term for nothing is *nihil*, and postmodern thought has often been accused of being nihilistic, with post modernity as a nihilistic state of society (Woodward, 2002, p. 51). Woodward traces nihilism’s most definitive form to Nietzsche’s “radical repudiation of value, meaning and desirability” (Nietzsche, Kaufmann, & Hollingdale, 1968, p. 7; also in Woodward, p. 51). Specifically, in line with postmodernism, extreme nihilism rejects “choosing one value, knowledge claim, or course of action over another” (Woodward, p. 51). That means a person is accountable to

nothing because nothing matters. In that sense postmodern/nihilist thinking displaces modern self-centered accountability with more extreme self-centeredness by eliminating the possibility of any objective perspective to which it is accountable. McGrath agrees when he says that “The postmodern emphasis on the absolute freedom of individual self-definition merely extends trends which were always implicit within modernism” (McGrath, 1996, p. 184).

The self of pure postmodern nihilistic philosophy can be seen within the framework of our developmental model as the fallen self, out of relation with Christ; unknown, and unknowable. Furthermore, the detachment of the fallen self from the continuum of understanding in the biblical model (Appendix A) is here reflected in that there is no superior perspective of reality to understand, know, or become one with. According to this scenario, we are, each one of us, intensely alone in the world.

Significantly, Woodward notes, “This nihilistic debilitation is usually associated with moods of despair, random destructiveness, and longing for nothingness” (2002, p. 52). Today the random destructiveness is evident in the rash of school shootings, while increasing moods of despair are reflected in Aubrey’s *Finding Hope in the Age of Melancholy* (1999). He found that contemporary Americans are at least 10 times more likely to have a major bout of depression than their grandparents (p. 16). Ten years after his book was published the number of depressed American adults doubled to nearly one out of every ten (CDC, 2010).

The “longing for nothingness” seems contradictory to Nihilistic belief that ones’ existence is meaninglessness already. Perhaps this longing for nothingness while in the midst of the nothingness can best be understood as a reflection of Nietzsche’s perspective

transformation. For him, chaos/meaninglessness/nothingness is ultimate reality so rather than look for something better, see it as acceptable reality. Nietzsche's idea of nothingness as a "Promised Land" is also reflected in the Eastern idea of Nirvana.

Philosopher Aldous Huxley also promoted the idea of meaninglessness within exodus terminology, and provides remarkable insight into the motivation of him and his colleagues reasoning:

The philosopher who finds no meaning in the world is not concerned exclusively with a problem in pure metaphysics. He is also concerned to prove that there is no valid reason why he personally should not do as he wants to do. For myself, as no doubt for most of my friends, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom. The supporters of this system claimed that it embodied the meaning - the Christian meaning, they insisted - of the world. There was one admirably simple method of confuting these people and justifying ourselves in our erotic revolt: we would deny that the world had any meaning whatever. (Huxley, 1937, p. 270)

Here the close connection between accountability and meaning can be seen as two sides of the same coin. When nothing matters, we are accountable to "nothing." A self-centered agenda is explicitly stated to influence Huxley's metaphysical perspective. Meaninglessness becomes an excuse for self-centered, unaccountable living. Therefore, preparing to reason with postmodern nihilist philosophers would likely yield little fruit. It is the infiltration of these ideas into the Christian worldview that we are primarily concerned with.

Gallup polls found that 80% of American adults considered themselves to be Christians in 2000 (Gallup & Jones, 2000, p. 180), and 13 years later percentages have only fallen slightly to 77% (Newport, 2012). When adding the percentage of other beliefs, it is clear that the majority of American adults clearly have not fully embraced a worldview of meaninglessness.

Yet, while the majority of the populace is not likely to have read philosophical writings enough to know the philosophies well, assimilation without critical reflection via cultural influences occurs (Wilkins & Sanford, 2009). While Christians do not formally hold to nothingness as ultimate truth, the infiltration of nothingness as ultimate communion with God may be seen in the church in the form of Eastern contemplative prayer (Douglass, 2011; Macquarrie, 2005).

Mystics, such as Evelyn Underhill, clearly articulate the importance of denying “egocentric judgments” in common with our biblical model, but unlike our model, a thoughtless, and imageless state of mind is presented as the closest communion with God possible to mankind (Underhill, 1914, p. 67). This concept of union with God is seen in direct contrast with the biblical ideal (Isa 32:4; Jer 3:15; Ps 119:105). That is, the ego denial, and passion for unity with God that mystics hold in common with the Bible injunction is derailed by unbiblical practices. Still, it stands to reason that this generation of church leaders, and laypeople coming of age in the postmodern era would be susceptible to a model of Christian communion that neglects the *sola scriptura* perspective. And the appeal of communion with “unknowing” to an age “longing for nothing” is evidenced in its rising popularity of contemplative prayer (Douglass, 2011; Howard, 2010; Peth & Douglass, 2012).

While passionate growing Christians may be derailed from the biblical understanding continuum by mystic “nothingness,” the average pew sitter is not likely to be. For her, or him the postmodern cultural undermining of meta-narratives will more likely manifest itself in a lukewarm mix of truth and error—some meaning, but not

complete *sola scriptura* accountability (Barna, 2001, 2003). Barna found that by their own accounts, Christians do not live according to a biblical worldview.

While Barna's research may account for what Christians do, or do not do, the question of why is of ultimate concern here. One reason may be crisis experiences for which their understanding of God does not account. While some Christians leave the faith completely as a result of overwhelming experiences, the majority may still claim Christ, but without continuing to advance their understanding of that experience from a biblical perspective they do not grow in faith.

Farley's research has been seen to contribute greatly to the current trend in spiritual growth interest. He traced the lack of mature unified Christian growth to theological education. He found that "understanding" as a paradigm for church and clergy education had "not been operative in the church for many generations" (Farley, 1983, p. 153). This emphasis on understanding for spiritual growth is reflected in our developmental model. Yet, while Farley rightly relates the value of understanding to Christian development, he seems to place Christian tradition as his reflection point, rather than Scripture.

Wood (1985) criticized Farley's displacement of the Bible with tradition as a reflection point, yet Wood himself has been criticized for rejection of the Bible as canon (Poythress, 1982, pp. 140-143). Indeed, it is not easy to find the Bible promoted, and used as a consistent reflection point for living life, even among Christian leaders.

Preliminary findings in this study indicated that many people in the postmodern age long for absolute truth in terms of dependability, or "reflective consistency." But while *sola scriptura* hermeneutics offer "reflective consistency," many Christians do not

hold to it, hindering ministry to unbelievers, as well as their own spiritual maturity toward the unity Christ prayed for.

In order to engage and advance the biblical understanding of both believers, and unbelievers we studied cultural preconceptions and terms (Long, 2004; Richardson, 2005; Wilkens & Sanford, 2009). Finding one's "authentic self" was shown to be valuable to believers as well as unbelievers, which lends itself to a framework illuminating the value of the *sola scriptura* perspective. Concomitantly, other desires expressed by the postmodern generation such as security, dependability, freedom, and reality can be addressed in relation to that framework.

Attention now turns to social science methodologies for facilitating understanding within that framework.

### **Transformational Learning**

Both educational theory and biblical spiritual growth are concerned with the questions "How do we come to know?" and "How do we become what we are not?" (Thayer, 2009, p. 26). Therefore, learning theory may provide insight into biblical spiritual development.

The U.S. government evaluated scientific data to find out how to educate for "deep understanding" (Bransford, Brown, Cocking, & National Research Council (U.S.). Committee on Developments in the Science of Learning, 1999, p. 233). The goal of impacting deep understanding reflects the ontological and soteriological goals of our developmental model in chapter 2.

Significantly, the data revealed that, "Students come to the classroom with preconceptions about how the world works. If their initial understanding is not engaged,

they may fail to grasp the new concepts and information...” (p. xi). This research affirms our earlier endeavor to understand the postmodern mindset before attempting to develop further understanding.

Attention to student’s preconceptions involves learner-centered education, which takes into account the student’s prior experiences. Thayer found that most of the twentieth century experiential learning theorists based their thinking on John Dewey (p. 26). Dewey’s major assumption was that “amid all uncertainties there is one permanent frame of reference: namely, the organic connection between education and personal experience...” (Dewey, 1938, p. 37). Consequently, he called for, “A system of education based upon living experience (p. 33). Thayer believes that empirical evidence over the ensuing years argues a strong case for experiential education, and finds that, currently; Kolb’s model of experiential learning is “probably the most frequently cited” (2009, p. 26).

In Kolb’s model, optimum learning involves four modes of knowing: “concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation” (Thayer, p. 27). Because of its empirical support, and analogous relationships to other contemporary models of learning theory, Thayer uses Kolb’s theory as a guide to select strategies for teaching Christian discipleship (p. 27). As a former professor of Christian education, Thayer prefers his model because of its social science research, and “because it works” (p. 29). However, while Kolb’s model is good at presenting “what is,” it lacks “what ought,” so she turns to Richard Osmer’s model, which includes the “normative power of theology” (p. 29).

While we can appreciate Osmer's model for overcoming Dewey's rejection of tradition, his reliance on Christian tradition may be too broad to fit our model. He states, "diversity cannot legitimately be boiled down to a single model, and we would do well to acknowledge at the outset the richness and variety of the Christian tradition of discernment" (Osmer, 2005, p. 286). In context, it seems this exclusion would include the *sola scriptura* principle as a single perspective by which to measure all "Christian" perspectives. So, while Osmer's addition of a normative "ought" offers much for developing Christian perspective, he neglects the explicit mention of the Bible as its own interpreter for normative reflective consistency.

The addition of a normative "ought to" reflects knowledge-centered education. Knowledge-centered education includes an "emphasis on sense-making—on helping students become metacognitive by expecting new information to make sense..." (Bransford et al., 1999, p. 125). Helping students become metacognitive in this scenario means helping them see the connection between new information and an "overall picture" (pp. 127, 236). The big picture "ought" must be perceived as relevant to one's experiential need.

Psychological case studies reveal a natural catalyst toward big picture sense making in that "when people are traumatized by life events... in order to recover, they must find some new framework" (Grossman, 1999, p. 210). Although traumatized people may not articulate their experience in these terms, they show a need to reach beyond self for a framework to interpret the event. The pain and stress that result from the trauma can motivate the search for relief. But lasting relief comes in the form of a satisfactory interpretive framework for the meaning of the traumatic experience.



All of the well-known theories of transformational learning (TL) begin with a “state of disequilibrium” (Thayer, 2009, p. 96), which can range from cognitive dissonance to overwhelming shock. Among the leading TL theorists, Thayer distinguishes developmental psychologist and theologian, James Loder, for explaining how transformation can occur within Kolb’s learning cycle (Thayer, p. 96).

Loder’s experience as a theologian and developmental psychologist enables him to engage human development theories in their own terms, and reveal their limitations. He believes that “Normal human development is psychologically constructed, socially supported, and culturally maintained so that people are drawn out of the full four dimensions of their being” (Loder, 1989, p. 157). That is to say, the “socially accepted norms” in developmental theory neglect necessary dimensions of human development (p. 157). Like Osmer, he argues for seeing human development in theological perspective of human development.

Loder’s four-dimensional model of development includes: worldview, self, the “void” (manifested in disease, divorce, abandonment, etc.), and the Holy (p. 69). Briefly, a person’s worldview is shattered by an experience with the void, which causes the search for a better one. The ultimate goal of this transformation is in shifting from ego-centered to God-centered worldview (p. 69).

Loder is outstanding at affirming what is right in developmental theories in unison with the larger theological perspective without absorbing their faultiness. He articulates their developmental trajectories in terms of ego development, while his own is a process of re-patterning one’s perspective around something other than ego. Ego, he believes, is an unnatural center for reality to revolve around. In terms of our own project,

development that maintains self at the center reflects church members who have been cultured to do all the “right things,” yet be self-centered, or legalistic. That is, righteousness is attributed to one’s self, rather than Christ. This may be seen in the long-time church leaders who do not seem to mature in Christ-like compassion or humility, and ultimately hinder church growth. One may fall to an egocentric perspective at any point along our developmental continuum if interpreting a righteous deed as being of self rather than Christ. Sometimes church leaders focus on their own accomplishments and judge God, self, and others according to that standard, rather than the biblical perspective.

Although Loder does not explicitly mention *sola scriptura* methodology, he makes no statement that can be construed to undermine its possibility like Osmer does (Osmer, 2005, p. 286). Indeed, the basic pattern of Loder’s developmental model is seen to be harmonious with our own. In fact, his explanation of “void” experiences in relation to an “evil” force that presses humanity toward ultimate nothingness exposed the lack of this biblical expression in our model (1989, p. 83). Loder astutely expressed the potential of void experiences for transformation. He illustrated the transformational process using the biographies of Martin Luther and C. S. Lewis, convincingly positing childhood trauma to be beneficial for this prospective transformation (pp. 150-152). To say that trauma can be beneficial is a step beyond other learning models, yet harmonizes with our biblical perspective.

Jack Mezirow is considered to be a leading theorist in the field of adult education, and seminal in the area of transformational learning (TL) (Estep & Kim, 2010, pp. 213, 214). His TL, also called perspective transformation (PT), exposes uncritically assimilated assumptions, or perspectives to make new meaning through personal learning

experiences (Cranton, 1994; Dieter, 2011). Furthermore, making new meaning of old experiences is considered to be emancipatory (Dieter, 2011, p. 9). Similar to our developmental model, emancipation involves overcoming distortions of perception. And by helping people transform worldviews to more realistically interpret experience, TL offers “emancipation in the form of a new state of being” (pp. 44, 45).

These aspects of Mezirow’s PT reflect a biblical model of development, and provide fresh language to articulate its depths. Furthermore, the volume of research affirming Mezirow’s process can be seen as concurrently supporting the biblical developmental aspects it holds in common with Scripture.

For example, 41 peer reviewed journal studies, largely using Mezirow’s conception of TL, revealed his theoretical framework to be effective at capturing the meaning-making process, and critical reflection and disorienting dilemmas to be vital catalysts for change (Taylor, 2007, p. 174). Critical reflection, and disorienting dilemmas were seen to be part of the meaning making process in the biblical model in chapter 2 also.

However, while Mezirow’s developmental pattern reflects, and even illuminates vital aspects of Scripture, he does not come from a biblical perspective. In fact, his “greatest assurance of objectivity” is community consensus (Mezirow, 1990, p. 10). That means consensus determines ultimate truth. The displacement of *Sola scriptura* with consensus compromises the integrity of the meaning sought. Mezirow recognized his lack of reflective consistency and the undependable result:

Ideally, the consensus would be such that any informed, objective, and rational person who examined the evidence and heard the arguments would agree... In reality, the consensus on which we depend to validate expressed ideas almost never approximates the ideal.... (p. 11)

In other words, people do not come to an ideal consensus of truth very often. Why Mezirow grounds his faith in community consensus discourse as supreme reflection point for determining truth is “the supposition that genuine consensus is possible and that it can be distinguished from false consensus” (p. 11). He credits his position to Habermas’ emancipatory learning theory.

Antonio (1989) writing from a strictly sociological perspective, argues that emancipatory theory has struggled with “contradictory and incompletely elaborated normative underpinnings that weaken its sociological and ethical credibility” (p. 721). Though he recognizes that the postmodern mind does not see this as problematic, Antonio also sees that “Without rationally justified normative foundations ... prescriptions for “emancipatory” social change seemed arbitrary” (p. 722). And Antonio recognized the same lack of rationally justified foundation in Habermas, and *ipso facto* Mezirow (p. 734).

Mezirow’s combined lack of reflective consistency, and support of community consensus fits well with postmodern mindsets. However, Antonio offers that the rampant “narcissism” of his day (1989) caused “many social and political theorists to warn about the precarious condition of the culture...” and the need “to shore up the normative underpinnings of Western democracy to avert a slide into despotism” (p. 741). Twenty five years later partisan deadlocks are just one sign that society is still in need of “normative underpinnings” that provide stability.

The normative foundation of *sola scriptura* has much to offer to this generation. And though Mezirow’s PT model lacks reflective consistency, his process of meaning making reflects the biblical pattern in language expressive of its truth. This language may

be seen to overcome Loder's complaint that it is hard to communicate one's conversion experience without sounding clichéd (1989, p. 18).

Taylor believes that the growing interest in the practice of fostering transformative learning (TL) "replaced andragogy as the iconic educational philosophy" in adult education, offering "proven teaching strategies based on substantive research framed within sound theoretical assumptions" (2007, p. 189).

Transformational learning also represents a step beyond Smith's presentation of classical learning (Smith, 1998). While Smith recognized the importance of connecting new information with a big picture already in the learner's head, TL begins when one senses the lack of an adequate framework to process new experience, or information, and goes in search of another framework (Mezirow). TL has been proven to be particularly effective at capturing the learning process of "paradigmatic shifts" (Taylor, 2007, p. 174). Direct, personally engaging learning experiences that stimulate reflection upon experience was seen to be a powerful catalyst for transformative learning (p. 182). Similarly, the use of writing as a medium when promoting transformative learning is another significantly powerful catalyst (p. 182).

It is these big picture, core paradigmatic shifts that are needed to advance long time Christians that have mastered fundamental doctrines, but continue to lead the church in un-Christ-like ways that hinder Christian unity.

### **Summary**

This literature review found extra-biblical insight for engaging personal perspectives and advancing them in common with the biblical model of development set forth in chapter 2. Various fields of study use a framework and methodology for

facilitating advancement harmonious with biblical aspects of human development to some degree.

Most relevant to this project was the discovery that where biblical spiritual growth reflected movement of a person's core perception in chapter 2, the same is true of transformational learning (TL). That is, TL articulates the process of core perspective transformation (PT), and affirms the catalytic power of disorienting dilemmas and critical reflection as well. Additionally, reflecting on personal experience from a larger perspective was seen to be as beneficial for personal growth in social sciences as it was in the Bible.

While aspects of TL were seen to be useful for engaging and advancing understanding, both Christians and non-Christians alike were found to resist the idea of absolute truth in this postmodern age. However, pursuit of "meaning" and "what is real" were seen to be viable access points by which to communicate the value of the *sola scriptura* perspective. Embracing such a perspective for those raised in the postmodern age amounts to nothing less than a perspective transformation. Therefore, presenting biblical conversion dynamics in terms of PT dynamics held potential for bringing home to participant minds what God was trying to do in their lives. That is, transformational language, such as found in the writings TL theorists were seen to be useful for helping participants appreciate, and cooperate with biblical PT.

In particular, *sola scriptura* hermeneutics were shown to be outstanding as a consistent, reliable reflection point by which to recognize and develop one's "authentic self." A cursory awareness of philosophical concerns over the "self" illuminated a depth

of meaning addressed but heretofore underappreciated in Scripture for me. And it should provide a powerful point of interest for others.

The following chapter synthesizes the findings of chapters two and three, and builds on them in order to assist members at the local church in reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective for spiritual growth toward unity in Christ.

## CHAPTER 4

### PROJECT DEVELOPMENT

The theological chapter (chapter 2) presented spiritual development on a continuum of “understanding,” progressing from self-centered toward God-centered perception (Isa 27:11; 32:4; John 17). Though this pattern of development is evident in Scripture, Farley argued that interest in developing understanding had been not accepted, much less “thematized” in theological education for many generations (1983, p. 159).

Farley’s indictment spawned a wave of interest in spiritual development that currently floods the Christian church. However, contrary to Farley’s belief, unity did not come with that awakened interest. While some church members have been observed to reject biblical practices because they are promoted in association with the term “Spiritual Formation,” others embrace unbiblical beliefs and practices in their hunger for experiencing God. All this was seen to undermine the unity and biblical Christian development Christ prayed for (John 17).

Our answer to the confusion over spiritual development was to begin by establishing a model of spiritual development using *sola scriptura* hermeneutics. Though, it is not explicitly stated as such within the Bible, a developmental pattern was repeatedly seen within its pages.

The literature review found the same developmental pattern in other disciplines. Philosophy, transformational learning theory (TL), developmental cognitive



neuroscience, and psychological case studies are among those sharing common developmental dynamics with the Bible.

This chapter seeks to correlate these extra-biblical resources with the Bible to further illuminate this pattern for developing understanding, which has been seen to be synonymous with Christian development. As Thayer (2009) astutely recognized, “Understanding and believing are essential to discipleship because these processes are grounded in both theology and learning theory” (p. 106).

The program began October 26, 2013, and finished on December 3, 2013. All meetings were held at the Topeka Wanamaker Seventh-day Adventist church chapel.

## **Philosophy and Methods**

### **Philosophy**

The foundation of the curriculum development was drawn from seven foundational principles of understanding development found in common among biblical and extra-biblical thinking.

1. One’s core “understanding” (worldview, central frame of reference, interpretive framework, structuring structure, etc.) is synonymous with one’s “Being” (Heidegger, 2010; Mezirow, 1990; Prov 23:7).
2. One’s core “understanding” is not readily apparent to oneself (Mezirow, 1990; Prov 20:5; Ps 19:12).
3. One’s “understanding” of reality may be distorted (Mezirow, 1990; Jer 17:9, Ps 19:12).<sup>[SP1]</sup>
4. An overwhelming experience may contribute to understanding development (Fowler, 1981; Ps 119: 67, 71; Mezirow, 1990; see also Ps 119: 67, 71) but

not automatically (Taylor & Cranton, 2012; Isa 42:5, Mal 2:2, Isa 57:1, Jer 12:11).

5. Reflecting on a past experience can be a catalyst for removing distortions of reality and advancing understanding (Boud, Cohen, & Walker, 1993; Fowler, 1981; Mezirow, 1990; Deut 30:1, 2).

6. Reflecting on study material can be a catalyst for advancing understanding (Arbel, 2009; Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985; Mal 2:2, Deut 30:1, Isa 41:20, 2 Pet 1:19).

7. The combination of experience and reflection dramatically increases potential for understanding development (Arbel, 2009; Boud et al., 1993; Boud et al., 1985; Cho, 2006; Cranton, 1994; Dewey, 1938; Harless, 2012; Hawkins, 2011; Hull, 2006; Hummell, 2012; McCaughey, 2004; Mezirow, 1990; Osmer, 2005; Padden, 2011; Pasquariello, 2009; Smith, 1998; Taylor, 2007).

In summary, several tenets of understanding development are common to both biblical and extra-biblical thinking. Where one's being is considered equal to one's core understanding, developing this level of understanding is considered to be equivalent to developing the person. Conversely, both the Bible and TL equate removing distorted perceptions of reality with human development. However, though developing core understanding may be of common interest, the theological chapter argued for the *sola scriptura* hermeneutic as the normative perspective of reality for the Christian. That which is accepted as authoritative understanding is of ultimate importance in a developmental process that seeks alignment with reality. Therefore, in order to facilitate understanding of God and his view of reality as set forth in the Bible, it is imperative that pastors become "men of understanding" themselves. That is, Pastors must have

experience with the way of understanding before we can teach it to others. The ability to reflect on experience and study has been shown to advance understanding effectively in both Scripture and TL.

### **Method**

The first step to facilitating reflection on personal experience was to realize how few people use critical reflection (CR). Studies indicate that many people do not reflect on personal life including a large percentage of college students (Arum, 2011), and pastors (Kanne, 2005). Therefore, the first step was to awaken church members to the value of reflection. Leading up to the project, I preached a sermon to emphasize the importance of reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective to expose our perceptual distortions “hidden” to even ourselves (Pss 19:12-14; 139: 23, 24).

Several studies have demonstrated methods of fostering reflection that have been helpful to this project. Kanne (2005) is among many who acknowledge Kolb’s major contribution to experiential learning, but he promotes Mezirow and Boud as more noteworthy learning theorists on the role of reflection (p. 84).

Padden (2011), also researching reflection noted that, “According to both Boud et al., and Mezirow, in order for the student to learn from reflection, the student must be able to reflect at a level where previously held beliefs and knowledge are challenged, resulting in the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, values, and behaviors” (p. 3). This statement highlights the importance of reflecting on experiences on a meaningful “level.” One of the major challenges of this project was motivating busy, tired congregants to engage on a meaningful level. Consequently project content, as well as process had to engage the thoughts (cognitive) and the heart (affective) as simply and as powerfully as

possible. Boud et al., contributes toward both aspirations.

While acknowledging the debt experiential learning owes to Dewey, Boud exerts “much greater emphasis on affective contribution to reflective learning (Boud et al., 1985, p. 21). The attention to the affective dimension of the learner helped not only to hold his or her attention, it also contributed to deeper transformation, as will be expounded upon later in this chapter.

Toward simplicity, although aware of multiple categories of reflection, Boud’s model of reflection offers three primary elements in the reflective process: (a) returning to the experience, and one’s reactions to it (b) attending to feelings (c) reevaluating experience inclusive of new information (Boud et al., 1985, pp. 26, 27; Kanne, 2005, p. 84). This reflective process was simplified for the purpose of this study to “return, reflect, and reframe.”

Mezirow’s TLT is similarly simplified when he states that “In transformative learning... we reinterpret an old experience (or a new one) from a new set of expectations, thus giving a new meaning and perspective to the old experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 11). Once again, the basic three-part pattern “return, reflect, reframe” is visible.

While Boud’s and Mezirow’s more detailed account of reflection dynamics helped me as a facilitator to *understand* reflection better, this more simplified model was seen to actually *facilitate* participant reflection better.

Using a simplified reflection process also provided an easy starting point for meta-cognition—thinking about one’s own thinking. In my pastoral experience it has

been very difficult to get the average church member to understand this level of thought, much less change it.

Mezirow defines the level of thought targeted for reflection in this project as a “meaning perspective.” In his own words, a meaning perspective is “The structure of assumptions that constitutes a frame of reference for interpreting the meaning of an experience” (1990). This definition was useful for beginning a discussion on the level of thought involved in transformation. Transformational learning was then defined as “The process of learning through critical self-reflection, which results in the re-formulation of meaning perspective to allow a more discriminating, and integrative understanding of one’s experience (p. xvi).

It was hoped that two such clear definitions in close proximity could hold wandering minds since participants did not likely sign up to understand learning theory. I had to strive to hold their attention here especially. The last quote exemplifies why Mezirow’s transformational learning theory is also referred to as perspective transformation (PT) (Estep & Kim, 2010, p. 214). I perceived the success of this project depended largely on participants understanding Christian development in terms of perspective transformation. It was hoped that brief quotes such as these sprinkled throughout the course would crystallize the concept of PT in the minds of the students as a developmental framework existing in Scripture, and acknowledged by social sciences.

Presenting a deep meaning-making structure shift in developmental terminology can be a bridge to see the same basic dynamic in Scripture. Once participants had been presented with the PT framework they were expected to see it more clearly in Bible passages. One clear example of BPT is where “People of no understanding... come to

understanding” (Isa 27:11, 29:24). Other verses, passages, and quotes from theologians used in the theological chapter contributed to participants understanding biblical PT by the use of non-cliché terminology.

Content was used from the theological chapter, which justified the basic model for discipleship in terms of PT: Movement from self-centered to God-centered perspective, which takes place on a continuum of “understanding.”

Fowler’s model of faith development (1981) was also presented to participants for emphasizing a shift from self-centered to God-centered perspective. Though like Mezirow, Fowler is not promoting explicitly biblical faith, both models have been utilized to access and account for dynamics of understanding on deep formative levels of being. The popularity and success of their developmental models attest to their viability, and lent credibility to their designers as being men “of understanding,” so far as they recognize the process of understanding, and their models harmonize with the general pattern found in Scripture.

It was believed that presenting biblical Christian development as PT would help participants relate to Bible passages in a way that perhaps they have not done before. In so doing, their perspective of self, God, others and their “worlds” would be transformed. That is, their core understanding would shift toward a more Christ centered perspective than previously held.

### **Perspective Transformation as the New Exodus**

The simplified three-part PT can be easily associated with the new exodus motif as it involves emancipation from misperception of self, God, others, or the world, to right perception. Dieter (2011) concludes, “By empowering adult learners’ ability to

reformulate their worldviews to more realistically interpret experience, TL offers them emancipation in the form of a new state of being” (pp. 44, 45).

Chapter 2 established the new exodus motif as a pattern of redemption repeated throughout Scripture with the exodus as a type upon which the new exodus is based. Perhaps the most vivid representation can be seen in the Apostle Peter’s own conversion experience, moving from misperception of self, Christ, others, and reality to accept the word of God as the more authoritative perception. What makes this example most useful is that this experience is so profound to Peter that he uses it to teach others. Lai (2009) demonstrated that “the Spirit’s sanctifying work in 1 Pet 1:2 echoes the New Exodus motif (p. 183).

Considering the documented results of Peter’s previous resistance to the words of Christ, 2 Peter 1:19 encapsulate the new exodus motif with God’s word as light and our thoughts as darkness. “We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place.” The dark place is easily seen as Peter’s mind universalized as every human’s perception of reality in comparison with God’s.

The New Exodus motif was a major component in this project, as it is a way for participants to see how biblical redemption involves their way of perceiving life, and not merely intellectual ascent, or doctrinal behavior. It is seen as incremental movement from misperception as darkness to right perception of self, God, others, and reality. And the difficulty of the developmental process can be visualized in the Exodus experience of the Israelites from bondage due to misperception, through a dangerous and disorienting wilderness, to a promised land of being one with God, heart, mind, and soul.

## Narrative Writing

Jones (2010) uses narrative writing exercises to access the meaning making process in his qualitative study of chaplaincy students. Narrative, he says, “seeks to communicate not only what happened in the experiences but also the emotions, thoughts, and interpretations” (pp. 79, 80). In other words, narrative writing reveals personal perspective of experiences, which is the level of thought that must be reflected on in order to transform, as already been discussed. Narrative writing was also used to assist students in the process of “making meaning retrospectively” (pp. 79, 80). So, reflecting on a past experience through narrative writing is a proven way of accessing and altering meanings associated with experiences.

Jones (2010) capitalizes on Brueggemann’s lament schema, which moves from orientation, through chaotic disorientation, to new orientation. Jones notes that “The use of the word, disorientation, by both Mezirow and Brueggemann points toward a similar understanding of the process of transformation” (p. 22).

The conjunction of three-part narrative poems with lament Psalms provided Jones with a richer understanding of the learning process within his students. Brueggemann’s scheme of orientation – disorientation – new orientation provided *him* with a “theological understanding of transformation” (p. 226). There is no indication that he used the Psalms to help *them, the students*, reflect on their experience *from* biblical material.

Though Jones’ project stops short of this project goal of having participants reflect on experience from a biblical perspective his research revealed helpful insights that contributed to this project.



Writing out experience in narrative form and then transposing it into poetry seemed potentially useful to our project. For one thing, this would double reflection potential on the experience. By writing the experience in two different ways, they would be focusing on their experience, and then refocusing their thoughts about the experience as they condense their narrative into poetry. Secondly, as Jones says, “Poetry communicates the emotional core of meaning more effectively than prose” (p. 218). This is important because we want participants to reflect on the emotional as well as the cognitive level of who they are (Prov 23:7). Writing out an experience and transposing it into a poetic format has been shown to reach that level of thought. But biblical material that addresses common personal experience must be available in order to reflect on experience from a biblical perspective.

Heys (2012) used biblically based writing prompts from the story of Ruth hoping that “participants would be led to reflect on their lives, recognize the holy, and experience spiritual growth” (p. 71). According to my research thus far, the juxtaposition of reflection on personal experience and Scripture should produce perspective transformation. Indeed, the results of her study indicated, “biblically-based creative non-fiction writing exercises can serve as tools for theological reflection” (p. 71). One participant used perspective transformational terms explicitly when she said Heys’ two-day workshop “made me look at the Bible in a new way... to relate my life to it” (p. 71).

Heys’ research supports the belief that reflecting on personal experience and biblical material may result in a new perspective of that experience. Furthermore, Heys believes other forms of Scripture, including poetry, could also serve as a basis for creative non-fiction writing (p. 72). Taken together, the research of Heys and Jones

affirms my own experience and belief that writing an experience in poetic form can access the cognitive and emotive core of one's being.

This brings us back to the importance of including feelings in reflecting on experience for transformation. The impact of emotionally charged experiences on people's perceptions of reality has been well documented (Sternberg, 2000). Goleman's landmark *Emotional Intelligence* (1995) also showed how traumatic experiences can be "emblazoned" on people's emotional circuitry, which affects his or her perception of reality without realizing it (p. 201). But significantly, Goleman noted evidence that such experiences are accessed and expressed through "art" and "story" (p. 209). This is a key finding for facilitating deep perspective transformation since reaching the affective dimension is vital to transformation.

Goleman states, "The emotional brain is highly attuned to symbolic meanings..." (p. 209). Veith, a Professor of English, shows how this dynamic works in particular. Poetry "generally operates within tangible vivid images... its words appeal to our senses... [and] requires us to picture things and respond in a personal way" (1990, p. 82).

Veith also goes on to show how Hebrew poetry would be particularly suited to PT, and this project. Hebrew poetry is based on parallelism, which says the same thing in a different way. While Western poetry "repeats patterns of rhythms and sounds, Hebrew poetry repeats patterns of ideas" (p. 87). Repeating the same thing in a different way is very close to seeing the same thing in a different way, and in fact, Veith goes on to say "Throughout Scripture, incidents are repeated, with the same facts being shown from different but parallel perspectives" (p. 87).

While poetry can access and express emotion, Hebrew poetry repetition could increase and expand reflection on experience, and take the pressure off thinking one has to rhyme verses. Furthermore, as Veith states, “Parallelism is one means by which Scripture interprets itself” (p. 87). That provides a natural entry point to present the *sola scriptura* principle to the class as a helpful way to know the perspective of God that we want to align our perspective with.

Overwhelming emotional experiences can be held up to a Psalm that is on the same emotional wavelength. This would foster identification with that Psalm, and encourage deeper reflection on that Psalm. Furthermore, a narrative of a personal experience can be transposed into poetic format, enabling participants to compare their own perspective to a lament psalm perspective. That, in turn, could help participants critically examine both perspectives, and compare differences, and hopefully appreciate God’s perspective of a personal experience enough to accept His perspective as most real.

The poetry writing assignment was perceived to be unappealing to church members. Therefore, it was presented to them as “not required, but encouraged.” Furthermore, the awakening narrative writing assignment was used as a step toward poetry writing to make it easier. This assignment was also not required, but designed to be less intimidating than poetry writing.

#### Awakening Narrative

An awakening narrative assignment was considered for several reasons. For one thing, it presented participants with a free writing exercise requiring no stipulations other than to write about a personal experience, and break it into three ordered sections. This began the reflection process, and put their experience into a structure that easily

transferred to a three-part lament poem. Most importantly, the awakening narrative provided a vehicle for participants to reflect on a piece of their life story.

DeGloma (2009) studied autobiographies from a wide variety of contexts, and found that the awakening narrative formula has long been used to “describe a major transformation of mind” (p. 5). Awakening narrative can potentially be a way to flesh out the theoretical bones of TLT in language reminiscent of Psalms:

When awakeners describe a transformation of worldview, they always move from a figuratively “lower,” “darker,” and/or “false” plane of awareness to a “higher,” “illuminated,” “true” plane of awareness. ... taking on a new set of ‘optical norms’ – established ways of seeing and knowing (DeGloma, p. 198).

The “transformation” of “worldview” from “darker” to “illuminated” reflects change on the meaning-making level of thought addressed in Scripture and TLT. DeGolma affirms that past experiences have not changed, “but rather his perception and understanding of them have” (p. 104). The awakening narrative is a vehicle to access and express the meaning making level of thought that can easily be transcribed into a three-part poem.

The awakening narrative also lends itself to my developmental model presented in chapter 2, which represents two “selves” within one person, as DeGolma finds, “Awakeners compliment their temporally divided selves by accounting for a cognitive migration from a community of darkness to a community of light” (p. 242).

The term *cognitive migration* reflects the New Exodus motif as defined in chapter 2, which is a cognitive emancipation from spiritual darkness. Likewise, DeGolma finds that awakeners always use terms of “liminality” to communicate their “jump” to a qualitatively different state of mind and portray “cognitive emancipation” (p. 198).

Liminality is the space between the two orientations, the spiritual desert. The

metaphorical “desert” has a long history of spiritual transformation, both in and out of Bible history.

Wilderness, lament and liminality come together in Fowler’s study of male bereavement in medieval literature (2011). His research shows that scholars “draw parallels between the wilderness and the mental state of such characters as Sir Lancelot, Sir Yvain, and the Black Knight...” (p. 13). Since medieval Knights have captured the imaginations of both men and women for ages this can be a way to bring the middle stage of the awakening narrative format to the attention of project participants.

For this project the middle stage of the awakening narrative was considered to be the most important one with which participants might identify. As Fowler wrote, “the wilderness reflects the inner turbulence of the man who finds himself there” (p. 15). Having participants relate their “inner turbulence” to a metaphoric wilderness stage within a three-part movement served well on multiple levels. For one thing, it provided a framework for people who had been stuck in a “wilderness” to see the experience as a stage within a larger developmental framework. This carried the potential to make the new exodus motif more meaningful to them, and therefore more likely to be understood by them.

Second, many men have been trained to squelch emotions which convey vulnerability. But medieval knights exemplify emotional vulnerability as necessary for them to fully access and transform turbulent perspectives. For men who have trouble with emotion, each of the four well known medieval texts in DeGolma’s study demonstrated that “masculinity is not immune to emotionality and that medieval men were represented as *feeling* men” (p. 4). This quote led to a discussion of King David, who was a

renowned warrior as well as a poet who often lamented. However, this project included women and once men were engaged, we broadened the discussion on expressing vulnerable emotions to be beneficial to all.

Viewing the liminal state within a lament Psalm reveals emotional expression of vulnerability in a productive manner. It allows participants to “own” the emotion associated with hard experiences, which is necessary for a true perspective transformation of depth, yet it looks forward in hope: “Out of the depths come the cries of the psalmist, and the cries of all those who have followed. The psalms of lament speak the unspeakable and name the unnamable. In doing so, they offer the hope for transformation” (Jones, 2010, p. 64).

Jones’ words capture the agony of the liminal state as well as the hope. LaRondelle harmonizes with Jones in his own study of the Psalms saying that if one would be like King David, he would express anguish and misfortune, but do so within a context that moves from “anguish to assurance” (LaRondelle, 1983, p. 16).

#### Narrative Example in Psalm 18

David’s 18<sup>th</sup> Psalm was particularly valuable to this project because of its strategic location of an awakening narrative within a lament, which seems to strengthen David’s hope for deliverance from his present liminal state. Furthermore, the deliverance David hoped for is set in parallel with the “awakening” stage he previously experienced. This links the three movements of his awakening narrative with the three movements of his lament. In addition, the awakening passage contains Exodus imagery, which in the context of the entire Psalm exemplifies the New Exodus motif. Therefore, Psalm 18 was used as a writing example for all three: awakening narrative, New Exodus motif, and

lament. Though overlapping, consideration of each mode of expression can be considered separately, all of which involves repeated acts of reflection on Scripture.

As participants recognized the PT elements in Psalm 18 they were enabled to reflect on Scripture at a *personal* level. As David expressed his struggle in symbolic terms, which transcend his own particular experience (darkness, light), condensing a personal awakening narrative into a poem where misperception is “darkness,” and awakened perception is “light” led project participants to a close identification with David and his Psalm and resulted in a deeper biblical reflection, transforming thoughts and actions.

Psalm 18 presents death, and darkness as forces of oppression (vv. 4, 5, 28), while emancipation is associated with “enlightenment” (vv. 14, 28). David is seen to represent the battle every person goes through in his struggle for light that overcomes the forces of darkness i.e., *understanding*. The aforementioned parallel between deliverance and the awakening stage translates to more than deliverance *from* darkness, but to an advancement of light; “my God will enlighten my darkness” (v. 28). David equates deliverance with an advancement of personal understanding, which fits the developmental model set forth in chapter 2.

It was important for participants to recognize that the darkness David struggled against was not simply the darkness of depression, but a lack of understanding that “prevented” advancement (v. 18). Not only is this recognition true to Scripture, it avoided the stigma associated with attending a depression program and opened the class to more potential participants. At the same time, Psalm 18 presents a wilderness experience in terms that depressed and struggling participants could resonate with. David, and others

like Job, were used to show how the depths of dark experiences have been felt by others to the point where they struggled to have any hope in God or faith in a future. Project participants were asked to write their own wilderness experiences including negative feelings and thoughts, and then see David's experience in Psalm 18 in order to identify with him, and then naturally reflect on their own deeper heart experiences.

The next step was for them to see their own wilderness experience in the lament context. They moved from seeing the wilderness state of mind as a liminal, in-between stage, which can lead to another much better state of mind than they were in before they entered their "wilderness" stage.

Psalm 18 proved to be an excellent tool for approaching several aspects of this project including awakening narrative, lament, New Exodus understanding development, and reflection on God's word. However, while Psalm 18 may exemplify two important points of PT, crisis as catalyst and seeing the same thing from a different perspective, it does not articulate them as such. Both need to be grasped clearly for participants to understand for transformation.

### Crisis as Catalyst

Disorienting dilemmas or crisis is recognized as catalysts for transformation in TLT as well as Scripture (Chapters 2, 3). The question remained as to how to harness its transformational potential for this project. The first step would be to introduce project participants to the concept of crisis as catalyst.

This can be a delicate subject for people who have related overwhelming experiences to God's providence in a negative way. Therefore, it might best be approached from outside direct biblical grounds at first. Concise quotes were used such



as James Loder's, "Disorienting dilemmas [are the] "dark chrysalis of new being" (1989, p. 180). Small excerpts from scholarly research also could be used.

Hummell's research indicates that trauma can result in a "dark night of the soul... [and] the loss of one's global assumptions about oneself, about the universe, and one's place within it" (2012, p. 42). The impact of trauma on thoughts of self, and reality can be seen here as a collapse of one's central framework. The statement also expresses the traumatic disorientation as a "dark night of the soul," which lends itself to the symbolic nature of the poem that will be assigned homework. After project participants have a chance to reflect on, and identify with the state of darkness, the next stage can be presented. Hummell goes on to say that this "dark night of the soul" can become "a vehicle for the purpose of transformation... to a further state of spiritual development... new vision of oneself, God, and the Universe" (p. 27). This reflects the second, and third stages of the New Exodus motif.

While the previous paragraph presents traumatic experience as a catalyst of deep PT, Loder offers something more by asserting that those who have experienced traumatic losses hold *greater potential* for transformation than those who do not:

One may be personally well prepared for an existential transformation by having suffered irreversible losses for which transformational narratives suggest an undoing... there may be a greater readiness to respond personally to transformational structure written out in historical terms by the action of God in Christ. (1989, p. 152)

Loder is saying that "irreversible losses" lend themselves to more readily appreciate the transformation God is offering through Christ. In this scenario, depression, or insecurity becomes an occasion "for finding the ultimate ground of the self (p. 89). If project participants understood the catalytic potential of personal crisis for knowing God

it could motivate those who have experienced them to be willing to explore these past experiences, where previously they may have resisted.

Having presented the catalytic potential of crisis as an observed dynamic of human development in other fields, I proceeded to biblical examples where crisis, or adversity is an integral part of Christian development. Bible passages in chapter 2, as well as other verses were used to further support the understanding that crisis can be seen, and used as a catalyst to grow spiritually. And verses like Lamentations 3:33 can clearly show that God “doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.”

#### Seeing the Same Thing in a Different way

As shown earlier (chaps. 2, 3), a hallmark of PT is the ability to see the same thing in a different way. Isaiah shows that adversity develops understanding that results in God’s people discarding idols like they are filthy rags, where they once saw them as worthy of worship (Isa 30:22). This is a clear case of PT.

Martin Luther is another powerful example of PT involving the word of God. He went from despising the words “the righteousness of Christ” to seeing them as though “the most beautiful” (D'Aubigne, 1992).

While PT can be presented from single Bible verses with fresh insight, the dynamic of seeing the same thing in a different way lends itself most naturally to an awakening narrative. While an awakening experience is likely to have already occurred in the lives of project participants, it may have been little reflected on, and nearly forgotten. Having participants reflect on their life story held potential to help them recognize an awakening experience, or an unresolved experience with awakening potential.

## Life Story

Streib builds on Fowler's theory of faith development, but rather than emphasizing "changing perceptions of meaning," he urges theorists to focus on individual life narrative in relation to God (cited in Estep & Kim, 2010, p. 178). Theologian, and psychologist James Loder uses well-known life narratives to observe changing perceptions of meaning. Like Loder, I used biographies to help project participants reflect on where God may have been at work in their own life stories.

Stories had potential to flesh out the bare bones model of understanding development, making it more accessible to project participants. *The Call of Stories* showed that the same people who shrugged off lectures and documentaries on prejudice responded to written stories of prejudice (Coles, 1989, p. 57).

The postmodern mind is known to be more receptive to stories. Consequently, though individual Bible verses and passages present crisis as potential catalyst, a Bible story would be more conducive to reflection and retention. The story and letters of Peter presents a life story illustrative of BPT that could provide a thread that weaves the entire project into a coherent whole.

White has been seen as a strong advocate for the impact of personal experience on public ministry. "Repeatedly, Ellen White appealed to ministers to make sure that the message had first transformed their own lives... Out of transformational experience, they can, in turn, invite others to experience the same" (Campbell, 2014). Two quotes clearly reveal this dynamic in her life. While visiting the spot where she became "a lifelong invalid" fifty years earlier she reflects:

this misfortune, which for a time seemed so bitter and was so hard to bear, has proved to be a blessing in disguise. The cruel blow which blighted the joys of earth, was the

means of turning my eyes to heaven. I might never have known Jesus, had not the sorrow that clouded my early years led me to seek comfort in Him. (White, 1985, p. 30)

Elsewhere she promotes this dynamic as a universal principle of spiritual development:

If received in faith, the trial that seems so bitter and hard to bear will prove a blessing. The cruel blow that blights the joys of earth will be the means of turning our eyes to heaven. How many there are who would never have known Jesus had not sorrow led them to seek comfort in Him. The trials of life are God's workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. (White, 1896, p. 10)

The repetition between the two passages clearly shows how a moving personal experience influenced her ministry. These two passages were used to illustrate several aspects of PT relevant to the present project. Seeing the same thing in a different way (crisis as catalyst) provides reflection on life experience from a biblical perspective. In class we can also include the verse with which she begins the second passage in order to include her harmony with the biblical perspective of bitter experiences: "When He permits trials and afflictions, it is 'for our profit, that we might be partakers of His holiness'" (Heb 12:10).

More current research supports the catalytic impact of childhood hardship when viewed in the context of life story, particularly regarding leaders (Blackaby & Blackaby, 2011, p. 38; George, Sims, McLean, & Mayer, 2007). My experience harmonizes with this pattern. Traumatic losses in early life left me in darkness. I did not fully recognize the positive effect of those "dark" experiences until I eventually found "light" in Bible answers for them. I thanked God for allowing the trauma that inspired the search that resulted in that light.

## Coursework as Catalyst

Though project participants may experience PT regarding a personal crisis, the crisis will not be facilitated in class. That is, all PT is facilitated through coursework designed to help project participants reflect on a personal experience they've had outside of class.

Pasquariello's (2009) qualitative study of catalysts and outcomes of transformative learning reveal "the strongest catalytic dimension related to triggering events comes in the form of coursework with the introduction and exploration of new understanding through lecture and assignments" (p. 77). That is, while a crisis may lead to transformation its potential might lie dormant, and "coursework" becomes "catalytic." Pasquariello cites several studies indicating "alternative understandings to Mezirow's original definition of disorienting dilemmas as crisis-driven and painful" (pp. 36, 37).

Studies found that a "... process of recognition, deconstruction, and reformulation of knowledge and understanding was directly related to engagement with coursework along with shared dialectic" (p. 88).

The ultimate goal of this project was to reflect on a personal experience in order to reframe it from God's perspective found in the Bible. However, the larger goal was for project participants to use God's word as a reliable reflection point by which to perceive and navigate life past, present, and future (Gal 2:20). Coursework for this project needed to help students reflect on personal experience from God's perspective, with the ultimate goal being to cling to God's word as "light" (Ps 119: 105).

Pasquariello's findings support the belief that Peter promotes the study of God's word for PT: "We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye

take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19). This verse was featured throughout the project, as it encapsulates the PT developmental framework, as well as Peter’s personal life experience.

### **Recruitment**

A confluence of circumstances called for extreme caution in recruiting for this project. The previous pastor had told me that in his experience the congregation was not open to a program promoting reflection for spiritual growth. This was assumed to be due to the recent high-profile controversy over the term “spiritual formation” because of a conversation with one member who became extremely agitated at the mention of the term. Also, another member financially supported the ministry of a defrocked minister who associated the term with Eastern religions. Because of the high emotional intensity, and lack of reasoning I had seen demonstrated, I determined that as a new pastor to the congregation there was a chance that I could be labeled by even using the words “spiritual formation,” or “reflection.” Instead, I presented a sermon featuring the need for reflection without using the word, “reflection” till the end. The sermon emphasized the dangers of misperceiving our experiences, ourselves, others, and God, and culminated by connecting what it means to give God glory as yielding one’s perception to the Creator’s word as the authoritative perception of reality (Rev 14:6,7).

During the sermon I mentioned that there would be an upcoming program to help people to check their perspective by God’s word and to see me afterward if interested. A more specific invitation was made at the following sermon, along with a simple bulletin announcement invited anyone over 20 years of age that was interested in biblical

transformation to see the pastor for more information, or to simply show up at 7:00 pm Tuesday evening. Tuesday was chosen to avoid conflict with the small groups already scheduled. This was communicated again via an announcement made during the main church service announcement time. Four people came to me after the service, and they were given a handout outlining the program in more detail.

The handout included the word reflection, but nobody said anything negative about it. It also stated that there would be five to seven sections, including a sermon, a one-hour Tuesday evening class, and homework consisting of reading, writing, and viewing assignments. It was also explicitly stated that no personal information would have to be shared in class.

The first Tuesday evening served as an orientation. This accommodated several people who were not able to attend until the first official class the following week.

### Curriculum

Every aspect of this project was geared to facilitate reflection on personal experience from biblical perspective for spiritual growth. The curriculum was drawn on three key tenets: meaningful personal experience or observation, critical reflection, and biblical perspective. These three areas were presented in sermons and classes, and experienced by participants in writing assignments.

Sermon based small groups (SBSGs) have been found to be effective for transformational discipleship, and to increase reflection (Harless, 2012). One element of SBSGs beneficial to this project was its most basic tenet. The mid-week class built on the main theme of the previous sermon in order to facilitate further reflection on key aspects of PT presented in the sermon.

A sermon, one-hour class, and homework assignments composed each weekly module. Five modules (sermon and class) were implemented over a six-week period, and included 10 presentations.

TL dynamics were presented and facilitated throughout the project. The developmental model found in chapter 2 provided the foundation and Peter's life and letters were seen to provide a story that could be referred to throughout the project for continuity.

### **Summary**

Reflecting on personal experiences has been shown to result in perspective transformation regarding the reality, and meaning of those experiences. A common developmental framework was seen to be useful for illuminating the worth of *sola scriptura* hermeneutics as the normative perspective to yield to.

Elements of Transformational Learning encouraged a program that used sermons in conjunction with classes and homework. The New Exodus motif provided a three-part framework to illuminate a transformational pattern inherent in Bible passages, and biographies. Lament Psalms, and awakening narratives also revealed potential for facilitating biblical PT in project participants.

Research revealed that writing an awakening narrative, and then transposing it into poetry would facilitate reflection on personal experience. Furthermore, the strategic use of Scripture in sermons, classes, reading, viewing, and writing assignments was designed to encourage reflection on personal experience from a biblical perspective.

The design of the project naturally lent itself to the use of narrative review, and a self-administered questionnaire for assessing the impact of the project. The former



provided glimpses into the meaning-making process, and perspective change as participants engaged personal experiences. The later allowed for participant perception of their experience in the project, and the degree to which perspective transformation occurred in key areas.

## CHAPTER 5

### RESULTS

The major goal of this project was to assist participants in reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective for spiritual growth. Practical aspects of the project involved recruitment, implementation, and assessment.

#### **Implementation**

##### Section 1

#### **Sermon**

The importance of giving “glory to God” (Rev 14: 6, 7) was aligned with the theme of Psalm 19. King David gave God glory by aligning his perception of reality with God’s word. That is, giving glory to God means to yield one’s own perspective to His perspective as found in His word. Peter’s conversion experience was explained in terms of a perspective transformation. He went from seeing self, God, and reality in general from his own limited perspective, to accepting Christ’s perspective as superior to his.

After connecting the importance of giving glory to God in terms of perspective transformation, an invitation to join a program that facilitates perspective transformation was made.

## **Class**

After a 10 minute sermon review, I introduced the Perspective Transformation (PT) model, and the awakening narrative format by which Peter's experience and letters may be viewed. Then, 2 Peter 1:19 was used to encapsulate his experience, as well as his teaching in terms of perspective transformation. A format was provided to assist students to write about personal experiences. It included my personal experience as an example (see Table 1):

Table 1

### *Sample of Questions and Related Answers*

<b>Personal experience</b>	<b>Your age then</b>	<b>What you thought</b>	<b>How you felt</b>	<b>Change of thought and feeling with new information</b>
(example) father died	nine	Didn't know what to think	Unprotected, insecure	Security, understanding

## **Homework**

Write an experience in awakening narrative format

### **My reflection on class experience**

Ten participants were in attendance. It was a rough start due to both printing and projection problems. No visuals and no handouts were available. The class is quiet, seemingly hesitant to respond.

## Section 2

### **Sermon**

Perspective transformation was presented in the process of Peter's conversion and his experience was related to the New Exodus motif within the three-part awakening format, which was prominent in Peter's personal experience. Peter then used this format in 1 Peter for his exhortation to his readers to be faithful (1 Pet 1:13-17).

### **Class**

Sermon review emphasized Peter's perspective transformation in the awakening/new exodus motif format and his use of the new exodus motif in his writing. The rest of the class time reinforced these elements with discussion of personal experience.

### **Handout**

Contained homework assignments and relevant quotes covered in class.

### **Homework**

Go to my blog for links including the Ted Talk with Neuroscientist Beau Lotto on perception, and the Johari Window. Write a reflection narrative of a personal experience. Write another experience, or elaborate on previous one in awakening format.

### **My reflection**

In class I simply asked if participants understood the awakening process and format. To my surprise several students spontaneously shared the content of their awakening experience. This openness corresponded with research, but was still a surprise, as the invitation to join the class included a statement that no personal information would have to be shared at any time.

## Section 3

### **Sermon**

I presented Peter's experience in New Exodus format. Then I focused on Peter's exhortation to have "active minds" for reaching God's true goal for them (1 Pet 1:13). The phrase "gird up the loins of your mind" is featured as a transference from the literal Exodus (Exod 12:11) to the spiritual exodus. I connected Jesus' reference to Peter's "conversion" (Luke 22:31, 32) with Peter's overwhelming experience when his worldview collapsed after denying Christ. He experienced a crisis in how he saw himself, his God, and reality in general. His perspective was insufficient to process his experience.

### **Class**

The sermon review emphasized that what threatened to undo Peter undid his delusional, and destructive goal pursuit instead. The lament psalm format was also discussed. Also, we touched on the working memory and how, as part of the pre-frontal cortex it can be strengthened by regular practices of biblical lifestyle teachings like studying God's word, diet, exercise, and abstinence from intoxicants.

### **Handout**

The handout repeated awakening narrative dynamics, and included an awakening poem written by a non-poet to show participants that they were not expected to be expert poets.

### **Homework**

Participants were asked to visit my blog to view video clips of conversion testimonies of people who were able to reframe personal tragedies. We also made writing prompts available online in the form of questions.

## **My Reflection**

With only two classes to go I realized that I needed to narrow the educational focus from understanding the awakening narrative format in relation to personal experience, to the practical experience of writing the awakening/lament poem.

## Section 4

### **Sermon**

Peter's transformation was explained in terms of a critical reflection on personal experience from a biblical perspective. An emphasis was placed on the two major components of transformation that are within our control: (a) reflecting on God's word, and (b) lifestyle choices that strengthen the part of the brain responsible for critical reflection such as diet and exercise (1 Pet 1:9, 13). Salvation in Christ's righteousness was mentioned to defuse any accusation of legalism in the emphasis on intentional effort on the part of the Christian. The importance of knowing the right goal was seen as vital.

### **Class**

We reviewed the sermon and discussed the tendency of Christians toward either legalism or liberalism. We also reviewed the awakening narrative format, as some of the participants still seemed fuzzy on the three parts.

### **Handout**

To focus the students in the direction of poetry writing, king David's spiritual battle in Psalm 18 was featured, which is expressed in symbolic terms of "light" and "darkness." Other examples provided were biographical narratives, and poetic examples that the participants might relate to.

## **Homework**

Participants were to transpose narratives into symbolic terms of ‘darkness’ and ‘light’ with “darkness” as a descriptor for a current or past difficulty, and “light” for describing relief from that darkness. Participants were to read Psalm 18 to see how King David’s example of this usage of terms.

## **My reflection**

I realized that five weeks is a very short time to move students this far. I think that reading through some of the major points in the handout helped students recognize what they have in them, and provided an outline for me to feed off of in class discussion.

## Section 5

## **Sermon**

Peter passionately promoted the importance of retaining an active memory of God’s word to avoid falling away from Him (2 Pet 1:12-15). His passion may be seen to be coming from his personal experience: “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word that ye may grow thereby: If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious (1 Pet 2:2, 3). Peter had tasted the sweetness of God’s grace, only after experiencing the pain of his need due to neglecting God’s word.

## **Class**

Because it was the Tuesday before Thanksgiving several participants were out of town. So we reviewed the sermon, and discussed the dynamics of the class in a conversational manner. They also filled out a questionnaire for assessing project impact.

**Handout**

none

**Homework**

none

**My reflection**

Because of technicalities the program began later than I had hoped, and ran into the holidays, which I would avoid doing in the future. I collected poems later, but did not pressure two students who did not submit a poem after a couple reminders.

**Assessment Implementation**

Measuring progress toward a goal of meaning transformation presented unique challenges. Quantitative data analysis may be efficient at reducing and summarizing data, but “statistics rely on the reduction of meaning to numbers” (O’Leary, 2005, p. 255). Since facilitating a meaning-making *process* and its assessment is the main interest of this project, qualitative data review seemed to be most appropriate. Research professor Zina O’Leary confirmed that qualitative data consideration is more effective when the goal is to “crystallize meaning” (ibid).

On the other hand, assigning poetry writing is, in the words of a church elder, “...going to go over like a lead balloon.” Clearly, the writing requirement could prevent people from attending a class, even though the writing is merely a tool for reflection. Therefore, it was repeatedly emphasized that even though a poem would be required, poetry-writing *skills* would not be. However, a challenge remained in that gathering accurate qualitative data from a poem written by people largely inexperienced and



uninterested in writing poetry could compromise the ability to discern meaning within a poem hampered by limited writing ability. Consequently, a self-administered questionnaire provided another measure of growth directly from the participant's perspective in straightforward question and answer format.

The questionnaire provided opportunities for participants to reflect on their program experience directly, but it had the potential to remind them of any particularly moving reflection experiences they had during the program. In effect, the assessment becomes part of the project itself, as it facilitates reflection. The awakening narrative and poetry writing provided reflection opportunities during the program itself.

### Poetry Writing Analysis

The purpose of this project was not to develop poetry-writing skills, but rather to facilitate reflection on personal experience, and to capture the meaning making process of each participant. Therefore, poetry review is done in this section intermingled with the key words and phrases of each poem and in past and present tense.

#### **Renee**

Renee wrote about losing her mother to cancer in an awakening narrative/new exodus format. Stage one revolves around the spreading cancer and Renee's own "panic." "How am I going to live without my mom?" she asks, and proceeds to "beg God... Cure my mom." Simultaneously, Renee has trouble sleeping until a friend prays for her, and God answers the prayer with a full night sleep, and a peace that God is in control. Renee also seemed to gain courage from seeing her mother read the Bible, particularly Job, and frequently saying, "Let me tell you what my awesome God did for me today."

Stage two begins “We said good-bye not understanding why God chose to say no to healing mom.” “Not understanding” is used twice in this section, and “why?” three times. The first two times “why” is used in conjunction with “not understanding,” but the third “why” is juxtaposed with “feeling overwhelmed with the darkness.” This arrangement parallels “not understanding” with “overwhelming darkness.” This parallel equates “not understanding” with “darkness,” and at the same time expresses something beyond intellectual “understanding” to a deeper understanding more inclusive of emotion, an existential understanding (Prov 23:7). A battle rages at the foundational level of Renee’s being. No doubt she was already feeling this, but now she captures her experience in symbolic terminology, which is equally expressive of the spiritual battle between the forces of light and darkness. Indeed she does bring her overwhelming darkness to God, much like Psalm 18. Twice in this section she mentions feeling God’s presence while at the same time “still feeling overwhelmed with the darkness.” She continues to pray, “...trusting He had a good reason to make me say good bye.” Such dependence on God despite the darkness anticipates a departure from the wilderness, like the woman in Song of Solomon.

Stage three begins with, “Spring came slowly.” Along with the actual season Renee noticed a corresponding spring in her “step.” She could “find joy in spring...” and credits God with her recovery, “He had brought me through.”

Renee’s experience is easily seen in an awakening narrative/exodus format from the darkness of not understanding to the light of understanding. Though she does not use the word “understanding” in the final stage, paralleling “overwhelming darkness” with “not understanding” in the second stage places understanding on an existential level

expressing the ground of ones being. Consequently, the re-grounding Renee experienced in the third stage is an answer to her need for understanding in the second stage. Though she did not get intellectual answers to her specific “whys,” she does gain a type of understanding that enables advancement in life, and peace with God. (Interestingly, a similar advancement of understanding is evident in the book her mother often read (Job 42:5,6). Rather than giving in to the darkness, Renee holds on to God despite the darkness. That she came through her “dark night of the soul” to stand on solid ground with God is evidenced in her last line, “I just have to be ready to meet Him [God] too.”

Though Renee may not have been fully conscious of the depth of these connections, she appears to be fully engaged in her past experience using transcendent terminology and meaning to express it in ways similar to Psalm 18. This should enable a deeper connection with the Bible, as she sees her personal experience reflected in its pages. The Psalm 18 framework reflects God’s help overcoming darkness past, but also hope for God’s help in current struggles, *based on* previous deliverance. This powerful pattern of help for future darkness could be more noticeable and therefore accessible to Renee in her future, because of her intimate experience with at least part of that pattern.

Also, because Psalm 18 was assigned reading, Renee may have used the words, and or pattern of Psalm 18 without reflecting in depth on them. Either way, it is evident that she is a veteran of the same war with unbelief that David was, whether she understands it that way or not.

## **Eric**

Eric wrote in awakening narrative format with lament qualities condensed into poetic form. In the first stanza God is “looked” for via “bookstore, church, friends, wife,

pastor.” In the second section he “caught a glimpse” of God in several of those places, but finally “experienced Him” in the next stanza, though only “a moment.” In the next stanza he experiences God in “anger, losses, disappointment, wife and kids.” The last part of the second section seems to shift when he “was down” amidst the same sources mentioned earlier. The only difference is the addition of “His word.” This is a significant addition, and another level is implied with another line break. The next stanza we find him standing on the word “declaring me righteous.” This provides a tone of certainty that in retrospect reveals a progression in the awakening format, with new exodus overtones. The final stanza reflects the new exodus promised land, “What is left for me to do – trust Him – Read Him – Pray Him.” This is reflective of Peter’s understanding “Lord, to whom would we go?” (John 6:86). It is also reflective of the symbolic meaning of the woman coming “up out of the wilderness leaning on her beloved” (Cant 8:5). The woman is a symbol of the true church, and after insecurity, and wilderness searching; she comes out of the wilderness leaning on Christ, the Word. This is an awakening narrative format with new exodus transformation. The lament format is also recognized as he finishes by declaring his intention to “trust” God no matter what life brings him. Eric’s account is sparse in feeling words, and therefore straightforwardly interpreted in basic steps.

However, transformation of understanding is clearly evident.

## **Mary**

Mary writes in simple but powerful fashion. The first four sections consist of three lines with one word in each line. Each word provokes images of singularity and detachment: “Alone” “Isolated” “Wandering.” The second section consists of failed attempts to leave the isolation behind: “Striving” “Attempting” “Failing.” The third

section elaborates on that failure to connect with strong emotional terms: “Shame, Fear, Exposure.” The first word of the third stanza projects finality, and emotional exhaustion: “Despair.” It’s as if repeated attempts at connection result in a conclusive “Rejection.” Mary seems to have accepted her place in life as “Unworthy,” of connection as if it is her identity. The first word in the fourth section supports an interpretation of finality, “Obstructed.” This word reflects David’s experience of being “prevented” by dark forces (Ps 18:5,8). Like David, Mary’s view is “Obscured” “and obstructed,” but the third line in this stanza is, “Seek God.” This is the first time “God” is connected with seeking, and it is interesting that she breaks her established form to add a subsection “just keep looking, just keep looking, just keep looking.” The effect of this break and repetition conveys a sense of desperation that could be a result of “despair,” as she casts order aside in her desperate search for connection. Another departure from established form adds a subsection to the previous subsection: “Awareness that the smallest most trivial sin would separate for eternity.” The juxtaposition of “trivial sin” with “eternal loss” and “Awareness” indicates cognitive dissonance of epic proportions. Though God was recently mentioned for the first time, the entire poem to this point now seems to be about Mary’s perception of God through a conscience as sensitive to the law as Martin Luther’s in his monastery. Her determination to seek God has to overcome a belief that the God she seeks is unreasonable, and unloving. She reaches the end of her rope with “wrenching sobs” in the “night.”

In the depth of this dark night she “claimed DA [Desire of Ages] 329.” And the next words are “Warmth” “Acceptance” “Peace” “Reality.” From this point Mary simply references verses that were used in class including Psalm 18; 37:6, and then quotes DA

329. The poetic format was dropped completely, but the content of the quotes together with the poem reflects the new exodus motif/awakening narrative format, with lament overtones.

### **Jan**

Jan begins her poem with her heartbreak over God's Word being ignored and His name being taken in vain by heathen and Christian alike. Yet she finishes her first stanza with "Am I perfect? How do I talk sometimes?" This thought reflected in each of the first three stanzas, and her struggle crystallized in the line: "Should I be pointing out the sins of others when I am a sinner myself?" She repeats, "Am I perfect?" in connection with her a desire to honor the Lord in her own conduct, and how to speak up for Him when others do not. She seems to be stuck with an awareness of her own sinfulness, amidst a sinful people, and wondering, "How do I address this issue when I hear it [see it around me]?" A strong indicator of this sense of being stuck is seen in the line "sometimes it seems hopeless. Sometimes it's so easy to just go along." Though the word "hopeless" begins the next section, Jan follows the lamentational format of Psalm 18 (promoted in class) of reaching back to past deliverances of God to strengthen her faith while in present darkness. Several answers to prayer are listed, followed by an exhortation to herself to continue in faith, to pray, and to "acknowledge Him throughout the day." Jan finishes her poem with a true lament finale, "He will answer... when the time comes."

### **Nancy**

Nancy begins "To you, O Lord, I call, my firstborn son has left the faith." The emotional impact of this statement is found in the second section: "O Lord I cry out." The image of "crying out" reflects a high level of emotional intensity, of anguish over the

loss of her son's faith. Indeed, connecting "O Lord" with the fact of her son's loss of faith in the first section, and Nancy's anguish in the second loads the phrase "O Lord" with their substance. That phrase carries the sense of anguish, and urgency into each of the poem's nine sections by its consistently repeated use. Because of this consistency I am tempted to think that we have discovered the primary theme of the poem. However, while the first two sections are related to the son, there is a shift that begins in the third section where Nancy asks, "Is it something I have done?" Though the rest of the poem does reflect Nancy's concern for her son's faith, it becomes evident that it is also about her own faith. "I believe..." "Comfort me in the knowledge" "Help me trust in your power" "[help me] rest in assurance that you are always there" "soothe my heart" "help me not be discouraged." Nancy's repeated references to her own need belie another theme of the poem. Her son's loss of faith is a real problem, but that problem is taxing her own faith. God does not seem to be answering this mother's prayers for her son's faith, but what about her prayers for her own faith? She repeatedly "cries out." The first time for her son, but in the fifth stanza the cry is for her own "comfort in the knowledge that he may return to the faith." The strength of her own faith is somehow contingent on her son's faith. But then in the next stanza the son is not mentioned in her need for faith to believe God is "always there" for her. Two sections repeat this need explicitly without any reference to her son's issue. Nancy's poem reflects the battle over belief very well. And, like Psalm 18, her final section she remembers God's presence in the past to believe in the present. "In times of trial I have always felt your peace O Lord, so I rest assured it will always be so." Though she mentions, "felt" his presence, she rests here in pure faith/belief/trust. She here wins another battle of faith.

## **Jimmy**

Jimmy wrote two pages largely in rhyme, and rhythm. This is surprising coming from an accountant. Three times he uses the word “inconsistency” explicitly, but multiple references to this theme are spelled out in other ways. The first third of the poem is about his father’s “inconsistency,” “false front,” and “blown cover.” The result of his father’s inconsistency is a personal experience of being “hollow” and “going through the motions” (which is repeated twice). The first third of the poem ends as Jimmy “avoids the man... for many a year.” In the second stanza of the poem Jimmy rejects his father’s attempts at reconciliation: “a hand that I did not take For my old feelings would not give me a break” But in the next stanza after Jimmy travels “down the road of life” he begins to see why his dad is the way he is—a “difficult youth” with no friends, or support. This look results in “regret” for not having “heart to heart” relations. However, in the next stanza begins with “The Lord helped me see,” acknowledging his own imperfection and “inconsistency.” This marks the resolution of a three-part shift, from seeing his father’s inconsistency to judging his father based on that inconsistency to recognizing his own inconsistency. Jimmy’s difficulty in traversing his experience in this awakening journey is visible in the next section “To understand another is no easy matter.” In the context of the poem, to “understand another” is to judge them more inclusively. This can either mean, as Mezirow would have it, to perceive the bigger picture of reality, or according to the biblical perspective. Though Jimmy’s last section seems to be detached from the flow of the poem, it is similar to Ecclesiastes conclusion of the matter, “Fear God” (Eccl 12:13).



## **Carlata**

Carlata writes in awakening format. Stage one orientation involves upbringing in the “light of SDA doctrine and tradition. It was a safe environment. In stage two her religious life feels “empty.” “There was no joy.” It was getting “harder to attend church.” But in stage 3 her heart is filled with God’s “light.” Bible passages she had already been familiar with are now seen “in the light of God’s love.” The result is that where God had previously seemed to be “afar off,” now “God was my best Friend.” Where in stage one she felt safe with church doctrine that safety came to feel like ritual, but now she has a “relationship.” And the result is that she “HAD to tell everyone about his new Love of my life! The context clearly indicates an overwhelming internal desire as opposed to a duty. Due to this added light Scripture now had “meaning” for her that it did not before. “Light” is associated with SDA doctrine in the first section of the awakening poem. Light is not mentioned in the second section, but three times in the third section. This indicates a qualitative progression moving from seeing the SDA doctrines and tradition as light, to seeing them in the greater light of God’s love for each one of us personally. Moving from one mention to three could be qualitatively comparable to a shift from darkness to light. This awakening format reflects an existential transformation affecting her understanding of self, God, and reality (Prov 23:7).

### **Preliminary Summary of Poetry Review**

Though participants were not experienced in writing poetry, or even interested in doing so, they were able to access and encapsulate cognitive and emotive experience in a powerful way. Every poem exhibited significant cognitive and emotional reflection and transformation.

Though participants did not always articulate transformation in terms of, “light” and “darkness,” the awakening narrative pattern was visible in each case at least implicitly.

### **Self-administered Questionnaire**

Since this project is particularly interested in how people understand themselves, and qualitative research is interested in how individuals understand themselves, a self-administered questionnaire was designed to reflect changes in self-understanding.

The poetry writing assignment provided the opportunity for participants to process a personal story in symbolic language that spared divulging personal details. This was intended to provide the possibility to reflect more deeply and honestly on experiences than they otherwise might have. But in anticipation of poor poetry writing skills it was necessary to measure perspective transformation apart from poetry writing ability. Toward that end, a self-administered questionnaire was designed. Also, in an attempt to reduce the possibility of rating their experience higher to please their Pastor, participants were not required to provide their names.

Each of the eight questions is also designed to exercise the reflective capacity of the participants. That is, they had to be aware of where they were before the class to compare with where they are after the class. It is also a chance to personally reflect on what it was in the class that brought about the change.

Participants were asked to:

“On a scale from 0-10 rate the following (0 being least, and 10 being greatest):”

1. Change in perspective of self

Results: one 5, three 6s, two 7s, one 8, one 9

2. Change in perspective of God

Results: one 4, four 7s, two 8s, one 9, one 10

3. Change in perspective of others (parent, spouse, friend, enemy etc.)

Results: one 4, two 5s, two 6s, two 8s, two 9s

4. Change in perspective of a personal experience

Results: one 5, one 6, one 7, three 8s, two 9s, one 10

5. Change in ability to reflect on Scripture (see Peter's spiritual growth with more depth)

Results: one 5, two 6s, one 7, two 8s, three 10s

6. Change of interest in studying Scripture

Results: one 2, one 6, one 7, two 8s, two 9s, two 10s

7. Change of appreciation for reflecting on life from a biblical perspective

Results: two 6s, one 7, two 8s, one 9, three 10s

8. Interest in continuing this study

Results: one 5, two 6s, one 9, five 10s

Reflection Question Averages:

- |        |        |
|--------|--------|
| 1) 6.6 | 5) 7.8 |
| 2) 7.4 | 6) 8.2 |
| 3) 6.6 | 7) 8.2 |
| 4) 7.8 | 8) 8.6 |

## Preliminary Summary of Self-administered Questionnaire

Every participant experienced changes of perspective in every category. Impact in the first five areas of perspective change—self, God, others and personal experience—can be accounted for in the different areas of emphasis in the poems. All experienced changes of perspective in each of these areas from mid to high grade. Question 5 shows marked increase in ability to reflect on Scripture. Question 6 reveals the only low score of 2, but does not account for the person’s previous ability, which may have been high or low.

Question 7 shows middle to very high range of increased appreciation for reflecting on life from a biblical perspective. Question 8 clearly reveals a strong interest in the majority of the class to continue to study.

### **Response to Questions A Through G**

The second part of the questionnaire involved attendance, and attentiveness to assignments.

Participants were asked to circle most appropriate answer: (you can circle more than one answer)

A. Sermons heard during this series 1 2 3 4 5

Results: Two 3s, two 4s, five 5s

B. Classes attended 1 2 3 4 5

Results: one 3, Six 4s, two 5s

C. Handouts read thoroughly 1 2 3

Results: Two 1s, three 2s, four 3s

D. Reflected on online readings and links a. less than half, b. more than half, c. all

Results: four “a”s, four “b”s

E. Completed writing 3 part awakening narrative Y N

Results: Four “n”s, five “y”s

F. Transposed awakening narrative into poem format Y N

Results: Four “n”s, five “y”s

G. I Read Psalm 18 a. somewhat b. thoroughly c. reflected on verses in connection with my spiritual experience

Results: Five “a”s, one “b”, three “c”s

### **Preliminary Summary of Questions A Through G:**

This section of the questionnaire reveals that even the most diligent of the students did not attend all the classes, and half of them did not attend all sermons. Again, only about half read the handouts thoroughly. Attentiveness to online assignments was divided, with no participant attentive to all online assignments. Half the class did the awakening narrative, and poetry assignments. Only three read Psalm 18 in connection with personal experience.

### **Summary of Project Implementation**

Initial reaction to the possibility of a program offering spiritual development via reflection was extremely unreceptive. However, by avoiding controversial terminology, and simply promoting the value of reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective for spiritual growth there was no problem. In fact, among the nine

participants in the program was the person who had sponsored a minister whose attack on spiritual formation was imbalanced enough that she may have rejected this program based on terminology, and not content. And even if her response to the anonymous self-administered questionnaire was the lowest she rated the experience positive, as all participants did so.

Following the basic format of a sermon based small group model served to reinforce the major points of the sermon. This may account for the ability of the participants to articulate their experiences in the awakening/lament format. However, the planned five units of class and sermon suddenly seemed to be too short after the third class and they had not even begun to write their poems. And when the poems were assigned on the fourth day the participants expressed some anxiety as well. However, despite the anxiety a remarkable ability to reflect on and encapsulate experiences was exhibited in every poem. In other words, even though it seemed like an extremely short time, it was enough for most of them. The two students that did not turn in a poem were given more time, but it became clear after several weeks that they were not going to ever turn one in.

It should be mentioned that because of body language observed when telling people that one of the requirements would be writing a poem, I decided to make it highly recommended, rather than a required task. I did not ask participants if they still would have stayed in the class if it was required. Conversely, perhaps the two participants who did not turn in a poem would have.

## CHAPTER 6

### REFLECTING ON PERSONAL EXPERIENCE FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE FOR SPIRITUAL GROWTH

#### **Summary of Project**

The goal of this project was to assist participants in reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective for spiritual growth. A sermon series highlighting Peter's conversion in terms of perspective transformation provided a framework by which to delve deeper in mid-week classes. Each of the five classes consisted of sermon review as a springboard for both universalizing and personalizing biblical transformation. Homework consisted of writing assignments, and viewing links on my website illustrating perspective transformation dynamics. Every element of the project was geared toward strengthening reflecting skills, and recognizing God's word as a reliable point to reflect on experience from. A model was provided that illustrated an ego to exocentric pattern of development common to many belief systems. But biblical spiritual development advanced according to biblical understanding that involved thoughts and feelings at the core of our being (Prov 23:7).

Participants were asked to write a personal experience in three-part awakening narrative, new exodus, and/or lament format. To encourage the fullest reflection and expression, participants were told the assignment would not be turned in. They were then asked to condense that narrative by transposing the personal experiences into symbolic

terms of “light” and “darkness,” with darkness for bad, and light for good experiences. The Poetry writing assignment was designed to process personal stories in symbolic language that could avoid sharing personal details. It also enabled the possibility of reflecting on a level deeper than mere intellect.

Psalm 18 provided an example of how symbolic terms of darkness and light could be used to express personal battles, and faith in God’s word/spirit as light to dispel the darkness. A step beyond this goal would be for participants to see his or her experience within Psalm 18 framework, and by doing so, identify with David, and what he means by “light” and “darkness.” And further, to recognize what God did in past experience, He can do for current or future trials.

## **Methodology**

### Description of Methodology

Since the meaning-making *process* and its assessment is of primary importance in this project, qualitative data was used to “crystallize meaning” (O’Leary, 2005, p. 255). Narrative writing had potential expose the participant’s process of meaning making, but potential may have been limited due to the *lack* of writing skills of the participants. Therefore, a self-administered questionnaire was designed to measure perspective transformation apart from poetry writing ability.

A self-administered questionnaire was designed to assess changes of perspective in eight simple and direct questions. A second benefit of these questions would be to help participants reflect on their experience, and what brought about the change, if any.



## Interpretation of Data

Though participants were not experienced or interested in writing poetry narrative, data revealed that they were able to access and express cognitive and emotive experience quite well. While each poem met the recommended format in varying degrees, every poem exhibited significant cognitive and emotional reflection and transformation. This transformation was not expressed in symbolic terminology in every case, yet advancement in understanding was clearly evident.

The self-administered questionnaire revealed significant changes of perspective in every category. Changes in perception of self, God, others and personal experience averaged in the upper half of the scale (Fig. 1). This reflects some of what was seen in the poems, but not all of the poems mention all the areas that are rated in this questionnaire. This may support the belief that moving someone's understanding more in line with God's perspective in one area, moves the person themselves more in harmony with God's Spirit, the fruit of which affects all areas of life. All participants experienced significant changes of perspective in every one of these areas.

A second part of the questionnaire monitored attentiveness to attendance and assignments. It revealed that none of the participants attended all the classes, and only half attended all sermons. Likewise, only half of the participants read the handouts thoroughly. Attentiveness to online assignments was also equally divided, with no participant attentive to all online assignments. Only half the class did both the awakening narrative, and poetry assignments. Only two participants read Psalm 18 in connection with personal experiences. Since the participants were not required to put names on the questionnaires they could not be matched in order to correlate attentiveness with their

poems. Not requiring participants to put their names on the questionnaires was an attempt to eliminate the possibility of rating the program highly in order to win pastoral favor.

Having all questions on the same page revealed that lower attentiveness ratings did not correlate the lower ratings of perspective transformation. The seeming dissonance between attentiveness and the high percentage of perspective transformation may be attributed to the repetition of basic perspective transformation dynamics throughout the program. The data indicates the thesis that reflecting on personal experience from a biblical perspective can lead to transformational spiritual growth.

### Outcomes

Questions and answers: Participants were invited to rate their experience on a scale from 0-10 (0 being no change, and 10 being greatest possible change), as reflected in Table 2. Participants' average response is shown in Table 3.

Table 2

#### *Change of Experience Ratings*

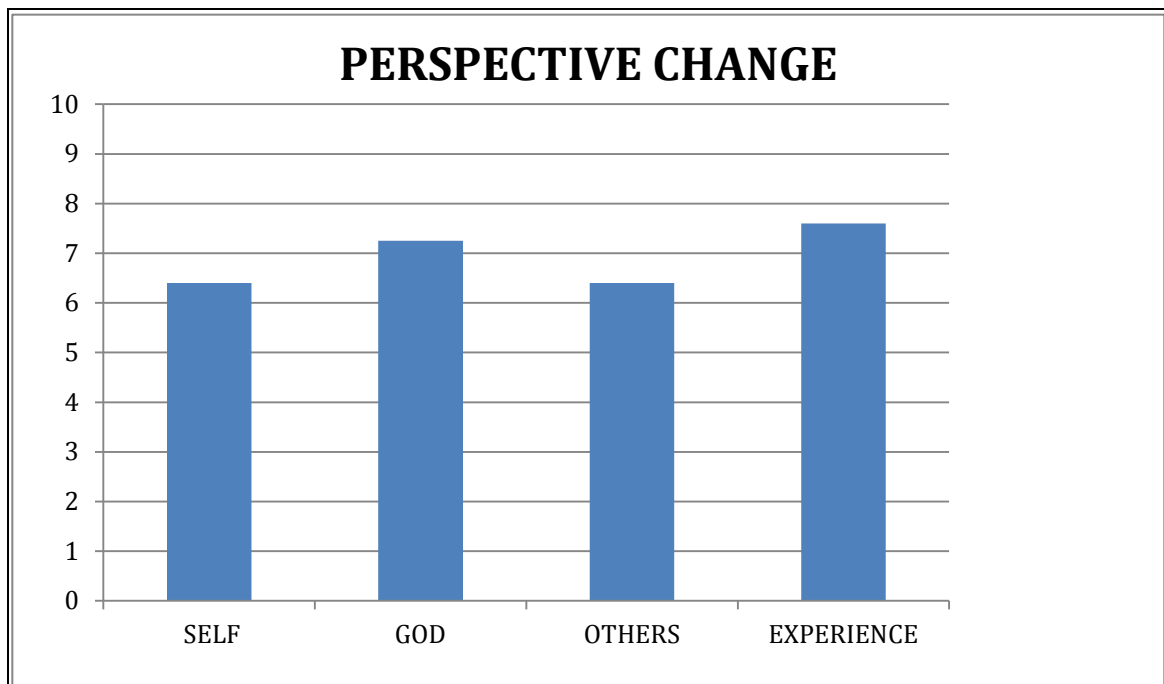
<b>Item</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>Avg.</b>
1 Change in perspective of self					1	4	2	1	1		6.6
2 Change in perspective of God				1			4	2	1	1	7.4
3 Change in perspective of others (parent, spouse, friend, enemy etc.)				1	2	2		2	2		6.6
4 Change in perspective of a personal experience					1	1	1	3	2	1	7.8
5 Change in ability to reflect on Scripture (see Peter's spiritual growth with more depth)					1	2	1	2		3	7.8
6 Change of interest in studying Scripture			1			1	1	2	2	2	8.2
7 Change of appreciation for reflecting on life from a biblical perspective						2	1	2	1	3	8.2
8 Interest in continuing this study					1	2			1	5	8.6

Table 3

*Participant Responses Averaged per Question, and Rounded to Nearest Whole*

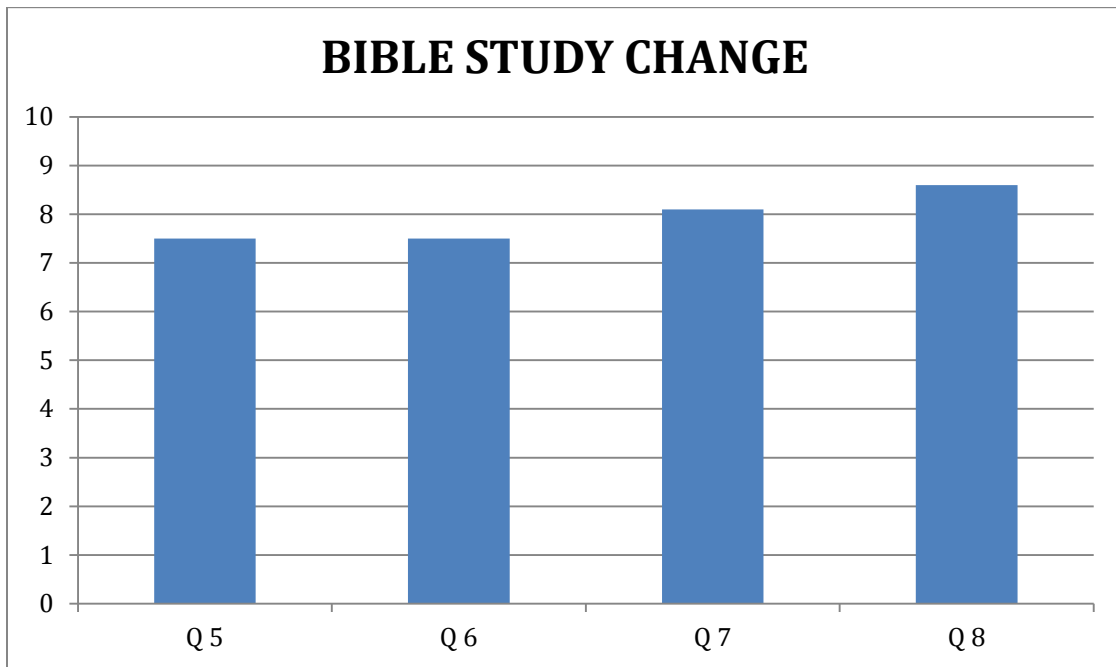
1) 7	5) 8
2) 7	6) 8
3) 7	7) 8
4) 8	8) 9

The first four questions pertain to perspective change in four vital areas: self, God, others, and personal experience. Since all participants had attended church regularly, the fact that there was any change is significant change (see Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Perspective changes of self, God others, and experience*

Questions 5 – 8 reflect change in Bible study perceptions that potentially contribute to spiritual growth.



*Figure 2:* Perceptions that potentially contribute to spiritual growth.

Figure 3 shows individual participant response to all 8 questions on a scale from 0-10.

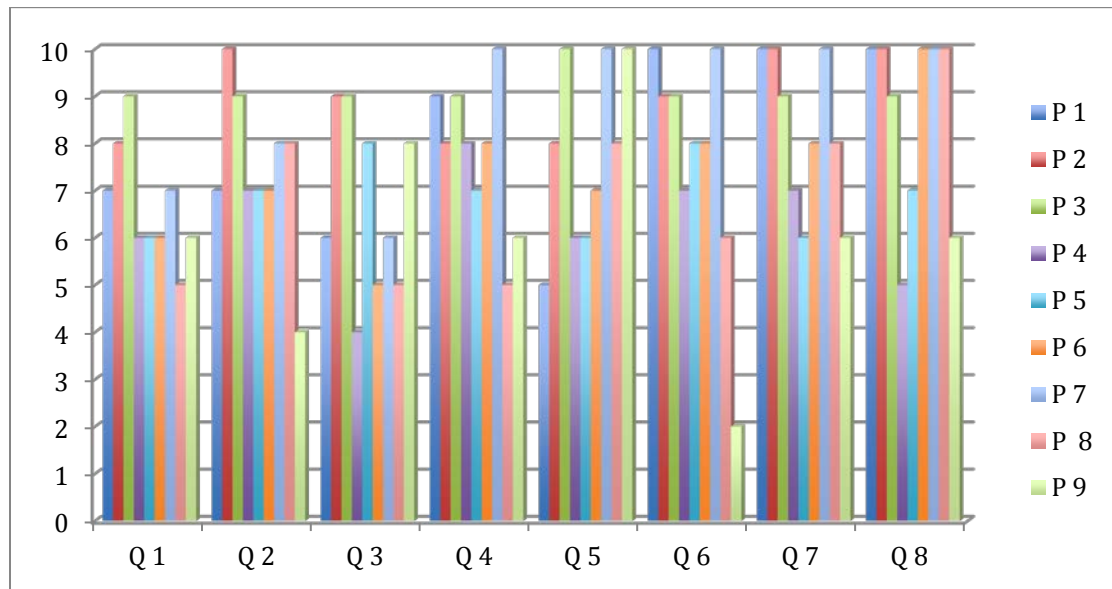


Figure 3: Response comparison of all questions.

### Poetry Analysis

So far as each participant's understanding has become more inclusive of reality their experience reflects the goals of Transformation Learning. Additionally, the degree to which each participant understands advanced in harmony with a biblical perspective that person appears to be more in harmony with God.

### Personal Professional Transformation

The time spent studying the field of spiritual development has enriched my ministry potential in multiple ways: (a) I'm better at discerning biblical spiritual development from spiritualism that so closely resembles it, (b) I am better able to articulate the story of Jesus, and why it matters in a postmodern life, (c) I can help others see their personal existential experience in scripture, (d) I am more appreciative of the

value of repetition as an educational tool, (e) I can provide a program of spiritual development that works in harmony with my own testimony, (f) Because of understanding common developmental dynamics better, I believe I am better equipped to minister to people in all stages of spiritual maturity, in and out of the church.

Seeing how *sola scriptura* hermeneutics answered the philosophical need for a consistent reflection point by which to recognize and develop one's "authentic self" was a thrilling insight. Researching the philosophical debate over the "self," illuminated a depth of meaning addressed in Scripture, but unrecognized by me until then.

### **Recommendations**

1. It may be beneficial to have participants provide their names to the questionnaire in order to compare their answers to their awakening poem. Though it may risk a higher participant rating of the program to curry pastoral favor it may be worth the risk.

2. Add the question, "Have you ever spent much time writing or reading poetry?"

3. Increase the length of the program to at least seven weeks in order to connect the participant's experience more solidly with Psalm 18.

4. The intervention and assessment of this project should continue in the Wanamaker Church to determine long-term practical impact.

5. A formal longitudinal study in another church would be helpful to determine to what degree these changes might affect participants on a long-term basis.

6. The findings of this study carry the implication that this program could provide a new framework for an evangelistic series to connect with un-churched individuals, or as a revival series to advance maturity in current members.

## Summary and Conclusion

In chapter 1 a model and method was seen to be needed for fostering biblical spiritual development at every stage beyond intellectual “knowledge” to “knowing” God. In chapter 2, the Bible revealed a pattern of biblical spiritual development that combined experience and study (1 Pet, Gen 12, Isa, Deut). Reflection on personal experience from a biblical perspective was clearly seen as a developmental pattern in Scripture. In Chapter 3 we observed biblical methods of fostering understanding in transformational learning (TL), philosophy, psychology, and neuroscience, and considered their use for advancing understanding, and knowing God. Debate over the popular idea of the “authentic self” highlighted the value of sola scriptura hermeneutics for a consistent reflection point by which to recognize and develop one’s “authentic self.” A cursory awareness of philosophical concerns over the “self” illuminated a depth of meaning addressed in Scripture that would likely gain the attention of class participants.

Chapter 4 combined insight from the two previous chapters to provide a base for the development of a method for promoting biblical spiritual development using TL. The resulting project was a five-week series of sermons, classes, and homework.

Qualitative and quantitative data revealed that presenting reality from a biblical perspective using the “fresh language” of neuroscience, social science, psychology, TL and English literature (awakening narrative) proved to be enlightening for participants of this program. So far as each participant’s understanding has become more inclusive of reality they meet the goal of Mezirow’s perspective transformation (PT). And so far as that reality is in line with Scripture they meet the goal of biblical perspective transformation (BPT). Furthermore, as each participant’s understanding advanced in

harmony with a biblical perspective the person is believed to have moved, or grown closer to God.

Despite high anxiety over the poetry writing assignment, an impressive ability to reflect on and encapsulate experiences was exhibited in every poem. Furthermore, according to the self-administered questionnaire, every participant experienced significant perspective transformation in almost every category. This change equates with biblical, spiritual, and personal growth in harmony with our conceptual model development (Appendix A). The addition of the second part of the questionnaire revealed that this change occurred even without complete attendance or attentiveness to assignments. This was perceived to mean that even a little reflection goes a long way toward personal transformative understanding.



APPENDIX A

Conceptual Model of Biblical Spiritual Development

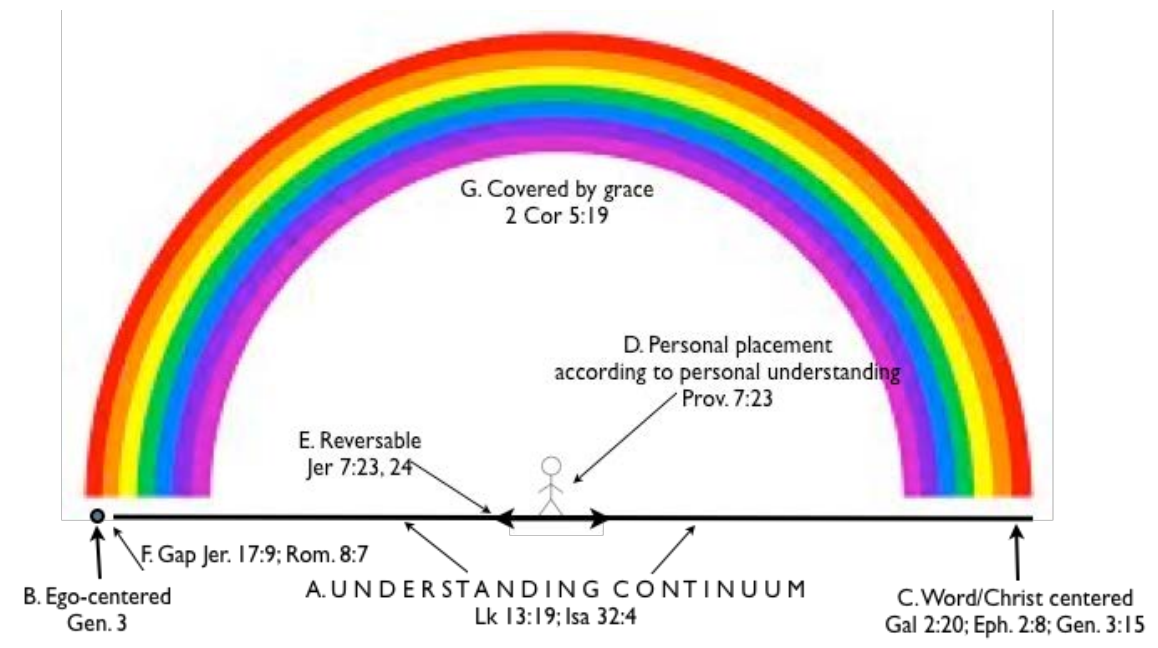


Fig. 4: Conceptual Model of Biblical Spiritual Development

The biblical model of spiritual development shows the dual construct of human nature as composed of both ego-centered (B), and Christ-centered perspectives (C). Development moves along a continuum of understanding (A), toward increased Christ centered understanding/perspective. Individual placement on the spectrum is according to the degree of understanding held in common with God (D). Since “understanding” refers to a person’s core worldview, or being, intellectual acceptance of “*an* understanding” without living in accordance with that understanding is not considered to be biblical “understanding.” Furthermore, one may lose the understanding one currently holds (E). The gap between the ego-centered self, and the understanding continuum (F) reflects the inability of the fallen nature/self to know or understand God. The gap also shows that biblical spiritual development is not a program of ego development. That is, while an unconverted person may have understanding in harmony with God, that understanding is seen to come from God regardless of the person’s awareness of the fact (Gen 3:15; Rom 2:14). Similarly, Christians also may be unconscious of the source of one’s own right thought or action as being of Christ. The understanding that advances in harmony *with* God is empowered *by* God who works in and through people (Phil 2:13), and the entire developmental process is covered by the grace of God (G). This includes the fallen self for some time (B). That is, while understanding is a gift available to all, it is accepted, and held to by few. The goal of this program is to recognize and facilitate that experience within this framework.

A secular version of this model is offered with certain qualifiers. Philosophers, along with other developmental theorists, often use words and phrases that mean one thing to them, and another to those outside of their respective disciplines. Therefore, at

first glance one might think a philosopher harmonizes with Scripture, but a closer look at the meaning at the use of words in context often betrays a different meaning. Heidegger, for instance, seems to promote a version of authenticity exalting egocentricity (2008, p. 434), but also makes a statement seemingly against egocentricity (p. 225). This apparent contradiction frustrates attempts to place him solidly in the model, even though aspects of his thought harmonize with the biblical perspective of reality. This frustration may result from his lack of a consistent reflection point to define God, others, or self (Bialystok, 2009). Heidegger's system exemplifies a common lack among developmental models (Mezirow, Fowler, Schon, etc).

The egocentric to exocentric development pattern has been seen as a common basic framework in religious, and secular groups alike. The content within this framework varies, based on the content of the primary reflection point in each particular school of thought. For example, postmodern theorists espouse rejection of meta-narratives in general, but exhibit them in practice.

Heidegger bases authentic "potentiality-of-being" on recognition of one's self as a "being-towards-death" (2010, p. 255). That is, death becomes a reflection point for authentic being. This is similar to Nietzsche's perspectivism, which seems to see the "abyss" as ultimate reality. Nihilistic postmodernism implicates meaninglessness as ultimate truth, and acceptance of this belief as ultimate perspective transformation (Nietzsche, 1969, p. 298). In this sense, nihilistic postmodern perspective transformation places meaninglessness as a reflection point by which to interpret reality. Furthermore, it seems to portray the egocentric 'self-out-of-relation' as the "authentic self." This may be

congruent with Heidegger's version of authenticity as freedom from the "they-self" or self-in-relation.

Loch's *Essay on Understanding* emphasized personal judgment in relation to individual understanding, which harmonizes with our model. But his reflection point for developing personal understanding exalts reason over revelation, which places human reason in the place of ultimate reflection point (1690, pp. 692-695). Mezirow and Gadamer used the terms "reality" and "understanding" for governing the meaning-making process, but lacked ethical considerations such as meaning, and discernment. Likewise, while Fowler's popular faith development program emphasizes egocentric to exocentric perspective transformation in harmony with our program, it is criticized for its lack of content for discerning between right and wrong (Estep & Kim, 2010, pp. 177, 179). Major Eastern religions follow the same pattern, but negate visible reality as illusion, and see the pinnacle of exo-centricity as a loss of individuality.

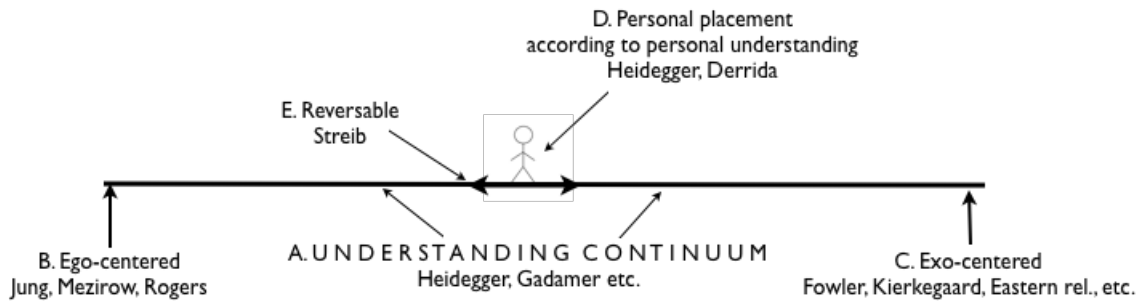
While these systems of thought both harmonize with, and diverge from biblical thought they can also foster a more careful look at Scripture. For instance, Heidegger's epoch perspective-transforming connection of Being with time harmonizes with Scripture. Therefore, it holds potential for bringing postmodern Christians and non-Christians to appreciate the Bible, which held this perspective long before Heidegger. Furthermore, Heidegger also draws attention to a subtle difference between Being and perception when he says that "Being is that which shows itself in the pure perception" (2008, p. 215). While Being and perception appear to be the same in this statement, the larger context makes it clear that he is referring to two interrelated entities. While this appears to contradict the biblical statement that says people are what they think in their

hearts (Pv 23:7), seeing that verse in its context may corroborate with Heidegger's understanding. That is, though He makes no mention of attempting to do so, Heidegger's account illuminates what is already in Scripture. He articulates how core thought/perception/WV and being are interrelated in a way that allows for both individuality and oneness similar to biblical truth. A person is individually a being, but his or her individuality does not exist apart from God who is life. Heidegger sharpened my understanding of the Bible without intending to do so. He is an example of the statement, "so, as far as their teaching is true, do the world's great thinkers reflect the rays of the Sun of Righteousness" (White, 1903, p. 13).

With these things in mind we envision a developmental model overlapping with our biblical model of development as a conglomerate of sources respected in secular circles. However it is quite possible that we misrepresent the intricacies of their programs due to our lack of expertise in their respected fields, and philosophies.

In this model, various developmental theorists posit egocentric (B), and exocentric (C) selves, or perspectives, with development taking place along a continuum of understanding (A), with personal placement on that continuum according to one's personal understanding/perspective/worldview (D). However, unlike the biblical model, it is a program of ego-development without the gap (B), or the grace (G), which covers and empowers understanding development. In this scenario external change of behavior is possible, but transformation in the biblical sense is still lacking.

**Fig. 5** Conceptual model of secular human development



While postmodern philosophy argues for equality of all opinions, the Bible distinguishes itself from among them by offering prophecies that have come true. This knowledge of the invisible future begs trust in its perspective (interpretation) of other invisible realities such as the authentic self, life after death, God, the future, and the meaning of reality.

A pristine perspective is found in God’s word, illuminated to us by the Holy Spirit who inspired it for us (2 Tim 3:16), to grow in harmony with Him. Though we see through the mirror “darkly,” we will “know as we are known” at Jesus return (1 Cor 13:12). In the meantime we grow in our ability to understand and harmonize with it (Rev 14, Eph 4).

As theorists and spiritual leaders specify different particulars in the exocentric reflection point the direction of understanding is altered. Gadamer studied all modes of understanding and concluded “understanding belongs to the being of that which is understood” (2013, p. xxviii). That means the reality of the object sought determines the degree and direction of the line of understanding toward it. That implies a position and direction of the seeker in relation to what is sought. This allows for a theological

transposition accounting for the variety of religions in the name of God, according to their ideas of God.

Likewise, placing the Bible in the exocentric reflection point, or perspective position determines the content and direction of understanding. Insisting on *sola, prima,* and *tota scriptura methodology* is more particular still. While one may know the Bible, the Goal is to *know*, as in *become one with* God through His word (John 17).

The Bible does not talk *about* God nearly as much as it *reveals* God's perspective, His "worldview." In other words, God's worldview permeates Scripture. Consequently, as we increase in ability to from the perspective of His word we synonymously grow closer to God. That is, a shared perspective implies a proximal position of relational oneness. Obviously someone may grow closer to God by understanding what Scripture says about God, but how much closer by sharing His thoughts, His perspective of reality (Psa 37: 6; 39:17). Consequently, the more we yield our understanding of life to *sola, prima, tota scriptura* hermeneutics the more we see life from God's perspective. And the closer we are to seeing ourselves, our friends, our work etc. from God's perspective the closer we are to Him. Physically speaking, a common perspective implies physical proximity. Spiritually speaking, the degree to which I understand something in harmony with God implies oneness with God.

Passion for oneness with God, or "the One" is shared with Plotinus, and mystics of various persuasions, but we diverge from those who would see ultimate communion with God *sans* thought. Furthermore, exalting thoughtlessness to the height they do implies an ultimate governing point of reflection that potentially corrupts the meaning of aspects of any program that overlap with biblical Christian development. Similarly,

though the secular model shares commonality with the biblical model the cover of grace precludes the latter program from being one of works to reach God, but rather a model of increasing intimacy in knowing God.

The absence of reflective content, and or consistency in developmental programs makes for unstable ground to build a consistent model, define the authentic self, or orient oneself to reality. However, people buy into schools of thought without critically reflecting on the foundational reflection point on which those systems of thought stand. This may be at least partially due to a ‘ground up’ adoption pattern. That is, people are cultured to believe certain things about the meaning of self, God, and eternity, and often absorb beliefs in particles without critical reflection of the whole (Wilkins & Sanford, 2009). Conversely one may join a group of ‘believers’ because they are good company. Simply put, people do not often critically analyze the thought systems they ascribe to, and sentimental attachment to beliefs associated with formative relationships often precludes critical reflection until either crisis, or good education is experienced.

Critical reflection on *sola scriptura* hermeneutics revealed a reliable, and consistent reflection point by which to interpret reality, especially in comparison with others. It was determined to begin this project by calling attention to the common pattern of meaning making, and the question of how to choose between them featuring how the Bible distinguishes itself from the pack.



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