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The Impact of Intentional Learning Experiences for Personal Spiritual Formation on Seminary Students

Carol M. Tasker
Andrews University

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THE IMPACT OF INTENTIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION ON SEMINARY STUDENTS

A Dissertation

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Carol M. Tasker

December 2001
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FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION
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Carol Margaret Tasker

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ABSTRACT

THE IMPACT OF INTENTIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION ON SEMINARY STUDENTS

by

Carol M. Tasker

Co-chairs: Jane Thayer, Jerome Thayer
ABSTRACT OF GRADUATE STUDENT RESEARCH

Dissertation

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Title: THE IMPACT OF INTENTIONAL LEARNING EXPERIENCES FOR PERSONAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION ON SEMINARY STUDENTS

Name of researcher: Carol M. Tasker

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Problem

Many seminary students describe their time in seminary as a spiritual desert. Most Protestant seminaries do not provide spiritual formation classes for their students, thinking that such measures are unnecessary or inappropriate for theological education, or assuming that the church is the place for spiritual formation to take place. Nevertheless, pastors are expected to be spiritual leaders, and the pastor’s spirituality is ranked by laity as the highest priority needed by seminary graduates for effective church ministry.

A literature survey of theological education shows that, in the last 150 years, students have consistently recognized their need for help with personal spirituality, yet
these needs remain largely unmet, with faculty feeling ill-equipped and uncertain about how to offer personal help for the spiritual life. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of a 10-week required class in personal spiritual formation for pastors in training.

Method

More than 2,100 pages of data were collected from 120 students (40 nationalities) over a period of 2 years. Pre-course questionnaires, field notes, weekly journals and reading reports, transcribed focus groups and interviews, reflection papers, and follow-up questionnaires revealed the impact of the four major intentional learning experiences in the class: the day-retreat, the learning about spiritual disciplines, the required 4 hours (weekly) of practicing spiritual disciplines, and the weekly accountability small groups.

Results

The retreat was the catalyst for increasing honesty and openness with God, self, and others. Learning about different spiritual disciplines through lectures and reading brought increased enthusiasm and variety to personal devotional times, while cultivating habits of consistency increased appreciation for God’s love and character. The small groups brought many benefits including accountability and mutual encouragement. The positive impact of the class extended to family members, church members, future ministry plans, and the unchurched. The uniqueness of impact on individuals was portrayed in student vignettes.
Conclusion

Students grew personally and spiritually in diverse yet beneficial ways, and were grateful for life-changing attitudes, perceptions, and habits, regarding spiritual formation as a highlight in their seminary experience. The teacher’s own authenticity and commitment to personal spirituality were seen as crucial factors.
Dedicated to

my husband, David,

my wonderful encourager and supporter

who always had time to deal with my computer problems—

even in the middle of Hebrew exegesis and writing his dissertation!

And to our delightful children who were students with us for four years, and then

in the final year of writing all left the nest—

Stephen to learn Spanish in Argentina;

Nathan & Janel for their first year of marriage in Oregon.

It has been a rich and unforgettable journey for us all—

Our God is an awesome God.
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Not only has this dissertation benefitted from your contributions, but my life has also been enriched in the process. With joy and gratitude "I thank my God, for every remembrance of you," Philippians 1:3.
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

How do ministers in training view God and how comfortable are they in His presence? When and where and how is a personal relationship with God cultivated? To what extent should a theological seminary concern itself with the spiritual formation of its students?

Expectations for Spirituality in the Seminary

Despite students, administrators, and church members having different priorities for theological education, they all assume that spirituality will be addressed in the seminary in some form. Their various concerns are exemplified below.

Student Concerns

Eugene Peterson (1993) reveals that the most frequently voiced concern of men and women who enter seminary has to do with spirituality. “They commonly enter seminary motivated by a commitment to God and a desire to serve their Lord in some form of ministry, and then find that they are being either distracted or deflected from that intention at every turn” (p. 4). He goes on to say that 40 years ago, seminaries were regarded as graveyards of spirituality where men and women lost their faith. Forty years
later, after both attending and teaching in a number of seminaries, he has found no evidence to suggest that these claims were exaggerated. "Seminary education is dangerous—and many have lost their faith in its classrooms and libraries" (p. 4). These sentiments are echoed by Robert Banks (2000), who admits that in a 1992 survey of seminaries, less than 40% of the students felt that their experience had helped them grow spiritually. One student lamented: "My time in seminary was spiritually speaking, the driest time in my life" (p. 200). One possible cause could be the problem of competing pressures of academic studies upon students' spiritual development, "which tend to choke out or remove to the periphery serious concern for an integral life of faith" (Edwards, 1980, p. 15). Another survey of a large well-known theological college found that 93% of students studying for the ministry said, "I have no devotional life" (Landes, 1979, p. 1). The concern for student spirituality is not restricted to students, however.

Administrator, Faculty, and Staff Concerns

Leaders of training institutions for ministers are also concerned about the spiritual life of their students. Terry Hulbert (1988) reports that at a meeting of deans of thirteen leading evangelical seminaries in the United States, "the subject which elicited the greatest concern and lengthiest discussion was the quality of the spiritual life of our students and ways in which we could help them grow" (p. 38).

The discussion is not new. In 1972, a foundational report on spiritual development was published by the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS) titled, *Voyage-Vision-Venture: A Report by the Taskforce on Spiritual Development*. The
opening statement observed that for a number of years, “a priority issue of major dimension is that of spiritual development of persons preparing for ministry” (Babin et al., 1972, p. 1). This concern was in contrast to issues of theological education in the mid-60s that focused on a quality education that would be experientially based and related to contemporary culture. However, increasingly the concern of laity, church leaders, and seminary presidents was that there should be a clear message accompanied by appropriate steps that would give the assurance that “those sent out to be preachers, teachers and church leaders should not only know about the eternal God but that they should know firsthand the One to whom the scriptures bear witness” (Babin et al., 1972, p. 1).

Seminary faculty also have concerns about spiritual formation. Between September 1979 and March 1980, six regional conferences, representing a broad spectrum of denominations and schools, identified some major faculty concerns. First, they were worried about how to “develop, model, and offer personal help for the spiritual life” (Edwards, 1980, p. 14). Second, they questioned whether they themselves are adequately equipped for such a task. Third, faculty wondered how to approach spirituality in classroom teaching—whether by special classes, or whether by integrating spirituality in the academic subjects, as well as personal, professional, and community arenas. Fourth, faculty wanted to know how seminaries can assist the spiritual life of spouses and families of seminarians (pp. 12-20).

Concerns of the Church Members

Focus groups conducted by E. Lynn and B. G. Wheeler (1999) revealed that
church members do not know what is taught in seminary training, except for the widely acknowledged “Greek and all that theological stuff” (p. 2). Lay members think that the academic part of a minister’s training is more than adequate, while they see that the practical training is lacking. A Roman Catholic member felt that theological education and knowledge were very important, that interpretation of the Bible was extremely important, but that the most important issue was how one relates the knowledge to the people being served. A religion reporter added, “Get out of those classrooms sometime, get out to meet the real people, talk to the people, and see what they need” (p. 2). Still another voice admitted that while seminary education gives one discipline, “it certainly doesn’t give you the Spirit of God that you should have” (Lynn & Wheeler, 1999, p. 4). Clearly, church members, students, and clergy recognize a need for spiritual renewal and practical experience that goes beyond the current academic training of pastors.

Competing Priorities for Pastoral Training

When the Murdock Charitable Trust (Morgan, 1994) asked more than 800 pastors, lay people, and seminary professors what abilities seminary graduates needed for effective church ministry, the results were dramatically disparate. Table 1 shows the ranked priorities for pastoral training according to the perspective of lay persons, pastors, and seminary professors. Laity saw spirituality as the top priority for pastoral training, pastors rated it in fourth position, while the professors did not even rank spirituality in the top five places. On the other hand, theological knowledge was the foremost consideration for professors, but ranked fifth for both pastors and laity (Morgan, 1994, pp. 74-78).
Table 1

The Perfect Pastor

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<tr>
<th>Lay Priorities</th>
<th>Pastor’s Priorities</th>
<th>Professor’s Priorities</th>
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<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>Spirituality</td>
<td>Relational Skills</td>
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<td>Second</td>
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The Need of Spiritual Formation for the Pastor

Consequently, how necessary is the pastor’s personal spiritual life and what obstacles may prevent its nurture? There are at least seven perspectives to consider. First, the faith of some pastors in training can be significantly shaken in the process of their theological education, and not all faculty may appreciate the impact this has on their students. Virginia Cetuk (1998) talks of “many conversations with students whose primary goal had become graduating with some shred of faith intact” while trying to satisfy faculty requests of curricular requirements (pp. 33, 34).
The struggle to reconcile pre-seminary faith with what is being learned at seminary can leave students confused and uncertain regarding what is true and how one's faith can be maintained, resulting in all kinds of physical and psychological symptoms of stress, says Gary Harbaugh (1984a, p. 58). He observes that when faculty sensitively minister to students in holistic ways, balance is restored to the students' lives, and these pastors in training are then better equipped for future tasks of helping other people as they struggle through their life transitions. Intentional spiritual formation initiatives in the seminary can therefore assist in bringing more balance to a largely academic program (pp. 59-60) and support students in a time of spiritual, mental, and emotional upheaval and change.

Second, Roy Oswald's 1980 research of seminary graduates from 10 seminaries, which reviewed their first 3 years following graduation, indicated that these new pastors recognized a "personal vacuum" and "a sense of failure in maintaining their own sense of spiritual feeding and growth" (p.18), as they experienced a decline or loss of spiritual wholeness. For many, the beginnings of their spiritual demise began with their call to Christian ministry. Having passed the academic hurdles of entering seminary, they assumed that any doubts or questions would be addressed during their training, and that the academic studies and chapels would make them spiritual giants. As graduation grew closer, and feelings of inadequacy in the realm of personal spirituality remained, students believed that spiritual growth would automatically "take an upward turn" once they began parish ministry. It was only in hindsight that these graduates realized they had gone through 4 years of seminary without once being asked about their personal life, their personal relationship with God, or how their spiritual lives might be nourished. When
things got worse instead of better in the field, they felt “trapped without skills and resources” (p. 18). The situation was made more painful for these pastors because of the high congregational expectation that pastors were the source of spiritual nourishment, thus making it difficult for these pastors to seek spiritual help for themselves.

Ellen White (1948) adds a third perspective, when she links a lack of a personal relationship with God with ineffective pastoral ministry: “The reason why our preachers accomplish so little is that they do not walk with God. He is a day’s journey from most of them” (p. 1:434). Furthermore, she suggests that all those in training need the quiet hour for communion with their own hearts, with nature, and with God. . . . They need to have a personal experience in obtaining a knowledge of the will of God, and individually hear Him speaking to the heart. . . . ‘Be still and know that I am God,’ Psalm 46:10. (White, 1905, p. 58)

She sees daily personal communication with God as effectual preparation for all workers for God, resulting in a life that will reveal divine power and reach people’s hearts. It appears that the pastor’s personal relationship with God, which often seems either forgotten, neglected, or taken for granted as an already functioning part of the pastor’s life, is at the heart of successful and satisfying ministry.

Fourth, George Barna’s more recent research (1993) concurs with White (1905). Barna notes that many pastors are so frustrated, unsatisfied, and overwhelmed by their work that they turn inward for strength, rather than upward for God’s guidance and power. He concludes:

Those of us who conduct research on the spiritual lives of pastors, have reason to wonder if perhaps greater attention needs to be placed on developing his closeness to God, before he can exhort others to devote themselves to following the Creator. (1993, p. 164)
Fifth, Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) young people are looking to pastors to model a life lived in relationship with God, as identified in the Valugenesis report analyzed by Roger Dudley (1992, pp. 270-272). This study of 13,000 (SDA) youth in North America, designed to gain a picture of the value system of SDA youth (Kijai, 1993), reveals that youth are wanting a deeper personal relationship with God and feel that undue importance is placed on the peripherals of religion. On the basis of these findings, Dudley makes three recommendations to pastors which directly relate to the issue of spiritual formation.

Pastors and church leaders need to:

a. Consistently model life lived in relationship with God (Dudley, 1992, p. 272)

b. Preach and teach that religion is basically a matter of relationships, with God and fellow humans, rather than a system of beliefs or a code of behavior (pp. 270, 271)

c. Give new emphasis to practices that make a rich devotional life (p. 271).

When young people were presented with a list of topics and asked how interested they would be in learning more about each one at either school or church, the topic "gaining a deeper relationship with God" attracted the highest interest with figures of 74% for the school setting, and 77% for church (Dudley, 1992, pp. 23, 24). These young people want to learn more about nurturing their spiritual lives and are looking to pastors to show them how.

Sixth, evidence of a link between spiritual formation initiatives and church growth has been furnished by the 2001 Faith and Communities Today (FACT) which studied 14,000 United States churches, synagogues, and mosques. The relevant conclusion drawn from the 406 participating SDA churches states that "the activity most likely to generate
growth among Adventist congregations is the congregation focusing on helping individuals develop a relationship with God, and helping persons deepen that relationship” (Ryan, 2001, p. 547).

Finally, the Bible itself is clear that a personal (intimate) knowledge of God is closely related to eternal life when the apostle John states: “Now this is life eternal: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).

Statement of the Problem

It is evident from the above statements of researchers, seminary students and faculty, church youth and church leaders, and the Scriptures that the pastor’s personal spiritual life is important, yet it appears that classes promoting spiritual formation have typically not been given high priority in pastoral training.

George Knight (1985, pp. 175-179) observes that SDAs have too often taught religion on an intellectual level and have therefore failed to bridge the gap between knowledge and experience, despite the warning that in all human experience a theoretical knowledge of truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul (White, 1940, p. 309). Many of the SDA colleges, universities, and seminaries responsible for pastoral training do not address personal spiritual formation in their curriculum. Indeed, when administrators of 42 SDA universities and tertiary colleges from around the world were personally asked the question in April 2001, “Does your institution teach any classes in personal spiritual formation?” only 7 responded in the affirmative. Many needed an
explanation of the class content before they could answer, thus indicating not a lack of interest, but a lack of awareness in the area of teaching for personal spiritual formation.

Walter Liefeld and Linda Cannell (1992, p. 246) observe that resistance to spiritual formation centers around the concerns that the church is the proper environment for spiritual formation, that legalism will eventually characterize such programs, and that the spiritual environment of the seminary is healthy enough without such a program.

Furthermore, there is a shortage of teaching faculty/staff who feel competent, confident, and called to become involved in the spiritual nurture of their students (Edwards, 1980, pp. 12-20), and even institutions committed to enhancing the spiritual life of their students are at a loss to know just how to go about the task (see Cetuk’s comment on Janet Fishburn’s study on seminaries in 1992, in Cetuk, 1998, p. 195). For example, Paul Bassett’s survey of 81 American evangelical seminaries (as cited in Johnson, 1993, p. 7, see also P. Bassett, in press) found a unanimous belief that a personal relationship with Christ is central to theological education, yet only 8% attempt to explain the why or how of this belief. And although 95% of these institutions include the student’s spiritual welfare in their mission statements, only 21% of these institutions offered anything more regular for the student’s spiritual development than chapel services (Bassett, 1991, as cited in Johnson, 1993). Clearly the issues cluster around a lack of awareness concerning both the need for personal spiritual formation and the means of nurturing it.

**Research Purpose**

It is the purpose of this study to document, describe, and analyze the impact of
intentional learning experiences for personal spiritual formation on seminary students at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, in terms of attitudes and behaviors.

Research Question

The Spiritual Formation class was introduced at Andrews University in the SDA Theological Seminary with the intention of nurturing the spirituality of pastors in training. This study captures both qualitatively and quantitatively the impact of the class by answering the following research question:

In what ways were the attitudes and behaviors of students in the 1999 Spiritual Formation class at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, impacted by the four intentional learning experiences:

1. the retreat
2. the learning about spiritual disciplines
3. the practicing of spiritual disciplines
4. the accountability small groups?

Assumptions

The research project extends beyond the typical educational setting of learners and teachers, and includes a spiritual dimension. The following two assumptions are therefore necessary.

1. Spiritual growth is primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. Based on the description of the Holy Spirit in John 3, humans can neither explain nor describe how He works, but they can describe some of the “visible” effects of His work. Therefore this
dissertation concentrates on describing the perceived impact (effects) of the Holy Spirit, in the context of the personal spiritual formation learning experiences.

2. Spiritual disciplines have value only as far as they foster communion with God (G. Smith, 1996, p. 87), since their function is to “place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (Foster, 1988, p. 7).

Most importantly, however, is the realization that because spiritual formation is a process of God at work,

no one can program, mandate nor control spiritual formation in others. It can only occur as persons respond freely to God’s grace. Spiritual formation is so holistic and pervasive that each person must take initiative and participate willingly. Efforts to foster spiritual formation in others have to take the form of example, encouragement and guidance. Nevertheless spiritual formation is not optional for those who minister and lead in the name of Christ. (W. Smith, 1996, p. 136)

Significance

This research project has the potential for significance in at least four areas. First, since few SDA schools or colleges have attempted to introduce classes in spiritual formation into their curriculum, this study will describe the class format and the impact of intentional learning experiences on seminary students who represent a variety of cultural backgrounds. The findings provide data to assist church leaders and educators in assessing the relative importance and value of courses in personal spiritual formation, thereby assisting them in decision making concerning curricula and course offerings.

Second, in contrast to a number of dissertations which have studied religious attitudes and spiritual maturity of SDA students in terms of denominational loyalty, church standards, and maintaining church affiliation (see Lewis, 1974; Nelson, 1971; Vonhof,
1972), this study explores attitudes and behaviors that result from nurturing a personal relationship with God.

Third, the research project is more extensive than previous research concerning spiritual formation initiatives, in terms of the number and nationality of subjects, the number of data collection methods used, and the span of time over which data were collected. Furthermore the content of the Spiritual Formation class under study is broader-based and more comprehensive than those classes studied in other research projects.

Fourth, if it could be shown that a class in personal spiritual formation does assist pastors to live their lives more consistently in relationship to God, and if pastors had the opportunity to participate in such a class, then the Valuegenesis recommendations for pastors to preach, teach, and model such a life for young people might become a reality.

**Background to the Study**

**Seminary Initiatives**

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, seminary professors at the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University became increasingly aware of perceived deficiencies in the spiritual life of their entering Master of Divinity (M.Div.) students. Many were seen to be biblically illiterate, lacking a personal spirituality, and/or struggling with addictive behaviors. It was at a spiritual retreat for seminary faculty that conversations turned to these problems. Meanwhile the annual spring quarter student evaluations of the M.Div. program were indicating a level of frustration with a frantic-paced seminary education
which focused on theological “head” knowledge but lacked an emphasis on personal Bible study and prayer. At the same time, informal faculty contact with other seminaries indicated a growing interest in the area of teaching for personal spiritual formation.

Bruno Vertallier (1993, p. 46) gratefully acknowledges the first Personal Spiritual Formation class in the SDA Theological Seminary in the fall of 1992, although the SDA seminary had discussed the need for such initiatives earlier (see section on Seminary Responsibility below).

In the past 10 years, the Spiritual Formation class, which is required of all M.Div. and M.A. in Youth Ministry students, has undergone a series of changes both in format and content, and whereas in earlier years there was considerable discontent with the class, student satisfaction has increased significantly in the past 3 years. The first attempts at teaching personal spiritual formation were in the context of a class called Pastoral Formation, which also had a segment focusing on the required practical field experiences for M.Div. students. The weekly class session had a de-briefing component, which often included student discussion of dissatisfaction with various aspects of the field training. The class atmosphere was seen as not being conducive to spiritual formation initiatives.

Later, alternate class meetings and small groups with faculty facilitators were attempted. It appears that it was difficult to find enough seminary faculty with both the personal interest in spiritual formation and the time to make these small groups effective (D. E. Kilcher, personal communication, September 21, 1999). Since 1998, required classes solely dedicated to personal spiritual formation have been provided, and student ratings of the new course show significant increases in the level of satisfaction, from 43%,
giving a high rating of 4 or 5 in 1995, to 66% in 1998 (Johnston & Vyhmeister 1999 p. 43).

This study explores the impact of the 1999 Spiritual Formation class on seminary students.

Personal Interest

I first heard about the class from a chance meeting with a student who spoke in glowing terms about this seminary class, “where they give you tools for your personal devotional life . . . and it really helps you to keep it up” (Data File, vol. 1, p. 4, hereafter 1:4). This was at the time when I was seriously contemplating a research topic and a week after I had written in my journal, asking God for clear guidance in the selection of a topic. Although the Fall 1998 Spiritual Formation class had already been meeting for 3 weeks, I asked the lecturer if I could observe the class. As I spoke informally with class members, I heard other comments of appreciation for a class which encouraged one’s personal walk with God. It seemed to me that this was a story too good to be left untold.

Eight months after this class had finished, I conducted two focus groups of class participants as a pilot study, which provided some conceptual clarification, helped to refine possible data collection plans (Yin, 1994, pp. 74, 75), and gave me additional experience with focus groups techniques, while gaining further insights into the various aspects of the class. I detected that some students had misconceptions and misgivings about the class before it began. Some were even hostile to the idea of spiritual formation: “I mean we’re ministers, we’re supposed to be teaching other folks” (1:9). The title of the
course put one student off completely, while another was puzzled at registration, wondering “why they wanted to waste my time in this class when I came to seminary for theology and real stuff” (1:12). However by the end of the course, these same students were rejoicing in a newly found passion for God and a hungering for an ever deepening relationship with Him. Someone else wrote concerning the class:

It was very inspirational—making me want to spend more time in devotions, in a different and more meaningful way, by journaling. Writing my prayers down and praying through the scriptures has been a completely new eye-opener. It has also helped me understand more the meaning of worshiping my dear Lord and Savior. (1:15).

Convinced that I wanted to study the next Spiritual Formation class, I submitted the proposal, and made preparations for data collection of the fall 1999 class.

**Explanation of Terms**

**Spirituality**

“Spirituality,” according to Dallas Willard, “is simply the holistic quality of human life, as it was meant to be, at the center of which is our relationship with God” (1991, p. 77). Marvin Wilson (1989, pp. 156-177) outlines how this is exemplified in biblical history. To the Hebrew mind, all of life was seen as a unity, and the entire world as the realm of God, therefore there was no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Every part of one’s life was a part of relating to God and acknowledging His presence, as illustrated by many scriptural verses, for example: Ps 16:8, “I have set the LORD always before me,” and Paul’s advice that whether eating or drinking or whatever the activity, all should be done for the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Since prayer is the means by which
one stays attuned to the sacred, the Hebrews offered hundreds of short prayers throughout the day for all situations, which was as natural and life-sustaining as breathing.

The daily life of faith for a Hebrew was understood in terms of a journey or pilgrimage, and concepts associated with such terms as walk, path, and way indicated that the essence of religion was a dynamic relationship. For example, Enoch and Noah "walked with God" (Gen 5:24; 6:9), and life choices were related either to "the way of the wicked" (Prov 15:9) or the "way of the righteous" (Ps 1:6). The metaphor continues in the New Testament (NT) with Jesus' teaching of the two ways in Matt 7:13, 14, and His declaration that He is "The Way, Truth and Life" in John 14:6 (Wilson, 1989, pp. 159, 160).

Wilson further suggests that in the last 1900 years, the Church has distanced itself from its Jewish roots, and in the process of embracing the dualistic thought of Greek philosophy, an appreciation for the wholeness of life has been forfeited. Dualism brought with it an emphasis on asceticism, where the enjoyment of physical pleasures was denied in order that the "spiritual" life lived in detachment from this world might be cultivated without hindrance (Wilson, 1989, p. 174). Thus various segments of Christianity have taught that "spirituality" implies a withdrawing from the ordinary world, abandoning common life activities such as work, love, marriage, the pursuit of happiness, and the acquisition of goods, to focus on the inward religious life, thereby elevating the monastic and ascetic life as being the highest experience of a life with God (Siqueira, 2000, p. 16).

However, the Scriptures provide a different perspective, for since all things in heaven and earth come from the hand of God (Isa 44:24) who deemed His created works...
as “very good” (Gen 1:31), then the whole of creation including everything tangible is to be enjoyed and appreciated. From Bible times, life with God was understood as living in the presence of God, thus common life activities should not be discarded but should be lived in a way that is appropriate to God’s presence (Siqueira, 2000, p. 16).

Jacques Doukhan (1998) points out that the word used to indicate the spiritual dimension of humankind life is the word *ruah* meaning both “spirit” and “breath,” and he then explains the “unexpected connection” between praying and breathing.

To create man, God came down, came near to man, and sighed in him the air enabling him to breathe (Gen 2:7). Ever since, the biological act of breathing has been sensed by the Israelite man as a divine and human embrace... Only those who breathe can enjoy a spiritual life. (p. 16)

For the prophet Ezekiel’s vision of a valley of dry bones, God’s *ruah* is His life-giving breath which dynamically revives His people and energizes them for service (Ezek 37:10), and Israel is restored so that they might “know the Lord,” which referred not to an intellectual knowledge, but to an experiential knowledge (Wilson, 1989, p. 176). Thus, says Wilson, spirituality for the Hebrews can be defined as:

Being fully human, every fiber of one’s being alive, empowered in passionate and inspired service to God and humanity... It did not come about by negating the richness of life’s experiences, or withdrawing from the world, instead they affirmed creation by finding a sense of holiness in the here and now. (Wilson, 1989, p. 176)

To live a spiritual life is not to go searching for God, but rather to acknowledge God who is already and always present (see Doukhan, 1999, pp.18-20, for a helpful overview of examples of God’s presence throughout the Old Testament). Hence Doukhan’s observation that the best way to find God is to be found by Him (Dereshah presented at Beit B’nei Zion, Andrews University, December 9, 2000). “The best way,
the only way indeed to live with God, is to let God live with us." Thus, in this
dissertation, spirituality is the "holistic quality of human life, as it was meant to be, at the
center of which is our relationship with God" (Willard, 1991, p. 77).

**Spiritual Formation**

Spiritual formation is the process of learning to live life as it was always meant to
be—living in the presence of God, with God at the center of our lives, so that who we are
with ourselves and with others and the world depends on who we are with God. Ben
Maxson’s definition additionally adds a reference to openness and receptivity on the part
of the individual. “Spiritual formation is the movement of the entire life towards God,
opening every area of life to intimacy with God, and allowing Him to do His will” (1999,
p. 25). According to Dwight Grubbs (1994), John Wesley saw the process as a response
to God’s initiatives:

> Spiritual formation is not seeking new ways to discover God, nor working
> harder to make God real to us. Rather, it is living in such a way as not to resist
> God’s gracious initiatives. Put very simply it is paying loving attention to all of
> God that we know, with all of our selves that we can, using all the resources
> we can gather. (1994, p. 23)

Robert Mulholland (1985) illustrates the difference between a functional and a
relational approach by proposing that worship as something we do to get right with God is
much different from offering ourselves in worship to God so that He can “draw us into the
depths of his loving presence” (p. 87). He further suggests that we need to continually ask
ourselves the question: Is our spiritual formation one of trying to get closer to God, or is it
rather a responsiveness to God, where we allow Him to draw us to Himself? (p. 93).
Mel Lawrenz (2000) uses a medical analogy to illustrate the importance of spiritual growth being formed under God’s direction, suggesting that all good growth is formed growth. On the other hand, cancer results from abnormal growth taking place without form or structure, and such growth indicates disease, not health and vitality. Thus form without growth in the spiritual realm—“having a form of godliness but lacking the power thereof” (2 Tim 3:5)—is just as ruinous to spiritual health and vitality (pp. 15-17).

Spiritual Disciplines

Spiritual disciplines are intentional, personal, and corporate activities that facilitate a growing relationship with God. Why disciplines? Rea McDonnell (1990) reminds us that the word “discipline” has at its root the Latin discipulus:a, a learner. “Discipline is all activity and attitude which alerts our ears, eyes, hearts, selves, to the attitudes and actions of God. Discipline is disciple-making activity, which fosters our learning of God and from God” (p. 18).

According to Foster’s classification (1988, p. v), spiritual disciplines may be inward practices such as meditation, prayer, fasting, and study; outward practices like simplicity, solitude, submission, and service; or corporate practices of confession, worship, guidance, and fellowship.

Purpose of Spiritual Disciplines

In contrast to a works-oriented striving in order to come into a right relationship with God is the joy-filled life of one who accepts righteousness as a gift from God, and delights in His presence. Foster believes that “God has given us the Disciplines of the
spiritual life [i.e., spiritual disciplines] as a means of receiving his grace” (1988, p. 7) and that the “Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us” (p. 7). As an antidote for our fast-paced, stress-filled lives, Henri Nouwen maintains that it is “through a spiritual discipline we prevent the world from filling our lives to such an extent that there is no place to listen” (1981, p. 68). He uses the example of solitude to illustrate how this works. “If we really believe not only that God exists, but that he is actively present in our lives—healing, teaching and guiding—we need to set aside time and space to give him our undivided attention” (1981, p. 69).

As with most things in life, spiritual disciplines have the potential for either benefit or harm. Mulholland (1985) reminds us that

our disciplines must emerge from our relationship with God if they are to be truly forming and not misforming, truly shaping and not misshaping. The first thing that happens if our spiritual disciplines don’t emerge from our relationship with God is that they become a form, a very subtle and destructive form, of works-righteousness. They become a means by which we either attempt to transform ourselves into the image of God or attempt to gain God’s favor. (p. 92)

Spiritual Formation Myths

The practice of spiritual disciplines is not a works-oriented method of obtaining favor with God, nor are spiritual disciplines a barometer of spirituality (Ortberg, 1997, p. 49). John Ortberg suggests that just as hours spent in training sessions do not qualify players for bonus points in the game, so time spent in spiritual disciplines does not gain extra merit with God. Some have even confused spiritual disciplines with the rigorous disciplines of self-denial and separation, practiced by ascetics, trying by strenuous human effort to attain union with God (Grubbs, 1994, p. 29).
Another misunderstanding comes from thinking that the term *spiritual disciplines* is related to self-inflicted bodily pain, or even pain inflicted by another. During the Middle Ages the term *discipline* referred to a whip that was used to punish the body during acts of penance (Willard, 1991, p. 135). Willard further observes that “the essential misunderstanding of ascetic practice—which tied it to forgiveness, punishment and merit, rather than to ‘exercise unto godliness’—always ended in abuse and then failure” (p. 144). The Protestant reaction against this understanding of asceticism was “a reaction against any essential role of spiritual disciplines in the process of redemption” (p. 144).

Furthermore, David VanDenburgh (1992) suggests that “we cannot allow our prejudices against the foibles of the ancient church to rob us of the art and science of the spiritual disciplines” (pp. 255, 256) since Jesus himself was an ascetic whose devotional practices became the foundation of his spiritual power—strengthening the connections between Himself and God. Peterson (1987) notes that unfortunately *ascetic* is now a ruined word, with images conveying the emaciated and the misanthropic, rather than its original usage as an athlete’s word descriptive of training for excellence, in which the practice of the disciplines prepared the athlete for the very best performance in an event (pp. 13, 14).

Even those acquainted with Scripture may misunderstand the true nature of spiritual disciplines. Phrases such as “when they fast, I will not hear their cry” (Jer 14:12); “I hate, I despise your religious feasts, I cannot stand your assemblies” (Amos 5:21); and “even if you offer many prayers I will not hear you” (Isa 1:15) seem to reveal an attitude of disdain on the part of God towards certain religious practices. God was not honored by religious activities being practiced with questionable and ungodly motives, thus instead of
being a delight to God, the religious practices were denounced as meaningless and
detestable as in Isa 1, 58, and 59 and Mal 3. The problem was not with the practices
themselves, but with the abuse of the practices, for instead of fasting, prayer, sacrifices,
and worship being acts of worship or service to God, they became occasions for
exploitation (1 Sam 2:12-17; Isa 58:3, 4) and hypocrisy (Isa 1:11-16; Mal 1:6-14; Matt 6,
23). What was intended to bring life and vitality to God-human relations, became instead
a stumbling block and a curse. As a result, some Christians may feel uncomfortable
engaging in observable spiritual disciplines for fear that their motives might be misjudged.

Foster (1988) describes three other myths concerning spiritual disciplines which
can prevent believers from incorporating them into their lives:

1. Spiritual disciplines are for “spiritual giants,” and are therefore beyond the
reach of average Christians.

2. Spiritual disciplines are some kind of drudgery aimed to eliminate laughter and
the joy of living, and should therefore be avoided at any cost.

3. Spiritual disciplines are difficult to do.

To the contrary, argues Foster, God intends the spiritual disciplines for ordinary
people:

People who have jobs, who care for children, who wash dishes and mow lawns. In
fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our relationships with our
husband or wife, our brothers and sisters, our friends and neighbors. (Foster, 1988, p.
1)

Second, “joy is the keynote of the disciplines because they release us from slavery
to self-interest and fear.” And on the final point of difficulty, anyone can try them, even
the one who is still contemplating a full commitment to God, because the primary requirement is a longing after God (Foster, 1988, p. 2).

On the point of joy, Ortberg (1997) notes that

many of us got the impression somewhere that for an activity to count as a spiritual discipline, it must be something we would rather not do. However, if we are training for a life characterized by joy, peace, and affection, we should assume that some of the practices are going to be downright enjoyable. Many of us need to discover “disciplines” such as celebration that will regularly produce in us rivers of wonder and gratitude. (1997, p. 50)

VanDenburgh (1992) suggests that a uniquely SDA reluctance towards spiritual formation initiatives may come from the denomination’s emphasis on eschatological urgency, which makes it easy for SDAs to equate busyness with doing good; thence the myth that taking time to be quiet before God is unproductive and a waste of time. There has been a tendency to view with suspicion the classical spiritual disciplines because of their connection with the medieval church, instead of seeing them as biblical practices which Jesus Himself modeled and encouraged in His followers.

A final misunderstanding is revealed when people think they are spiritually superior because they practice a certain discipline, for, as Willard (1991) notes, “the spiritually advanced person is not the one who engages in lots and lots of disciplines, any more than the good child is the one who receives lots and lots of instruction or punishment” (p. 138).

Jesus and the Spiritual Disciplines

Throughout Scripture, people were called to participate in spiritual disciplines, but people today may question why there is little biblical instruction as to how to do them. Prayer, meditation, worship, fasting, and celebration were previously common practice,
and very much part of the cultural context (Foster, 1988, p. 3; Willard, 1991, p. 137).

However, in today's society, spiritual disciplines are not common practice, and people are in need of instruction and explanation regarding their purpose and practice. The life of Jesus on earth exemplified a life lived in dependence on God, and the practice of such spiritual disciplines as meditation, prayer, fasting, worship, simplicity, solitude, service, frugality, submission, fellowship, and sacrifice were part of His daily life:

Yet the activities constituting the disciplines have no value in themselves. The aim and substance of spiritual life is not fasting, prayer and so forth. Rather, it is the effective and full enjoyment of active love of God and humankind in all the daily rounds of normal existence where we are placed. (Willard, 1991, p. 138)

Seminary, Theological Education, and Pastoral Training

In the United States, and some other countries, the seminary or theological seminary refers to a graduate institution which prepares men and women for vocations in ministry. Typically this training follows the completion of an undergraduate degree, either in liberal arts or religion. However, in some parts of the world (for example South America and Australasia), the pastor's professional training is incorporated into the requirements of a 4-year undergraduate program; thus, in this study, the terms seminary, theological education, and pastoral training have been used somewhat interchangeably to reflect international understandings.

Impact

Impact refers to any perceived effects on people that are either directly or indirectly attributed to the Spiritual Formation class. Impact could be recognized by
changes in attitudes or behaviors and may not be necessarily limited to those two areas.

Intentional Learning Experiences

The term *intentional learning experiences* refers to intentionality and purpose in three areas: (a) the seminary program; (b) the teacher’s curriculum; and (c) the student’s choice of spiritual disciplines to fulfill the weekly requirement of personal time with God.

First, by requiring classes in spiritual formation at the Seminary for all M.Div. students, the Seminary indicates that this class is considered an important part of the graduate program and pastoral training.

Second, the teacher of the class outlines his intentionality for the class by requiring students to spend 4 hours per week engaging in the spiritual disciplines and by stating such objectives as:

1. To lead the students to analyze themselves in the light of spiritual perspectives
2. To introduce the student to the history, literature, and concepts of devotional theology
3. To introduce the students to the practice of the spiritual disciplines
4. To relate Adventist theology to the practice of the spiritual life
5. To introduce and model spiritual retreats and small group experiences for spiritual growth
6. To create in the student a desire to live closer to God and to embark or continue on the spiritual journey (Dybdahl, 1999).

Third, in choosing one discipline over another for weekly assignments, the student...
also demonstrates a measure of intentionality regarding the personal devotional life.

The Four Intentional Learning Experiences

The four intentional learning experiences in this study were the focus of the research question and the term refers to the four main components of the Spiritual Formation class: the initial day retreat, the learning about spiritual disciplines through weekly class lectures and required reading, the 4-hour per week practice of spiritual disciplines, and participation in a weekly small group experience. While the teacher may provide basic information and knowledge about the various types of spiritual disciplines, how to practice them, and what the benefits are, applied learning cannot take place until the learners have chosen to try something for themselves. In looking at Jesus’ teaching methods, He always provided learners with opportunities to practice what they had learned (Schultz & Schultz, 1993, pp. 33, 34).

Doug Fields (1998), a nationally acclaimed leader in youth ministry and discipleship for more than 20 years, agrees with the need for including the teaching of personal spiritual disciplines for discipleship training. He explains that for many years he thought he was following Christ’s methodology by using a 50-50 approach that focused on educational and relational teaching. However, he has come to realize that Jesus also informed His disciples that He would be leaving them, and part of His training involved specific learning opportunities for developing habits of spiritual independence through the spiritual disciplines. Fields has now adopted a third-third-third approach which incorporates the practice of spiritual disciplines into his discipleship training (p. 158).
Lynn Stoddard (1992), director of the National Alliance for Redesigning Education, emphasizes that teaching and learning are not synonymous, and suggests: “We must shift from the traditional role of ‘knowledge dispenser’ to that of model, mentor, and organizer of experiences that help students grow” (p. 61).

In the Spiritual Formation class under study, the teacher’s approach is learner-centered as exemplified in his modeling, mentoring, and organizing of the students’ personal spiritual growth experiences.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

What kinds of people are enrolled in theological educational institutions at the close of the 20th century? How have societal changes impacted the pastor's role and perceived training needs? To what extent has spiritual formation been part of the pastor's seminary education? What do we know about spiritual formation initiatives within the SDA denomination?

This chapter examines the changing profiles of seminary students, the changing pastoral roles and expectations over the years, and the varying degrees of commitment to spiritual formation that institutions of theological education have articulated and at times demonstrated. As well as looking at theological education in America in general, it also surveys the role of spiritual formation in Seventh-day Adventist history, and in particular SDA theological education.

The structure of the literature review mirrors the components of the study: seminary students, intentional learning experiences, and impact. Seminary students are examined looked at in terms of such characteristic profiles as age, gender, religious background, expectations for seminary, and reasons for enrolling in the seminary. A link is made between teacher effectiveness and a teacher's knowledge of students. The section
on intentionality is a historical survey of the extent to which spiritual formation has been a deliberate part of theological education thinking and practice over the years, while the impact section looks at particular studies and research on spiritual formation initiatives.

Seminary Students

Teacher Effectiveness Related to Their Knowledge of Students

Why is it important for seminary teachers to learn as much as they can about their students? It appears that teacher effectiveness is related to how well the students are known by their teacher. Roy Zuck (1998b) notes that 6 of the 14 outstanding qualities of Jesus that demonstrate His effectiveness as a teacher are related to the knowledge He had of His learners. Jesus' modeling of empathy, intimacy, sensitivity, relevancy, clarity, and consistency reveals a teacher who knew His students on a personal basis. A seminary student's family and religious background, previous career, life experiences, age and stage in life, personal goals, and struggles all affect his or her readiness and ability to assimilate new ideas. The closer a teacher can empathize in difficult circumstances, communicate with students outside of classes, be sensitive to individual needs, and live a life consistent with the message being taught, the greater the chance that classroom communication will be clear, appropriate, and relevant to the students' needs. "Today's students demand much of us, not only as professors but also as persons. They ask of us involvement, not merely knowledge. They wish to see our faith credentials before listening to our theological expertise" (Babin et al., 1972, p. 15). Not surprisingly, Arthur Chickering and Zelda Garmson (1987) list "frequent student-faculty contact in and out classes" as the
most important factor in student motivation and involvement (p. 4). So what do seminary professors need to know about the kinds of students coming to seminary these days to take up theological training? Perhaps the most important thing for faculty to realize is that the profile of today's seminary students is vastly different from that of the 60s, 70s or even 80s.

Seminary Students, a Reflection of Humanity

In reflecting on the call to ministry and the nature of discipleship, Cetuk (1998) finds it disconcerting to realize that most seminary students do not come expecting to change or be changed by the experience. While they expect to leave the seminary with more knowledge than when they came, they are unprepared for the "soul-searching and wrestling with issues that is part of theological education" (p. 49). She continues:

Of course, people entering seminary are no more likely to seek change than the general population . . . . Some come with the same reluctance to change and the same misunderstanding of the true nature of God's grace that is seen throughout society. Others come expecting and hoping to change and counting on the grace of God to see them through. In short, seminary students are a reflection of humanity. (p. 49)

Added to the picture is the alarmingly high number of persons in ministry today who are wounded and in need of healing—some with the unhealthy desire to receive the "respect, authority and power that is afforded clergy" (p. 53). The picture is not only congruous with the brokenness of society, but also with the image of ministry being that of the "enterprising healer" (Shelley, 1993, p. 44). Furthermore, because many students come from dysfunctional and abusive families, a remarkably large number report finding love in the church that they did not experience elsewhere (Cetuk, 1993, p. 3).
Whereas "the church building was physically the center of a community and the parish was the vital center of religious activities" at the beginning of the 20th century, by 1959, as observed by Philip Rieff, the symbolic center of the cultural landscape was the hospital (Shelley, 1993, p. 44). The allusion to society in need of healing perhaps helps to explain the increased interest in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and similar programs, and more demands for seminary courses in counseling and therapy from that time on.

It appears that the complexity of an increasingly secular society places today's clergy under greater pressure than their predecessors. Religion no longer enjoys a preeminent position in society, and as Neese (1996) observes, "competing professions offer alternative avenues of advancement for those who seek to be community leaders" (p. 4). Ministry is no longer the attractive option it once was, so recruitment of highly promising seminarians is more difficult (Wheeler, 2001, pp. 1, 20.)

Demographic Profiles

In the mid-1960s, the student body of a typical theological school was comprised almost entirely of recently college-graduated White males, who were studying for the basic ministerial degree. They were unmarried, living on campus, and planned to complete their studies in the normal time frame (Senior & Weber, 1994, p. 18). Forty years later, the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) Fact Book on Theological Education for the Academic Year 1995-1996 indicated that the largest percentage of male and female students in theological schools were in the 40-49 age bracket, and 58% of all enrollees were 35 years or older (ATS, 1996, p. 46).
The percentage of women entering seminary had risen from a reported 11% in 1973 (Cetuk, 1998, p. 50), to 35% in 1998 (Wheeler, 2001, p. 5), with some mainline denominational schools approaching 50% (Neese, 1996, p. 2). This means that seminarians are older than their counterparts 30 years ago, with many of them being married, separated, or divorced. Female seminarians have a much higher rate of failed marriages (1 out of 6 in 1986), as compared to the male rates of 1 out of 50 (Wilkes, 1990, p. 50). There are increasing populations of international and culturally diverse students, doubling to 23% in 1997, as compared with 1987 figures (Schuth, 1999, p. 73), although compared with their general population presence in North America, the theological student population of African-Americans (9%) and of Hispanics (3%) is significantly underrepresented (Wheeler, 2001, p. 5).

Furthermore, while the overall enrollment has increased, the number of students pursuing a degree leading to preordination degrees has decreased (Neese, 1996, p. 2; Pacala, 1987, p. 21; Senior & Weber, 1994, p. 18; Wilkes, 1990, p. 66; as cited in Howard, 1999, p. 21). Large numbers of students are married with children and can only study part-time, and more students than ever are commuters, spending little time in “community activities” beyond the classroom (Senior & Weber, 1994, p. 18).

Previous Career and Life Experience Profiles

The increasing average age of seminary students means that many enroll after one or more careers. Dean Thiemann of Harvard University Divinity School indicates that “people who turn to the divine realm have often been successful in the secular realm first,”
as evidenced by lawyers, bankers, and other professional business people who are now enrolled in seminary (Wilkes, 1990, p. 61). This creates a rich and diverse teaching environment, where students and faculty can learn from the experiences of other students. David Hubbard acknowledges that many students come after having been established in a profession, so their experiences often go beyond those of the faculty. He therefore suggests that teaching needs to be more participatory, since students who have experience either in the church or the professional world are capable of contributing much to the classroom learning experience (Brushaber, 1993, p. 46; Klein, 1994, p. 19).

Religious Profiles

The religious profile of seminary students reflects current religious trends in society. Unlike the typical seminary student of the 70s who was raised in a Christian home, many students come to seminary as the result of a recent conversion in adult years (Brushaber, 1993, p. 46). Without any previous religious background, they arrive “with great expectations and great commitment, but relatively little knowledge of Scripture and the history of the church” (Senior & Weber, 1994, p. 18). David Hubbard, in his 30th and final year as President of Fuller Theology Seminary, admitted that seminaries do need to provide for these deficiencies, but that “it has taken a while to discover that” (Brushaber, 1993, p. 46). Some students have encountered “something they urgently need,” and they feel that other people need it too—whether at the workplace or in the pulpit. For them it is very personal, but it is not the classic ‘call’ to ministry. Indeed some students are in
seminary “not always because they have found God but because they have decided to search for him” (Wilkes, 1990, p. 70).

Reasons for Attending Seminary

The reasons people choose to study at a seminary are numerous and diverse, and have changed over the years. In the 1950s, most students wanted to learn all they could before going out as ministers of the Word; nevertheless, Niebuhr outlines 10 different motivations for seeking theological education. People enrolled because they were sent by family or home congregation, needed personal healing, sought a stable career, wanted to further an already successful pastoral experience, were zealous to work for God, enjoyed intellectual stimulation, had humanitarian and social justice interests, or had issues of faith to clarify. The 10th category of students, said Niebuhr, is a small group with mature faith, who are more interested in learning than grades, and who have the maturity to see that effective ministry requires knowledge and education that is merely begun in seminary and will continue throughout the years of ministry (Niebuhr, 1956, pp. 145-159).

The 1960s saw a demand for relevance, with some coming to seminary unsure of whether they had a genuine call to ministry from God. Some came to seminary to avoid the draft. By the 1970s, six distinct groups of students were identified in introductory seminary classes. These groups represented those (a) preparing for parish ministry, (b) still determining whether or not they had been called to ministry, (c) avoiding the draft, (d) wanting to go into full-time ministry, but had no interest in the local parish, (e) trying to
decide whether or not they wanted to be Christians, and (f) wanting to promote some cause, and felt the seminary was the best place to do it (Schaller, 1989, pp. 171, 172).

Hubbard considers the most significant change in seminaries in the last 30 years concerns training programs designed for laypeople. He contends that between 25-30% of students come to be enriched by a seminary education without aiming for ordination or professional ministry (Brushaber, 1993, p. 45). Indeed half of the women respondents in the 1999 Auburn survey of theological students, and 29% of the men were not planning on ordination or were unsure of their plans (Wheeler, 2001, p. 12). Other reported reasons for seminary enrollment include: a call from God, desire to serve others, opportunity for study and growth, to make a difference in the church, spiritual fulfillment, desire to contribute to the cause of social justice, search for meaning in life, influence of family or spouse, a major life event (e.g., death, divorce), and many others (Cetuk, 1998, pp. 51, 52). Still others come to "sort themselves out, deepen their new-found faith, or even to engage in a search for God" (Banks, 2000, p. 192). Rebecca Chopp's interviews with seminary women over 4 years describe as "startling" the revelation that, for many women, theological education is used to rewrite their history, or to write a new story, and that career pursuits may not be their primary concern. Furthermore, "external events—death, divorce or other unusual experiences—lead women to use theological education to make sense of their future" (Morgan, 1994, p. 77).

On the other hand, there is some concern about students who turn to theological training after vocational disappointment and failure, perhaps seeking perceived status that has eluded them elsewhere. Some burdened with psychological baggage are seeking a
profession that will provide due respect, and a church that “will protect them from a
hostile and confusing world.” Other concerns extend to the 7% to 9% of admitted
students with elevated scores on the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory (MPPI),
an instrument used to detect mental disorders (Wilkes, 1990, p. 61).

Selection Process of Seminary Students

Ron Clouzet (1997) recommends that “if pastoral ministry is to be considered a
vocation rather than a mere profession, students cannot simply be accepted on the basis of
financial ability, morality and good intentions” (p. 331). He wishes that recommendations
for ministerial candidates would come from local congregations and judicatories, and that
there would be some proven years of ministry, adding weight to the person’s inner sense
of “the call.” On the issue of self-selection versus the choosing of candidates for seminary
training by a church governance board, Paton (1956, pp. 510, 522-523) outlines the
Church of England’s approach of careful nomination—a policy that continues into the 21st
century. The applicant’s call to ministry is tested at a Selection Conference that lasts for 3
days. While worship and meditation are central to the conference, various personal
inventories, cognitive exercises, written exercises, group discussions, and personal
interviews with the conference selectors take place. The interviews are wide-ranging and
cover such areas as the sense of calling to ministry, personal faith and spiritual discipline,
maturity and ability to work with change and pressure, self-awareness, communication and
competency in interpersonal skills, evidence of previous experience in church leadership,
commitment to mission, understanding of the tradition and practice of the Church of

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England, and quality of intellectual ability to cope with ministerial training. Approximately half of the applicants are accepted for ministerial training. Those not chosen are encouraged to channel their spiritual gifts and talents into other avenues of church service.

Most seminaries do not have the luxury of choosing superior students from a surplus of applicants, which is why administrators often wish for a more committed and capable student body. In 1992, the Dean of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Theological Seminary noted in a letter to the Ministerial Training Advisory Council (MTAC) that “a larger percentage of our students is of a lower caliber as compared with students ten or more years ago.” The following year he appealed nationwide to pastors and teachers to assist in a careful and earnest search of “good candidates” (cited in Clouzet, 1997, p. 252).

Financial Issues

It appears that rising financial burdens for both seminaries and students have meant a decreasing student population, resulting in some relaxation of academic standards of entry and a greater willingness to accept anyone who can pay the tuition. This then leads to schools “tailoring their curricula to fit what they think the students will agree to study—rather than what they think those students will need to be effective clergy women and clergymen” (Wilkes, 1990, p. 61). In fact, many schools have commenced off-campus programs and web-based courses to attract new student markets.

For students it means that they are less likely to pursue full-time studies on the traditional campus, and therefore will have minimal interaction with fellow students. Student indebtedness was almost unknown in the early 1970s, yet this situation has been
steadily escalating to the point that the financing of a theological education is a major challenge requiring considerable borrowing for many students. The Auburn study conducted in 1995, on student debt concluded that debt is a problem for heavy borrowers, causing financial stress, and lowering the quality of life by decreasing the opportunities for further study and home ownership. It can influence the choice of ministerial assignment following graduation, and in a few cases has resulted in ministers and rabbis leaving their vocation and choosing secular employment, in order to pay off their debts (Ruger & Wheeler, 1995, p. 14). In 1993, student indebtedness at the SDA Theological Seminary existed for 127 families (74%) with debts of between $500 and $68,000, with 43% owing more than $10,000 and six families (3.5%) owing $50,000 or more (Dudley & Dudley, 1993, p. 8). The 1999 Auburn survey found debt levels indicated financial need for at least half of entering students, and levels of prior educational debt as well as seminary debts appear to be rising (Wheeler, 2001, p. 13).

Seminary Student Expectations

Thomas Gillespie, president of Princeton Theological Seminary, says that "many students come to seminary expecting to have a perpetual mountain experience" (Voskuil, 1994, p. 13); however, this is often short-lived.

Students who arrive expecting to find a "spiritual hothouse" often find seminary to be a singular test of faith. The crushing academic work-load, the uninspiring and unhelpful courses, the equally hard-pressed fellow students all contribute to the spiritual debilitation. I have known a number of students who have stopped going to church while in seminary, and others who wander from church to church in a fruitless search for genuine Christian fellowship, yet unwilling (some of them would say "unable") to give enough of themselves to others to make such fellowship possible. (Frame, 1984, pp. 371, 372)
Other students entering seminary with a view to ordination in the future are likely to have expectations of the seminary centering on the "how to's" of ministry, where they will receive answers for all possible future questions and solutions for all possible future problems. As Cetuk (1998) points out, this view of seminary education is flawed by its assumption of a static humanity and an unchanging civilization, for

in a world that changes quickly, is complex and ambiguous, and has technological capability which far outdistances its moral maturity—in our world—it is simply not possible to cover everything or prepare for all that will come your way in ministry. (p. 64)

She suggests that a more appropriate expectation is for students to be taught how to think critically and theologically about the issues of faith, life, and ministry (Cetuk, 1998, p. 65). Donald McCullough, President of San Francisco Theological Seminary, agrees that seminary education cannot do everything expected of it. He suggests that the seminary can start some people on the road toward greater wholeness, it can be a center where students develop their gifts for more effective ministry and are helped to develop basic disciplines of spirituality, but he says to students, "If you think you're ready for ministry, we've failed you. At most, you're more able to learn what you'll need to know in the coming years" (2000, p. 24).

Though students increasingly call for spirituality to have a higher profile in seminaries, their struggles at seminary revolve around the present day-to-day realities of trying to cope with excessive commitments—to church, job, family, and their seminary studies, often within the confines of finishing their studies as rapidly and as inexpensively as possible (Banks, 2000, p. 200), thus allowing little time for their own spiritual nurture.
Another unrealistic expectation can result from the seminarian’s view of seminary as an “arrival” instead of the start of a “journey.” Cetuk argues that the “arrival” metaphor is dangerous, because it implies a crowning or conclusive event, rather than the beginning of a “spiritual, psychological and intellectual wrestling that is a necessary part of the formation of pastoral leaders” (1998, p. 66). If students can view their seminary experience as a “journey,” then the important elements of faith in the invisible, a growing relationship with God, and the belief that “to be alive is to be constantly changing and growing” (p. 67) will be anticipated and therefore negotiated with less stress and trauma.

As can be deduced from the above profiles of seminary students, attitudes and expectations for spiritual formation in the seminary vary widely. Similarly, the posture of seminaries towards spiritual formation displays a wide spectrum of variation. One helpful way of understanding this diversity is to take a look at some of the major paradigms in theological education as outlined by Grahame Cheesman (1993, pp. 484-499). It will be noted that each paradigm or model relates to the issue of spiritual formation in different ways.

**Theological Education and Spiritual Formation**

**Paradigms in Theological Education**

Cheesman (1993) defines his use of paradigm in the context of his paper as “a model of interpretation of the task of Theological Education which has become dominant in a particular era or culture and which today competes for importance with other historical and cultural models as we seek to understand Theological Education today” (p.
His approach is not chronological; instead he starts with the academic paradigm because of its present domination of theological education.

Academic Paradigm

The establishment of universities in the 12th and 13th centuries, with the ensuing age of enlightenment and scientific inquiry, brought into question the church’s position as the ultimate authority in areas of knowledge and understanding. In premodern times, the term *theology* had two different meanings. The first described “an actual, individual cognition of God and things related to God” (Farley, 1983, p. 31). The second usage was connected to a pedagogical setting, and referred to a scientific and scholarly discipline. This was later broken down into the four separate disciplines of biblical studies, dogmatics, Church history, and practical theology, with each area developing a unique identity with its own conferences, journals, and societies (p. 32). The possibility of teaching knowledge and the ability to think and reason are important considerations aspects of this paradigm. However, even though the Bible does admonish us to engage our “whole mind” in our love for God, and while academic rigor may in some ways prepare Christians to answer for their faith in an increasingly secular society, the academic model does have some drawbacks (Cheesman, 1993, p. 486).

1. By focusing on knowledge of God in cognitive terms, the personal relationship aspect is ignored, or relegated to a place of minor importance. In this model, “the goal to digest packets of knowledge supersedes the goal to bring students to maturity in Christ and ministry” (Liefeld & Cannell, 1991, p. 19).
2. The academic model “usually promotes the educator primarily as a lecturer,”
and this, says Cheesman, “then becomes the role model for the aspiring servant of God.”
The problem with this training is that the student may enter some form of ministry, “seeing
the task as primarily a cerebral one” (1993, p. 487).

3. An academic model as the primary focus for theological education will result in
the exclusion of those with lesser intellectual capability, and the possibility of creating an
intellectual elitism. For this reason there needs to be alternative training possibilities for
those with lesser qualifications (p. 487).

Monastic Paradigm

In the monastic setting, theological education was conducted in a structured
community, with the primary goal being the spiritual development of the individual. The
Bible College Movement of the late 1800s appears to have had similar goals, since “the
original intention of the Bible movement was to train men and women for Christian service
in a warm spiritual environment” (Lee, 1987, p. 4). An intense spiritual atmosphere was
accomplished by numerous prayer meetings and worship services throughout the week, so
that the “center of gravity was spiritual development rather than academic excellence” (p.
5). It was believed that a person’s relationship with God was the most important
qualification for Christian service, and that the greatest damage is done when it is absent

Training Paradigm

Theological education is task oriented and mission driven in the training model.
With an emphasis on practical training, theology is seen as a practical task rather than a science to be studied. Those who favor this model remind us that NT theology was formulated by active practitioners in the course of their fieldwork, and theology was therefore clearly related to the needs of the world and church in which they operated, as illustrated in the writings of the apostle Paul, where real situations were addressed and ethical norms established. The advantages of this model include the training placement opportunities given to students, and the sense of purpose that teachers endeavor to provide in all their expository classes as they seek to provide spiritual and practical applications.

The chief disadvantage is seen in the elevation of technique above conviction and relevance above truth, and an activity-oriented person who gains more satisfaction in doing rather than in being. In this paradigm, theological education is defined more by what the church does than what the church is (Cheesman, 1993, pp. 490-492). A model measured by success in accomplishing a mission is likely to have a workforce with the potential to suffer from burnout in its ceaseless activities. The helpful antidote of taking time to spend with God tends to be pushed aside, because such “inactivity” is deemed to be a waste of time. White (1940) outlines the results of such a strategy:

As activity increases and men become successful in doing any work for God, there is danger of trusting to human plans and methods. There is a tendency to pray less, and to have less faith. Like the disciples, we are in danger of losing sight of our dependence on God, and seeking to make a Savior of our activity. We need to look constantly to Jesus, realizing it is His power which does the work. (p. 362)
Business Paradigm

In the last few years, theological education has also been influenced by market concepts of leadership and management from the business world. Since seminaries provide education for a fee, courses are seen as products, and as being influenced by market trends. Increased accountability and stewardship are seen as a plus, with some theological institutions gaining their financial viability because of careful management principles. Cheesman (1993) also points out that market-led courses could be indicative of a servant attitude (p. 493), which is fine if students are choosing courses that are in the best interests of their future vocations, and are compatible with the vision of stakeholders.

However, this model also has some inherent weaknesses. First, when the products are the focus rather than the students, then the training and formation of students become a side issue. Second, economic viability should not be the main basis on which institutional policies are voted, for in this process important philosophical issues may be ignored. Third, a market-driven approach does not guarantee that courses of the greatest importance to the mission of the institution will be chosen by the students (pp. 492, 493). Thus a cafeteria style of course selection by students means that the school has minimal opportunity for crafting a program that aims at the student’s personal formation.

Discipleship Paradigm

Discipleship sees theological education as a training relationship. This model has great potential in the area of personal spiritual formation; however, the ever-increasing specialization of teachers in particular academic or training fields means that it is becoming
more difficult to find the necessary competent and multi-discipline teachers. The discipleship or apprenticeship model is not based on a Western model of learning, so there is some difficulty in making it fit Western culture and structures of education. To be effective, this model requires a deep spiritual commitment on the part of the discipler, as well as a significant commitment in time to the oftentimes slow process of nurture and growth. The teacher must also be a person of absolute integrity and honesty, to avoid accusations of hypocrisy. This model also has the potential for the abuse of power (Cheesman, 1993, pp. 494-496).

Which Model?

This brief overview of theological education paradigms reveals that there is no single ideal model either for theological education, in general, or for the spiritual formation of ministers in training, in particular. Indeed, many situations may benefit from a more eclectic approach. Cheesman (1993, pp. 496, 497) asserts that if theological education is serious about focusing on the kind of person we expect the student to become, then the emphasis must be on the training of students and not on the courses, and that a “person-related, holistic approach has at least three advantages”:

1. “It requires humility on the part of teachers. We cannot dole out spiritual maturity, fitness for ministry, or knowledge of God as we can lecture notes; it is the work of God” (p. 497). This understanding helps a college or seminary realize that its role is not to dispense the Holy Spirit, but rather to be available for its reception.
2. The centrality of the student in training, as opposed to what subjects should be taught, has the potential of providing focus to what has been seen as a very fragmented task.

3. If the prepared person is indeed the end of theological education, then all other activities linked to this objective become the means to the end. The traditional Western academic model of the four-legged table (i.e., Biblical Studies, Theology, Church History, and Pastoral Studies) is inadequate for the task. Cheesman further suggests that a more holistic approach is the three-legged stool of Academic, Spiritual, and Ministerial growth, as outlined by Robertson McQuilkin (1985). Ron Clouzet's *A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training* (1997) also sees a three-pronged approach to theological education—character formation, community, and missional methodology, based on biblical evidence.

Theological Education's Stance Towards Spiritual Formation

Not all seminaries and institutions of theological education have exhibited a clearly defined paradigm in their history. However, a survey of the literature over the last 150 years will reveal two trends concerning spiritual formation. First, in every period, there have been calls and pleas from the church, students, and at times seminary administration for more spiritual preparation for students. Second, it will be demonstrated that initiatives for spiritual formation have not been met with uniform enthusiasm by those involved in theological education. Responses on a continuum went from the very hostile perspective that spiritual formation should not even be considered a part of theological training...
(Brown's comments at the conference convened by the Evangelical Alliance in 1893, as cited in Fletcher, 1983, p. 12), to the overriding passion that spiritual formation is the overarching theme around which the entire theological education curriculum should focus (Banks, 2000; Cetuk, 1998; G. Smith, 1996). In between these two extremes, attitudes ranged from the apathetic (e.g., Kelly, 1924, p. 58); to the assumption that spiritual formation probably happens automatically in a religious school (Brown, 1934, p. 156); to an acknowledgement that "something should be done about it" (Edwards, 1980, p. 14); to the conviction that spiritual formation must be intentionally included in the curriculum (Babin et al., 1972), or that it should be integrated with the intellectual and practical aspects of the curriculum (Grubbs, 1994 ICAA Manifesto, 1983; Warfield, 1904;).

Historical Perspectives

No discussion concerning the spiritual formation of seminary students can be divorced from the more foundational issues of nature, purpose, and content of theological education. The debate concerning the aims, function, and curriculum of theological education is not a new one. Edward Farley (1983) maintains that the complaints concerning theological education are as old as theological education itself. "Today alumni feel they weren't adequately prepared for church work, and students feel their field experience is trivial, and the academic pursuits are irrelevant" (p. 3).

Beginnings of Ministerial Training in America

The first ministers in the new American colonies of the 17th century had been trained in the Old World and came already equipped. Later, others returned to Europe to
prepare themselves for ministry; however, it soon became apparent that this source of trained ministers would be insufficient for the needs of the growing settlements. Higher education on the American continent therefore began with the establishment of Harvard College in 1636, which, as the plaque over the gateway reads, would ensure that there would not be left “an illiterate ministry to the churches, when our present ministers shall lie in the dust” (Kelly, 1924, p. 24).

Since the minister was also the teacher in these communities, the education provided was a liberal education, with mathematics, logic and rhetoric, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, and the “Divinity subjects,” and in fact whether preparing for ministry or some other vocation, the courses were the same (Kelly, 1924, p. 24). However, Harvard was always seen as more liberal than Puritan theology, which led in 1808 to the establishment of a separate theological seminary at Andover in 1808, and many other denominationally established seminaries followed. Although Andover was not the first separate theological school—the Dutch reformed church established the first separate seminary in Flatbush, Long Island, New York, in 1774 (Kelly, 1924, p. 25)—Andover’s curriculum became a model for other centers of theological training (Fletcher, 1983, p. 7).

A brief historical survey of the development of American seminaries, excerpted from Fletcher’s (1983) Alban Institute study, provides a context of understanding for specific descriptions of spiritual formation initiatives which follow. What becomes apparent is that in each time period, a need for some kind of personal spiritual experience is recognized and articulated, yet there seems to be a corresponding difficulty in actually implementing anything that might address these deficiencies.
Reading Divinity

In the 18th century, one of the accepted ways to prepare for ministry was to “read divinity.” Young candidates for ministry would connect with experienced clergy or a college professor after school to read important texts (in much the same way that aspiring lawyers or physicians would attach themselves to experienced men in their field). Some churches attached examinations to these readings. The Methodists also utilized a reading system for their circuit-riding frontiersmen (Fletcher, 1983, p. 7).

Seminaries Established

Andover’s highly structured 3-year post-college course of study was introduced, with studies in Sacred Literature (Bible), Christian Theology, Sacred Rhetoric (preaching), and Church History. While Greek and Hebrew were important for the appreciation of the “riches” of the Scriptures, and value was placed upon the student’s ability to reason and debate theological controversies, personal piety also remained an important component of this learning. Between 1820 and 1870, seminary education spread to every major denomination, with the “well-spring of support” coming from the generosity of laity, who saw the seminary as “a special servant of their churches for preparation of well-educated and pious clergy” (Fletcher, 1983, pp. 7-11).

Influence of German Universities

During the 19th century, many teachers in the newly founded American seminaries studied in German university schools of theology such as Berlin and Hallé, where the foremost consideration was research rather than ministerial training, and where research
rather than ministerial experience was emphasized as the basis for faculty appointment. Higher criticism was also introduced, and the university seemed to focus on producing intellectuals. The university ideal separated the intellectual task from the spiritual task, and seemed only interested in the former, as indicated by the remarks of Francis Brown of Union (N.Y.) to the Evangelical Alliance in 1893, when he stated, “The theological seminary is not a church, and was not intended for the spiritual training of future ministers, but for their intellectual training” (Fletcher, 1983, pp. 11, 12).

Princeton’s Address on Spiritual Integration (1903)

In contrast to the above opinion, Benjamin Warfield’s address to incoming Princeton students focused on the school’s commitment to the spiritual formation of its students as part of a holistic education. Recognizing that this new group of students had their forthcoming intellectual training uppermost in their minds, Warfield (1904) reminded them that “intellectual training alone will never make a true minister . . . and that it behooves us above everything to remember that the ministry is a spiritual office” (p. 65). However, he was not against keen intellectual scholarship, and suggested that criticism concerning undue intellectualism in those preparing for ministry was not an absolute problem but a relative one. “It is not that they are too highly trained intellectually, but that they are sadly undertrained spiritually; not that their head has received too much attention, but that their heart has received too little” (pp. 66, 67). He wanted to maintain academic excellence while at the same time ensuring that spiritual formation held an equally prominent and important place in the curriculum.
His threefold emphasis on the training of the heart, hand, and head (devotional, practical, and intellectual) was biblically based on Jesus' training of the disciples. "We may learn first to know Jesus, then to grasp the message He would have us deliver to men, and then how He would have us work in His vineyard" (pp. 67, 68). Rather than saying which aspect of ministry was most important, he emphasized that all three must be "twisted together into a single three-ply cord," and that all three must be worked on simultaneously (p. 68). Furthermore a lack in one area could be traced to a neglect in one of the other areas, and conversely an arousal of the spiritual life or a taste of the practical work of ministry is a great "quickener of the mind for intellectual preparation" (p. 70). Here is a clear reference to the synergistic potential of the spiritual, practical, and intellectual areas of ministerial training with examples of the impact of their interdependence.

As well as outlining specific avenues available at the seminary for enhancing the spiritual life, (e.g., public worship gatherings, small fellowship groups, and daily personal spiritual disciplines of Bible reading, prayer, meditation, and personal examination), Warfield likened the entire seminary experience to a retreat. "in company with a select body of godly companions" (p. 75).

For Warfield, spiritual formation was related to the whole of seminary life, and was not meant to be an isolated compartment. He encouraged his students to do all their work religiously—with a "religious end in view, in a religious spirit, and with the religious side dominant in their minds," since each opportunity could be used to "enlighten, deepen and strengthen their devotion" (p. 73). He felt it important that the content of each subject be
internalized and applied to their own lives and thoughts, and that the entire seminary experience be the means of knowing God better:

Treat, I beg you, the whole work of the Seminary as a unique opportunity offered you to learn about God, or rather, to put it at the height of its significance, to learn God—to come to know Him whom to know is life everlasting. If the work of the Seminary shall be so prosecuted, it will prove itself to be the chief means of grace in your lives. (p. 74)

It has not been easy to ascertain the success of such worthy ideals. However, Warfield’s holistic and integrated view of spiritual formation in the seminary can be contrasted many times over with the comments of countless other students spanning the last century for whom the seminary experience has resulted in their spiritual undoing (Banks, 2000; Ferris, 1990; Johnson, 1932; May, 1934; Oswald, 1980; Peterson, 1993). Ray Barber (1999) reports one such testimony of a practicing minister: “I was in worse shape spiritually when I left the seminary than when I arrived. I sometimes wonder if I will ever gain my spiritual joy” (p. 1). Barber comments:

We knew how to prepare a paper for a Greek course and the proper steps one is to follow in preparing a homiletically sound sermon. What we did not know was how to care for our own spiritual selves. The devotional life was not a major topic in any curriculum we studied. Professors geared courses to show us how to minister to other people, but they did not attempt to place in our hands tools for the cultivation of our spiritual selves. (pp. 1, 2)

Evangelical Training Schools

The founding of Bible colleges, some evangelical seminaries, and 36 missionary training schools between 1881 and 1914, resulting from a “heightened sense of personal holiness and duty,” provided an alternative to liberal seminaries that stressed higher criticism (Fletcher, 1983, p. 13). Practical missionary work and involvement in social
work became features of these institutions which focused on the study of the whole Bible, a consecrated life, and a commitment to spreading the faith. In many of these institutions there was no tuition, classes were held when convenient for the students, and practical training was done in the community.

No Consensus on Standards

Up until 1920, there was substantial variation in the rules and guidelines under which each school operated, with no standardization regarding teaching qualifications, curriculum, teaching methods, electives, and practicums, or for that matter, spiritual formation. However, there had been conferences from 1903 to 1920 which debated the problem of standards and the meaning of degrees in an effort to bring about some kind of consistency. John D. Rockefeller, Jr., felt that denominations should stop competing with each other, and unite in a global effort to further the kingdom of God through the Interchurch World Movement (IWM). This group wanted to know more about the state of the seminaries in the U.S. and Canada, and after a preliminary 1920 survey, they commissioned a survey of 161 seminaries through the Institute of Social and Religious Research, known as the Kelly Report (Fletcher, 1983, pp. 13, 14).

Kelly Report (1924)

The survey of 161 seminaries between 1921 and 1923 grew out of a widely accepted belief that the "machinery and the methods used in educating Protestant ministers were inadequate" (Kelly, 1924, p. vii). One of the questions addressed the type of ministerial character that was being created by the seminaries. The following excerpt from
Kelly's report reveals some basic understandings brought to the study regarding spiritual life in the seminary:

Recognizing that the spirit of consecration and Christian zeal is in danger of evaporating in an atmosphere dominated by intellectual and technical studies, and that the development of the inner life of prospective ministers is a fundamental element in their education, an effort was made to ascertain the success with which methods of discovering and developing spiritual gifts and promoting the spiritual life of students have been used. (Kelly, 1924, p. 58)

Answers varied widely. One executive officer reported that his faculty members were "presumably Christian gentlemen," another said "not interested," and a third asked "why the seminary should concern itself with such matters." At the other end of the spectrum was the seminary that had three required daily chapel services. One hundred and twenty seminaries reported some methods they found successful in promoting spiritual life in the seminary, which included some individual and corporate prayer initiatives, and to a lesser extent group meetings, student societies, volunteer religious work, and the like. While some mentioned the "spiritual" aspect of required work, and the "spiritual atmosphere" of the school, little mention is made of special classes, retreats, and devotional reading of the Bible. However, one exception is found in the Church of England in Canada, in a circular entitled Recommendations for the Training of Candidates for Holy Orders, which provides an enlightening section on "spiritual training" as outlined below:

The true success of the Ministry depends on the spiritual sympathy and devotion of the Clergy. No intellectual or practical efficiency can supply the lack of these essentials. This fact must be fully recognized in the preparation of men for Ministry. The highest duty of the Theological Colleges is to give to the Church clergy who in prayer and meditation speak to God and listen to His voice speaking to them. . . . Each College

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must wrestle with the problem in its own way. Nevertheless, we venture to make the following suggestions. . . . (Kelly, 1924, p. 59)

The recommendations included the responsibility of a specially qualified staff member to maintain personal relations with students on spiritual matters, satisfying himself “in a tactful way” that each student is “forming and maintaining the habit of private prayer and meditation and giving definite advice and guidance . . . with individuals at frequent intervals” (Kelly, 1924, p. 59). The devotional use of Bible reading was emphasized, recognizing that it was “not enough to study the contents of the Books of the Bible in the classroom,” and that students should be encouraged to “learn in an intelligent and yet humble way more of God and His ways of dealing with men” (p. 60). Furthermore in addition to formal chapel services, shorter periods were to be set aside for meditation, as well as a weekly quiet hour for the entire college body. The students themselves would be taught how to lead out in intercession services, and a “quiet day,” once a term for prayer, meditation, and spiritual instruction, was also recommended (p. 62).

The Education of American Ministers Study (1926-1934)

The study of 1,500 students in 66 seminaries (May 1934) directed by Mark A. May with consultation by William A. Brown, probably provides the most extensive and in-depth data in the area of the religious life of faculty and students (p. 5). A four-volume report of the findings, titled The Education of American Ministers, and consisting of over 1,400 pages, was published in 1934. An additional 300 pages were written by Ray
Johnson in his Yale dissertation (1932), which analyzes the survey data dealing with the religious life of theological students.

Changing roles of ministers

The first task was to define more exactly the work for which the minister must be trained; however, the status of the Protestant minister in society had changed dramatically in the space of one or two generations. The wide-sweeping changes that were taking place in the political, economic, and cultural aspects of society were therefore of particular significance to the role of the clergy (Brown, 1934, p. 16).

Previously the minister was likely to be the leading citizen of his community, due to educational attainments in advance of most, if not all his congregation; now his prestige in the community was being eclipsed by lawyers, doctors, and business professionals who had superior education. Moreover, the church, which had once occupied a central position in the life of the community, providing educational, social, and community functions in addition to its religious role, was becoming less visible, as other agencies took its place. This period was also seen as a time of “great insecurity and instability” resulting from “rapid changes in population, which had been brought about by the increased power that science has put in the hands of modern industry” (Brown, 1934, p. 6). The growth of great economic, industrial, and financial powers, with ever-increasing control over areas of human life, together with increasing unemployment, and the resultant insecurity and irresponsibility, “placed upon the minister a responsibility with which it requires exceptional wisdom and knowledge to deal” (Brown, 1934, p. 8).
Even the Christian ethics textbooks were deemed worthless for these new situations, since they were written for the previous “simpler and more stable society” (Brown, 1934, p. 8). Both at home and abroad, ministers and missionaries were confronted with social issues requiring specialized problem-solving skills. At the same time, trained psychiatrists and social workers were entering the field and usurping the minister’s elevated position of status in the community. The minister was faced with two choices—either isolate himself from the non-religious problems, refusing to get involved in secular issues, or he could seek answers from his religious perspective that would address the issues being presented in society.

Educational standards

Coupled with a felt inadequacy of preparation for the task was the recognition that other educational institutions were requiring higher standards with more rigor in their professional courses, hence an eagerness to assess the existing ministerial training.

Brown’s study had two stated major objectives:

1. To provide current teachers with convenient and accessible information they lacked, in order to help them improve their methods

2. To impress upon those controlling the church policies the importance of creating such conditions in the church that will “attract to the ministry, men of the highest intellectual and moral caliber, and so supply to the nation and to the world the spiritual leadership it needs” (Brown, 1934, p. 5).
Religious life of faculty and students

His study concluded that the religious life of faculty and students was a matter of critical and central importance, because “unless the seminary succeeds in keeping the religious life of its students unimpaired, it has failed at the place where failure is most dangerous” (Brown, 1934, p. 155). That the seminaries made little provision “for the systematic oversight and discipline of the individual religious life” was seen as not only surprising, but also one of the most conspicuous failures of the modern seminary (Brown, 1934, p. 155). Furthermore, this situation was seen not as being due to any lack of appreciation of the importance of the religious life, but rather it was due to the assumption that students could look after themselves in this area, especially in communities where the freedom of the individual is emphasized (Brown, 1934, p. 156).

The report of the Conference Committee on the Spiritual Life and Welfare of the Students recorded its conviction “that the cultivation of the private and corporate devotional life and the development of the moral character of the theological student should be regarded as a major responsibility of the seminary” (Brown, 1934, p. 156). It was further noted that as long as religion is thought of as a separate compartment of life, it is comparatively easy to deal with the matter by providing corporate acts of worship for students to attend; however, the task is much more difficult when the spiritual life of both students and faculty is seen as an integrating feature of the whole seminary experience, for when the religious life is to carry the consciousness of the presence and guidance of God into all that is done, the matter becomes less simple. In this case all the activities of the seminary must be judged from the standpoint of their bearing upon personal
religion, and the hard and fast line between the intellectual and the devotional tend to break down. (Brown, 1934, p. 156)

Findings

The study did find four ways in which some seminaries were promoting religious life among their community:

1. Providing public corporate worship exercises
2. Providing opportunities to work in local churches
3. Discussing religious problems in connection with regular classwork
4. Providing personal counsel through a religious director (Brown, 1934, p. 157).

However, there were areas of spiritual formation that were clearly lacking. Only three seminaries reported a class specifically devoted to the spiritual life. Some professors mentioned pastoral theology classes which suggest the cultivation of the religious life, but they admitted the emphasis was theoretical rather than practical, and that "any help a student might receive for his own religious life, would be incidental to the main purpose of the course" (Brown, 1934, p. 162).

Chapel services were uniformly rated near the bottom as a source of help for solving personal and religious problems, and the report therefore recommended that attention be given to those areas (such as chapel services) in which the administration invests a lot of time and energy, but which do not yield correspondingly high results for the student's spiritual development. By contrast, private devotion ranked at the top among helpful sources, followed by talks with a faculty member, second, and quiet meditation, third (May, 1934, 3:448). Unfortunately a major difficulty for students was a
lack of proper technique for private devotion. They wanted a devotional life but did not know how to go about it. The comment was made that “the ignorance of many theological students on this subject would be amazing if it were not pathetic” (Brown, 1934, p. 164). Yet, when instruction was given on the topic, most students found the material “entirely new.” Of perhaps even greater concern, however, was the realization that faculty may find the territory of personal spirituality equally unfamiliar—as the remarks of one professor illustrates. When a chapel for private meditation was shown to him, he said, “meditation, what do you mean by that? I confess the term conveys nothing to me” (Brown, 1934, p. 164).

Students’ personal testimonies

It is difficult to capture the richness of the 70 pages of the report dedicated to the religious experiences of students and faculty in seminaries in a few short paragraphs. The answers to six questions posed to students regarding the intellectual, practical, and personal problems “which the seminary helped you solve, or has not helped you to solve,” provide much food for thought. While 267 students reported 312 personal problems overcome in the seminary, 219 students told of 241 personal problems yet unsolved. Some of these were in the area of their personal religious life, e.g., “I have not been able to make a right religious adjustment to the work the seminary demands. Hence I have not grown morally or spiritually as I have intellectually. Hence I border on cynicism” (May, 1934, p. 442). “The faith of this student has not been strengthened or developed. On the other hand, the problem of keeping my faith has become the greatest problem” (May,
1934, p. 442). "In studying religion so much, the seminary has failed to satisfy sufficiently my personal spiritual need" (May, 1934, p. 446).

The religious integrity of the faculty and a willingness to share their own spiritual journey with students were seen to be very positive initiatives, as they allowed their own spirituality to permeate through all aspects of seminary life and the curriculum. Of greatest concern to the commission was the "inevitable loss of enthusiasm for a life of religious service which is more or less inevitable as the consequence of three years' professional academic work" (Brown, 1934, p. 165), with many not retaining the strong spiritual vitality that led them to the seminary in the first place.

They may leave the seminary intellectually better trained men than they were on entering, yet much of their learning has not been interpreted in terms of life; and through the process, there is a certain relaxing of their whole idealism for the ministry as a religious vocation. At this point we were agreed that gains in technical professional proficiency, whether in theological speculation or in practical church methods, do not compensate for the loss of personal devotion to religion. On the contrary, the culture of the private and corporate devotional life and the development of the moral character of the theological student should be regarded as a major responsibility of the seminary. (Brown, 1934, p. 165)

Aims and objectives of ministerial education

To what extent was this lack in spiritual training for the students a reflection of the aims of ministerial education? An attempt at defining the aim of ministerial education was also drawn up at a representative committee appointed by the Conference of Theological Seminaries in 1931, and included in Brown's report. While the committee considered the aims as being similar to those of other specialists who seek to advance the knowledge in their subjects of primary interest, they saw "the function of the theological seminary as a
professional school for training men and women for ministry in the Christian church” (Brown, 1934, p. 95). Next, it was recognized that the type of education required depended on (a) the purpose of the church for whose service the ministers were being trained, and (b) the type of ministry they are to provide. The church was then defined as the organized fellowship which has for its own special function, the cultivation of the religious life through the worship of God as revealed in Jesus Christ and the releasing and directing of energies which are to bear fruit not only in the development of Christian character in individuals, but in the creation of a Christian society. (Brown, 1934, p. 95)

Minister’s role and seminary function

The minister’s role was seen in terms of five types of service: (a) teacher, (b) evangelist, (c) leader in worship, (d) pastor, and (e) administrator, and this view of the minister’s work then sets the seminary its task, maintained Brown (1934, p. 96). The function of the seminary based on the minister’s work was therefore:

1. To clarify the student’s conception of the God whom Christ reveals
2. To deepen their loyalty to the cause to which He summons
3. To furnish them with the knowledge and skill they need to serve the cause effectively in the place to which they shall be called (Brown, 1934, p. 96).

Aims of seminary training for effective ministry

Based on the foregoing process, the committee concluded that every seminary providing training for effective ministry would therefore include four main aims, with many subheadings. For the purposes of this review, three are summarized, and the one concerning spiritual formation is quoted in full.
1. To assist students gaining an accurate knowledge of the Christian doctrines

2. To promote the growth of the religious experience among the students themselves by both the quality and nature of instruction and by the religious life within the seminary community, for the purpose of stimulating the building of dynamic, intelligent, and constructive convictions as the dominant note of their message and ministry (p. 96)

3. To help students identify needs, utilize resources, and obtain cooperation in their fields of missionary labor

4. To develop leaders who, through their creative thinking, preaching, leadership, training, and education of lay groups, will win individuals to the service of Christ, and organize local Christian groups to facilitate the development of Christlike attitudes (Brown, 1934, p. 96).

It will be noted that personal spiritual formation features both in the function and definition of the church as well as the function and aims of the seminary. The impressive feature about this extensive study is that it not only identified and illustrated areas of weakness and difficulty, but it outlined specific solutions, suggested by administrators, teaching faculty, and students, in the context of redefining the aims and purposes of theological education.

Ray Johnson's study of the data (1932)

It seems that Brown and May do not acknowledge the contribution of Johnson's research to their study, even though much of his work appears to be included in their report. For instance, he is the one who states that "students indicate they are helped least
by those activities regarded by faculty as most important, and vice versa.” His aim for the study was “to give facts concerning the religious life of theological students which might have educational significance for the further development of that religious life” (Johnson, 1932, Summary), which therefore makes his work relevant to this study.

Also of interest were his observations regarding the wide individual differences of religious experiences among seminary students, which he felt required individual understanding and guidance on the part of the faculty. Johnson suggested that providing differential and individual treatment of problems would not only assist the students, but would also be beneficial for them in learning how to foster religious life in their future parishioners (Johnson, 1932, p. 152). “But,” says Johnson, “if students are to be treated as individuals, they need to be known as individuals” (p. 261).

He found that students themselves recognized several needs that resulted from their seminary experience: the need to rethink their religious beliefs, to maintain their religious zeal and enthusiasm, and to have both satisfactory private devotions and corporate worship experiences. However, the students also believed that many of their religious needs were left unmet. Specifically, they believed that they were neither known nor treated as individuals; that the seminaries neither recognized the importance of the religious life, nor made provision for its development; that while intellectual processes are being reconstructed, it was difficult to retain positive faith, and that there was no faculty help in either private devotions or stimulating corporate worship. He further noted that there is usually a strong connection between a student’s personal religious experience and his initial decision for ministry, and since the religious life is a vital part of the minister’s
equipment, seminaries cannot afford to neglect this area (Johnson, 1932, p. 151). There were no references to female seminary students in his study.

**Niebuhr and Purpose (1956)**

The next major study of more than 90 North American seminaries was one led by the American Association of Theological Schools (AATS) and funded by the Carnegie Corporation on theological education in the United States and Canada that resulted in H. Richard Niebuhr’s (1956) *The Purpose of the Church and Its Ministry: Reflections on the Aims of Theological Education*. It seems that although Niebuhr found difficulty in determining the purpose of the church and its ministry, he was convinced that “the curriculum is overloaded and the student must be relieved of its burden” (Niebuhr, Williams, & Gustafson, 1957, p. 81). This contention was no doubt fueled by those who kept wanting to add new courses in new disciplines, in an effort to keep up with increasing demands made of clergy in an ever-changing society, because from the 1930s to the 1950s, classes in psychology, ethics, Christian education, history of worship, music, evangelism, as well as field work courses were added to an already full curriculum.

However, whatever the church ought to be, one thing was certain: The theological schools should be providing well-prepared leadership of these churches—hence his preference for the term ‘pastoral directors’ since terms of “priest,” “preacher,” and “evangelist” were no longer helpful designations (Ferris, 1990, p. 8; Niebuhr, 1956, pp. 4, 82, 83).
The contribution that Niebuhr’s work makes to the spiritual formation discussion has to do with his plea that each student find internal consistency and a personal synthesis during theological training. For despite the outside pressures from changing world conditions and the changing motivations for coming to seminary (1956, pp. 145-173), “students need to recognize that the Christian faith has at its center a personal response to the reality of the creative, redeeming, inspiring God . . . a reality which shapes the whole of life” (p. 82). This requires a continual seeking of the “wedding of intellectual maturity to personal integrity and Christian commitment” (p. 83). Going beyond the discussions on ways to bring order and unity to the curriculum by outlining a group of studies in which the relationships are formally stated, Niebuhr sees a more personally integrated scheme.

Unity then, in theological education, means more than logical unity, though that is a value to be prized. It is a matter of the interconnection of all topics in the curriculum and their being bound up with life experiences in such a way that the student discovers exciting new possibilities through that central reality in his faith, which gives meaning to the whole. (p. 83).

In this system, the faculty would not be working as individuals, finding their own ways to show the connection between their subject and the Christian cause, but rather faculty would maintain continuous intellectual and spiritual contact among the other teaching members. He further observes that

the unity of theological study can be served . . . only if the faculty consists of a genuine collegium of teachers who have not only achieved personal synthesis for themselves, but also realize as a group of intellectual workers the unity of the Church. (p. 83)

He goes on to say, “What is essential to the preparation of any Christian minister is his grasp of the Christian faith and its promise and relevance for every human situation”
Once again ideals are set forth, but it is not clear how they will be implemented, which is probably why Ferris (1990) considers that the studies led by May and Brown (1930s) and Niebuhr (1950s) have had little discernible impact on theological education despite the considerable investment of time and resources (p. 8).

Niebuhr's observations regarding the actual process of a student's theological education is, I believe, significant to the discussion of personal spiritual formation. Not only was there the acknowledgment that students come to seminary with at least 10 different motivations (Niebuhr, Williams, & Gustafson, 1957, pp. 145-173), but also that each person comes at a different stage of personal, intellectual, social and spiritual maturity, and will respond in different ways to the material presented in class, due in part to past or present situations which may be going on in his own world or the global sphere (pp. 159-173).

Blizzard's Ministerial Roles (1956)

Samuel Blizzard’s 1956 survey of 690 Protestant clergy revealed a basic dilemma. While the clergy’s views of theology and their seminary training dictated a certain priority order for their roles in parish ministry, the study found that they actually spent most of their time performing duties they considered least important. In addition to the traditional roles of preacher, priest, pastor, and teacher, the societal expectations of organizer and administrator were added. The survey also provided information regarding the amount of time spent in each activity (Blizzard, 1956, pp. 508, 509). What is significant for my study is the absence of any reference to personal time with God. It appears that societal
expectations were the main motivating force in the ministry of these clergy, and that while their lives were being filled up with the expectations of their parishioners, there was little time to reflect on what God’s priorities may have been for their lives.

**Changes in Society**

Societal and cultural changes in the last 50 years have led to wide-sweeping changes in the demands and expectations placed upon clergy, and thus their training. Whereas, in the 50s, pastors could depend largely on values taught in the school and home to validate and strengthen those taught in the church, Schaller (1987, pp. 22-24) cites television, with its anti-Christian moral perspective, and the passivity towards community involvement it breeds, as well as the public schools’ fear of a value-laden curriculum, as all being counter to what the church stands for. He also suggests that local pastors have to compete with unrealistic expectations of the congregation who compare their pastor’s performance and services with those of the super preachers on television, and that characteristics of market processes including competition between products, increasing possibilities of market selection, and decreasing brand loyalty seem to be having a transference effect on the choices people are making about church attendance and affiliation (pp. 25, 26).

These societal changes have led to changing expectations of the seminary, so that instead of one or two main purposes for theological education, the list is endless. Schaller (1989) posits that while an organization can usually fulfill the original one or two stated purposes for which it was established, adequate functioning usually breaks down when
many additional purposes are added. He then gives what he designates as a partial list of some of those extra demands placed on seminaries as he poses the questions:

What do you believe should be high on the list of priorities of a seminary? Should the top priority be preparing people for full-time service in parish ministry? Or socializing students into the culture of the denomination? Or preparing students to serve as bivocational ministers? Or reinforcing the love of reading and learning? Or encouraging students to go on to graduate school to prepare for a career in higher education? Or to serve as an entry point for ethnic minority students into what was largely an Anglo denomination? Or encouraging research by the faculty to advance the frontiers of knowledge? Or to produce graduates who are expert administrators, spellbinding preachers, superb teachers, and loving pastors? Or to provide continuing education experiences for pastors? Or to train students for that growing variety of specialized ministries? Or to deepen the faith of students and assist them in their personal religious quest? Or to provide guaranteed employment for adults? Or to create specialized centers for research and study? Or to maintain a valuable piece of real estate? Or to change the denominational culture and value system on divisive issues such as the role of organized labor, immigration policies, homosexuality, abortion, the ordination of women . . . euthanasia, marriage and divorce? Or should theological seminaries, like the army and navy, see themselves as institutions preparing young adults for entrance into the American labor force? Or should greater emphasis be placed on training and attracting mature second-career people for the parish ministry? Or should theological seminaries be expected to prepare students to go out as church planters immediately after graduation? Or should a greater allocation of resources be placed on the continuing education of the lay leaders as part of an effort to expand the ministry of the laity? Should theological seminaries be encouraged to prepare students to go out and fit in comfortably as pastors of long-established congregations? Or should a greater emphasis be placed on students to master the skills necessary to be an intentional agent of change? Should the top priority be placed on preparing students to serve as the pastor of a smaller congregation or to serve as a program specialist on the staff of a large congregation? (pp. 175, 176)

This extensive, but by no means exhaustive, list illustrates the great variety of purposes for which an institution of theological education could exist. The list also reveals the spectrum of situations in which the issue of spiritual formation could be either vitally important or completely irrelevant.
David Wells (1992) observes that societal pressures on ministers to provide professional help in ever-increasing areas of expertise results in “clientele expectations . . . so bloated that no mere mortal can any longer satisfy many churches” (p. 183). May and Brown’s 1934 study of five pastoral roles had grown to 14 roles in Hartford’s *Church Planning Inventory: Comparative Tabulations: 72 Congregations* (1986), with the top three priorities given to planning ability, facility in leading worship, and sensitivity to the congregation. Spiritual development of the congregation was the fourth priority. Wells further suggests that if the theological and biblical core has disintegrated, then these pastors no longer have a way to judge how their time should be spent, and become entirely at the mercy of the parishioners they serve, thereby making the life of the church the center that defines what they do, instead of a knowledge of God.

As an illustration of how far God has been pushed to the periphery of evangelical thinking, Wells (1992) cites research of 200 sermons preached by evangelicals between 1985 and 1990, which were classified according to their amount of biblical content: 24.5% included biblical content; 22.5% had some biblical reference, but personal organization; 39% were classified as non-biblical but identifiably Christian, and 14% of the sermons had neither content nor organization identifiably Christian. Less than half were explicitly biblical, and a significant number were not Christian at all. More significant for Wells was the fact that “only 19.5% of the sermons sought to ground or relate what was said in any way to the nature, character, and will of God” (p. 185), and more than 80% were anthropocentric, leading him to comment:
It seems that God has become a rather awkward appendage to the practice of evangelical faith, at least measured by the pulpit. . . . If these figures bear any significant relation to what those in the pews are thinking and hearing, then we have the makings of a faith whose life is only tenuously related to the Word of God, that is not much nurtured by it, that is not much anchored in the character and greatness of God, and that is almost completely unaware of the culture in which it must live—for in virtually none of the sermons analyzed was any attempt made to take account of the modern situation. (Wells, 1992, p. 185)

In the older model, theology was a synonym for the knowledge of God, and was the basis for ministry, whereas the present emphasis on ministers’ professional roles, makes the church, and not God, the “fulcrum around which ministry turns” (p. 187). This means the minister, “like a small boat cast loose upon the high seas,” has become vulnerable to many perils, including the religious consumers in the church (Wells, 1992, p. 187). With no time for God at the center of life, there is the danger that the minister will spend all his days and energy trying to meet the impossible demands of church congregations, in an increasingly complex and ever-changing society. More than ever before, it seems that pastors need to know what or who is the basis of their ministry, which again relates back to the issue of the theological education curriculum in general, and the place of spiritual formation in particular.

Relating Purpose, Curriculum, and Spiritual Formation

It seems to me that discussion concerning theological education could profitably center around the question of the “why” rather than the “what.” For example, Farley himself (1983, p. 3) speaks of the focus of the theological education debate being more on symptoms than the disease itself, yet he then proceeds to skirt around the issue of the purpose of theological education by embarking on an historical account of the types and
characteristics of various forms of theological education, and the need for a unity in the
“clusters of sub specialities” that are now being offered as a “school-catalogue
phenomenon” (p. 141). He seems preoccupied with the question of what are we going to
teach, instead of the more foundational question: Why are we teaching what we teach, and
what is the teaching to accomplish?

David Kelsey (1992) identifies a number of functional and conceptual issues
associated with theological education which also embody spiritual formation
considerations. These include:

1. The goal of theological schooling—how to prepare genuinely “professional
church leaders, or how to “form” future church leaders “spiritually.”

2. The curriculum of theological schooling—how to integrate the “theoretical”
and the “practical” sides of the curriculum, or how to overcome the fragmentation of the
curriculum. Should such contrasting terms as “theoretical/practical,”
“academic/professional,” “head/heart” be used—and if not, how should the curriculum be
described?

3. Should theological schooling be thought of as “character formation” or
“spiritual formation,” or “personal formation,” or “intellectual formation,” and if more
than one of these, what is their interrelation (pp. 24, 25)?

When concerns for the social and cultural context both immediate and global are
added to concerns regarding human resources, financial resources, and governance of
theological institutions, it becomes obvious that the issue of spiritual formation in the
seminary can easily be overshadowed by other pressing needs. Hence Article 7 in the
International Council of Accrediting Agencies (ICAA) *Manifesto on the Renewal of Evangelical Theological Education* (1983) reads:

Our programmes of theological education must combine spiritual and practical with academic objectives in one holistic integrated educational approach. We are at fault that we so often focus educational requirements narrowly on cognitive attainments, while we hope for student growth in other dimensions but leave it largely to chance. Our programmes must be designed to attend to the growth and equipping of the whole man of God. This means, firstly, that our educational programmes must deliberately foster the spiritual formation of the student. We must look for a spiritual development centred in total commitment to the lordship of Christ, progressively worked outward by the power of the Spirit into every department of life. We must devote as much time and care and structural designing to facilitate this type of growth as we readily and rightly provide for cognitive growth. (p. 5)

**Taskforce on Spiritual Formation (1972)**

Experiential spiritual formation

The report from the AATS task force on spiritual development describes aspects of a personal spiritually formative process that occurred concurrently with a research process. As the group wrestled with the mandate to “shape a set of concepts and principles that can guide a program of spiritual development” (Babin et al., 1972, p. 3), they began to realize that their assignment was “so much more than an intellectual clarification of concepts” (p. 3). In fact the time together included “an opening up to each of us of the graciousness of God . . . an awareness of the complexity of the process . . . and a grappling with the contemporary meaning of spiritual development for ourselves” (p. 3). As a result of their time together, the group became convinced that “spiritual development stands central not only in the training for ministry but central for all of us who dare in any way to do theological education in times such as these” (pp. 3-4).
Seminaries' primary commitment to Christ

The task force noticed that the brochures and catalogs of most seminaries “described themselves in terms of a Christian community, seeking to serve the various members of that community, the church, and the world in the name of the Lord” (Babin et al., 1972, p. 8), which led the group to confirm that “the primary commitment of a seminary is not to training nor to education but to Christ and His service” (p. 8).

Further, they concluded that it is this commitment that distinguishes the seminary from a university department of religion; that gives a seminary its raison d'être; and that makes sense out of everything else it may do (p. 8). This is a perspective on the purpose of theological education that I have not seen articulated elsewhere.

Faculty role in spiritual formation of seminary students

As the task force continued to meet, they noticed that any observations and insights that were shared concerning spiritual formation and development “would grow out of and be dependent upon, the spiritual formation and development of each of our members within the group” (p. 9). Which then led them to realize the fundamental principle: The spiritual formation and development of seminary students begins with, and is dependent upon, the spiritual formation and development of its faculty (Babin et al., 1972, p. 9).

The task force acknowledged the threatening, promising, frightening, and exciting implications of this statement, realizing that the point may not be received enthusiastically by many seminary faculty, since it penetrates to the very core of life. However, they
purport that in the eyes of the students the faculty is the seminary, and that students look to faculty for a witness of God’s kingdom principles—not to curriculum revision, student evaluations, or the reorganization of the board of trustees. Furthermore, the task force recognized that faculty responsibility operates on two levels at once: First as brothers and sisters working together “imagining to the student a personification of the body of Christ” (p. 10), and second, reflecting the life of Christ in one’s own individual living. The balance of the report was then devoted to working through some of the implications of these observations, giving support and resources for those who might dare to go further. There was, however, “no question of the involvement of the seminary in the process of helping a student grow in faith and grace. This is the very purpose of its (the seminary’s) existence” (Babin et al., 1972, p. 11).

Holistic nature of spiritual formation in the seminary

While recognizing that each seminary may address spiritual formation in different ways, the task force was very clear with the idea that

in a student’s experience of the entire spectrum of seminary life, he is being spiritually formed or malformed . . . and that he can be expected to grow in Christian faith, hope, and love only insofar as these form the seminary’s purpose, govern its self-understanding, and influence all its policies, structures, decisions—indeed all its life. (Babin et al., 1972, pp. 25-26)

In naming “the attitudes of registrar, the gardener, student aid and housing, the form of student government, the conduct of faculty meetings, the tone of administration, the hiring policy and wage scale, types of tests and the grading system” (p. 27) as all shaping the spiritual life of students, it appears that a large responsibility rests on the
faculty and the administration to ensure that every aspect of the seminary operates according to godly principles and actions (pp. 25-26), thereby demonstrating that spirituality is "simply the holistic quality of human life, as it was meant to be lived, at the center of which is our relationship with God" (Willard, 1991, p. 77).

Seminary—the Vehicle for Spiritual Formation

The potential of the entire seminary experience to be the vehicle for spiritual formation principle is also illustrated in Cetuk's (1998) *What to Expect in Seminary: Theological Education as Spiritual Formation*. However, she encourages the student to take active responsibility in the process. She readily acknowledges that in all areas of seminary life—whether in terms of thinking and learning, relating to diversity, ministry demands, or time, money, and family pressures—the seminarian is likely to be confronted with incredible challenges, disappointments, and at times confusion. However, instead of running away from the stressors, or just going into survival mode until the studies are completed, students are encouraged to see themselves as current ministers, to see the difficulties as opportunities for growth and faith, and dependence on God, in the context of a faith community, and to see theological education as teaching one "how to think critically and theologically about issues of faith and life and ministry" (Cetuk, 1998, p. 65).

Spiritual Formation as the Goal of Theological Education

Graeme Chapman (1986) postulates that the groundswell has become sufficiently numerous and articulate to be taken seriously, concerning the argument that "the spiritual
formation of theological students ought to be the principal goal of theological education” (p. 9). This assertion is based on two presuppositions: (a) that such an aim is far more comprehensive than either the practical goal of professional formation or the traditional institutional emphasis on theological sophistication, and (b) “that mature spirituality is the sine qua non of effective ministry” (p. 9). As Leonard Griffith (1973) observed, “Men and women who expect to share Christ’s ministry . . . must understand that its main motive . . . is to bring God into the experience of men [and women], and to bring men [and women] into the presence of God” (p. 11).

**Intentional Teaching for Spiritual Formation**

A number of studies have sought to describe or measure the effects of a short-term planned program designed to enhance spiritual growth or spiritual formation (see Adams, 1998; Cetuk, 1993; Jackson, 1982; Kvapil, 1982; Lindell, 1996; Miller, 1988; Van Dyke, 1990). Most of these have targeted a small group in a local congregational setting, and over a period of a few weeks introduced the participants to some of the spiritual disciplines. At the end of the class, evaluations are taken, and growth in spiritual awareness and spiritual practices is reported.

An additional five studies were located that deal specifically with spiritual formation in the seminary. Richard Stuebing (1994) analyzed how five theological institutions in Africa have sought to comply with various social, relational, and spiritual aspects of accreditation, noting how the importance of spiritual formation in theological education is supported by training-in godliness in the epistles. He also considers the
important role of faculty in modeling non-academic functions of seminary objectives, again in relation to spiritual formation, and the value of encouraging students to take on spiritual leadership roles on the campus. William Matz (1982) studied the value of a program of one-to-one and group experiences of contemplative practices for spiritual formation for seminary students, and found this intentionality was an important part of the curriculum; that integration in the total seminary life was stimulated; and that participants could see how the program could be modified for a local congregation (p. iii).

W. Michael Smith’s (1996) contribution to the field is the development of an extensive Bible-based field education program, with a carefully planned Supervised Ministerial Experience (SME) manual, which provides opportunities for both mentoring by an experienced pastor and for interns to have input into their future goals for personal and professional growth. His emphasis on spiritual formation comes from the understanding that spiritual formation “is to education for ministry as general physical conditioning is to basketball training. No ‘out of shape’ player can make the team even if gifted with abundant ‘razzle-dazzle,’ isolated skills, and impressive moves” (p. 138). He sees spiritual formation as the “foundation of all Christian ministry” (p. 138).

Cetuk (1993) used a small group experience for first-year seminarians to explore their faith journey as they were affected by their seminary experience. In addition to prompting caring ministry towards each other outside of class, there was increasing awareness of God’s presence and working in their lives, and “a corresponding deepening love and dependence on God” (pp. 46, 47). Her later book (1998) invites seminarians and faculty alike to look at the various aspects of theological education—the call to ministry.
classroom learning, community life, field education, financial and time management constraints—as opportunities for spiritual formation. The suggestion is made that perhaps theological education is not about learning, but about change—"changing students' worldviews, and receptivity to others; it is about changing their self-understanding in relation to God and others" (p. 45). However, she admits that this is usually an unexpected aspect of seminary education that does not come without upheaval and discomfort.

Barber's (1999) study combines the development of a Spiritual Formation course for seminary students and a quantitative analysis of its effectiveness. While some of the data showed the students benefitted from the class, three of the subscales in the Spiritual Life Inventory resulted in negative mean scores, which Barber believes could be attributable to the type of study and the type of data collection used. It is possible that students may enter the class with a feeling of spiritual well-being, yet after being confronted with a more realistic picture of themselves before God, may see themselves in a poorer light by the end of the session, hence the negative results (p. 85). Accountability with spiritual mentors or friends was also tried with varying success. Nevertheless, students' verbal statements indicate that students generally benefitted from the course, with the exception of two or three students who were dealing with major traumatic events during the course of the class.

Adding to the understanding of the topic, Barber reports reasons given to him regarding why no spiritual formation curriculum had been offered previously at his
university. The comments reflect commonly held resistant views towards intentional learning experiences for spiritual formation:

We are Baptists and historically Baptists believe spirituality is a personal issue between God and the individual. You cannot teach people to be spiritual.

General Baptists have never had an accountability system built into their structure. We believe in freewill of persons and freewill suggests that you don’t force people into a preconceived mold.

How does a person do spiritual formation in an academic setting? You cannot grade a person’s spirituality. What we perceive as spiritual may not really be spirituality. Spirituality is too subjective for a curriculum consideration.

We just take it for granted that ministerial students know how to care for their spiritual needs. (Barber, 1999, pp. 6, 7)

Robert Banks (2000), in Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models, provides a overview of the theological education discussion, then offers 60 pages of biblical perspective, which appears to be a rare occurrence. In reviewing the path of theological education over the centuries, Banks acknowledges that among seminary teachers today, there is a growing consensus that moral and spiritual formation must be an intentional part of seminary training, both inside and outside the classroom (p. 25). Regarding spiritual formation, Banks believes that spiritual formation does not develop through specific programs or chapel worship, but as a result of the leavening effect of the personal example of teachers and other key figures (including chief administrators and student leaders), with the broader culture and mission of the seminary, and with a whole range of co-curricular groups and available activities. (p. 201)

He admits that curricular offerings and programs in personal formation will be more effective when students can engage in the formative practices, as well as learn about them.
but stresses that their impact strengthens when they form part of a missional model of theological education (pp. 201, 203).

**Spiritual Formation and SDA Ministry**

When it comes to intentional initiatives in SDA ministerial training programs for personal spiritual formation, one is not overwhelmed by numerous examples and documentation. Bert Haloviak’s (1988) unpublished paper, *A Brief Sketch of SDA Ministerial Training*, does, however, provide a historical overview of the SDA church’s expectations for ministers, and of various training initiatives. There are occasional references to personal spiritual matters, but the majority of pastoral energy for more than the first 100 years of the SDA church appears to have been focused on evangelism, and although increasing membership resulted, “the church paid a heavy price due to the entrance of a debating, argumentative style of ministry that focused almost entirely upon the theoretical rather than the practical aspects of Christianity” (p. 337).

**Historical Perspectives**

This historical survey briefly traces the changing functions and training of SDA pastors since the 1860s, with particular regard for spiritual formation initiatives. The strong emphasis on cognitive and evangelistic strategies, without a corresponding emphasis on personal spirituality, is noted. Plans for formal training institutions, programs, and committees are discussed, and references to spiritual formation recorded.
Itinerant Evangelists

In the 19th century, SDA ministers were itinerant preachers, and the husband-and-wife “team ministry” concept meant that the wife would continue the follow-up Bible studies with new converts, while the husband moved to a new area to begin another tent series (White, 1860, p. 124). However, concerns of churches disbanding, and children rejecting the religion of their parents, led the church to see the necessity of a pastoral ministry with localized pastorates, and conferences began to arrange for systematic visitation of congregations. Annual licences to preach were granted to those who demonstrated evangelistic successes in new areas. At the 1870 and 1871 General Conference (GC) Sessions, a committee was established to outline a course of study for ministers, which was published in the *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* of May 10, 1870. The course of study consisted of 10 doctrinal topics, the reading of four historical works, and a section on English grammar, rhetoric, and punctuation, to ensure the quality preparation of manuscripts for publication (White, 1870, p. 164). The study was to be done independently during the year, and the ministers were examined at the end of year. The emphasis was very definitely on cognitive understanding, sufficient to teach others in a convincing manner (Haloviak, 1988, pp. 4-6). No mention was made of the personal devotional life.

Ministers of Compassion and Spiritual Guidance

However, while in Australia in the 1890s, Ellen White encouraged ministers to focus on compassion, following Christ’s methods of addressing the needs of humanity
(Havoliak, 1988). At a time when the church was judging the success of ministers according to the results of their evangelistic efforts, she emphasized the importance of personal work in families, which included the minister “understanding the spiritual condition” (p. 6) of his parishioners.

These men ordained to preach the word, should be educated to make full proof of their ministry in their personal labors in families, talking with the members of the family, understanding their spiritual condition, encouraging, reproving with all long-suffering and doctrine, praying with them, binding up his interest with their heart and souls. This is the work of the faithful shepherd. (White, 1892, p. 19)

This was not a new topic, for Ellen White often encouraged ministers to maintain a personal relationship with God. For example, in 1882 she wrote:

Many a proud-hearted professor would tremble like an aspen leaf in the tempest, could his eyes be opened to see what spiritual life really is. To be living Christians we must have a vital connection with Christ. . . . We must hold converse with Him while we walk by the way, while our hands are engaged in labor. . . . To comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise of the powers of man. (p. 337)

However, it seems that the busyness and preoccupation of working for God often crowded out the relational aspect of fellowship with God, hence White’s admonition that no work for the church should take precedence over communion with God (White, 1948, p. 6:47). “We want men that walk with God daily, that have a living connection with Heaven” (White, 1889, p. 2).

**Spiritual Life Sustained by Social Meetings**

Interestingly, while ministers, who were largely working in new areas, were being admonished to spend time cultivating their relationship with God, church members without pastors were involved in their own spiritual formation activities. Russell Burrill
(1997) describes how the religious life of early Adventist believers was primarily sustained through the “social meeting” (p. 107), in which the members could share together their life in Christ (p. 104). Consisting variously of prayer, encouragement to others, testimonies, confession, and song, these meetings were additional to, and separate from Bible study and business meetings, and were seen as extremely important for building personal spiritual accountability as well as for building healthy communities of faith.

A knowledge of truth without a sustained experience with God was anathema to early Adventists. That’s why the social meeting was of such supreme importance to them. The truth which they had discovered had now been validated by a deeper experience with God. (p. 109)

Burrill also noted:

There seemed to be an openness in these meetings that hardly seems possible in today’s individualized society. People openly shared their hopes, dreams as well as their struggles. (p. 106)

He further observes that since many of the communities “did not have the disadvantage of listening to a preacher every Sabbath, they were forced to develop their own communal spiritual life, apart from clergy interference,” with a resulting “very healthy spiritual church” (Burrill, 1997, p. 124). However, after Ellen White’s death in 1915, social meetings were gradually replaced by “prayer meeting,” in which congregational pastors would often preach, and the relational element of personal spirituality was thus largely lost. “An unbalanced emphasis on the cognitive and eventually even a fear of the relational replaced the beautiful balance of early Adventism” (p. 125).
Academic Demands

At this time when other denominations were establishing seminaries to promote an academic and professional training for pastors in keeping with the levels of training for doctors and lawyers of society, the GC Committee of SDAs also passed a resolution that recommended new plans for ministerial training (Winslow, 1990).

Advanced Bible School

The plans did not come to fruition until 1934 with the establishment of the Advanced Bible School, which ran three successful consecutive summer schools at Pacific Union College from 1934-1936. The primary reason for its establishment was to give younger Bible and history teachers the opportunity for graduate study and research (Welch, 1977, p. 4), although in the second year of operation, the door was opened for some promising ministers. High standards of excellence were envisioned. “Our Bible departments should and must be the peer of any and all others in power and influence, resulting from sheer knowledge, spiritual life and understanding, and pedagogical skill” (Froom, 1934, p. 11).

Of the three areas mentioned, instruction in academics and pedagogy appears to have been catered for, but one is left to imagine how such subjects as Judaism During the Second Temple, The Medieval Church, Seminar in Prophetic Fulfillments [sic], the Catholic Church in Contemporary Europe, Bible and Science, Philosophy of Christian Education, Hebrew, Greek, Prophets of the Assyro-Babylonian Period, Systematic Theology, Persuasive Speaking, Preaching and Radio Speaking, and a Seminar in...
Scientific Methods of Research (see appendix E) would necessarily result in "spiritual life and understanding." Even though administrators spoke of "the need to delve deeper into the realm of spiritual experience" (Kern, 1934, p. 5) and the need for "scholastic equipment and spiritual training which are necessary to enable them to elevate the truths" (Kern, 1937a, p. 24), the focus appears to have been apologetic and polemic making "truly effective soldiers of the cross" (Rudy, 1937, p. 3). "Knowledge of the word of God must be enlarged and deepened to include the truth that will stand in the face of present-day attacks" (p. 3). Such declarations could lead one to conclude that knowing how to uphold and defend truth was more important than knowing how to live in the presence of the God of truth.

Shearer (1990) cites more than 60 articles that appeared in church papers from 1934-1938 concerning the establishment and successful operation of the school; however, only two articles mention spiritual blessings—one in relation to the guiding of the Holy Spirit "as teachers and students pursue truth" (Rudy, 1937, p. 3), and the other, the student-initiated request for special groups for prayer (Kern, 1934, p. 5). Thus by concentrating "upon the revival of truth for the salvation of men and women," spirituality seemed largely confined to the intellectual realm.

**SDA Theological Seminary**

When the GC voted to rename the Advanced Bible School the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary on October 27, 1936, denominational articles emphasized "the importance of our own advanced training institution, for no other denominational
seminary can prepare preachers to unfold the Bible prophecies as we believe them” (Evans, 1937, p. 15). Thus ministerial training continued to focus on evangelism and apologetics, with earlier statements of Ellen White which spoke of the “expansion of the human intellect and the need for intellectual giants” (Kern, 1937b, p. 17) being used to support their emphasis on intellectual training.

Haloviak (1988) comments that the ministerial internship plan “seemed to push academic training strongly into an evangelistic mold,” with students being trained to use “charts and maps, stereopticon and moving-picture machines, and equipment for giving chalk talks” (p. 11). By 1942, it was noted that the ministerial student needed to have a firsthand knowledge of many things that were not required 25 years previously, consequently “the place and use of projectors, the technique of the radio, the best methods of publicity all must have a vital place in our present theological courses” (p. 12), illustrating the continuing emphasis on techniques and technology for “doing the work.”

Call for a Balanced Approach

The Fall Council of 1946 called for a “balanced” approach to ministerial training with four components of ministry—Evangelistic, Pastoral, Teaching, and Promotional, although one could legitimately question how balanced this fourfold “activity approach” could really be. In 1947, it was finally recognized that soul-winning was not the only work of the minister, and designations of shepherd and counselor were also added (Haloviak, 1988, p. 13).
In this brief history of SDA ministerial training, we have seen that although the spiritual component of life was sometimes mentioned as being important, little attention was given to its intentional nurture. It is as though the spiritual aspect of life was assumed to be present, functioning well, and not needing any special attention.

Potomac University

A view of spirituality that is somewhat detached from the rest of life is exemplified in the objectives of the SDA Theological Seminary as found in the Potomac University 1957-58 Bulletin. The first paragraph clearly states that the objective is to provide advanced training for those church workers whose service is to be primarily spiritual, such as pastors, evangelists, missionaries, etc. The next three paragraphs mention an impressive range of skills to be taught, ranging from habits of sound scholarship, public relations, administrative procedures, personnel management, institutional board responsibilities, and learning the needs and characteristics of people among whom one is working (Bulletin, 1957-58, p. 53), yet no visible connection is made between the mastery of these skills and the "primarily spiritual service" that the individual is ostensibly being trained for, nor is there any clarification as to what the "primarily spiritual service" might entail.

Ministerial Advisory Training Committee (MTAC)

A Ministerial Training Advisory Committee (MTAC) established by the GC of SDAs in 1950 has looked at various forms of ministerial training over the years, and at
times has been informed by a number of research projects. Findings related to my study will be briefly discussed.

SDA Research Studies

Lack of Spiritual Emphasis

Don Jacobsen (1974) asked 292 recently graduated students (1969-1973) to what degree their seminary training had prepared them for ministry. Two of the 28 pastoral skills listed were related to spiritual formation issues. The item "lead young people in meaningful Christian growth experience" was listed as the third lowest with only 40% feeling they had received adequate preparation in seminary, while the item "maintain a personal devotional life" received 64% (Jacobsen, 1974, pp. 44-54). Moreover, students said they wanted less theory and more practical application of the theory—less concentration on books about the Bible, and more concentration on the Bible itself. "Except for three or four courses, I didn’t need to study my Bible for the entire 27 months," said one student. Another said there was far more use of the Bible in college classes than there had been in seminary and he felt his biblical understanding had gone backwards while in the seminary, and that it had taken 3 years to recover his former familiarity with the Scriptures. Concerning personal devotional time, one student believed the faculty assumed that students were studying their Bibles outside of classes, which he felt was in most cases not true (Jacobsen, 1974, pp. 63-65). One student summed up his feelings with this statement: "If there were more fellowship, and spirituality, warmth and informality. The place needs to be humanized" (Jacobsen, 1974, p. 85). It appears that
students did sense a lack of spiritual emphasis in their classes, and were unable to compensate for this lack in personal devotions or fellowship with other students.

**Not All Helped Spiritually by the Seminary**

In 1974, Mervyn Maxwell surveyed over 500 lay-leaders across North America to ascertain how M.Div. graduates were received in the field. While 80% of the laity responded positively regarding the graduates' Bible knowledge and upholding of church standards, only 56% felt the seminary had helped the graduates to become deeply spiritual, with 11% saying it did not help (Maxwell, 1975, p. 6, cited in Dower, 1980, p. 40).

**Curricular Design**

Alex Currie’s (1977) dissertation on strategies for theological education in the South Pacific developed a conceptual model for theological education from the writings of Ellen White (see Appendix F). “Spiritual qualities” and “Christlike character” were included in the Prerequisites and Qualifications sections, and “Development of students’ personal religious experience” was one of the eight specific curriculum concepts (Currie, 1977, pp. 200-208). Although there are no classes dedicated solely to spiritual formation in any of his 10 curriculum models for theological education, his *Curriculum Model Six* (p. 229) has a segment in the Pastoral and Applied Psychology class relating theological concepts to practice—Bible study, prayer, devotions, and meditation. In recent (2001) correspondence with Currie, I asked him about intentional initiatives for spiritual formation, and he replied, that initially, the students were well versed in devotional strategies since they had grown up in the Adventist schooling system; however, when
student intakes included those from Government schools who had little religious
background, "more emphasis was given to grow and develop these students from a
spiritual viewpoint" (A. Currie, personal communication, January 16, 2001).

High Priority of Devotional Life

Dower's 1980 needs assessment study of the M.Div. program was based on data
from graduates, faculty, students, and employers of graduates, and sought to establish
how well the seminary program prepared students for ministry. All four groups saw
"nurturing a meaningful devotional life" as a high priority need of ministers, and all four
groups indicated that there was inadequate preparation in the seminary to meet that need.
Out of 101 items on the survey, the maintenance of a meaningful devotional life was
ranked as the second highest perceived need by ministers in the field, yet in terms of
preparation received in seminary, it was ranked 71" (Dower, 1980, p. 141). For this
reason, it was felt that there should be specific provision made for this in the M.Div.
curriculum (p. 144), with "instruction included on the growth and maintenance of the
devotional life" (p. 156). The study noted that students expect to receive through the
M.Div. curriculum an experience which nurtures personal and spiritual, as well as
academic and professional growth, and they wished for skills to assist in maintaining
balanced lives while in the seminary (Dower, 1980, p. 145). It was also noted that
without spiritual nurture, the study of the Bible can become merely another academic
discipline (p. 163).
Spiritual Life a Resource for Pastors

Ben Shoun (1981) surveyed SDA pastors in North America to ascertain what support systems they had, with a view to developing a psycho-social support system for them. Concerning how effective the person's personal Bible study, meditation, and prayer were in coping with problems and frustrations in ministry, 90% found this resource "very effective" (Shoun, 1981, p. 92). Further, many desired to have a mentor, especially those pastors with 2 years or less experience (p. 97), and the highest resource wished for was for a regular peer pastors' support group (p. 97). Shoun's proposed design for a support system includes brief references to the value of the personal spiritual life (p. 155), friendship (pp. 172-174), and support groups (pp. 176-179), thus, spiritual initiatives were seen as helpful and supportive resources available to pastors.

Seminary Responsibility

In 1984, the Dean of the SDA Theological Seminary spoke to some of the issues raised in previous studies concerning the seminary in the Focus alumni journal of Andrews University. He acknowledged the stresses placed on seminarians due to the shortened program, moving of families, and financial burdens, and acknowledged the seminary's responsibility as extending beyond the individual seminary student, to include the whole family. For this reason, a new position, Director of Student Life, was established in 1982, to assist students developing social and inter-relationships as a whole person in a family setting in addition to the intellectual attainments. Regarding the spiritual development of the student, Dean Gerhard Hasel (1984) added:
Some may feel that the spiritual development of the seminarian or minister may be taken for granted. We can take nothing for granted, and we are interested in strengthening the spiritual life of our students as well as their social relationships. The task of Dr. Holmes is precisely this direction. (p. 23)

This appointment was perhaps a concrete example of Hasel's recognition that beyond their formal training was the seminary students' interest and indeed hungering for food for their own spiritual lives. They want to grow not only intellectually but spiritually. They are eager to be fed in the totality of their body as well as ministered to in their spiritual and intellectual pilgrimage. (Hasel, 1981, p. 3)

It appears that the publishing of *The Adventist Minister*, edited by Holmes and Kilcher (1991), and written mainly by SDA seminary professors, was an attempt to help seminary students gain a comprehensive picture of the minister as a person, so that their pastoral "doing" would develop as a result of who they are. Issues of personal spirituality and integrity (Morris, 1991, pp. 1-26), relationships and nurture in the home, church, and community (pp. 27-53), as well as spiritual leadership, are all addressed.

The next edition of the University's alumni magazine reports Pastoral Formation classes in the seminary, "where students are assigned to a growth-action group."

Comprising the pastor of the church in which they were working, a faculty advisor, and fellow students, the groups met to pray, study the Bible, and discuss ways to better serve the church both presently and in the future ("Practical Experience for Seminary Students," 1984, p. 4). This was probably the forerunner of the current Spiritual Formation class as described in chapter 1. Vertallier (1993, p. 46) gratefully acknowledges the first Spiritual Formation class in the SDA Theological Seminary in the fall of 1992, whose course outline stated: "This course invites the pastor to develop his/her understanding and
practice of the spiritual dimension so that ministry may more intentionally take place in the context of God’s presence” (Course syllabus, 1992).

Studies in Spiritual Formation

At least five doctoral dissertations in the area of spiritual formation (Doss, 1987; Dunavant, 1988; Morris, 1987; Willsey, 1991; Yeager, 1988) were written under the guidance of Dr. Ray Holmes between 1987 and 1991, and it appears that his class on spirituality opened another dimension of ministry which had previously been unknown (Mathema, 1991, p. x).

Process of Spirituality and SDA Perspectives

Beginning in 1987 with Gorden Doss’s *Analytical Review of Christian Spirituality With Special Reference to the Seventh-day Adventist Church*, a number of dissertations written by SDA pastors address spiritual formation in various ways. A common thread among the writers seems to be a personal appreciation for the difference that knowing and practicing spiritual disciplines has made to their own lives, and a keen desire to share this discovery with others, which contrasts with their previous feelings of inadequacy and incompetency when asked by church members for help in the area of developing one’s relationship with God.

Doss reminds Adventists that although an accurate understanding of Christology and soteriology is valuable, “it is spirituality that informs and guides us into a relationship with Christ... Spirituality in the Adventist Church is implicit but it needs to become explicit and intentional” (Doss, 1987, pp. 123, 124). He also points out that some unique
Adventist doctrines, such as the Sabbath, the sanctuary, and the second coming, have significant connections with spirituality (see pp. 126-128). He suggests that ministers-in-training from their freshman college year right through seminary would be greatly benefitted by spiritual direction and training, for in the process of receiving help for themselves, they would also be learning how to provide the same kind of care for their parishioners (p. 125). Like VanDenburgh (1992), he suggests a more balanced approach for spirituality that encourages both the receptive and active modes, so that "being" with God can be balanced with the endless round of "doing" for God (p. 128). Doss would like to see each Conference provide spiritual guidance for its pastors, and for ministerial spirituality to be the topic of mutual sharing among clergy-in-training and clergy (Doss, 1987, p. 136).

**Spiritual Direction and Prayer**

Derek Morris's (1987) study on *Nurturing the Pastor's Spiritual Discipline of Prayer Through the Dynamic of Spiritual Direction* assumes that pastors-in-training may not have had sufficient spiritual guidance before they graduate from seminary, despite the strong emphasis on theology and praxis. Therefore, he explores the potential of spiritual direction as a means for nurturing the pastor's spiritual discipline of prayer (Morris, 1987, pp. 1-3). His own recorded experience through a period of spiritual direction is a testimony to the potential of spiritual direction as a dynamic for nurturing spiritual life in ministry (p. 3).
Spiritual Growth

Delbert Dunavant's (1988) study, *Lessons on Spiritual Growth and a Pilot Study of Their Effectiveness*, resulted from feelings of inadequacy regarding his ability as a pastor to provide competent guidance in spiritual formation for his church members. He regretted not having the opportunity to have formal instruction in spiritual formation as part of his theological training (pp. 1, 2). His biblical and historical study into the subject resulted in his writing 17 lessons which he invited five of his congregants to test. He describes the impact of these lessons in five case studies, and concludes that he learned much about how respondents' personalities reflect their patterns of spiritual formation (p. 188), and that he felt his own skills in spiritual formation had been sharpened in a number of ways (p. 188).

Deeper Life Conference

Norman Yeager's (1988) study, *The Deeper Life Conference: An Adventist Adaptation of the Spiritual Retreat Concept*, grew out of a desire to grow in a relationship with God, and to know how to help others who came to him as their church pastor seeking "a living relationship with God" (Yeager, 1988, p. 3). Conversations with other pastors confirmed the lack in the church of suitable materials to help people, hence his development of approximately 100 pages of presentation and resource materials for a weekend retreat where spiritual formation and the spiritual disciplines are explained and practiced. The study also analyzes the responses of attendees at three separate weekends.
Introducing Spiritual Disciplines to Church Members

Steve Willsey’s (1991) *Model for Introducing the Spiritual Disciplines to the Members of Capital Memorial SDA Church* developed from his own spiritual pilgrimage and an appreciation of the ancient spiritual disciplines of prayer, devotional use of Scripture, meditation, and journaling as a means for developing intimacy with God. He believes that

experience proves that, at least for most Christians, spirituality must be intentionally cultivated. Without commitment or a plan which includes actions designed to provide openness to God, the relationship begun at conversion in a decisive act of the will fizzles out and continues in name only. (p. 66)

His study looks at the process of spiritual formation, providing a historical overview of its place in the history of the church, and illustrating some perspectives of such Adventist writers as Morris Venden, Edward Heppenstall, and Ellen White (pp. 49-118). He shows how Ellen White understood the importance of the spiritual disciplines and the process of spiritual formation (pp. 104-117). Willsey observes that “for years Adventists have talked about the importance of readiness for the Lord to come, but have dwelt on good works, rather than the spirituality (or the relationship with God) that produces the good works” (p. 102). Furthermore, “many members became guilt-ridden but afraid to admit that they really were not ready, nor did they know how to develop a meaningful relationship with God” (p. 2). Thus Willsey wished for spiritual formation to become a more important denominational priority than theological debate and institutionalism, which he perceived as consuming the greatest attention (Willsey, 1991, p. 4).
Biblical Models of Spiritual Leadership
and Spiritual Formation

Ben Maxson's workshop which explored ways to help pastors grow spiritually was enthusiastically received by the 300 pastors who attended the 1990 World Minister’s Council in Indianapolis (Willsey, 1991, p. 210). Maxson has continued to study and develop resources in this area for the world church, and his work in the area of spiritual leadership incorporates biblical models of spiritual formation, spiritual growth, spiritual leadership, and discipleship based on extensive biblical study yet combined with practical strategies which the local pastor can use in visits that seek to enrich a person’s walk with God.

Roles and Goals of Pastoral Ministry
From Scripture

VanDenBurgh’s belief that “Adventism has never had an intentional and articulated theology of pastoral ministry” led to his 1992 study, The Effective Pastor: A Theology of Equipping Ministry for Seventh-day Adventist Pastors, which seeks to discover from Scripture the parameters of pastoral ministry and the role and goals of ministry (pp. ii-v). He uses a colorful word picture to describe the frustration of his post-seminary pastoral experience, and suggests that many young ministers may have left the ministry because of similar frustrations associated with role confusion:

I as a young pastor struggled to make sense of all the conflicting demands thrust upon me. Seminary had taught me a lot of theology, but the church I served and the conference administrators who considered themselves my superiors wanted a set of behaviors that seemed to have nothing to do with the theology I had learned. For a long time I felt like the man in the circus who spins plates on the ends of sticks. I got so I could keep a number of them spinning all at the same time, if I ran fast enough,
but I couldn’t see why I should (except to keep people happy) nor could I see any relationship between the plates, or any theological warrant or significance to it all. (pp. iii, iv)

In looking for ways that one’s theology of pastoral ministry can inform and shape one’s practice of ministry, VanDenburgh (1992) found the “equipping model” as a dominant biblical model, and he sought ways that this knowledge could inform pastoral functioning, decisions, and strategies in the local parish. In this context, spiritual formation is addressed in the chapter on the person of the Pastor (pp. 248-272), since “what the pastor does must flow out of and be consistent with what he is. . . . In no other profession is consistency in being and doing so necessary” contends VanDenburgh (1992, p. 248). In a society that is “big on doing,” and which “values busyness and activity . . . what we need to do is to make space for God in our lives” (pp. 248, 249), hence the encouragement to practice spiritual disciplines. A holistic approach is advocated, with a very engaging values clarification exercise on personal life goals offered as a means of helping the pastors gain new perspectives for their pastoral ministry (pp. 264-268).

**Spiritual Formation Course for Zimbabwe**

Zacchaeus Mathema’s (1991) project also originated with a sense of the personal and corporate need for pastors to experience a balance in their lives by providing time for the contemplative mode of spirituality, in addition to trying to satisfy the continual demands of evangelistic and administrative responsibilities (pp. 1-3). His biblical study includes the NT images of Christian experience (pp. 16-50), and NT concepts of ecclesiology which relate to spirituality (pp. 51-100). With a brief history of ministerial
training in Zimbabwe, Mathema mentions that the faculty memorandum to the Division committee articulated the need for a well-educated and professional ministry, and then comments: “Spiritual qualifications of the minister are mentioned here and there as essential, but there was apparently no thought of a specific spiritual formation program for the pastors in training at that stage” (pp. 145, 146). A similar situation has already been noted in American theological training. The remainder of the project outlines the format for spiritual formation in the classroom setting, and an informal seminar setting, with guided meditations on the spiritual disciplines being included in one of the appendices.

**Spiritual Formation Course for France**

Bruno Vertallier’s (1993) study provides materials for a class in spiritual formation and arises from an earlier (18 years previously) time in his ministry, in which he regrets his “inability to recognize his own needs in the spiritual dimension” (Vertallier, 1993, p. 2).

Recognizing that spiritual formation does not “just happen” at a seminary, he wrote nine 2-hour sessions on personal spiritual formation, as well as the materials for a weekend retreat for the Collonges-sous-Salève Seminary in France. Although he sees spiritual formation as part of the curriculum, he feels that it should be a free-will decision to participate, thus if students do not feel like becoming involved in the experience, they are able to postpone their attendance to a more appropriate time (p. 105).

**The SDA Church and Spiritual Formation**

One of Vertallier’s significant contributions to the conversation is to address the question of how the SDA church lost its focus on spirituality, for he suggests that the early
pioneers of the SDA church had a deep love for the Lord, and spent considerable amounts of time each day in devotional Bible reading, prayer and meditation, as, for example, J. N. Andrews (Smoot, 1985, pp. 1-13).

How the Church Changed Its Focus

Knight (1990) explains that the phenomenal expansion in the educational work of the SDA church, from 1895 onwards, was due to the “Christocentric revival in the church’s theology, that led to spiritual revival in its educational program, accompanied by a clearer vision of its purpose” (p. 14). William Prescott (1892), the GC education director, led a number of ministerial institutes in the years following 1888, which emphasized the centrality of righteousness by faith to Adventism’s teaching and mission, and the need for a spiritual revival among the educators (Knight, 1990, pp. 13, 14).

Some of these materials, preserved in denominational journals of the times, reveal a clear emphasis on personal spiritual formation issues as opposed to mere academic learning:

There surely cannot be any controversy over the statement that in every Seventh-day Adventist school special attention should be given to the study of the Bible. But while this is true, it is important to know how to study and teach the Bible that the best result may follow. What is the object to be sought?—It is the spiritual growth of the students. But is it not desirable to be well versed in Bible manners and customs, to be familiar with Biblical history, and to know many interesting things about the Bible?—Most certainly; but all this is valuable only as a means to an end, and that end is personal religion, a genuine experience in the things of God. (Prescott, 1892, p. 554)

Somehow in the church’s eagerness to take the gospel to all the world, the focus turned from a theocentric approach to an anthropocentric one, where the planning, organizing, and success of the whole strategy depended on human wisdom, energy, and
plans. In the process of developing all kinds of programs and strategies for reaching a lost world, "the programs have become the goal, rather than the means for reaching the goal—which is preparing a spiritual people for the great encounter with the Lord" (Vertallier, 1993, p. 49). The problem is one of reversed priorities. The church became primarily task-oriented, with little time spent in getting to know God, whereas work for God should always be the result of a relationship with God. Vertallier illustrates how such a situation develops, when he admits that earlier in his working life he would generate so much work for himself and the staff that there was really no time for prayer; then he would justify the lack of prayer by generating even more work (p. 55).

References to Personal Spirituality in Official SDA Publications

To what extent have official publications of the SDA church recognized the importance of the spiritual life? In the Church Manual and various minister's manuals, "a personal spiritual experience" has been referred to as essential for church membership, ministry, and pastoral ordination for decades.

Church Membership

Since 1932, the SDA Church Manual has announced that church "membership rests on a spiritual basis.... Only those giving evidence of having experienced the new birth into a spiritual experience in the Lord Jesus, are prepared for acceptance into church membership" (1932, p. 72). Furthermore, it states that "church membership is a spiritual relationship," to be entered into only by the converted, for "in this way only can the purity
and spiritual standing of the church be maintained” (p. 72; see also Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, 2000, p. 29).

The Call to Ministry a Call to Spirituality

The most recent minister's manual titled Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook (1997, p. 21), as well as the previous Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Manual (1992, p. 21), declares that “a call to ministry is first a call to spirituality.” Spirituality is explained as being personal, and that it “must have a private dimension before it has a public influence. It is a response to God’s initiative, not something we initiate on our own. It leads us to center ourselves in Him. Christ becomes the passion of our lives” (Manual, 1992, p. 21; Handbook, 1997, p. 21).

The primacy of spirituality is then outlined as being essential to the pastor’s leadership, soul-winning success, preaching, and courage. The passage further elaborates that without the spiritual dimension, “ministry will degenerate to implementation of psychological techniques, organizational methods, and motivational cheerleading. Real power in ministry springs from spirituality that comes from a personal encounter with Christ” (Manual, 1992, p. 21; Handbook, 1997, p. 21).

Spirituality to Assess Readiness and Suitability for Ordination

As early as the 1932 Church Manual (p. 140), but also including the 1942, 1954, and 1977 editions of the Manual for Ministers, it was stated that a relationship with God was a necessary, non-negotiable item for pastors. In addition to “a belief in and
knowledge of the scriptures,” the “present personal religious experience of the candidate” was also examined to assess readiness and suitability for ordination (1942, pp. 13, 14; 1954, p. 19). The wording of the 1977 edition was expanded to include: “Spiritual stability and maturity, Christian experience and consecrations, and devotional life” (1977, p. 18). However, while it has been articulated for at least the last 70 years that personal spirituality is important to the pastor’s life and ministry, specific intentional initiatives to teach and assist pastors in this area have not been very evident.

Helps for Developing the Personal Spiritual Life

What is evident in official church documents is that although personal spirituality is affirmed as being important and necessary, little has been written about how this might be accomplished or nurtured over the years. However, the most recent Seventh-day Adventist Minister’s Handbook (1997) has five chapters (chapters 1, 2, 9, 10, and 15) which mention aspects of personal spirituality, with chapter 2 entirely devoted to spiritual formation.

For the first time, references to spirituality go beyond the typical “ought” and “should” statements, to include some “how-to” instruction. Five barriers to spirituality are described: The lack of confidence, time, privacy, planning, and discipline, which point to the fact that the things that hinder a personal devotional life are things that can be changed intentionally by new priorities, goals, planning initiatives, and discipline (see pp. 22-24). Another section provides a helpful variety of devotional methods (pp. 24-26) which up until this time has been rare in official SDA church publications.
It seems as if in previous years the personal spiritual life was taken for granted as being alive and functioning, so that practical ideas of how to have a meaningful devotional life were not seen as necessary. However, chapter 10 on professional growth reminds ministers that they must overcome the temptation of thinking that because they are doing spiritual things they must be spiritual. Moreover, in the minister’s code of ethics (chapter 9), the minister pledges that both his personal and professional activities will be “rooted in the Word of God and subject to the Lordship of Christ” (1997, p. 53), with a “commitment to maintain a meaningful devotional life for myself and my family,” to ensure “the spiritual growth of those to whom I minister,” and a continuing professional growth which “is always toward God” (p. 62).

Theological Training Proposals

Meanwhile, various initiatives in theological training were being written about and considered by SDA church-appointed committees.

Committee on Theological Education (CTE)

In 1986, the Committee on Theological Education (CTE) referred the document *Objectives for the Education of Ministers* to the various Division Committees of the world field for review and input, with a view to directing it to the appropriate bodies for adoption and implementation. In 1988, the same committee reaffirmed the former action, hence my reason for asking the GC Education Department for a copy of the adopted SDA goals or aims for theological education. However, the Associate Director of Education at the GC of SDAs acknowledged that “we have dealt with the practical aspects of
theological education before looking to specific goals or objectives” (E. Becerra, personal communication, June 4, 2001). Even though the 1988 document has yet to be officially adopted, it is noteworthy that the proposal recommends a holistic approach to ministerial training encompassing spiritual, physical, intellectual and special objectives. The pastor's devotional life is addressed as a distinguishing feature:

A ministerial graduate has a growing Christian experience established upon a regular devotional life-style of study in the Bible and writings of the spirit of Prophecy and a firm reliance upon private prayer as a source of strength and of solutions to problems. (p. 1)

Ministerial Intern Training Committee Progress Report

Some references to personal spiritual formation are more covert than others. For example, a Ministerial Intern Training Committee Progress Report of August 2, 1988, on the training of ministerial interns makes mention of “Bible Study—personal and doctrine,” and “Spiritual Formation thru [sic] communication with Members— newsletter” and Relationships within the Church—Christ, congregation, conference, supervisor” (p. 4) as the most obvious signs of anything related to pastoral spiritual formation.

However, a later version (Ministerial Education Curriculum, 1990, “Intern Training Core” places personal devotions—Bible study, prayer, meditation—at the top of the Personal Growth Core. Both Haloviak (1988) and Winslow (1990) document many of the ministerial training proposals. These include the MTAC decisions, and VanDenburgh's (1988) Proposal for a Ministerial Training Program for the Pacific Union From the Ministerial Education Sub-Committee of the Pacific Union Ministerial Training Review Committee, which outlined a coordinated 10 years of ministerial training.
to include College (4 years), Pastoral Assistant (1 year), Seminary (3 years), and Intern (2 years) (Winslow, 1990, p. 9).

Ministerial Training Advisory Committee (MTAC)

In a sub-committee of MTAC, Jon Paulien (1990), writing on behalf of the Ministerial Training Study Committee (MTSC), notes that “spiritual formation is the number one priority at all levels of the process” (p. 1), and “Personal Spirituality” is listed in the “Skills” section of essential ministerial training. Three months later in August 1990, spiritual formation was further articulated in the MTAC committee with the Ministerial Training in the SDA Church document. The importance of ministerial training to the SDA church was recognized in the introduction, where it was acknowledged that “the organization and message of the church often have little impact in a local field apart from the influence of dynamic, spiritual and well-trained ministers” (p. 1).

Since the minister’s role is first and foremost a spiritual one, we strongly recommend that spiritual formation assume a prominent place in the entire ten-year training process. Encouragement to spiritual formation should focus on how to know and experience God through such disciplines as prayer, fasting, meditation, devotional Bible study, and service. (p. 2)

This emphasis was then reflected in the Ministerial Education Curriculum (July 8, 1990), in which the proposed 70 subjects to be studied over the 10 years, together with the 350 outcomes or skills, are listed. Spiritual formation appears in each of the four spheres of ministerial training, with both personal objectives: “Openness to personal spiritual growth and renewal and willingness to accept guidance. Ability in the face of alternatives to choose and act upon values. A responsible person with maturity,
authenticity, personal integrity, flexibility and humility,” and teaching objectives such as “spiritual growth programs; teaching spirituality” (p. 2). The document was voted with “a fair amount of consensus,” (J. Paulien, personal communication, April 11, 2001), and although it was envisioned that the documents would move through the appropriate channels, so that by the end of 1991 coordination and implementation of a comprehensive ministerial-training program for the North American Division (NAD) of SDA’s would be established, it appears that this has not yet happened.

International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE)

In 1998, the Annual Council Meeting of the SDA church “voted to establish an International Board of Ministerial and Theological Education (IBMTE) to coordinate and supervise all undergraduate and graduate programs in pastoral ministry, theology, Bible/religion, and chaplaincy offered by the Church” (Annual Council of the General Conference Committee: General Actions, 1988, p. 18), and this new committee (which replaces the CTE) has begun formal meetings.

Ministerial Association Initiative

In 1995, the GC Ministerial Association produced the compilation Pastoral Ministry (White, 1995) as a resource for Adventist ministers. More than 13,000 Ellen White references to “ministers, “clergy,” “pastors,” “shepherds,” and “preachers” are collated into 52 topical chapters on practical, professional, and personal issues pertaining to ministry. The encouraging feature is that the first chapter concentrates on the value,
importance, and even necessity of a pastor's walk with God. White says that "there is nothing more needed in the work than the practical results of communion with God" (1948, p. 6:47). Other chapters related to spiritual formation include "Characteristics of a Minister" (pp. 35-40), "Ministerial Training" (pp. 43-48), "Development of a Personal Support Group" (pp. 49-51), "Preaching" (pp. 187-200), and "Jesus as Model Preacher" (pp. 281-287). Effectiveness and efficiency in ministry are linked time after time to a pastor's dependence on God and continual communication with God.

Research Without Spiritual Components

If "the most important concern to the minister must be a personal relationship with Jesus Christ," and if "this can be meaningful only if there is a consistent devotional life," and if the "minister's work will be powerless" unless "time is set aside for daily study of the Bible and prayer to sustain the soul" (Manual for Ministers, 1977, p. 9), how valid are studies on pastors and ministry if the spiritual aspects of a pastor's life are excluded from the study? A recent 2000 report, titled "What Makes a Pastor Effective?" seeks to answer the question on the basis of research, yet does so without including the spiritual component. The researchers acknowledge that "parishioners desire a minister who is deeply spiritual, a sensitive listener, and one who cares passionately for the congregation," yet because they (the researchers) saw those qualities as hard to quantify, "it was necessary to select some measurable outcomes" (Dudley & Swanson, 2000, pp. 26-29). In their conclusions, they admit that they have not studied criteria like "spirituality and love for the flock, or even powerful preaching," conceding that "no doubt these are very
important,” but because they are “prohibitively difficult to measure” they stay with four measurable outcomes: (a) percentage of membership growth, (b) baptisms as a percentage of membership, (c) baptisms from a non-Adventist background as a percentage of membership, and (d) average Sabbath worship attendance as a percentage of membership (p. 27).

Another study in the area of ministerial effectiveness lists 27 pastoral qualities and skills. Yet despite White’s (1958a) assertion that “those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm . . . [and] the men of prayer are the men of power” (p. 509), the pastor’s personal relationship with God and the ability to help parishioners to find or deepen their relationship with God are not listed (Dudley & Dennis, 1988). Not only does this situation lead to incomplete conclusions, it may also be sending a clear message to all those who participate in or view the results of such research that a pastor’s spiritual life is not an integral part of ministry, thus denying the relevance of statements that link an appreciation of the divine presence, to the power of one’s ministry (White, 1962, p. 144; Manual for Ministers, 1942, p. 7; Manual for Ministers, 1954, p. 12), and the measure of a pastor’s influence being “in proportion to their fellowship with God” (Manual for Ministers, 1977, p. 9; Manual for Ministers, 1942, p. 7; Manual for Ministers, 1954, p. 11).

Christian Schwarz, in his Natural Church Development (1999, pp. 26, 27), lists “passionate spirituality” as one of the eight quality characteristics of healthy growing churches, so one may assume that any research on effective pastors and ministry that excludes the spiritual dimension is incomplete, and will therefore draw distorted
conclusions. Furthermore, if the research has been commissioned by some church entity as a tool for future policy making, then decisions based on these kinds of results could be weak and ineffective.

Jack Bynum and Douglas Clark's study, titled "Indicators of Ministerial Resilience: The Dropout Dilemma" (2000a), has a similar problem. SDA academicians, an SDA conference, and an SDA college sponsored a study that followed the progress of ministerial student graduates over a period of 10 years, differentiating between those who stayed in ministry ("persisters"), those who started but dropped out, and those who never did enter the ministry ("rejects"). Data concerning lifestyle and economic comparisons, values and attitudes, and demographics were collected. Regarding predictability, the researchers reported that "the strongest and most impressive early indicators of future Ministerial Persister or Dropout behavior are Age at College Graduation, Sibling Birth Order, College Grade Point Average, Number of SDA parents, and Parents' Marital Status" (Bynum & Clark, 2000b, p. 14).

In a personal e-mail communication (January 30, 2001), I asked the researchers if their survey addressed the issues of the personal devotional life of pastors or spiritual formation classes during their seminary training, or whether the participants made any reference to their relationship with God. Bynum replied by saying:

Unfortunately, our survey questionnaire was so long that we had to delimit it to mostly demographic questions that could be quantified. The inquiries you are interested in are extremely relevant, I would think, to persisting and dropping out of ministry and would make an excellent research project. The difficulty would be in standardizing subjects' responses so definite patterns could be revealed. While challenging, it could be done if very careful structure were used in the questions. (J. Bynum, personal communication, January 31, 2001)
Peter Ballis's (1999) study of the exiting process of SDA pastors similarly does not address the personal spiritual life of the pastors, and one is left to wonder whether that may have also been a significant factor. Smuts van Rooyen (1996) did not specifically address the pastors' spiritual life in his study of discontinuance from the SDA ministry; however, one of his questions, "The spiritual needs of my family could be met more adequately by a denomination other than the Seventh-day Adventist church," yielded a 25% agreement (p. 185).

As Wilkes observes, in the 1950s when theological education was being compartmentalized into specialized disciplines, "academic specialization set in, as it did in fields from anthropology to literature to physics. A person's spiritual life could not be quantified, charted, or assessed, so it was pronounced personal and left up to the individual" (1990, p. 72).

Summary of Research in Spiritual Formation Initiatives

The research I found in the spiritual formation field can be categorized in the following groups:

1. Individuals who presented their own spiritual formation journey as a case study

2. Pastors who produced a seminar and tested it out on a select group within their church (The seminar typically consisted of a number of weekly lectures, and homework involving reading and the practicing of one or more designated spiritual disciplines. By limiting the number of spiritual disciplines introduced, data collection and analysis became more manageable for the researcher; however, this restriction may have meant that some
preferred learning styles or temperaments were not catered to, resulting in a decreased interest in the program.)

3. College teachers who developed a college course, which they believe would be useful in teaching spiritual formation

4. College teachers who produced a college course, which they believed would be useful in teaching spiritual formation, and which they tested on a selected group

5. Pastors or teachers who worked on the rationale for spiritual formation or on a model for pastoral training that included a segment on personal spiritual formation

6. Research that looked at various aspects of a pastoral vocation, without making reference to the spiritual life, perhaps implying that spiritual formation is unrelated to the life and work of the pastor.

Conclusion

This chapter has looked at the changing profiles of seminary students, the changing pastoral roles and expectations over the years, and the varying degrees of commitment to spiritual formation that institutions of theological education have articulated and at times demonstrated. It was noted that changing societal situations, including the move from rural to urban communities, as well as changes in higher education and whole new fields in behavioral studies, have resulted in major shifts in role expectations for clergy. In many instances, these role expectations have increased to impossible levels. Nevertheless, the need for pastors to be spiritually attuned both to God and their parishioners has never changed.
This historical survey of the literature over the last 150 years reveals three trends concerning spiritual formation. First, in every period, there have been calls and pleas from the church, students, and at times seminary administration, for more spiritual preparation for students. Second, it has been demonstrated that initiatives for spiritual formation have not been met with uniform enthusiasm in theological education circles. Responses have ranged from hostility that spiritual formation should even be considered to be a part of theological training, to a total ignoring of the issue, to apathy, to the idea that it probably happens automatically in a religious school, to a general assent that "something should be done about it," to the conviction that it must be intentionally included in the curriculum, to the belief that it must be integrated with the intellectual and professional aspects of the curriculum, to the overriding passion that spiritual formation is the overarching theme around which the entire theological education curriculum should focus. Third, a recurring theme is that seminary faculty wonder how to approach spirituality in the classroom. They are concerned about how to develop, model and offer personal help for the spiritual life, yet feel ill-equipped for such a task. It is in the context of these multi-layered historical perspectives, that my research is situated.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter, the historical review of theological education in the last 150 years repeatedly exemplifies the research problem associated with this study. Pastors are expected to be spiritual leaders in their congregations and even teach their parishioners how the spiritual life is nurtured, yet most seminary programs do not specifically address this need. While some possible reasons have been given for this lack of training, a recurring theme is related to faculty feelings of inadequacy about how to "develop, model, and offer personal help for the spiritual life," and faculty questioning as to "whether they themselves are adequately equipped for such a task" (Edwards, 1980, p. 14). Furthermore they wonder how to approach spirituality in classroom teaching—whether by special classes, or by integrating spirituality in the academic subjects, in addition to personal, professional, and community arenas.

Research Purpose

Since there is little documented research of those seminaries that specifically and intentionally address the spiritual formation of their students, it is the purpose of this study to document, describe, and analyze the impact of four intentional learning experiences for personal spiritual formation on seminary students at the SDA Theological Seminary at
Andrews University in terms of behaviors and attitudes.

Because "purpose is the controlling force in research" (Patton, 1990, p. 150), decisions regarding the research design, site and subject selection, data collection, analysis, and reporting are made with the research purpose clearly in mind.

**Research Questions**

The Spiritual Formation class was originally introduced to the seminary curriculum to cater to a perceived need for personal spiritual nurture for pastors in training, so the study was designed to describe the impact of this class on students. The research focused on behaviors and attitudes which resulted from participating in the four intentional learning experiences facilitated by the classroom teacher: an initial all-day retreat, class lectures and readings, the required 4 hours (per week) of personal devotional time, and the weekly meeting of accountability small groups.

John Cresswell (1994), informs the qualitative researcher to "expect the research questions to evolve and change during the study" which is also "consistent with the assumption of an emerging design" (p. 71). My initial "grand tour" question was intentionally broad, so as not to limit the inquiry (p. 70), and included the nature of the class, as well as student perceptions of the class.

"Since qualitative design allows researchers to discover what are the important questions to ask of a topic" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 394), and best contribute to a understanding of processes, perceptions, and attitudes (Glesne, 1999, p. 24), my research question was:
In what ways were the attitudes and behaviors of students in the 1999 Spiritual Formation class at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, impacted by the four intentional learning experiences: (a) the retreat, (b) the learning about spiritual disciplines, (c) the practicing of spiritual disciplines, (d) the accountability small groups?

Site Selection

The class under study was the 1999 fall quarter class entitled Spiritual Formation GSEM541 in the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan. The site for the study was selected for a number of reasons. First, this institution has traditionally played a leading role in graduate SDA theological training in North America and continues to attract seminary students from six continents. Second, the international composition of the class (about two-thirds from outside of USA and representing more than 40 countries) was important to determine if there were any aspects of the Spiritual Formation class that were more (or less) culturally acceptable or relevant than others. Third, the annual class evaluations for this particular course had indicated increasing satisfaction in the 3 years prior to this study, hence the desire to describe, document, and understand the nature of this satisfaction. Fourth, the proximity of the seminary allowed me to observe all classes and continuously collect data over a 2-year period.

The Participants

Spiritual Formation class is typically a required class for first-year M.Div. students, so nearly all participants were in the class because of degree requirements; however, there
were five individuals who enrolled in the class for personal enrichment (see Table 2).

Table 2

Profile of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>101</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-24 years</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-39 years</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>66.0</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years SDA member</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-9 years</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+ years</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>74.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing data</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous Spiritual Formation Class?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>28.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>69.5</td>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Already pastor?</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>53</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* From Pre-Course Survey of 118 students, 1999 Spiritual Formation class.
Participant Profiles

Most of the participants were males, with less than half having previously been pastors. All had been SDA members for varying lengths of time (see Table 2).

Previous Pastoral Experience

The majority of participants (63 persons or 53%) had never pastored before. Of the 53 (45%) who had previously been pastors, many of these were continuing to pastor churches part-time while studying in the seminary. (The remaining 2% was missing data). The length of service in ministry ranged from less than 1 year to 13 years (see Fig. 1)

Figure 1. Frequency distribution of years in ministry.
The Class

The 3-hour Spiritual Formation class met once a week in two sections, either 8:30-11:30 Monday mornings or 2:30-5:30 Monday afternoons. The first 2-hour block was in the form of a lecture/discussion, covering such topics as biblical and Adventist spirituality, world view, temperament, and the practice of spiritual disciplines, for example, worship, confession, prayer, meditation, journaling, fasting, and simplicity. The third hour of each session was devoted to small group meetings which used *A Spiritual Formation Workbook (SFW)* (Smith, 1999), and suggested scriptural passages provided by the teacher. The first meeting of the class was an 8-hour required retreat which the students could attend either on the Saturday or Sunday prior to the commencement of the fall quarter's classes. For about 95% of the class participants, the retreat was their very first class appointment in their seminary experience.

The Research Design

This exploratory study used primarily qualitative research methods to describe and explore the impact of a particular spiritual formation class and analyzed the reported behaviors and attitudes of class members resulting from the four main intentional learning experiences of the class, namely: the retreat, the required 4 hours of personal devotional time per week, the class lectures and required reading, and the small groups. I chose qualitative research because it best suits the research purpose, since it endeavors to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. . . . To understand the nature of that setting—what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them,
what their meanings are. What the world looks like in that particular setting—and in the analysis to be able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. . . . The analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Merriam, 1998, p. 6)

The description uses prose to describe and analyze situations, presenting documentation of events, and quotes often over a period of time (Wilson, 1979, p. 448). A naturalistic approach was taken, which means that the class was studied in its normal, natural situation, without the researcher controlling or manipulating any aspects (Worthen & Sanders, 1987, p. 139).

This study is further designated as a qualitative case study, “since the defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of the study, the case” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27), which in this instance is a particular class in a particular seminary. A case could be a person, a program, an institution, or a policy—“a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 25). “The case is a specific, a complex, functioning thing” (Stake, 1995, p. 2), and the researcher aims to “uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). Robert Yin (1994, p. 13) adds that case study research is well-suited for situations where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their context, and, in fact, “meaning-in-context,” which refers to data contextualized within a particular environment, is one of six criteria used to substantiate qualitative studies (Leininger, 1994, p. 105).

Another special feature of case study research relevant to my study is the particularistic characteristic, which focuses on a particular class for “what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent” (Merriam, 1998, p. 29).
Data Issues

The timing, type, and method of data collection were carefully thought out to minimize disruption to the students’ learning environment. A major consideration that was important both to the classroom teacher and to me was that neither the research nor the researcher should intrude or interfere with the spiritual impact of the class or the course objective of “inviting the student to develop his/her understanding and practice of the spiritual life so that ministry may more intentionally take place in the context of God’s presence” (Dybdahl, 1999, p. 1). I did not want to be collecting artificially manufactured data, nor did I want data collection to interfere or distract from the spiritual experience that was occurring. Furthermore I did not want the extraction of data from the students to become a tedious burden to them.

From the students’ perspective, written assignments were part of the course requirements and were handed in to the class teacher. The departmental secretary graciously agreed to the important role of photocopying the student papers, and cutting off the student names, so that I received papers identified only by the student’s self-chosen code number that would identify all the data to be included in my research.

The students were informed of the research project by the teacher, who formally introduced me to the class on the first day of campus classes. I had already personally met many of the students at the two retreats the previous weekend so that I would not be a total stranger to them. I read a statement to the class explaining my topic and inviting students to participate in the study (see Appendix A). Complete anonymity was assured,
and implemented by the students themselves choosing a code number to identify all their data. The students' informed consent to be included in the research was demonstrated by their use of the self-chosen code number, with the understanding that at any time they were free to hand in their class assignments (my data) without a code number.

While wishing to attend and observe all classes, the retreats, and a small group, I did not want my presence to distract the normal class activities in any way. For this reason I chose a place to sit at the far left in the front row of the lecture hall, so that the tape recorder would not be intrusively conspicuous, and students could "revert to normal behavior patterns" (Popham, 1988, p. 169). I recorded all the lecture periods.

Data and Methodology

Case study research has no specific methods for data collection or data analysis which are unique to it as a method of inquiry, since the research is focused on insight, discovery, and interpretation, rather than the hypothesis testing of experimental, survey, or historical research (Bassey, 1999, p. 69; Merriam, 1998, pp. 28, 29). Case study research is therefore "eclectic," with researchers using whatever methods seem "appropriate and practical" (Bassey, 1999, p. 69). The data I collected are largely qualitative, as it is important to collect the students' own words about the various learning experiences, thereby providing rich descriptions (Merriam, 1998, p. 8). However, some brief descriptive statistics are also included, so that some idea is obtained regarding the extent of the impact of the class experience among the class members. Multiple methods such as observation and field notes, surveys, focus groups, written reflection papers, metaphors,
and weekly student reports were collected during the 10-week quarter to enable
corroborate the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 596). Some of these data
were already part of the course (for example the weekly reading report and journal of
devotional time); others, like the retreat survey and final reflection paper, had been used as
evaluation tools by the teacher in previous spiritual formation classes, but I suggested
modifications of the questions to the class teacher that would better suit my research
purpose, and he graciously agreed. The focus groups, metaphors, and the surveys
administered 1 year later provided additional types of evaluation data, and were developed
specifically for this study. Inductive analysis was used so that categories and patterns
emerged from the data, rather than being imposed on the data prior to data collection

Quantity of Data

Although qualitative studies do not typically focus on a large population, I
wanted to make the most of a sizeable multinational class whose pastoral experiences and
previous familiarity with spiritual formation processes differed widely, since atypical cases
"are essential for understanding the range or variety of human experience" (Abramson,
1992, p. 190). I also wanted to identify any disconfirming data, in an effort to see the
widest possible range of heterogeneity of perceptions regarding the class experience.
Miles and Huberman (1994, pp. 268-270) remind the researcher that exploring the
meaning of outliers, extreme cases, and surprises all help to guard against self-selecting
biases, and can therefore strengthen the basic findings. Trustworthiness of the study is

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improved when the researcher consciously searches for the negative cases (Glesne, 1999, p. 152). As Merriam contends, "the more cases included in a study, and the greater the variation across those cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40).

Bassey (1999, p. 69) advises not collecting more data than one has time and energy to analyze; however, the relative ease of data collection, with the possibility of using it in later research projects, prompted me to be as thorough as possible in collecting a variety of data types. Table 3 provides an overview of the 2,116 pages of data collected.

Data Management

Each researcher needs to develop an organizational system that is manageable, ensuring that access to original data and references is readily available. Such organization "provides an audit trail by which other researchers may validate, or challenge the findings, or construct alternative arguments" (Bassey, 1999, p. 61), thereby strengthening the trustworthiness of the study. The system of indexing and referencing chosen to identify, preserve, and access all data is explained below under Archive.

Master Record

The careful management of all materials and documents used for this study presented a major organizational challenge. An inventory of all materials related to the dissertation—both research and data—were listed in the front of my Master Record binder. The inventory listed 23 binders with original data, 8 with class notes, 12 with
Table 3

Summary of Data, With Number of Subjects and Number of Pages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data</th>
<th>No. of Subjects</th>
<th>No. of Pages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retreat survey</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-course survey</td>
<td>116*</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection paper</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphor (optional)</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 2</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 3</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 5</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>196</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 6</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 7</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 8</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Report Week 9</td>
<td>88</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
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<td>Focus Group 2</td>
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<td>26</td>
</tr>
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<td>Focus Group 3</td>
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<td>30</td>
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<td>Focus Group 4</td>
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<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-year later survey</td>
<td>62**</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>2,117</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 116 surveys collected at the beginning research, with 120 students in the class
** 62 surveys collected one year later out of possible 103 still in seminary.
photocopies of the data, 34 audiotapes of classes, focus groups, and interviews, a
bibliographic card file with 56 sub-headings, an article file with 34 subheadings, and a
record of the various computer back-up options I had chosen.

Archive

The Master Record serves as the index for my archive, which is the complete set of
documents involved in the enquiry (Bassey, 1999, p. 79). The archive comprises an
original set of the raw data, transcriptions of focus groups and interviews, and analysis of
the data, both in draft and final forms. There are 23 volumes in this set, with Volume 21
being the Master Record. The pages in each volume have been numbered in red ink to
distinguish between any other page numbers that may appear on some of the pages. This
pagination is used as the standard data reference system throughout the dissertation. The
index to each of the 23 volumes is outlined in Appendix A, so that a reference of (17:45)
means that a quotation from page 45 of volume 17 (Weekly Student Reports: Week 7) is
being documented. Some pseudonyms have been used and in cases where the same
person is quoted in different places, the pseudonym is consistent. When many individuals
are quoted from the same page of a data file, their personal 3-digit codes have also been
used.

Additional Copies

Photocopies of original data were placed in additional folders, and therefore have
the same standard pagination. Some of these copies were used for cutting up the data for
organizing into categories, and further analysis; however, I ensured that each datum has
been identified by its volume, page, and subject code number before being separated from its original source (Merriam, 1998, pp. 164, 165).

An additional card file on my desk managed the day-to-day organizational challenges while researching and writing, by providing a place for recording such things as notes to my committee members, Inter-library loan (ILL) requests, people to contact, references to chase, and ideas to pursue. Merriam (1998) talks of the necessity to “keep track of thoughts, musings, speculations, and hunches as you engage in analysis” (p. 165). Bassey (1999, p. 70) describes a computer day-by-day journal of the researcher. A typed diary, which recorded procedures I followed, with resources, reflective thoughts, questions, and possible areas of further research was kept in a 3-column table which could be sorted according to date or subject area as required. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest that verification procedures begin “by logging and then describing procedures clearly enough so that others can understand them, reconstruct them, and subject them to scrutiny” (p. 281). The researcher’s diary or journal plays an important role in this process.

Such devices as the researcher’s notebook, methodological diary (Walker, 1981), “reflexivity journal” (Carney, 1990), recording changes in design and associated thoughts, “data analysis chronologies” (McPhee, 1990; Pearsol, 1985) or running diary (L. M. Smith, 1992) strengthen the study as it goes. (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 282)

Glesne (1999, p. xiii) goes one step further by proposing that using a journal to reflect on one’s behaviors and thoughts, as well as the phenomenon under study, creates a means for continuously becoming a better researcher, because it captures the dynamic nature of the process.
Data Collection

Participant Observation and Field Notes

I observed and made field notes on all whole class appointments as follows:

1. I attended both all-day retreats on Saturday, October 2, and Sunday, October 3, 1999. All students in the Spiritual Formation class were required to attend, and this enabled me to begin the process of learning names of class members and establishing rapport with them.

2. I attended and recorded the two 2-hour classes per week.

3. As a participant observer I joined one of the small groups (female), which met for 1 hour each Monday following the morning session.

Written Data

Written data included both qualitative and quantitative questionnaires, journals, and reflection papers, collected at various times before, during, and after the course in the following sequence:

1. Spiritual Formation Retreat Evaluation (see Appendix B). This survey consisting of both qualitative and quantitative questions, was distributed on the first day of classes, which was between 16-45 hours after the retreat/s, and was collected during the class period by the teacher. The secretary then photocopied these for my data file.

2. Pre-course Survey (see Appendix B). I anticipated that the pre-course and post-course survey with the same questions could reveal changes in perceptions and attitudes towards various spiritual formation concepts over the time period of the class.
3. The weekly *Spiritual Formation Report* and *Reading Report* (see Appendix B). This report was handed in to the teacher every week, with the student’s name at the top of page 1, and beneath the name, the student’s self-chosen code number for the research study. Student anonymity was preserved by the teacher’s secretary photocopying the pages, then cutting the students’ names off the top before giving me my data copies. However, the Week 3 reports were returned to students before being photocopied. Later, three reports were turned in, and became the only reports saved in my archive file for Week 3. Similarly, many Week 4 reports were returned to students before being photocopied, and again a reduced number of reports are therefore recorded on the data record list.

4. The required three-page reflection paper was written and handed in at the end of the quarter together with the students’ notebooks (see Appendix B for reflection paper guidelines). The secretary photocopied the reflection papers and wrote the student identification code numbers on them, ready for my collection. The instruction sheet encouraged students to organize their thoughts around three ideas: Ways they had grown spiritually, what they had learned about themselves this quarter, and what they had learned about God. As it will be seen in the data analysis chapters, students addressed aspects of each of the intentional learning experiences within the framework of the three reflection questions, thus the 258 pages of the reflection papers covered many aspects of the class and its impact.

5. The personal metaphor of their spiritual journey was created at the end of the quarter. This was an optional exercise and was collected in the same way as the reflection
paper. Five bonus points were awarded by the class teacher for this extra work, which appeared to be a suitable incentive for the 68 students who took the time to do this.

6. Personal journals offered by volunteers at the end of the quarter. (These journals were optional and private, and should not be confused with the required weekly journals that recorded the 4 hours of devotional practices.) I made a written appeal for volunteers to offer their personal journals for me to read anonymously, but no one offered.

7. The Post-Course Survey (see Appendix B).

8. Follow-up Survey collected 1 year after the completion of the class. This consisted mainly of quantitative questions, with three open-ended questions and space to write a sentence or two. One year after the class had finished, I checked the class lists with the M.Div. program secretary, who confirmed that there were now 103 of the original 118 research participants still attending the seminary. I then procured the current seminary class lists, and looked for the fewest number of classes which would yield the highest number of these students. Three classes (combined) had approximately 80% of the students, and I negotiated with the three teachers who were willing to give me 10 minutes at the end of a class period to administer and collect the survey. This worked well with one lecturer, and 30 surveys were collected. Unfortunately, a snow day resulted in 1 day less for lectures than anticipated, which meant the other two teachers were not able to offer in-class time for the surveys. One teacher offered to administer and collect the papers after an examination, while the remaining teacher suggested I try and catch students at the end of his class periods. I therefore went to each of his remaining classes, asking individuals both before and after classes to fill in the surveys, and bring them back.

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the next class period, or fill them in on the spot. This was not very successful, as students were busy hurrying to the next class, and although some did take a form, and checked some boxes, most were too rushed to think about or respond to the open-ended questions. Seeing that the data collection had not been overly successful, the teacher then suggested I come to the final exam, and coax people to fill in the survey after their 2-hour exam! This netted another 5 or 6 surveys. I also went to a couple of seminary chapels and was able to encourage a few more to fill in the surveys and place them in an envelope I had with me. Other students I met in the corridors of the classrooms said they would fill out the survey and put it under my carrel door, and one survey was received by this method. By this time, it was the end of the semester, and my system for recording who had returned papers would no longer function, as giving out surveys did not guarantee their return. I therefore had to be content with the 62 returned papers (a 60% response rate), many of which had been filled out in a hurry.

**Focus Groups**

Six focus groups were organized to explore the process of spiritual formation. These groups met for 1½ hours at 3-week intervals (Week 3—October 18, Week 6—November 8, and Week 9—December 6), and were conducted on Mondays, immediately following either the morning class at 11:30 or the afternoon class at 5:30.

Each group consisted of six to eight volunteers, who indicated their willingness on a sign-up sheet circulated during the previous week’s class. Although it was planned that students would be purposively selected to get a variety of input, in actuality, all who were
available for the day were included, and no one was excluded. Even so, the 34 participants represented 14 nationalities. The morning focus group maintained the same membership, while each evening had new participants. The purpose of tracking the morning focus groups with the same members was to explore process and attitudinal changes across time. The planned incentive (my providing the lunch or supper so we could talk and eat at the same time) addressed the anticipated difficulty there would be in asking students to stay for a focus group without eating, or of trying to schedule another time in the week to meet. I hoped to overcome the problem of participants forgetting the appointment by meeting immediately after the weekly Spiritual Formation class. The system worked well except for the last group, when there were just three students; however, fewer participants was not a problem, for it gave each person opportunity to contribute in greater depth. The sessions were audio taped and transcribed prior to analysis.

**Interviews**

Both formal and informal interviews were conducted and recorded as I had opportunity to chat with students. Informal conversations were generally chance meetings, where students often initiated conversation regarding spiritual formation and asked about my research. These data may well be an example of “stronger data” due to the circumstances of collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 268).

**Selection of Data**

In the planning stage of the study I knew that I would have far more data than
could ever be included in one study; however, I did not want to pass an opportunity to collect varieties of data, as long as the data collection did not impact negatively on the students' spiritual formation experience. Therefore at the end of the data collection, I had to decide which data would most accurately fulfill my research purpose.

A comparison of responses on the pre-course and post-course survey was not attempted, because the pre-test was actually answered after the retreat and the first class lecture. Nevertheless, some data concerning initial concepts and misunderstandings of the term *Spiritual Disciplines* were used, as well as some of the descriptive data on the pre-course survey (e.g., the number of years in ministry and previous spiritual formation class attendance).

Time constraints prevented me from doing a detailed analysis of the optional metaphors, however a couple of examples have been included to illustrate the added richness in description and understanding that such data can provide. An in-depth analysis of these metaphors could significantly contribute to our understanding of the process of personal spiritual formation.

**Behaviors and Attitudes Studied**

Data were collected to measure behaviors and attitudes as shown in Table 4. Furthermore, the research design aimed to explore the impact in terms of behaviors and attitudes of each of the intentional learning experiences in the spiritual formation class. Table 5 lists each of the intentional learning experiences of the Personal Spiritual Formation class and indicates the sources of data for each.
Table 4

Behaviors and Attitudes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Attitudes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retreat Field Notes</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retreat evaluation</td>
<td>1, 3</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly student report</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>6, 7, 9, 10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection paper</td>
<td></td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal metaphor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One year follow-up survey</td>
<td>1, 4</td>
<td>9, 12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Table 5

Data Sources for Each of the Intentional Learning Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Experience</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retreat</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practicing Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning About Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>3, 4, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small Groups</td>
<td>3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Analysis

Retreat Evaluation Survey

The first five quantitative questions were designed to get an overall picture of the students' response to the retreat. Using a Likert-type scale, responses ranged from 1 (not helpful) to 5 (extremely helpful).

1. I believe such a retreat is an important part of the seminary experience.

2. To what extent was the retreat spiritually beneficial?

3. How beneficial was the meditation on Scripture?

4. How beneficial was the personal reflection?

5. How beneficial was the small group experience?

Mean scores were computed for each of the questions to see whether some aspects of the retreat were preferred above others. Individual scores were also scanned in search of atypical cases.

The qualitative questions asked students what they learned about God, themselves, and others at the retreat. I chose comprehensive sampling in which every participant is chosen (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 398) in order to gain as wide a perspective as possible, and to ensure that the unique, negative, and extreme cases were included. I therefore analyzed the responses of all 118 participants for each question. The first task involved typing the responses of each participant next to their identification code. This resulted in 7-8 pages of typed data for each question. All pages were then paginated in Volume 5, Data File, titled Analysis Retreat Surveys.
Labels using the student's own words were attached to the attributes of God. These were then sorted according to meaning and were labeled according to the students' own words and placed into categories. Three larger domains emerged, based on God's being, His thoughts, and His actions. I then typed a chart of these three columns, which Merriam (1998) suggests is a good way to check for conceptual congruence (p. 184).

**Focus Groups**

All six focus group audio tapes were transcribed, and analysis commenced by listening to the tapes a number of times while writing notes and observations in the margins of the transcriptions. The text was then analyzed in relation to the intentional learning experiences (the retreat, required devotional time, lectures and readings, small groups), as well as the class in general. Information was entered onto 3x5 cards, and subcategories emerged as cards were sorted into piles consisting of similar concepts.

**Observation and Lecture Notes**

These notes provided the content of the lectures, student questions, and class discussion, as well as my observations of the retreat and any other informal conversations with students. In reporting on lectures and discussions and participants, the notes were used to extend the description and understanding of the learning context.

**Reflection Papers**

The reflection papers written by students at the end of the quarter provided the richest data in terms of changed attitudes and behaviors. A total of 258 typed pages was
collected and paginated. These were read many times, and marginal notes were made concerning in-depth meanings and new insights discovered. Index cards, with brief notes and references, were annotated, and the 500 cards were sorted into subject areas. Photocopies of the data were cut up and sorted according to subjects, then referenced, and tabulated in readiness for repeated readings and further analysis. These papers were also used for the 15 selected vignettes in chapter 7.

**Weekly Student Reports**

The weekly journal and reading reports were read, and while some of the writing did not relate to the research questions, anecdotal comments were used to illustrate or confirm statements made by students in other data sources. Some of the reports were helpful in gaining extra insights into the week-by-week progress of students who were individually profiled. Those students who responded to the individual reflection section each week also made some valuable contributions.

**One-year Later Follow-up Surveys**

This survey was largely quantitative, looking for which parts of the class experience were seen to be most valuable from a 12-month-later perspective. The open-ended questions looked at reported changes or impact in their lives as a result of the class.

**Verification of the Study**

There are many ways that qualitative researchers can verify or strengthen the “truth value” of their conclusions, and whether conventional terms of *internal validity*,...
external validity, and reliability or the suggested naturalist’s equivalents of credibility, transferability and dependability are chosen to validate research findings, qualitative researchers have different ways of convincing their readers that what they have found can be trusted (Freed, 1991).

Validity

When qualitative researchers speak of validity, they are usually referring to research that is credible, trustworthy and therefore defensible (Johnson, 1998). One of the biggest threats to validity is researcher bias, and it often results from selective observation and selective recording of information, or the allowing of personal views and perspectives to affect the interpretation of the data. Since my initial interest in the topic had been sparked by very positive comments about the class, I wanted to minimize researcher bias by pursuing any negative or discrepant cases. Thus, I chose to include data from all the class members of the Spiritual Formation class to ensure that no negative cases had been excluded. I also wanted to find out the circumstances and reasons for both positive and negative findings. The four individual stories chosen illustrate unexpected experiences and outcomes. Additionally, the discussion of the Spiritual Formation Workbook is perhaps longer than expected, because this was the one aspect of the class that generated a considerable number of negative responses. Other strategies which I used to reduce researcher bias included the keeping of a field journal with its documentation of research decisions, discussions with others, and reflections on the decision-making process, and an audit trail that maintained data management techniques, and drafts of preliminary diagrams.
and findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

Maxwell's (1996) interpretative validity refers to the degree to which the research participants' viewpoints, thoughts, feelings, intentions and experiences are accurately understood by the researcher and portrayed in the research report. I used a number of strategies to ensure interpretative validity, such as participant feedback or "member checking" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), which was used throughout the study, as I invited both the students and teacher of the class to read sections of the final report and to make comments. The in-depth interviewees also had opportunity to check the text written about them. Periodic focus groups were helpful in clarifying issues raised in other data (e.g., the weekly reports), so a process of on-going feedback on both data collection and interpretation was used. Since most of the data collected were in the students' own words (either written or verbal), the report uses low inference descriptors (often even verbatim), so that the reader can experience the participants' actual language and personal meanings. Extended fieldwork, especially where multiple types of data are collected over a period of time, also strengthen the validity of a study. My data were collected over a period of two years, using multiple data sources, with periodic checking through focus groups, and individual interviews in informal settings which Miles and Huberman (1994) suggest is evidence of "stronger" data that is likely to be more reliable.

Glesne (1999) suggests that credibility of the findings and interpretations is established when there is prolonged engagement which provides the scope for the study, and persistent observation which provides the depth of understanding. The longer the time spent with respondents, the less likely they are to feign behavior, and the more likely
they are to give frank and comprehensive answers. I was surprised at the level of honesty and vulnerability that many students displayed in their reports, as they openly admitted, for example, a complete lack of any personal devotional life, or laziness, or lack of organization, which demonstrated to me the strong level of trust that was developing between the teacher and his students. Furthermore, I found that participants which met in the same focus group throughout the quarter became more open and shared personal insights with greater depth than those who participated in a single focus group.

Qualitative researchers depend on a variety of data collection methods, and it is the process of analyzing three or more different types of data (known as triangulation) that strengthens the trustworthiness of the study. As Glesne (1999) observes, “The more sources tapped for understanding, the richer the data and the more believable the findings” (p. 31). Credibility of the study is further demonstrated through structural corroboration, where the multiple types of data (surveys, reflection papers, metaphors, focus group transcripts, and journal reports) are related to each other to either support or contradict the interpretation and evaluation (Eisner, 1998, p. 110). A grid for each of the data sources was constructed, in which insights and observations regarding behaviors and attitudes could be recorded against each of the four intentional learning experiences. This means that when it comes to the presentation of the data findings, corroboration of the data is facilitated, and the reported findings for each intentional learning experience are clearly established from multiple data sources.

After the data have been organized, classified, and themes have been found, the researcher still needs to make connections that are meaningful both to the reader and the
researcher (Glesne, 1999, p. 149). I prepared a series of organizational grids that focused on the eight data sources, and filtered the data through the concepts of behaviors and attitudes, as well as descriptions, according to the intentional spiritual formation learning experiences (Volume 20, Data File). See Table 6.

Reliability

The concept of reliability for the qualitative researcher, goes beyond the typical replicability issue, since, as Merriam (1988) points out, no situation is static, and with the complicated component of human nature, a social phenomenon could never be measured in exactly the same way as a previous study, since it would be measuring a new phenomenon. Nevertheless a number of research practices can strengthen a study’s reliability. First, I was the sole observer, and attended and recorded every class session of every week, including both retreats. Second, all class sessions and focus groups were audio taped, and all six focus groups were transcribed prior to analysis. Third, all class members were included in the study, which resulted in multiple reports for each student, and a total of over 2,000 pages of data gathered. Furthermore, by maintaining a careful audit trail which traces the decision-making, in both data collection and analysis, as well as providing careful details of the organization and content of the Spiritual Formation class, sufficient detail should be available for “other researchers [to] use the original report as an operating manual by which to replicate the study” (Merriam, 1988, p. 216).

Generalizability

Eisner (1998) admits that when the term generalization is used in the context of educational research it implies that what is learned from an inquiry will be used in other
settings. However, the high degree of context specificity in educational settings underscores the formidable conditional aspect, since educational research cannot be literally replicated because no group of students is identical to another. He therefore suggests that the researcher of a qualitative case study can generalize, but it is likely that the readers will determine whether the research findings fit the situation in which they work. Thus my description of what happened and what I think it means is an invitation for the reader to reflect on whether the findings have any bearing on their situation, recognizing that generalizations "are tools with which we work and are to be shaped in context. They are part of a substantive exchange between professionals with their own

Table 6

Data Sources and the Four Intentional Learning Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Retreat</th>
<th>Learning About Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Practicing Spiritual Disciplines</th>
<th>Small Group Participation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Retreat Survey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journal Reports</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Groups</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Reflection Papers</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metaphors</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One-Year Later Survey</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Notes</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. From Master Record Student Data File Vol. 21.
expertise, not prescriptions from the doctor” (p. 205). Further, *anticipatory* generalizations may sensitize researchers to what is likely to be found, if they know where and how to look, and I believe that my research findings, together with the extensive historical literature survey of spiritual formation in theological education over the years, provides that perspective. On the other hand, *retrospective* generalizations come from ideas that allow us to see past experiences in a new light (pp. 198-209), and some readers involved in theological education may relate to that perspective. So while “the intent of qualitative research is not to generalize findings but to form a unique interpretation of events, limited generalizability might be discussed for the categories or themes that emerge from the data analysis or for the data collection protocol used by the researcher” (Cresswell, 1994, pp. 158,159). The extent to which some of my conclusions may be generalizable to other people, settings and times may depend on the degree to which these conclusions are applied to similar circumstances as this study (after Johnson, 1998).

**Representation**

The challenge for this qualitative researcher was to re-present in the final report, the findings and conclusions of data that were originally presented in the form of written responses on survey instruments, weekly reports, reflection papers, interviews, and focus groups. The sheer volume of data required considerable data reduction, yet the form of the final representation is intended to shape experience and to enlarge understanding. Therefore the most effective tools used to represent the data are those that illuminate rather than obscure the message and which accomplish the work that the researcher wants
done (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). I wanted the reader to experientially connect with the participants' observations, to sense the particularity of each participant, and to gain an understanding of the context in which seminary students live their lives.

**Low Inference Descriptors**

Since scholars have begun to realize that "human feeling does not pollute understanding," and in fact may enhance it, forms of data representation that contribute to empathetic participation in the lives of others are necessary for having access to a part of their lives (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). For this reason, I used the exact words of participants as much as possible, since they are low inference descriptors and allow the reader more direct access to the raw data, allowing readers themselves to place judgment on the data.

**Short Vignettes**

The uniqueness of each student's spiritual journey was discovered while reading the 15 reflection papers of selected students. I wanted to see how similar or different the overall student experiences were, but with 107 students writing a total of 258 pages in their final reflection papers, this number needed to be limited, and a process of elimination was conducted. Since I needed to gain as much information as I could from each subject, those students who had forgotten to include their code identification on any papers submitted during the quarter were excluded. Others were excluded because some weekly journal reports were handed back to the students before photocopies had been made for my data files. This process of elimination resulted in 15 students remaining on the list because all their data had their identification code number attached. The resulting 35 pages

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of textual data constituted the basis of analysis of the reflection papers as a sample, and represented 14.3% of the total number of reflection pages collected. All students had attended the same class, and their reflection papers were a response to the 3 questions asked at the end of 10 weeks:

1. In what ways have you grown spiritually
2. What have you learned about yourself
3. What have you learned about God?

In-Depth Interviews

In-depth interviews of four students were chosen to portray a more complete perspective of seminary students, and participants were chosen that revealed unexpected outcomes both positive and negative. The process of selection, including selection criteria used are discussed in chapter 7. Each of these individual case studies adds a greater depth to the study, since they look at a whole person, rather than the impact on a particular aspect of one's life.

Metaphors

People constantly use metaphors as a means of making sense of their world and their experience (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 250), and many people can only grasp abstract ideas by mapping them onto concrete ones (Lakoff, 1987, as cited by Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because "the essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (Lakoff, 1987, p. 5), they provide both a richness and complexity of meaning. On the other hand, they are also data-reducing devices,
taking several characteristics, and making one generality (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 250). Metaphors can also be pattern-making devices, as they pull together several pieces of separate information; they can be decentering devices, forcing the observer to question the circumstance or event. "Metaphors will not let you simply describe or denote a phenomenon, you have to move up a notch to a more inferential, analytical level" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 252). As well as allowing student metaphors of their spiritual journey to add depth of understanding to their experience, I also chose metaphors to depict key issues surrounding the teaching of spiritual formation. While it is true that many teachers would agree with the idea that the experiential component of spiritual development is important, the fact that teachers who accept this premise still teach the course without an experiential component, may indicate that the concept needs to be represented in a different form—hence my swimming metaphors in chapter 8.

Criteria of Quality for Judging Qualitative Research

Each qualitative study has a unique context, intent, and methodology, yet it is important to establish some guidelines for judging the quality of the research. I therefore used Noreen Garman's eight criteria, which she suggests (1996, pp. 18, 19) are particularly useful for doctoral students in assessing their qualitative studies.

1. Verité—Does the work ring true and does it fit within the discourse of appropriate literature? I found a number of areas in which students echoed what I had read in the literature of theological education, for example, regarding their expectations of seminary, the loss of spiritual fervor, the feelings of being isolated and overwhelmed by
the amount of work and the external pressures, and the feelings of being in a spiritual
desert while studying in the seminary.

2. Integrity—Is the work structurally sound, hanging together with a logical,
appropriate research rationale that is identifiable within an inquiry tradition? My chosen
case study methodology was chosen in order to
understand the nature of a particular class—what it means for participants to be in that
setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them,—and in the analysis to be
able to communicate that faithfully to others who are interested in that setting. ... The
analysis strives for depth of understanding. (Merriam, 1998, p. 6)

A naturalistic approach was taken, which means that the class was studied in its normal,
natural situation, without the researcher controlling or manipulating any aspects (Worthen
& Sanders, 1987, p. 139). Robert Yin (1994, p. 13) adds that case study research is well-
suited for situations where it is difficult to separate the phenomenon’s variables from their
context, and, in fact, “meaning-in-context,” which refers to data contextualized within a
particular environment, is one of six criteria used to substantiate qualitative studies
(Leininger, 1994, p. 105).

3. Rigor—Is there sufficient depth of intellect, with sound portrayals? Although
sheer volume of data does not necessarily ensure rigor, I believe that my multi-sourced
data, as well as the multiple types of data collection, with fieldwork extended over a
period of two years, and frequent member checks, together with an extensive historical
study of related literature, make this study one of rigor.

4. Utility—Is the work professionally relevant and does it make a contribution to
the field? Does the study have a clearly recognizable professional audience? The
professional audience for this study is church and educational administrators responsible for the training of pastors. Unfortunately, most seminary programs do not specifically and intentionally address the personal spiritual formation needs of pastors in training, even though pastors are the ones expected to be spiritual leaders in their congregations and even teach their parishioners how the spiritual life is nurtured.

5. Vitality—Is the study meaningful and non-trivial, with a sense of vibrancy of discovery? Is there powerful communication of participant and author voices, images, and metaphors? The participants' own words provide vitality, while a meaningful historical context is provided in the extensive literature review. The over-arching theme has been diagramed and metaphors have been used to portray key spiritual formation concepts.

6. Aesthetics—Is it enriching and pleasing to experience, "giving insight into one's educational self?" From the feedback received by participants and other interested adults who have read parts of the research report, I believe that the narrative is engaging, and authentic since readers connect to the story by recognizing particulars, by imagining the scenes, and by reconstructing them from memories associated with similar events (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990).

7. Ethics—Is there evidence that privacy and dignity for all participants have been respected, and that the inquiry has been conducted in a careful, honest way? At all times the privacy of participants was preserved. The anonymity of weekly reports was provided by a departmental secretary who removed all names while preserving the research identification codes before photocopying the data for me. Pseudonyms were used for all focus group participants.
8. Verisimilitude—Are human experiences represented in sufficient detail so that portrayals are recognized as "truly conceivable experience?" (Bruner, 1986). This was accomplished by the individual portrayals—the 15 vignettes which provided the reader with a sample of the diversity of responses that came from students in the same class. In each of the four extended stories I have endeavored to portray a more complete view of the person involved in spiritual formation, including details of their background which may have somehow influenced the impact of the class.

Justification for the Current Research

Many voices have suggested that a person’s spiritual life cannot be quantified or assessed, and while this may be true, people can still report perceptions of change they see in their own lives, and a researcher can still analyze these self-reports, interview the participants, and report on observations. Motivated by a desire to increase people’s awareness and practice of personal spiritual formation, a number of research studies have described spiritual formation initiatives and reported on the impact. In the following ways, my research extends the current body of knowledge on intentional learning experiences for personal spiritual formation.

1. The nature of the Personal Spiritual Formation course I have studied is far more comprehensive than any other course reported in research studies. Issues of world view, temperament, and biblical foundations are all included as well as an introduction to at least 18 of the spiritual disciplines.

2. There is more than one learning context in this study—a day retreat, small
groups, lectures and discussions, personal reading, and private devotional practices.

3. I have used a number of data collection techniques—surveys, interviews, focus groups, reflection papers, and metaphors—thus providing the opportunity for a great amount of corroboration of the data.

4. The data were collected at varying times throughout the study—before, during, and immediately after the class, as well as one year after the completion of the class, with interviews up to 22 months after the course—thus allowing for process as well as final analysis of data.

5. All participants were expected to spend a minimum of four hours in practicing spiritual disciplines, which gave a degree of uniformity in the study which many of the other studies lack, yet there is great flexibility in the type of devotional practices which the participants could choose, thus accommodating the whole range of temperament types and preferences of students.

6. I researched a course which I did not develop, so there were no pre-conceived biases as to what aspects of the course I would anticipate as being beneficial, based on course development issues.

7. Because I as the researcher was not the one who would be giving the final grades, I expected honest and “uninflated” reports from the students with perhaps greater ease of disclosure in focus groups than may have been the case if I had been the class teacher.

8. My subjects represented diversity in ethnicity (more than 40 countries), previous pastoral experience, and exposure to previous spiritual formation initiatives.
9. The number of participants (118) was far more extensive than any previous study I found, thus providing a greater possibility for discrepant or negative cases.

10. The volume of data was more extensive with a major emphasis on qualitative research, thus allowing for greater depth in analysis and understanding.

Conclusion

Although there is no single “right” way of doing qualitative research, Bassey (1999, p. 69) asserts that careful and systematic record keeping is essential. He sums up the process by saying that “qualitative research is about an intellectual struggle with an enormous amount of raw data in order to produce a meaningful and trustworthy conclusion which is supported by a concise account of how it was reached” (p. 84).

After the research purpose has been defined, the research questions formulated, the literature searched, the research methodology chosen and implemented, and the data collected and analyzed—the story is then told. In chapters 4-6, intentional learning experiences for spiritual formation (namely, the retreat, the class lectures and readings, the practice of spiritual disciplines, and the weekly small group meetings) are described, and their impact discussed. Chapter 7 looks holistically at the impact of the spiritual formation experiences on the lives of individuals with 15 brief vignettes, and four more extensive stories derived from in-depth interviews, while chapter 8 concludes with a summary of the findings, conclusions, and recommendations.
CHAPTER 4

IMPACT OF THE RETREAT: ENCOUNTER WITH
GOD, SELF, AND OTHERS

Some persons seem to live most of their lives without ever noticing the One who is their most attentive audience. Others attend God on occasion. Most of us need help in learning to live this great adventure.

Ben Campbell Johnson
Living Before God

For many seminary students, the 1-day retreat was an introduction to “this great adventure” of living life in the presence of God. This chapter looks at the impact of the day-long retreat which began the Spiritual Formation class. How eager were the students for a day retreat at the beginning of their seminary experience? What were their expectations? How did they feel after the retreat, and what was the nature of its impact?

The chapter begins with an overview of the retreat impact—both in its extent and areas. Next, the retreat setting, program schedule, and planned activities are described. Finally specific retreat impacts are analyzed and discussed using participant quotations.

Data concerning the retreat came from five sources, and collection of these data spanned a time period from the day of the retreat to 15 months later. Spontaneous verbal comments that were shared with the whole group at the end of the retreat were recorded.
(see Appendix C), retreat surveys were collected within 2 days of the retreat, two focus groups were conducted 3 weeks after the retreat, final reflection papers were written 10 weeks after the retreat, and the follow-up survey was collected 15 months after the retreat.

**Impact of the Retreat**

**Extent of the Impact**

Results of the five quantitative questions on the retreat survey revealed that more than 95% of the students thought the retreat was “an important part of the seminary experience,” and 91% found the retreat “spiritually beneficial.” Meditation on Scripture was rated “helpful” to “extremely helpful” by 96% of participants, while the personal reflection rated 93%. The small group experience was judged to be “helpful” to “extremely helpful” by 94% of the participants. While the percentages indicate widespread agreement that the retreat was beneficial, they do not reveal specific areas of impact.

**Overview of Impact Areas**

The retreat impact was seen in a number of areas, as it modified perceptions of and attitudes towards God, self, others, the class, personal devotions, retreats, ministry, and the seminary. Skills relating to small group functioning and personal devotion methods were also developed. The areas of impact are briefly described here, and are expanded in the section titled *Detailed Retreat Impacts*.

The most profound attitude change related to student concepts of God in relation
to themselves. Pastors can spend considerable time studying the Scriptures for sermon preparation, yet many had never experienced the joy of spending time in the Scriptures for the purpose of cultivating a relationship with God (7:69). Many learned for the first time the satisfaction of approaching the Scriptures for personal enrichment as a springboard for dialogue with and listening to God. There were fresh understandings of God and how He personally relates to individuals, together with new and honest revelations of self, including the acknowledgment of personal struggles, weakness, and failure (see Table 7).

This openness before God was not anticipated, for coming to seminary has been described by some to signify “the arrival” on a journey, rather than the beginning of a journey of growth and change. Seminary students came to learn how to care for the needs of other people and did not expect to confront themselves as people in need of divine help and guidance.

Brief instructions regarding strategies for scriptural meditation, reflection, and journaling, together with large blocks of time to practice these skills, resulted in much enthusiasm for the process, and new priorities and commitments were made regarding personal devotions (7:209). Time spent with God was seen as enjoyable and valuable, and students said they wanted to schedule more of it into their daily programs (5:49).

The small group formation became a powerful instrument of God’s graciousness, as group members prayed for and encouraged each other. The beginnings of openness and honesty were apparent, as students shared parts of their spiritual journey, and group members were relieved to realize that fellow seminarians also struggled with similar issues. This was a surprising revelation for many, resulting in the strengthening of friendship ties.
Table 7

*Question 6(b), God-Related Responses, “What Did You Learn About Yourself?”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God Relates to Me</th>
<th>I Relate to God</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>He has worked in my past, guiding my life (124, 135, 140, 152, 188).</td>
<td>I am God’s son (132). I am a creature (233).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He is in charge of my past, present and future (115, 137, 209).</td>
<td>If I keep my eye on Him, He will show me the way (188).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has a plan for me/purpose for my life (126, 200, 224, 227, 244).</td>
<td>I am an instrument in His hands (113, 188). A servant to be used according to His will (113, 188).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He has chosen me for His work (133, 143).</td>
<td>I recognized the call on my life (103).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He calls me to be like Him and prepares me for serving Him (112, 150, 160, 167, 227, 229, 287).</td>
<td>I need to spend more time with God (122, 123, 134, 137, 177).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am protected in the palm of God’s hand (160, 209).</td>
<td>I need Jesus every moment, every hour, abiding, in-dwelling presence (187, 257).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He will reveal my shortcomings (113).</td>
<td>I cannot hide from God (244).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He will change my heart, needs to do a work in me (188, 192).</td>
<td>I need God so much if I would accomplish His purpose (282). I need to trust God more (206).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He truly cares about my personal experiences, not left alone (140, 162, 226).</td>
<td>Need to be God’s friend more (206). Need God’s friendship to do His will (240).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives new chances to make right choices with His strength (204).</td>
<td>How much deeper my relationship with Him can be (157). I want to draw even closer to God (190, 212, 225). How much more I need him (127).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He gives me gifts, has blessed, I am favored, important, loved (116, 144, 167, 219, 227, 242, 250, 255).</td>
<td>Need to spend more time reflecting on His goodness in my life (206). I long to celebrate life in Him (173).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He thinks about me as His servant-child (114).</td>
<td>Need more construction by God in my personal scheduling of time with Him (252).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He promises to help me grow to be the man He wants me to be (117).</td>
<td>I learned to open the Scripture, not just only to read it, but reflect on God’s word (203).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Numbers in brackets indicate student identification code.*
and a new appreciation for the diversity found in this international group (7:71, 73).

For some, the impact of the retreat went further than the class and class members to family members and acquaintances, and will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 7. Others saw how the retreat concept could be adapted to future ministry situations, and these ideas were shared enthusiastically with others both at the retreat and in later discussions.

Moreover, the retreat had the effect of engaging the apathetic, the antagonistic, the fearful, and the reluctant, so that by the end of the day, students spoke of being energized, encouraged, motivated, and inspired (5:1, 2). Seven who recalled their initial resistance towards the idea of a retreat acknowledged the unexpected positive impact the retreat had upon them, voicing appreciation for being required to attend. Their understanding of the nature and purpose of a retreat had also radically changed, and students gained the distinct impression that the Seminary places a high priority on the spiritual life of its students.

Furthermore, before the first class lecture, all the students had already tried some of the spiritual disciplines and benefitted from participating in a small group. The retreat thus furnished students with an important “hands-on” initiation to the Spiritual Formation course, preparing them for the experiential nature of the class, with the added advantage of each class member bringing to the first class a commonly shared pre-class experience. In this context, the retreat was described as a “very grounding” experience (5:72), the “best way to start my seminary experience” (5:2), “a very solid foundation” (7:48), “setting the tone for the whole class” (6:29). So what were the components of the retreat and how was it organized?
Retreat Outline

Context of the Retreat

The first meeting of students in the 1999 Spiritual Formation class was at the Michiana Christian Service Camp, a 15-minute drive from the University. The Spiritual Formation retreat was conducted from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. on the Saturday and Sunday prior to the beginning of classes, and students were required to attend one of those days. Punctuality was expected as small groups that would meet for the duration of the Fall Quarter would be finalized early in the program. Those unable to attend for the whole day would have to take the class next year. These firm guidelines indicated to students that the retreat was an important part of the course and that it should be taken seriously.

Purpose of the Retreat

The written handout described three aims for the retreat as follows:

1. Begin bonding to a small group that will furnish spiritual and social support.

2. Take time for examination of past spiritual experiences and present standing with God as you begin seminary.

3. Let God help you envision the future and discover particular areas where you need spiritual growth.

Arrival at the Retreat Center

On both Saturday, October 2, and Sunday, October 3, more than 60 students assembled promptly at the Christian camp. Nearly all participants were new seminary
students, and this was their first meeting for a class. Few knew any of the other participants prior to the retreat.

Saturday was overcast and chilly, and there appeared to be some apprehension and tentativeness as people moved from their cars to the meeting venue. Inside, students were warmly greeted, and name-tags were provided. The hall was comfortably heated, and praise music led by three students provided a pleasant worshipful background. Following a time of worship with singing, prayer, and thanksgiving, the teacher welcomed the participants, and described the various aspects of the day's activities to allay fears and anxieties, and to ensure that everyone was relaxed and comfortable. He even assured those who may have forgotten to bring lunch that his wife had brought extra bread, spreads, and a box of apples, so none need be concerned about going hungry.

In describing the format for the day's activities, the retreat program was portrayed as merely a structure or framework, which would provide each student with the time and space to listen to God speaking to them throughout the day. The teacher saw his role merely as the facilitator for this process. Students received a printed copy of the following program schedule. Once the small groups were formed, the program alternated between extended periods (40-50 minutes) of personal reflection and journaling on a scriptural passage, and the sharing of insights in the newly formed small groups. This process was repeated three times during the day as students reflected on God's involvement in their past, present, and future lives.
The Retreat Program

**Spiritual Formation Retreat—October 2 or 3, 1999**

**God's Hand in My History**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8:30-8:45</td>
<td>Welcome and prayer—&quot;Why We Are Here&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8:45-9:15</td>
<td>Singing/worship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:15-9:40</td>
<td>Group formation and get acquainted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:40-10:30</td>
<td>&quot;Perusing the Past&quot; (Isa 49:1-7)—Silent reflection and journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:30-11:20</td>
<td>Sharing in groups on past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11:20-12:10</td>
<td>&quot;Pondering the Present&quot; (Ps 139:1-24)—Silent reflection and journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12:10-1:15</td>
<td>Lunch—rest break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:15-2:00</td>
<td>Sharing in small groups on present</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:00-2:20</td>
<td>Break</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:20-3:00</td>
<td>&quot;Facing the Future&quot; (Isa 55)—Silent reflection and journaling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:00-3:45</td>
<td>Small group sharing on future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:45-4:00</td>
<td>Group affirmation and group prayer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:00-4:25</td>
<td>Large group sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:25-4:30</td>
<td>Close</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Small Group Formation**

In preparation for the formation of small groups of four, students divided into two groups according to whether they would be attending the morning or afternoon Spiritual Formation classes during the quarter. Next, the whole group was asked to think back to when they were 11 years old, and contemplate the following questions:
1. Where did you live when you were 11 years old?

2. What was the source of warmth in the family?

3. What's your favorite song?

After a few minutes to reflect on these questions, the students were asked to share their answers with one other (same-sex) person in the room. Each pair was then asked to find another pair they did not know and share answers with them. The teacher explained that single-gender small groups usually work best, and that the participants generally find it easier to share their experiences in such a group. The resultant groups of four became the small groups which would meet for 1 hour each week following the weekly 2-hour Spiritual Formation class for the duration of the fall quarter.

Scriptural Meditation and Reflection

The theme for the retreat, “God's Hand in My History,” was explored through meditation and journaling on three scriptural passages. The atmosphere of complete quietness, together with three large blocks of time to meditate on a specially chosen scriptural passage, provided opportunity for God’s word to speak first to individuals, and then in groups, as participants shared their reflections on the scriptural passages.

In the morning, “Perusing the Past” was accomplished by each person spending 50 minutes contemplating and reacting to Isa 49:1-7. Some key questions were provided in a handout to help participants connect the passage with their own life journey. (See appendix D) For example:

Then. Who is the one called in verse 3 “my servant” and “Israel?”... In what ways has God worked for the servant in the past? Has the servant always been what he/she
should have been (note verse 4)? Write down all the ways God has acted in the history of His servant.

Now. Can you identify with the servant? Did God call you from the womb and name you? (verse 1). Have you “labored in vain” and “spent your strength for nothing” (verse 4 RSV)? Has God worked in your past? Recall your past pilgrimage . . . and trace those key points where God has acted for you. Recall even those times when you were not sure where God was. Write down as much as you can of your personal specific story of God's work in your past. (Retreat Handout 1, 1999, Appendix D)

This personal reflection was followed by 50 minutes of sharing insights in the newly formed small groups. Four rules to be followed by all group members were announced by the teacher:

1. Do not preach or give advice. Listen empathetically.

2. Maintain confidentiality. Things shared in the group should not go outside the group.

3. Give roughly equal time to all group members. Do not have one or two monopolize.

4. Let people share naturally. Do not force people to share or do things they do not feel comfortable doing. (Rules for Groups, 1999 Spiritual Formation Retreat)

After the group sharing, opportunity was given to discuss corporately this first meditation and the process. While some were beginning to tell their life story within the first 2 minutes of group sharing, others were more comfortable staying with theological interpretations. Some students thought the time was too long for the exercise, while others felt it was too short, so the teacher concluded that “we must have about hit the middle.”

Before lunch, the present was pondered by 50 minutes of personal exploration of Ps 139:1-24. Students were encouraged to list all the things the Psalmist says God knows
about his or her present life, to ponder the awesomeness of God’s knowledge, and to think
how this realization of God’s knowledge affected the Psalmist’s decision making.

Application questions included:

Sensing that God knows all about us, what do you think would be His evaluation of
your present life? . . . Picture yourself in God’s presence. Knowing that He knows all
about you, yet loves you tremendously, honestly face your present. Record in writing
what you think is His as well as your evaluation of the present. Where are you now?
Then write down three things you think God would like you to work on in your
spiritual life this coming year. One good way to do this is to think of one thing
directly related to your devotional life or your relationship with God. Write down a
second thing related to human relationships—a spouse, child, parent, friend, sibling,
etc. Lastly, write down something that has to do with your relation to the physical
realm—diet, exercise, addictions, use of time, recreation, etc. (Retreat Handout II,
1999, Appendix D)

An hour’s break for lunch provided a time of relaxation and getting acquainted
informally with fellow students. After lunch, the groups formed again to share the
scriptural discoveries and the anticipated growth areas in the spiritual, relational, and
physical realms which they had found in the second passage.

The third passage with a focus on the future was Isa 55. Students were first
invited to note all the things specifically promised for the future in vss. 10-13, trying to
sense how a discouraged Israelite would have felt when he/she read them, then to relax in
quietness in God’s presence. Here was a chance to be encouraged by promises,
“meditating on what you’d like to see God do in your future . . . writing down your hopes,
dreams and plans for your future” (Retreat Handout III, 1999, Appendix D). Following
the personal meditation time, the groups formed for a third time and each person shared
some of his or her thoughts and dreams for the future.

At the conclusion of that session, and while the small groups were still intact, the
teacher reminded everybody that each person had provided a valuable listening service to fellow classmates, considering the large sums of money charged by professionals to listen to their clients. Therefore opportunity was given for a time of affirming and praying for each group member within the small groups.

Spoken Comments Concerning the Retreat

Around 4 p.m., everyone formed a large circle around the room, and while hands were held, opportunity was given for spontaneous comments, and reactions to the day-retreat. References were made to the spiritual and social bonding, the amazing discovery that there were many shared experiences (experiential congruence), the sense of God's presence throughout the day, appreciation of the retreat format, and praise and gratitude for the encouragement that had been gained. The majority of these spontaneous comments did mention some aspect of social interaction, and perhaps those most likely to respond to an impromptu invitation to speak are those for whom social connections are most important. However, other areas of retreat impact are now addressed in detail.

Detailed Retreat Impacts

New Perceptions of a Retreat

The very word retreat is likely to conjure up a number of different thought associations, and for many Protestants, the association is unlikely to include “personal encounter with God.” Kvapil (1982) observes that retreats are often used as “working times for goals and strategy planning, rather than times of silence,” and while planning community projects or congregational strategies may be worthwhile, such activities
become empty and meaningless unless motivated by a rich inner devotional life (p. 72).

Indeed, retreats that encourage social interaction and fellowship seem to be more the norm, as Foster (1997) found out when he contacted all the retreat places he could find in southern California, in search of a retreat center for one of his congregants. There were retreat facilities accommodating 500 people, but Catholic places were the only ones that would take an individual person (p. 112). It could be surmised that many retreat centers are more people-oriented than God-oriented, and because they are often intentionally situated away from the busyness of everyday life, a retreat is more likely to provide an escape from demanding schedules without necessarily providing an escape towards God. Hence Marie's anticipation of get-to-know-you ice-breaker activities (6:25) and Andy's expectation of a "day of fellowship, morning worship and an afternoon class" (7:11) were pictures of a comfortable, social, non-threatening event that did not anticipate personal involvement or commitment. Not surprisingly then, Andy admitted that he "in no way expected what was coming." What was not expected were penetrating questions, not usually encountered, but which demanded honesty and self-examination as the individual came face to face with reality and with God (6:30).

Learning New Ways to Interact With Scripture

The first scriptural passage for meditation promptly followed the combined prayer and praise session. Meditating on Scripture was a new experience for many, yet the effect was powerful and positive. "We got into the Word, and let it speak to us, we meditated, and made a commitment—it was very good" (5:2). There was surprise at how much
learning had taken place in a short time, and how writing down answers prompted thinking about issues that would not have occurred merely with the reading of the passage. As a result, "quality time with God was seen to be so valuable," and it was realized that there "hadn’t been enough time with the Lord" (7:8). Two admitted (7:177) that the process was not initially easy, and at first Joe was "extremely bored," and thought of reasons to leave the retreat, yet his perseverance with the retreat paid dividends.

Seven hours later, I was thanking God for giving me the opportunity to participate in the spiritual retreat. The retreat created an atmosphere where I was able to reflect upon my relationship with God in the past, present and future. This was a very important experience in my life because I was having doubts about my call to ministry. The retreat reaffirmed my call to the ministry and I concluded that God wants me to remain in Andrews University. (7:65)

For Joe, the retreat clarified some issues resulting in a reaffirmation of his call to ministry.

**Formational Versus Informational Scripture Reading**

Without actually labeling the experience, students were involved in reading Scripture *formationally*, rather than *informationally*. Mulholland (1985) begins his explanation of these two motivations by suggesting that our culture is so shaped by the informational mode as it seeks more data (new knowledge, new techniques, new systems, and new programs) "in order to improve its functional control of its environment" that when a book is opened, an automatic response is to read for information (pp. 47, 48). Further, he posits that instead of changing the quality of our being, the acquisition of information primarily improves the ability to function in a changing world, and that this informational-functional dynamic is so ingrained that even serious Bible students are more likely to use the *informational* approach in their reading of Scripture. By contrast,
formational reading of Scripture is characterized by a genuine openness and receptivity to the Word of God with a willingness to be changed by it. Both approaches are compared in Table 8.

Changes in Beginning Attitudes Towards the Class

The early focus on scriptural reflection together with personal application questions helped some students to view the class in a new light (6:4). The message was clear that the seminary was serious about the spiritual condition of people, and not just their intellectual attainments (6:138). For those who knew their devotional life was not regular, and desperately needed help (7:214, 224, 247, 251), the retreat provided some immediately available tools that were easy to use. Apathy due to participation in other spiritual formation classes elsewhere was quickly turned around by a “dynamite small group” where honesty and accountability grew (7:247). At the other end of the spectrum were the spiritually secure who felt all was well with their devotional life (7:29). For Tim the retreat was not his priority. He had an important Bible study commitment with non-believers, was overwhelmed with other obligations, and hoped to be excused from the retreat. “After all, I hate retreating. I believe in advancing!” (7:31). However, Tim was “exceedingly grateful” that the professor chose not to excuse him from the retreat, learning that “it is important not to let even Christian duties, press God out of my life” (7:31). Yet another wrote of what he had gained from the 8-hour retreat after thinking “he was spiritually fine, and the class could not teach him anything”:

I really did not want to attend the retreat, but I learned so much in a few short hours. The song service was good, but the time we spent in reading and thinking about
### Table 8

**Comparison Between Informational Reading and Formational Reading of the Bible**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Informational Reading</th>
<th>Formational Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose and Extent</strong></td>
<td>Seeks to cover as much material as quickly as possible</td>
<td>Avoids quantifying the material to be read; more interested in deeper levels of meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Direction</strong></td>
<td>Informational reading is linear; the task is to move chronologically through the parts until completed</td>
<td>Formational reading is in depth, with less concern for how much material is covered, and more concern for its personal implications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td>Reader seeks to master the text, to use it and control it</td>
<td>Reader comes to text with openness to hear, receive and respond—to be a servant of the Word, rather than a master of the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text</strong></td>
<td>The text is an object—to be controlled/manipulated according to the reader’s desires or purposes. It is held at a distance “out there”</td>
<td>The text becomes the subject of the reading relationship; the reader becomes the object shaped by the text. This requires time—requires waiting before the text in order to hear what it says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approach to Reading</strong></td>
<td>Is analytical, critical and judgmental, as the text is read through the filters of the perceptions and needs of the reader</td>
<td>Is humble, detached, willing, loving approach—a genuine yielding to the penetrating address of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mind-set</strong></td>
<td>Characterized by problem-solving mentality—text is analyzed to see if it can be ‘used’ for something</td>
<td>Characterized by relinquishing need to problem-solve; an openness to mystery of God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Preparation</strong></td>
<td>Requires no prior preparation—just pick up the book and start reading</td>
<td>Requires time to slow down, to be still, to relax in the presence of God and receive spiritual insights</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* From *Shaped by the Word: The Power of Scripture in Spiritual Formation* (pp. 47-60), by M. Mulholland, 1985, Nashville, TN: Upper Room.
God’s word was awesome. I had asked myself questions before when studying the Bible but never had written the answers down. I found that by writing things down I was able to more clearly understand how I really felt. It also made me think through issues that I would not have if I did not write it down. Overall I learned that quality time with God is so valuable. I realized that I had not been taking enough time with the Lord. I also learned that I should regularly write reactions to Scripture to gain a fuller blessing. The atmosphere also taught me that nature can teach just like the Bible can. Nature spoke to me of God’s great love and awesome power. (7:29)

In a few short hours, a formerly spiritually satisfied student learned and practiced new Bible study skills that enhanced his understanding of issues, enabling him to see the value of spending time with God, and realizing that he had not been spending enough time at it. He could then identify further activities that would enhance his Bible study appreciating the role that nature can play in teaching about God.

The final reflection paper did not ask about the retreat—it asked students how they had grown spiritually, and what they had learned about themselves and about God, yet one in five papers referred to the retreat as an important part of their growth process, and was still prominent in their thinking 10 weeks after the event. At the end of the retreat, those previously unenthusiastic about the retreat felt closer to God (7:12), appreciated the beginning fellowship of a small group (7:38, 48, 76, 142, 179, 233, 239), and saw the value of meditating and reflecting on Scripture (7:29, 48, 65, 110, 142, 166, and 179).

Changes in Attitudes and Perceptions of God

Meeting God in Scripture with personal application questions to reflect upon changed student perceptions of both God and themselves. “Prior to the class, devotional time was all about what I could get from God from studying His word, instead of what I can offer to God in worship to Him” (7:253).
I used to treat God as a genie in a lamp, only speaking to Him when I needed something. Praise and adoration were perfunctory if that. But I believe this experience has helped me see Him for what He really is—AWESOME and interactive. (7: 256)

The changes in understanding of God’s character were numerous and varied. Analysis of the 120 responses to the question, “What did you learn about God,” yielded more than 50 different aspects of His character. These were all grouped into three larger categories: What He does, what He thinks, and who He is (see Table 9). The students all read the same biblical passages, and had the same amount of time to reflect on them, yet there was a wide diversity in the pictures of God they described. Some were impressed with aspects of His character that describe the way He deals with humankind—His graciousness, goodness, generosity, patience, sharing and love, seeing God as being the great provider and as always being there for humankind. While some wrote of gratitude for God’s redemption, mercy, restoration, and forgiveness for the past. others were impressed with present relational aspects of His character—“He knows me, accepts me, thinks about me, understands me, is interested in me, is my friend and companion.” Others concentrated on the long-term personal interest that God has had in their lives, as they traced God’s choosing, calling, planning, leading, guiding, intervening, strengthening, and empowering in their lives. Yet others gained a new appreciation for the greatness of God as they contemplated the attributes of immensity—powerful creator, omnipotence, omniscience, His changelessness and consistency, and the fact that He controls the universe. While many of these terms have connotations of love, the most frequently expressed characteristic was also “love.”
Table 9

Perceptions of God: Characteristics of Thinking, Being, and Doing, in Retreat Survey
Question 6: “What Have You Learned About God?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who He Is: Characteristics I Value</th>
<th>What He Thinks: God’s Attitude</th>
<th>What He Does: God’s Activity for Mankind</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alive/real</td>
<td>Accepting</td>
<td>At work in our lives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always with me</td>
<td>Approachable</td>
<td>Blesses us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awesome</td>
<td>Brings hope</td>
<td>Calls me/chooses me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changeless/consistent</td>
<td>Friend/companion</td>
<td>Cares for me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Controls the universe</td>
<td>Forgiveness</td>
<td>Completes His plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creator/originator</td>
<td>Gracious</td>
<td>Redeems/covers us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God of yesterday, today and tomorrow</td>
<td>Interested in me: thinks about me</td>
<td>Communicates: speaks listens, responds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fire</td>
<td>Knows me</td>
<td>Restoration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>Loving</td>
<td>Empowers, strengthens me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goodness</td>
<td>Merciful</td>
<td>Generous: giving/sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Holy</td>
<td>Our best interests</td>
<td>Gives me vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Light</td>
<td>Patient/longsuffering</td>
<td>Honors me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omnypresent</td>
<td>Plans for my life</td>
<td>Provider</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omniscient</td>
<td>Reconciles</td>
<td>Intervenes in my life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>Relational interest in me</td>
<td>Leads and guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trustworthy/promises</td>
<td>Seeks me</td>
<td>Commands me to be light of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes silent</td>
<td>Understands me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Characteristic labels (using students’ terminology) categorized according to thinking, being, and doing attributes of God (5:17, 28, 29).
Interestingly, although the question focused on God, 91% of responses described God’s attributes in terms of a relationship orientation. For example, this included His thoughts, feelings, and wishes for them, His method of communication, His plans for their lives, and those characteristics such as love, forbearance, patience, forgiveness, mercy, and grace, which need a social entity larger than one to be operational. This means that in almost all cases, God was seen in terms of relationship.

Changes in Self-Awareness

The retreat afforded many new avenues of self-understanding for the participants. Some of these insights were related to God, and to others. Other insights involved positive or negative traits, while others included desires and intentions for change. Some areas of metacognition were also observed, as well as self-awareness in community.

Self-awareness and God

When asked: “What did you learn about yourself?” 37% of responses included observations of either God’s initiatives with the student, or the student’s response to God’s initiatives (see Table 7 above), indicating again a connectedness between themselves and God. Many of these statements reveal concepts of a trustworthy and dependable God who is the provider, and of individuals who recognize personal need and dependency on God. Interestingly, although the question was asking what was learned about themselves, 79% of respondents included God or made allusion to their spiritual lives in their answers, especially regarding changes they would like to make in the future.
Self-awareness of Positive and Negative Traits

Many of the positive comments focused on aspects of ministry, and perhaps some saw personal strengths for the first time, while such negative comments as “I over-rate my abilities and experiences, I can be superficial, still egotistical and self-centered, need to give up on self, stop relying on own understanding, have made many poor choices” (5:44) indicate significant self-examination accompanied by total openness and honesty before God. Personal awareness came as a result of self-examination stimulated by Scripture meditation, personal reflection, and even the observations and conversations of others.

Three-quarters of all the positive traits which students identified in themselves appear together with comments about God and/or make reference to some area of struggle. For example:

God has a purpose for my life and He continues to guide me. As I reflected, I realized my shortcomings, my strengths, my hopes. (5:33)

I am not alone in my spiritual struggles, and God has given me gifts to be used in the most powerful manner possible. (5:31)

Paulien (2000) explains the dynamics of this seemingly paradoxical situation where one can express both personal humility and boldness at the same time.

The gospel humbles us in the presence of others because it teaches us that we are sinners saved only by grace. At the same time, it emboldens us before others when we realize that we are loved and honored by the only eyes in the universe that really count. The gospel gives us both boldness and humility. It gives us a boldness that needs no grounding in superiority. And it gives us a humility that doesn’t depress. (p. 55)

When students listed their own negative traits, in every case, there is a reference to some characteristic of God either in the same sentence or in the previous answer. This
mirrors the experience of the prophet Isaiah, who felt his unworthiness after he had seen
the King—high, holy, lifted up and seated on a throne (Isa 6). This new vision of God
also provided Isaiah with a new vision of himself, and as Roy Hession (1975) suggests,
this provided him with a new perspective for ministry in which he saw himself as more
needy of God’s grace and salvation than those to whom he was ministering.

In His own time He will show you Himself and you will see yourself more sinful than
the very people you have been ministering to. And then you will no longer be trying
to be a shepherd over sheep, but taking your place as a sheep among sheep, a sheep
that has gone astray whom the Shepherd has restored, and you will share that with
your fellow sheep. (p. 26)

In the first five chapters of Isaiah, the prophet pronounces censure and woe upon
everyone else, but when he sees a vision of God, he pronounces woe upon himself.
Apparently one can be in ministry for quite some time before catching a vision of who
God is, and from the comments of at least 23 persons, their new perspective of God was
accompanied by a more realistic picture of themselves. For example, in the following
couplets, a negative statement of self-awareness is followed by the same person’s new
picture of God:

Need to give up on self. (5:30) God is ready to do big things, we just need to get out
of the “me first” gear. (5:6)

“O wretched man that I am.” Why has God chosen me for His work? (5:32) He is
personal and caring. He loves us so much that He takes the first initiative in
reconciling us with Himself. (5:7)

God needs to do a work in me—especially regarding selfish pride. (5:34)

How much He longs to be in fellowship with us in both corporate and individual times
of meditation. (5:9)

Although I’ve made many poor choices, God continues to give me new chances.
His love runs deeper than I realized—He really does stand in the gap for us.

Weak and feeble, need to take an inventory of my strengths and weaknesses. He was there in my past, He is with me and will continue to be with me. He is interested in my life and success.

Personal Goals and Intentions for Change

Twenty-two percent of comments outlined the types of changes that they would like to make in their lives. The "should-do" list largely referred to spiritual goals such as spending more time in prayer, with God, Scripture meditation, journaling, reflecting on His goodness, getting to know God, developing and growing spiritually, strengthening faith and trust, and giving God the glory. There were "things to work on," "make goals," and let go of TV. Someone else felt the need of spending more special times with God, family, and community. Others felt their commitment needed improvement. Specifically, there were needs to be humble, give up on self, "have an early morning meditation with God before family worship and personal studies," and to "worry less, accept my limitations and learn to forgive myself." Finally there were two wishes for submission in relation to the future. "I would rather leave it to the Lord," and "I want to do His service everywhere, anywhere."

Self and Metacognition

Metacognition, simply stated, is "being aware of our thinking as we perform
specific tasks, and then using this awareness to control what we are doing” (Marzano et al., 1988, p. 9). A few students verbalized their self-awareness in terms of describing this process of self-understanding. For example, instead of merely describing the newly discovered personal strengths and weaknesses, one saw the experience valuable in “learning what my strengths and weakness were” (5:47). Another felt it “good to find myself in reflection” (5:47), finding “strength in quietness and meditation” (5: 47), while one who is used to constant activity found that “meditation is hard” (5:47). Perhaps the depth or extent of self-revelation is captured by the comment, “I know myself in a short time” (5:47), indicating the efficiency of the retreat process to facilitate self-understanding.

For another the retreat highlighted the current situation of being “in the midst of many changes” (5:47) a condition which Cetuk (1998, pp. 43-45) observes is characteristic of the seminary experience, but which is not always anticipated by students. Since, according to Bonhoeffer, stasis in the spiritual life is neither healthy nor desirable (Cetuk, 1998, p. 44), those who recognize themselves as being situated in the middle of change are more likely to be open to spiritual growth.

Self-awareness in Community

The retreat experience provided personal insights for individuals in relation to others. For example: “[I learned] to open more myself to others, and get more acquainted with my brothers and sisters” (5:46), “I am not alone in my trials and triumphs” (5:46). Another learned that he “had similar feelings about the same anxiety of ministry as others” (5:46). For three more individuals, it was other people who helped in the self-awareness
process. Thus, "others see in me the things I want to improve most" (5:46), and "my group partners told me something about peace in my face, and that's so good because I have been praying for peace in my life for a long time" (5:47). Finally, "I learned that sharing with others, in the context and mind-set of Scripture, is far more an enriching experience than without it. It set my mind at ease" (5:47). Clearly spiritual formation is enhanced in the context of community.

Perceiving Others in New Ways

As the students became comfortable in honestly sharing their journey with others in a small group, they were surprised to find out how many similarities they shared with fellow seminary students. This was illustrated in a number of different areas. Whether it was how God relates to other people, how He works through other people, or how each learns from and encourages the other, there was a sense of how important each person is to God and to others. For example, "God speaks through others to me" (5:52). Despite the fact that the question asked "What did you learn about others?" 43% of the responses included a reference to God, indicating that, for many, the retreat provided the opportunity for people to integrate God's activity in their own lives and the lives of others with the new situation they now found themselves in at seminary.

Some communication issues focused on prejudiced first impressions, versus getting to really know people. Again openness and honesty resulted in an appreciation for differences and diversity; "I learned that others have different leadership and devotional qualities" (5:58), and while it was recognized that "we’ve all come through a winding
twisting diverse path to arrive at the same time, demonstrating how God works differently in each of our lives” (5:54), by far the most frequent comment recognized that “others struggle with much the same issues as I do” (5:58, 66, 67).

A third of the responses made reference to how “similar we all are,” and although many did not specify in what areas the similarities occurred, others mentioned similar experiences as far as calling to ministry, similar journeys, and desiring to know God’s will. Students saw many more similarities than differences between themselves and fellow seminary students. Sixty responses included ideas of similarity—either in personal traits, relationship with God, or their call to ministry (being), or in experiences, struggles, or challenges either currently or previously experienced (doing). When similarities with others are recognized, there appears more bonding, greater respect and tolerance for others, and a desire to get to know each other more. There was also a degree of relief when it was discovered that other seminary students struggle with similar issues, and that everyone is a sinner in desperate need of the Savior. These concepts were illustrated a number of times through the journey theme (5:70).

The spiritual journey, walk, or path portrayed a process not yet completed: “Each of us is in a spiritual journey, no one is perfect” (109). “We are walking in search of concrete answers” (104). There is more than one pathway that can lead to the “same place” (150), for “each of us has a different spiritual journey. God has several ways of working in our lives” (244). There was also a sense of comradeship since “we’re on this journey called life together” (246).
Impact for Future Ministry

The retreat inspired a number of ideas for future ministry. In addition to being seen as a model of a well-organized spiritual retreat (6:45), some saw it as a useful means "for congregations to combat divisions in races and cultures" (5:2), or as a new way to evangelize secular communities, providing Christian fellowship where there is now no church (6:26, 27). The retreat demonstrated how an individual can bond with one other person (6:28), and it was suggested that a similar format could be used by a pastor to promote relationships between pastor and leaders, or leaders and members (6:28).

Small Group Bonding

In the small group dynamic, bonding and connectedness were experienced as life experiences (5:71-77, 119, 137, 138, 148, 166), testimonies of God’s leading (125, 132) and blessings (122), commonalities (170) were shared, group members prayed together (150, 180, 218, 220, 226), and listeners were strengthened (142) and encouraged (212). Fellowship was a key word for 17 responses, while many more implied the concept by using such phrases as “getting to know the other guys in my group” (156), and “starting friendships with others” (188), “forming spiritual partnerships” (265), and “unite with my fellow classmates” (272). Two individuals especially appreciated the “inter-racial union and fellowship” (102): “In my group there was one African, one Vietnamese, one White American, one Black American. This was very insightful” (167). Discussion, listening, affirmation, and praying together were all valued ways of connecting in groups, and contributed to one of the retreat objectives: “Begin bonding to a small group that will
furnish spiritual and social support.” (See Appendix D, Retreat Information Handout, for retreat objectives.) For many participants, the two came together as in the following: “Meeting God-fearing people who love the Lord and want to do His will just as I want to do His will” (117).

Comments like “I’ve just met three great friends” (5:1), which attracted lots of loud “amens,” and “I’ve just thought, when I get to Heaven, I’ve got three new brothers” (5:2) indicated that spiritual and social bonds had been formed. Impressed with the unity that had been demonstrated in culturally diverse groups, one student expressed appreciation to the teacher by saying:

In ministry there’s lots of divisions—competing, divisions between races and cultures, even divisions within races and cultures, and then we see the same kinds of problems in our congregations. But here’s something we can do in and for our congregations. (5:2)

One pastor expressed his desire for more meaningful relationships to develop:

I’m a task oriented person, and as pastors busy going here and there, I guess we don’t spend much time getting acquainted with people on a deeper level. I want to get to know people more than just a “Hi Hi” in the corridor. (5:2).

People felt relieved and encouraged when they realized how much they had in common with others in the class. The comment, “My brothers are more like me than I ever imagined” (5:1), was heartily affirmed by many in the circle. Someone else was encouraged because of learning “I’m not the only one in my situation” (5:1). Seminary spouses were invited to attend, and a few did. One of them gratefully announced:

As a seminary spouse, I want to say how much encouragement and inspiration I have received from this retreat. It was just what I needed, and as I heard the experiences of others sharing how the Lord has led, I felt more sure that the Lord will provide. (5:2)
Someone else described the motivation and encouragement this way:

In one word, this retreat has been motivating, and I feel my personal experience with spiritual life has been energized. I've come to realize that everyone struggles with similar things, and I am not alone. I'm leaving here this afternoon encouraged and motivated. (5:2)

I want to encourage us all. Keep praying, keep studying, and just make Jesus your best friend. (5:2)

Most Significant Part of the Retreat

Was there one outstanding aspect of the retreat that was foremost in the minds of the participants? All responses could be classified into four categories: Group activities, individual activities, music, and the natural setting. A total of 92% commented on either group activities (47%), individual activities (35%), or both (10%). Although the question on the survey asked for the most significant part, 10% of the students included activities from at least the group and individual categories, for example: “Personal reflection, silent meditation, singing and personal testimonies” (233), indicating that there were a number of aspects of the retreat that were highly valued.

The largest number of students (47%) commented on various aspects of the group dynamics at the retreat as being most significant for them. The most frequently mentioned activity was the sharing of experiences in small groups and learning from others, followed by fellowship and connecting with classmates, and discussion. A few mentioned the sharing of similarities, being vulnerable about oneself, the establishing of the groups, the affirmation and prayer time, and the new cultural perspectives gained by getting to know students from different ethnic backgrounds (see Table 10).
Table 10

**Most Significant Part of the Retreat**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Activities</th>
<th>$N$</th>
<th>Individual Activities</th>
<th>$N$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing experiences in small groups and learning from others</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Meditation of Scripture</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship, connecting with fellow classmates</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Meditation on Scripture &amp; applying it to my life</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small group discussion</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer in small groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Scripture came alive and God spoke to me</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-racial union &amp; fellowship in group</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Individual Bible study time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affirming each other in small groups</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Personal meditation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting up the groups and introducing ourselves</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reflect on my history from biblical perspective</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening to others’ experiences</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reflecting on present evaluation</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being vulnerable about myself</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Reflection on future &amp; promises</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small groups</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Being still &amp; recognizing God seeking my presence as much as I was His</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharing our similarities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Getting away - time with God</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First sharing on the past</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Reading &amp; listening</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting other’s views on Scripture</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Holy Spirit moving on my heart</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting God-fearing people who love God as I do</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chatting in break and final group sharing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group singing/worship</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Appreciation of nature</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total group activities</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>Total individual activities</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* A further 11 students commented on *both* group and individual activities as being the most significant part of the retreat; 2 gave general comments of appreciation, 1 sounded negative, ("Time to go home"), and 2 were invalid. From retreat survey Question 7, "Describe the most significant part of the retreat for you" (5:105-107).
The second highest category (35%) was the category of individual reflection and meditation activities. Included in the comments in this category were: meditation on Scripture, reflection, applying Scripture to my life, “being still and recognizing that God was seeking my presence as much as I was His” (5:74), individual Bible study, “reflecting on God’s guidance in the past” (5:76), and “the Holy Spirit moving on my heart” (5:71). References to peace, quiet, and time indicate there was an affective impact of the scriptural meditation and reflection, evidenced in such comments as: “personal encounter and peace with God” (257), “quiet time with God, His word and my own thoughts” (255), “time to reflect on Scripture—beautiful choice of passages” (246), “just being still and recognizing God was with me and seeking my presence as much as I was His” (173). Others spoke of “the quiet moment with God, God speaking through His word to me” (113), “Personal reflection and meditation on God’s word: I felt close to God on an intimate and personal level” (110). Moreover, comments about “the atmosphere” (244), the “natural setting” (157), and “seeing and experiencing what my walk with Jesus should be, through nature” (133) highlighted the value of the natural setting for the retreat.

Conclusion

Students reported that the retreat engaged them directly with God through the Scripture meditation passages and personal journaling, and then in a small group as they shared insights and experiences. As the teacher later underscored, “if you talk about experience, you must create an experience—you cannot teach what a relationship with God is like by just talking about it” (J. Dybdahl, personal communication, June 7, 2001).
Because the environment for an encounter experience with God had been provided, students recognized the retreat as “a solid foundation for the Spiritual Formation course” (7:48), and “began to see the personal focus of the class” as they talked about their relationship with God in small groups (6:4). The retreat was also the vehicle for teaching “the importance of balance in one’s life that allows one to reflect in the midst of a busy program” (7:166).

Furthermore, student statements indicated that two of the most important rationales for the course were recognized on that first day. Concerning the process of spiritual growth and learning, one student observed, “We learn and grow well when we are in community; I learned this at the retreat and during the small group, during moments of sharing” (7:233). Reflecting the Seventh-day Adventist ideal of a holistic lifestyle which strives for a balance in mental, physical, social, and spiritual activities, another student discovered that the retreat “put balance in my life. As busy as I could get with the Seminary and the ministry itself, I need time to reflect” (7:166).

In short, the retreat put students in touch with God, themselves, and with new seminary students in new ways that encouraged openness, honesty, and authenticity. For example, “The most important part of the retreat for me was to reflect on my life from a Biblical perspective. I saw myself, my history very clearly” (7:72). Areas of needed spiritual growth and development were identified and a vision of hope that this growth could happen was provided by the initial experience gained with the spiritual disciplines and small groups. Metaphorically, the retreat prepared the ground for the planting of new ideas, strategies, and skills to enhance one’s personal walk with God.
Finally, at the end of the day, one student enthusiastically summed up the retreat by saying, "I want to give my personal thanks for giving us the best way to start our seminary experience. There could have been no better way" (5:2). Thus, perhaps unconsciously, students learned that the Seminary encourages pastors in the cultivation of their personal devotional life.
CHAPTER 5

THE IMPACT OF THE KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTICE
OF SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES: CULTIVATION
AND CONNECTION

Every skill has a body of knowledge to be understood, and tools to
be mastered. . . Requiring an action does not necessarily make
it rote and legalistic. On the contrary, it may result in greater
refinement, proficiency, and love for the activity, as it did for
many of us in the development of our academic and professional
skills. . . My experience has been that students appreciate being
given "space" in the curriculum to explore . . . their internal life
before God.

John Coe
Intentional Spiritual Formation in the Classroom

Through a spiritual discipline we prevent the world from filling
our lives to such an extent that there is no place left to listen.

Henri Nouwen
Making All Things New

How did students learn about the spiritual disciplines, and what was their
response? What were student reactions to the requirement of engaging in 4 hours of
personal devotional time per week? What impact did the class lectures, readings, and
practice of the spiritual disciplines have upon the students?

Chapters 4, 5, and 6 deal specifically with the four intentional learning experiences
for personal spiritual formation, namely:

1. the retreat
2. the knowledge of spiritual disciplines derived from lectures and readings
3. the practice of at least 4 hours per week of personal spiritual disciplines
4. the weekly participation in a one-hour specific small group meeting.

The retreat (see chapter 4) had the effect of helping students individually identify their need to spend more personal time with God, and also providing a positive initiation into practicing some of the spiritual disciplines. Further learning about the spiritual disciplines was cultivated by class lectures and assigned readings, while the practice of the spiritual disciplines was accomplished in the personal devotional time. Chapter 6 explores the impact of the fourth intentional learning experience—the weekly small group meetings.

This chapter, chapter 5, specifically examines the impact of intentional learning experiences numbers 2 and 3: the theoretical knowledge of the spiritual disciplines, which students acquired from class lectures and assigned readings, and the practical application furnished by the class requirement of logging 4 hours per week of personal devotional time. The context for learning about the spiritual disciplines is described by providing an overview of the class including its objectives, time allocation, lectures, and requirements.

The process of learning about the spiritual disciplines includes initial misunderstandings of the term, as well as the strategies and impact of learning new spiritual disciplines. The practicing of the spiritual disciplines is traced through beginning attitudes and the impact of recording devotional time, having a grade incentive, and a devotional plan.

The role and impact of habit formation for the devotional life are examined, and
commonly held arguments against intentional classroom initiatives for spiritual formation are discussed. Three areas for intentionality in spiritual formation are outlined, and evidences of teacher impact are presented.

Overview of the Class

The Spiritual Formation class met in a three-hour block once a week for nine weeks. The class began with a short worship experience, followed by an hour-and-a-half lecture. After a ten-minute break, students met in their small groups for the third hour. The course description stated: "This course invites the student to develop his/her understanding and practice of the spiritual life so that ministry may more intentionally take place in the context of God's presence" (Course Outline, Spiritual Formation, Fall 1999). Four underlying assumptions of this statement deserve comment. First, God's presence is the desired context for ministry. Since it is apparently possible for ministry to be attempted without acknowledging and appreciating God, awareness of His presence needs to be intentionally cultivated. Next, the development of the spiritual life is believed to be assisted by both theoretical understanding and practical experience, and finally the course "invites" students to become involved, thus indicating respect for their individual choices.

Course Objectives

During the first class period, the following course objectives were discussed:

A. Lead the students to analyze themselves in light of spiritual perspectives.

B. Introduce the students to the history, literature, and concepts of devotional theology.
C. Introduce the student to the practice of the spiritual disciplines.

D. Relate Adventist theology to the practice of the spiritual life.

E. Introduce and model spiritual retreats and small spiritual growth groups.

F. Create in the student a desire to live closer to God and to embark or continue on the spiritual journey. (Course Outline, Spiritual Formation, Fall 1999)

Four of these objectives had immediate relevance to the students since A, C, E, and F had already been introduced at the day retreat.

Class Time Allotments

The 90 hours of total time allotted for this 3-hour class were divided in the following way:

32 hours - Personal spiritual formation (4 hours per week for 8 weeks)
18 hours - Class lectures (2 hours per week for 9 weeks)
16 hours - Assigned reading and reading reports (2 hours per week for 8 wks.)
9 hours - Small group meetings (1 hour per week for 9 weeks)
8 hours - Retreat
5 hours - Preparation of notebook
2 hours - Final reflection paper

This means that the experiential aspects (personal spiritual formation, the small groups, the retreat, and the reflection paper) occupied a major time allocation of 57%, while theoretical instruction from either lectures or assigned reading was designed to occupy 38% of the total time, with the remaining 5% for notebook organization.
Class Lectures

The class lectures provided the biblical foundation, the rationale, and a historical context for focusing on the personal spiritual life. The weekly readings were illustrated by the teacher's personal stories and experiences, student questions were answered, and concepts were clarified (7:66). Furthermore, the deeper implication and meaning for the personal spiritual life of a key biblical belief was explored each week (see objective D).

In the first lecture, the need for spiritual formation was suggested by highlighting two problems—the lack of spiritual life in the church, and the plurality of spiritualities in society reflecting humanity's hungering for God. It was also pointed out that at various times in biblical and church history, sound doctrine and personal piety were emphasized together (e.g., Luther, Wesley, and White) and that an imbalance became evident whenever either belief or personal piety was overemphasized to the detriment of the other.

The disparate views on the relative importance of the pastor's spiritual life was introduced with the 1994 research of the Murdock Charitable Trust (see Table 1), revealing that church members see the pastor's spirituality as the first priority, the pastors see it as their fourth priority, while seminary professors do not rank it even among their top five priorities.

Other weekly topics focused on worldview and the relationship between spiritual realities and practices and one's view of God. The topic on temperament illustrated how different people respond and are attracted to different modes of personal worship and devotional practices, and how one's temperament, personality, and history may be closely
linked to how one relates to God (see Goldsmith, 1997; Thomas, 2000). Following these three introductory lectures, the disciplines of worship, confession, prayer, meditation, Scripture learning, journaling, simplicity, fasting, solitude, and retreat were all discussed in depth with many personal examples of ways of incorporating these disciplines into everyday living.

Biblical teachings were injected with fresh vitality and meaning, when linked to one's personal spiritual life. For example, one week the question was posed: "What meaning does the biblical teaching of the personal, visible, literal, and imminent second coming of Jesus have for one's personal spiritual life?"

It was pointed out to the students that the early Advent believers did not see the second coming of Christ as just another doctrine to be explained and preached, but rather they saw it as an eagerly anticipated meeting of a long-awaited friend. William Miller's poem "Disappointed," written between the disappointment of 1843 and the expectation of 1844, depicts this heart-felt yearning desire to meet the Savior:

How tedious and lonesome the hours, while Jesus, my Savior delays!
I have sought Him in solitude's bowers, and looked for Him all the long days.
Yet He lingers—I pray tell me why His chariot no sooner returns?
To see Him in clouds of the sky, my soul with intensity burns.
I long to be with Him at home, my heart swallowed up in His love,
On the fields of New Eden to roam, and to dwell with my Savior above. (White, 1994, p. 50)

Thus a doctrinal belief was seen to be enhanced and strengthened by personal experience.

Class Requirements

The course requirements were discussed and explained in detail (see Course
Outline, Spiritual Formation, Fall 1999). It was noted that both practical and theoretical aspects of the course would be graded. The practice of spiritual disciplines for 4 hours each week and the accompanying weekly report generated some lively class discussion. Students were reminded that this was a wonderful opportunity to experiment with different ways of getting close to God. They were free to choose whatever devotional activities they liked, as long as it was personal time with God (family worship and Sabbath School classes were thus ruled out from being part of this assignment). The 4-hour time period was to be spread over at least 4 days during the week, and students were encouraged to think ahead at the beginning of the week to decide on their daily plan, and write it down at the top of their weekly report. Students were to keep a careful log of their time with God, recording the date, the time and duration, and a brief 1-2-sentence summary of what happened, including whether the plan was followed or not.

The teacher acknowledged that while some might think that recording one’s personal devotional time would seem artificial, such a practice actually helps people stay honest with God and themselves, and in the final analysis, most students are grateful for the exercise. Points would be awarded each week, with full credit given to those who completed the 4-hour requirement and reported it adequately. Students were assured that they were not being graded on the quality of their spiritual experience, nor on whether they meticulously followed their plan. Both the making of the weekly plan and the recording of their time with God were for the purpose of helping students build some structure into their devotional lives and to think and plan ahead for their special time with God.
The final grade consisted of 42% awarded for the weekly practice and reporting of the spiritual disciplines, with a further 35% for completion of the assigned weekly readings and the writing of a reading report. The final reflection paper was allocated 6% of the total, and the assembly and organization of the class notes received the remaining 17%. Thus the importance of the experiential component of the class was emphasized to the students.

Learning About the Spiritual Disciplines

In order to practice spiritual disciplines, students need to have a clear idea of what they are, what their function is, and how they are incorporated into the personal life. This section describes some of the beginning understandings and misunderstandings, how and what students learned about spiritual disciplines, and the impact of this knowledge.

Beginning Understandings of Spiritual Disciplines

As the term *spiritual disciplines* is often misunderstood, students were asked for their understanding of it in the pre-course questionnaire. Responses revealed wide variation in understanding. A few were able to list such spiritual disciplines as prayer, Bible study, meditation, simplicity, and fasting, and some even correctly described the purpose of spiritual disciplines as enhancing one's walk or relationship with God. However, a lack of familiarity with the term and the practice of "spiritual disciplines" was indicated by the obvious confusion of the term with such concepts as:

1. Disciplining oneself spiritually, e.g., "bringing every thought into captivity to Christ" (2:127), "training oneself in order to discern spiritual things" (2:155).
2. Self-discipline, for example, "living a life in which my carnal nature will not be what dominates my actions" (2:190), "being responsible for all you do" (2:202), "striving to live up to the standard or title you possess" (2:282).

3. Discipling, for example, "practicing the teachings of Jesus Christ" (2:205), "areas in my life where God has complete control" (2:206), and "following spiritual knowledge truthfully and loyally" (2:219).

4. Spiritual commitment, for example, "We must have a life of total consecration and commitment to God, respecting and obeying God's commands" (2:278).

Others either left the question blank, or said they did not understand the question. Such confused ideas about spiritual disciplines would suggest that clarification would be necessary before attempting to practice them.

Strategies for Learning About Spiritual Disciplines

Students learned about the spiritual disciplines from assigned readings, lectures, and small groups. Foster's Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth (1988) has become a recognized classic on the spiritual disciplines for more than 20 years, and was a primary text for those who had not read it previously. In it, spiritual disciplines are divided into three domains, each contributing to a balanced spiritual life.

1. The inward disciplines of meditation, prayer, fasting, and study provide opportunities for personal examination and change.

2. The outward disciplines of simplicity, solitude, submission, and service help people make a positive difference in the world.
3. The corporate disciplines of confession, worship, guidance, and celebration draw us nearer to God and to others. In each chapter is found the biblical foundation for the discipline, the role and purpose of the discipline, and a wealth of ideas and illustrations which encourage the reader to experiment and practice. White’s *Steps to Christ* (1956) places the spiritual disciplines in the larger context of God’s plan of salvation and the human response of living the Christian life on a daily basis. Henry Blackaby and Claude King’s *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (1994) was an alternate text offered to students who had already “digested” (as opposed to skim reading) Foster’s book. Although *Experiencing God* is not primarily focused on the spiritual disciplines, the disciplines are referred to in the context of discerning and responding to God’s will for one’s life. The *Spiritual Formation Workbook* was chosen to provide some direction and structure for the small groups and will be discussed in chapter 6.

**Impact of Learning New Spiritual Disciplines**

Learning about and experimenting with a variety of spiritual disciplines transformed many devotional doldrums (7:102). One student said he learned that God is accessible in many ways, and “really enjoyed mixing up my devotional routines like never before!” (7:238).

Andy had studied spiritual formation in an undergraduate class, yet found his devotional life was changed when he realized there could be diversity in devotions. He refers to increased enjoyment and consistency in the following before and after scenario:
My devotional life was sporadic at best. I honestly wanted a personal devotional life but the monotonous grind of waking up at 5 to read seemed more than I could handle. But in this class what changed my devotional life was that I found there could be diversity in devotions. All of a sudden the devotions had life. They became more regular and I definitely enjoyed them more. I guess my temperament called for different types of worship toward God in the mornings. . . . I have grown spiritually by incorporating the ideas found in the reading into my life. (7:11, 12)

Cultivation is a word picture that captures the essence of the experience of learning new spiritual disciplines (see Table 11 for the areas of change impacted). Hard, impenetrable, and unpromising soil when cultivated becomes aerated and life-giving:

I feel excited about the new methods and applying them in my life. I’ve learned to pray in ways that give me a greater sense of communication with God. I’ve learned to be open to principles that hold me more accountable to God (i.e. confession), which liberates me to accept His complete forgiveness. I’ve discovered areas I’ve been neglecting (listening, purposeful meditation), and I’m encouraged about learning and incorporating them in my life. My time in devotion is enjoyable. Spiritual disciplines are the reality of a full life, and with this knowledge I operate less from feelings of guilt and am more motivated by joy and anticipation of what God has in store. I relish time of conversation with God and enjoy talking and listening to God. (7:102, 103)

Practicing the Spiritual Disciplines

Is there any connection between learning about the spiritual disciplines and practicing them? How does one get students to actually try out experientially the things they are learning about cognitively? What happened when a specified number of hours of practice became a required part of this seminary course?

As can be seen in Table 11, increased learning and understanding about spiritual disciplines resulted in a changed perception of the nature, purpose, and function of the spiritual disciplines. This in turn resulted in students’ experimenting with new devotional
Table 11

*The Impact of Learning New Spiritual Disciplines*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area of Change</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>View of Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>Minimal knowledge of spiritual disciplines, and my perception of their purpose was not very good</td>
<td>Foster conveyed in clear terms that spiritual disciplines are not done to achieve salvation, but are simply to place the individual in a position to encounter God (7:85). Before reading I thought it was the disciplines themselves that changed us. Now I know that it is meeting God in the context of the disciplines that makes the change (12:62, 64).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nature of Spiritual Life</td>
<td>I was born in the church but my spiritual life was incomplete</td>
<td>Life is such an amazing and exciting experience with our Lord and with others when we learn and practice new spiritual disciplines. I can hardly wait to tell others how many things exist to help me grow in my spiritual life (7:54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice of the Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>Spiritually I was like a roller coaster, and I believe it was due to the fact that I wasn’t placing myself where God could work in my life</td>
<td>Journaling helps me pray longer and more focused. Meditation on Scripture helps me internalize it, so that Bible reading became real and personal. So now I look forward to hearing what God has to say to me each morning (7:42).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rescued from Skepticism</td>
<td>Skeptical of spiritual disciplines because of previous fanaticism</td>
<td>I can now see that the disciplines are not laws, but precious avenues to come into contact with a loving, caring, understanding God (7:72-74).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>Felt something wrong with a spiritual life consisting only of reading a devotional book or SS lesson. Felt ashamed but couldn’t ask anybody, because others looked to me for help.</td>
<td>Our life is such an amazing exciting experience with our Lord and with others, when we learn and practice a new perspective of spiritual disciplines (7:53, 54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consistent Devotional Life Related to Awareness of Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>I found it difficult to keep a consistent devotional life, and I wasn’t aware of all the disciplines.</td>
<td>Through this semester as I read the books, I was learning and applying the principles that were new to me (7:42).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship Forms</td>
<td>Before—very limited—devotional book, SS lesson or Bible</td>
<td>Now many different forms to talk to God (7:53-55).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase of Quality and Amount of Time Spent in Worship</td>
<td>I felt that my spiritual life was fine and that this class could not teach me anything.</td>
<td>I have found so many new things that I have tried and they have worked. I spend more time in the mornings and it is not only more time, but better quality time (7:9).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11—Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Witnessing</th>
<th>Before I found it hard to witness because I knew I struggled with my spiritual disciplines.</th>
<th>Now . . . I find myself wanting to spend more time with God because only then would I be able to share what God is doing in my life with others (7:42).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Different Spiritual Disciplines Suit Different Situations</td>
<td>I learned about my weaknesses which I didn’t notice before, and learned what kind of discipline is most helpful in crisis.</td>
<td>I never realized how helpful it is for me to worship God with singing when I am feeling depressed. (7:54).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experienced More of God’s Reality and Joy</td>
<td>Through the knowledge and practice of some new disciplines such as study and solitude, I have come to experience even more the reality of God’s grace, comfort, power and providence in my life.</td>
<td>Through the various disciplines I have come to depend and to trust more in God and His power to deliver. I have felt the joy and peace of God more throughout the day. My prayer life has been richly blessed. My heart was constantly opened to my heavenly Father at least two or three times a day in prayer. (7:226)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meditation</td>
<td>Never done it before</td>
<td>I have gained a tremendous blessing from it. After reading the Scriptures I meditated in God’s word and many times I could feel God speaking to my heart (7:137). Meditating caused me to do some real in-depth examinations of myself. This has kept me honest with myself (7:110).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fasting</td>
<td>I have begun fasting more regularly</td>
<td>I feel closer to God not only during my hours of fasting but also when I am not fasting. Lately when I fast and pray I seem to receive clearer and clearer guidance from the Lord. I know He is working through people to guide me (7:149).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journaling</td>
<td>Never had an experience journaling</td>
<td>When I started to journal I just didn’t want to stop, and I want to do more. I think it will be valuable because when I re-read what I had written it helped me in a specific situation. Just learning the discipline is really helping me (6: 55). Prayer journaling now regular habit (22:20).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from Focus Groups (Vol. 6), Reflection Papers (Vol. 7), and One-year Follow-up Surveys (Vol. 22). Before and after columns refer to the same person.
practices which enhanced their worship experiences, increasing their joy and enthusiasm for God. Students were not expecting this outcome from what initially appeared to be a rather regimented program.

**Beginning Attitudes Towards the Class Requirements**

Assigned readings and reading reports are predictable course requirements for seminary classes and were accepted without comment. However, the announcement of the 4 hours per week of personal devotional time met with a diversity of reactions, both spoken and unspoken. These student reactions can be divided into at least five groups: the contented, the grateful, the embarrassed, the deluded, and the indignant.

**The Contented**

There were a few students who were already practicing a consistent devotional time with God. When they realized that what was being required in class was something they were already doing, they were surprised to discover that what they had thought was standard practice was actually only practiced by a few. Some improved their situation by learning about and practicing new spiritual disciplines (7:37), while one or two others were content to continue their personal devotions as they had done for many years.

**The Grateful**

Some were “quite pleased” when they saw the course requirements because at that time their “devotional life was not very regular or systematic” (7:224). These were the ones who knew and admitted they needed help and were glad for the extrinsic motivation...
to get them established in a regular program. The hope was expressed: "Maybe now I would be able to have a fixed schedule of when I could have personal devotions" (7:224). This group was optimistic that permanent habit patterns could now be established, since "it helped me to put into practice the things I have wanted to do for a long time" (7:163).

The Embarrassed

At least four openly admitted that from the beginning of the class, their only motivation to do the class assignments was the grade (7:74, 96, 215, 238). At the end of the 10 weeks, they were embarrassed to acknowledge that had there been no grade for the class, they simply would not have bothered with the 4 hours of personal devotional time every week. However, during the process, the weekly requirements became a habit, and with the time spent in personal devotions came real joy and satisfaction. What seemed like an impossibility, became a habit through repetition, and instead of a meaningless ritual, time with God became eagerly anticipated time with their best friend.

The Self-deluded

A fourth group initially thought they would learn nothing new in this class, so were surprised at what they gained.

I felt that my spirituality was fine and that this class could not really teach me anything. As the quarter went on I found that I was completely wrong. Through this class I have discovered that there are many ways in which I can become closer to God and maybe even better ways than I had known before taking this class. (7:8)

Others thought the required 4 hours of personal devotions would be no hardship (7:121), however, the discipline of logging the actual time spent with God in the first week was a
reality check, and brought the realization to many that they were not in the habit of spending anywhere near that amount of time in personal devotions. Many found the 4 hours were difficult to complete without discipline, planning, and careful organization of their time.

The Skeptical and the Indignant

Some in this group had strong reactions against the recording of their personal devotional time. For some it made no sense: “I thought that keeping a log of time or timing myself in devotions was stupid” (7:8), while others felt it an intrusion of privacy.

I was highly skeptical about many of the course requirements. It seemed as though the professor was trying to legislate spiritual growth. I also felt violated to a degree, by the required logging of the content and duration of our devotional time. (7:85)

One student’s rejection of his own previous fanaticism had resulted in an aversion to any kind of discipline and made him skeptical about writing down a devotional schedule. “Initially it was hard, but as time progressed I started to enjoy the devotional time, and God began to show Himself in a way that was comforting to me” (7:74).

Impact of the Practice of Spiritual Disciplines

The practicing of the spiritual disciplines also involved the related activities of recording the time, making a plan or “rule” for the week’s personal devotional time, and obtaining a grade. Each of these required activities impacted students in various ways.

Impact of Recording the Required Personal Devotional Time

Requiring students to record the actual times spent in personal devotional time
attracted the most criticism both inside and outside of class, yet in the final reflection
dpaper it evoked the largest number of thankful comments, all of which were highly
appreciative and supportive of the discipline. The impact of recording personal devotional
time resulted in a number of behavioral and attitudinal changes (see Table 12).

There appears to be a cumulative effect, commencing with an alarming and often
painful revelation of self-awareness. Initially, there were thoughts that recording time
would somehow make the devotional time less spiritual. Instead, recording the time
became the means of linking time spent with God to assessment of their current
relationship with Him. The disturbing self-revelation was that, based on time allocation,
God was not being given first priority. Past inconsistencies with the devotional life were
identified and the need for change verbalized. In the process of altering self-awareness
and changing behavior patterns, it was recognized that the recording of devotional time
was merely a means to a greater end—communication with God. Throughout this
process, personal awareness was characterized by an authenticity and honesty that clearly
recognized problems in the past, and despite major current progress, students admitted
that the process was not easy. A few acknowledged that an optimum amount of time
spent with God had still not been reached by the end of the class. While the above
elements are not all recounted in each reflection paper, the following student's response
illustrates the process, trends, and principles in a candid and honest manner. It appears
that being held accountable for devotional time was like receiving some kind of shock
treatment with some immediate results, which in turn flowed on into other areas of life.
Realized how little time I was spending with God

My eyes were shockingly opened to how little time I was spending with God. This revelation came because of the required time to spend in study and prayer (7:114). I had let the cares and pleasures of this life invade my personal life. The report forms where we needed to keep track of our times with God made me realize this (7:186).

Realized I need to spend time with the Lord

I thought that timing myself in devotions was stupid. But it really helped me to realize that I needed to spend much more time with the Lord (7:8, 9).

Discovered I am a person who needs discipline

The more disciplined I am, the deeper my relationship with God is. I am glad that certain parts of my devotional life have become disciplined. I am seeking such discipline in other aspects of my spiritual life (7:18, 19; 7:245).

Helps with discipline, consistency, depth of relationship, identifies inadequacies, eliminates self-deception

Best growth in the area of discipline. To fulfill the 4 hours I had to get up early and make my time with the Lord a priority. Noticed greater consistency and depth in my time with Him. I learned more about my personal inadequacies and needs in the area of spiritual growth. More than anything, I am beginning to eliminate some of the self-deception and rely more on the Lord for accomplishing things in my life (7:245).

Helps with my priorities

I learned I always have time for things that are important to me. When time with God is important it happens. I don’t know why, but forcing myself to spend a certain amount of time by the clock with God really works (7:97).

Results in opportunities to bless others

When I am truly right with God I am at peace inside and confident in my relations with others and I actually have more opportunities to be a blessing to others (7:97).

Helped me to plot my spiritual growth

I have benefitted from seeing how long I have spent each week in my devotions and recording my thoughts each day after I study. That is a practice I want to continue beyond the class (7:17). The 4 hours made by spiritual vision grow in leaps (7:247).

Created an awareness of the presence of God

Recording my spiritual time with God created an awareness of the presence of God. At first I disliked it. It seemed awkward and took me a whole quarter to get used to it. I thank God I was required to record my devotional time because it disciplined me to be consistent, and compelled me to make devotional time as the priority of my life (7:65).

I am benefitted by an outside accountability force.

Specifically, knowing that I am required to turn in a weekly report on time spent in devotions has kept me more consistent (7:103). I have loved that accountability of having to record my devotional time (7:117, 118).

More able to see God’s working

Through my reading and logging of my spiritual time, I was able to see more the events and happenings where God was working in my life. I honestly can say that these practices that were required in class have drastically changed my daily connection with God (7:197).

My stewardship of time is greatly enhanced and revitalized

The recording of my time proved to be helpful ... more consistent; when time for devotion comes I get more interested to start reading and praying, also helped me to be spiritually sensitive about length of time I give myself in conducting private devotions (7:29). The required four hours of personal devotional time forced me to include Bible reading in my daily schedule. Previously it was not a priority and was not regular. Worship to me now is a time to be happy and rejoice—a special time/date with the Lord (7:239, 241).

Note. Data from Focus Groups (Vol. 6), Reflection Papers (Vol. 7), and One-year Follow-up Surveys (Vol. 22).
I have been studying as a religion student for more than five years, and I can say without a doubt that this class more than any I have ever taken has forced me to take a very hard look at my relationship with God. It wasn't very pretty. I was challenged in almost every facet of my Christian walk. And it was clear that I was not where God wanted me in our relationship.

I believe the devotion assignments were the catalyst to my realization. Suddenly I was held accountable for my devotional time. This was something I had never even thought of doing before. At first it sounded kind of unspiritual, I mean recording your devotion time seems like it would take away from the whole meaning. It didn't. By keeping the time of how much I was actually in communication with God I quickly realized I was falling way, way short. And it took me a while to even get half way on track. Before this class devotions and prayer were somewhat hit and miss. I would have something short in the morning, but if I didn't get anything else in I might have gotten by okay. I certainly wasn't making God number one in my life. Something had to change and it has. Now I can't go through the day without constantly being reminded of where I am with God in our relationship. It started by recording number of hours but now it has become more personal than that. I want to spend time with God not for the hours but for the communication. It still isn't easy and I'm still not spending as much time as I should but it certainly has become the major concern of my heart. And I believe that's what God is really asking, that our relationship be my utmost concern. . . I'm glad this class is required, because not really knowing much about it before taking the class, I probably wouldn't have chosen it on my own. But that would have been a big mistake. (7:82, 83)

In summary, the logging of time prompted an honest self-evaluation of current spiritual standing, and resulted in a great amount of self-awareness, which came from having to keep an authentic log of personal devotional time spent. As a result, the value of an accountability scheme was acknowledged as producing greater consistency and permanent devotional habits, which in turn increased students' enjoyment and appreciation of their time spent with God.

One student described the logging of hours spent in personal devotions as "keys of freedom," as he likened the experience to "clocking in" for work (6:13). No matter what other responsibilities might be waiting for a person at home or at school, when its time to clock in for work, the compulsion to concentrate on those other demands is relinquished,
as one focuses on the work at hand. Similarly, "clocking in" for time with God released
this student from his anxiety about all the other areas of his life that were demanding his
attention.

**Impact of the Grade Incentive**

Is it possible to benefit from engaging in spiritual disciplines even if they are
practiced for dubious reasons? In their final reflection paper, four students admitted that
the initial incentive for their devotional life was the grade for the class. "This class has
forced me for a grade, to have a consistent devotional life with God. The daily encounter
with Christ through Bible study and prayer has revolutionized my life" (7: 96). This
student then described the dramatic breakthrough he received on the very first day he
placed himself before God for a quantity of time as necessitated by the class requirement.

God broke through my pride and gave me strength to deal with an issue between me
and a friend. I approached my friend, there were tears and healing, and life has been a
steady process of growth and increasing joy in the Lord ever since. (7:96)

The same student announced that "Spiritual Formation I is the best thing that happened to
me since I got married." While admitting there had been short periods since then when he
had been close to God, he had "lacked the long-term commitment to the effort required in
maintaining my relationship with Him." Being concerned about falling back into old
patterns once the class was completed, he began meeting weekly with a friend for spiritual
accountability (7:97).

Another spoke of his "few" years in the church but without God in his life, and
then he describes how this class brought him back:
It is very sad that it had to be a required class that brought me back. When I was almost three class sessions behind I realized that if something did not change I would have to take this class again and I couldn’t afford the time. So I had to start changing my schedule and mainly rethinking my priorities. (7:215)

At the same time, a business partner who had been far from God for many years was reconverted and asked this seminary student to be his spiritual mentor. This man’s new faith became an additional motivation for the student, who marveled at “God’s miraculous ways of helping us in order to save us” (7:215).

Another student admitted that he had always wanted to spend as much time in devotions as he had this past quarter, but had never been motivated enough. “It is sad that I am only motivated that much by getting a grade in this class.” However during the quarter he learned how to communicate with God, and now he craves those moments more, as he recognizes that “God has created within me a desire to reach Him” (7:185).

The fourth student conceded that although the grades did motivate him into producing a devotional life, it was not forced or faked. It became real and alive, and something that was looked forward to every night. The effect of the grade was that it helped this person develop a habit that brought consistency, life, authenticity, and joy to his devotional life (7:238).

**Impact of Having a Devotional Plan**

The purpose of making a devotional “rule” or plan at the beginning of each week was so that students would plan the format of their daily personal devotional period ahead of time, thus eliminating the wasted time, energy, and motivation which could result from trying to decide what to do on a daily basis. Points were not deducted if the plans were
modified, as long as the required weekly 4 hours were fulfilled. Some students discovered that the planning ahead provided ready-to-use devotional ideas, and also made them look forward to their devotional times with anticipation.

As with the logging of devotional time, some were skeptical about writing down a devotional schedule, and at least one person was convinced to stick with it only because his grade depended on it. However “as time progressed, I started to enjoy that devotional time, and God began to show Himself in a way that was comforting to me” (7:73, 74).

As time devoted to the practice of any kind of skill results in increased proficiency and therefore increased satisfaction (Coe, 2000, pp. 102, 103), so time devoted to the practice of spiritual disciplines also resulted in increasing satisfaction with students’ personal devotional life. Numbers of students commented on the benefits of planning their devotional times, and noticed the change from “sporadic, hurried, unplanned activity, to a joyful time which is planned and time-tabled” (7:205). “Instead of doing whatever I turned to in the Bible, I now have a direction to go in my worships” (7:9). For another student, the course helped the student organize his devotional life (7:162). Another student elaborates on getting a devotional life organized:

The most helpful thing this class has helped me to accomplish is to get my devotional life organized. The simple discipline of writing out a plan for the week and sticking to it was most helpful. I have become more aware of my spiritual life. I am more intentional in what I do. I plan ahead and look forward to my time with God. Yet I still have flexibility. (7:13)

Others spoke of how they had plans and goals for other areas of their lives, but had never thought of having goals and plans for their devotional lives (7:257, 169, 188, 245, 226). Advance planning for their devotional times for the week reminded them of the
priority and importance of reserving time for God, as well as giving them organization,
direction, and something specific to look forward to (7:13). It appears that having a
weekly plan also made it easier to get started with a devotional program and to maintain it
consistently with minimal stress and anxiety.

The Role of Habits

In this chapter a series of changes in attitudes and behaviors concerning the
students' personal devotional life has been documented. Many of these changes have been
impacted by habit formation and illustrate the five general principles for change related to
the nature and role of habit formation which Archibald Hart (1996) outlines below.

Hart's Habit Formation Principles

First, Hart suggests that one of the best ways to eradicate bad habits is to establish
new habits that compete with the old ones. Second, creating good habits require strong
motivation for change; the desire for self-improvement is usually insufficient. Third,
staying motivated is important and is best achieved with group support (American
habits takes time, and 21 days is a commonly accepted time period for change to be
accepted by the body or mind as natural. Fifth, motivation survives better if one is
flexible, and can bounce back when there are setbacks. His essential rules for habit-
building include:

1. Have a plan; for one must be intentional in purpose and action.
2. Define the desired habit.
3. Challenge any potential sabotages of the new habit.

4. Set up reminders

5. Reinforce the new habit, which may include social accountability

6. Change the plan if it does not work (Hart, 1996, pp. 38-40).

Impact of Establishing Devotional Habits

The foregoing rules and principles concerning habit formation were substantiated by many of the students. They also spoke with gratitude about the new devotional habits formed as a result of the required 4 hours of personal devotional time per week, then went on to describe how this impacted other areas of their lives. For example, one student wrote: “The daily discipline required by this class has been instrumental in establishing good devotional habits” (7:165). This resulted in a deeper relationship with Christ, with the “biggest impact in my relationship with my wife and children. My attitude has softened and it has been easier to relate to my sons with fewer personality clashes and less competition.” Devotional time is better used because spiritual thoughts are more readily discerned. There is more spontaneous prayer throughout the day, and an appreciation for “the incredible things God wants to teach me” (7:165). This husband and father also learned that skipping one morning devotional is a spiritual handicap.

Establishing new devotional habits is not necessarily easy, yet the rewards are great:

I have discovered that I am the type of person who needs discipline. The more disciplined I am, the stronger I am. The more disciplined I am, the deeper my relationship with God is. It does not come naturally for me. However, when I have established habits, over time they become second nature. (7:18, 19)
The establishing of devotional habits was also observed as a process, both in frequency and duration. One student confessed that, prior to this class, personal devotional time had never lasted very long before it would be used for sermon preparation. Now he says, “the activities are differentiated and one hour for my daily devotion seems too short now.” Previously his weakness was in regularity—now the daily habit is established. “I could not make it if I didn’t take this class or was not asked to do the class assignments” (7:57).

The process of establishing habits can feel rather “mechanical” to start with, but “after two weeks the situation was really different, you just do it, and a deep need for these moments develops within you” (7:121). It is possible that one may not even feel like doing anything like “going to the street ministry, attending class, or doing spiritual disciplines; however, if you do something long enough it becomes a habit” (7:170). So “although consistency may be quite challenging at first, the joy and peace of God is felt even more throughout the day” (7:226).

Another admitted that, “although it started with recording numbers of hours, it has become more personal than that. I want to spend time with God not for the hours but for the communication” (7:82, 83). Thus “the requirement to have four hours in devotion has become part of my daily routine and not just a class requirement” (7:241). This person’s view of worship has also radically changed. “Worship to me now is a time to be happy and rejoice. I look at it as a special date/time with the Lord” (7:241). Similarly, one whose first year of ministry featured an impoverished devotional life, which resulted in an inability to bring other people into a deeper relationship with Jesus, found “a huge benefit in regular, consistent time with Him” (7:198).
In fact, consistency in devotional habits not only gave new vitality to the Christian life, but also created a desire for continued and increasing relationship with God, with the realization that

my intimate time with Him is never enough, and every time I approached Him he had new blessings and teachings for me. . . . I learned that life is different without that personal relationship, and no matter what responsibilities I have every day, it is necessary for me to give Him time to work in my life.

This observation reveals a paradigm shift in thinking—that giving time to God to work on one’s life is a higher priority than any work an individual might do for God, for it values God’s work for humans as being far more important than humankind’s work for God.

The actual recording of the devotional time was an acquired habit which initially helped people realize how “sporadic the devotional life really was.” Consistency was difficult and revealed that although God was a priority, He was not always the top priority. However the “greatest blessing of the quarter” for more than one family was the establishing of personal devotional habits:

My wife and I are now having regular worship together. We’ve always wanted to do this. We knew this was important but somehow what we knew was important never became our daily habit. Today I can say we now have family worship, a worship that is helping us to be real with ourselves and accountable to each other. We’ve grown very much spiritually already, and God is drawing us closer to each other. Thank you for challenging my spirituality, Dr. Dybdahl. God knows I need it. (7:108, 109)

Intentionality in Spiritual Formation

There were three aspects of intentionality for spiritual formation in this study.

First, by choosing to add a course in Spiritual Formation to the core of the Master of
Divinity program in the SDA Theological Seminary, the seminary indicated to students that personal spiritual formation is important to their pastoral training. Second, the teacher's choice of class assignments informed the students which activities are perceived to be of greatest value to their personal devotional life. Third, when students planned their weekly devotional schedule, and chose certain spiritual disciplines, they also demonstrated an intentional commitment to the program. The impact of intentionality in spiritual formation on seminary students will be noted, and some prevailing arguments against intentional spiritual formation will also be discussed.

Intentional Spiritual Formation via the Curriculum

Deciding which subjects are included in a particular seminary course or curriculum teaches students many important things besides the content. Eisner (1998) believes that students quickly learn what adults consider important for them to learn, from the amount of time allocated to the subject, the extent to which it is graded, and the extent to which the curriculum allows for the practice of skills learned. Not only does the curriculum teach content, it is also "a symbolic structure that defines a hierarchy of values for the young" (p. 76).

Students recognized the seminary's intentionality for spiritual formation by the subject's inclusion in the curriculum: "I like the idea that the Seminary is concerned about the spiritual condition of people and not just their intellectual attainments" (6:138). However, this idea was coupled with the observation that it would be more effective if it were spread throughout the entire seminary experience, instead of done just at the
beginning (6:138, 7:216), since “the last thing we want is a bunch of people graduating after two and a half years who don’t know the Lord, who have a theoretical knowledge and don’t have a relationship” (6:154).

In a focus group discussion, one student referred to Ellen White’s description of the schools of the prophets saying that “there’s more to the schools of the prophets than just intellectual learning. It was a place where you could communicate with God. I’m so glad that the spiritual formation is part of the program” (6:141). White (1900) spoke of the schools of the prophets, producing students who were “not only versed in divine truth, but who themselves enjoyed communion with God and had received a special endowment of his Spirit” (p. 691).

A course that addressed the personal spiritual life was not expected by some people who were used to only the intellectual rigors of theological studies. However, expectations of academic excellence without accompanying expectations and opportunities for personal spiritual formation lead to an imbalance in perceptions of ministry, as well as personal priorities, thinking, and values. These observations were exemplified in a weekly diary report during the second week of the course as the purpose and function of spiritual disciplines for seminary students were being explored.

As a Seminarian, I was always taught of the importance of academics. Theology, the study of Biblical languages, reading, and overall scholarship have been paramount throughout my academic career. I was taught that discipline, hard work, networking skills, homiletics, and the like were the most important things that you could master. Our professors encouraged us to put everything aside and focus on our number 1 priority—school. If we would complain of the work being too overwhelming, we were met with the response, “that’s how it is in the real world” and encouraged to stop whining and do work. However, Foster claims that God is not looking for intelligent people as He is looking for deep people. This is so true! Intelligent people...
are a dime a dozen. It is the man or woman who can honestly say that he or she has been with God that the church needs desperately. (12:139)

Thus, when a course of study for pastors emphasizes academic excellence and does not make any reference to the pastor's personal devotional life, it is natural for students to conclude that the pastor's personal spiritual life is unimportant and irrelevant to successful ministry.

Intentional Spiritual Formation via the Class Requirements

How appropriate is it to make the practice of spiritual disciplines a class requirement? As outlined in the section *Beginning Attitudes Towards Class Requirements*, student reactions ranged from grateful to indignant, yet after the experience of having to practice spiritual disciplines consistently, there was virtually unanimous endorsement and approval of the requirement. For some, the requirements of the class actually enabled students to do something they always wanted to do: “What I liked most from my devotional activities is that it helped me put into practice the things I wanted to do for a long time” (7:162), while for others it revealed an area of their personal lives that needed more time and attention (7:5).

Concerns Regarding Intentional Spiritual Formation Initiatives

As noted in chapter 2, historically there has been wide variation in the opinions of seminary faculty regarding intentional spiritual formation initiatives, with many feeling themselves to be unprepared or ill-equipped to assist students with their personal spiritual lives (Edwards, 1980, pp. 12-20). In an effort to increase faculty understanding of the
issues, providing them with a workable rationale for their involvement with the spiritual lives of their students, Coe (2000) discusses eight of the most commonly touted arguments against intentional spiritual formation initiatives in the classroom, together with responses developed from his more than 20 years of personal involvement in intentional spiritual formation initiatives. (See Table 13.)

He proposes that while every class taught at a Christian institution of higher learning can advance the spiritual life of its students, there has been the tendency to relegate training in spiritual formation to the non-curricular, so that the experiential components of spirituality are kept on the periphery of Christian education (Coe, 2000, pp. 85, 86). Since students are at different developmental stages, with many struggling to find their identity, he maintains that it is “imperative to intentionally and consciously assist students in exploring personal motives and the manifold temptations in academic life regarding autonomy, idolatry and the finding of one’s identity outside of Christ” (p. 90).

This section has explored the arguments against intentional learning experiences for spiritual formation. The question then arises, What happens when spiritual formation is not intentionally catered to in the seminary curriculum? Unfortunately, the truth of the matter is that

all too often when assignments are packed with the theoretical only, prayer and soul work are the first to be left behind in our students’ lives. As a result, we are implicitly teaching them that it is possible to be a successful student without a life of prayer. (Coe, 2000, p. 103)

Therefore, Coe encourages Christian faculty to “take an inventory to see whether they are
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Concern Named</th>
<th>Concern Described</th>
<th>Concern Addressed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intrusiveness</td>
<td>Experiential assignments are an invasion of student privacy.</td>
<td>Students are instructed to share only what they are comfortable in sharing, so invasiveness is generally not a problem for students. They know ahead of time who will read their reports, and often use the opportunity to disclose some of the details of their lives in confidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Therapeutic</td>
<td>How can a professor individually tailor these projects for student’s benefit and safety? Intensive soul work may explore material that the professor or course is incapable of dealing with.</td>
<td>Faculty do need to be sensitive to age and content appropriateness when designing spiritual formation projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competency</td>
<td>Do faculty have the necessary background and training to assign and monitor these kinds of assignments?</td>
<td>Faculty workshops could help train faculty in both theory design of spiritual formation projects relevant to their fields, as well as in sensitivity in dealing with student reports, with appropriate referrals as necessary. (A few students end up going to counseling of their own accord; others say they would like a spiritual mentor.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legalistic</td>
<td>Is the requiring of students to do spiritual disciplines in opposition to freedom and spontaneous growth, leading to legalism and spirituality by rote?</td>
<td>Requiring an action does not necessarily make it rote and legalistic. It may result in greater refinement, proficiency, and love for the activity, as it did for many of us in the development of our academic and professional skills. Students appreciate being given “space” in the curriculum to explore . . . their internal life before God. (pp. 102, 103)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluative</td>
<td>Is it possible to evaluate spiritual growth from the spiritual disciplines in order to assign a grade?</td>
<td>Since all skills have some knowledge base, an understanding of the theoretical knowledge component can be tested. Proficiency in the spiritual disciplines is more easily graded based on time and effort spent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>How can one reasonably or helpfully assign experiential projects when classes are large and there is no time to read all the assignments?</td>
<td>Students usually desire much more feedback than is possible, yet reports can be skimmed and counted.</td>
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Table 13—Continued.

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<tr>
<th>Concern Named</th>
<th>Concern Described</th>
<th>Concern Addressed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time Concern</td>
<td>How can one add experiential assignments to already overloaded class which has insufficient time to cover existing class material?</td>
<td>The issue for the amount of content is one of values, choices and wisdom, and how well one can &quot;learn&quot; spirituality without personal involvement.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriateness Concern</td>
<td>The church, not the university, is the place for this intentional training in spiritual formation. The university is primarily for teaching course content and developing professional skills.</td>
<td>Since the whole of life is to be a training-in-righteousness, with no autonomous spaces between, neither church nor seminary can afford to distance themselves from the personal spiritual formation of their students.</td>
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</table>


...unwittingly encouraging students to 'do education' in autonomy from God, apart from prayer and the spiritual disciplines” (p. 94). This inventory would require looking not only at the nature of the assignments, and the manner of approaching the subject, but also the amount of work that students are expected to do, for many have relinquished devotional time with God in order to achieve academic excellence.

Transforming Student Attitudes and Behaviors

Learning about the spiritual disciplines and having the opportunity to try them out under the mentoring of a caring teacher and with the support of encouraging peers have the potential for transforming student attitudes and behaviors and can be likened to the
experience of learning a new skill. Since spiritual formation involves the learning and practice of skills, evaluation and feedback are important components of this skills training.

Skills Training, Feedback, and Accountability

Unfortunately, Christian spiritual formation in the seminary has often been viewed as a private matter, thus precluding both the teaching of devotional skills and the accompanying mentoring and feedback. While this situation might be more comfortable for faculty who may feel ill-prepared for the task, it is not what the students want. Students realize they need help in their spiritual lives, but do not know what to do or where to turn for help. However, by the end of the Spiritual Formation Class, it was recognized that “the right amount of discipline, encouragement, and example go a long way” (7:159). It seems that these three components mirror closely the experience of the disciples learning devotional habits from Jesus, and are complementary to personal involvement in the class requirements. According to one student:

What I liked most from my devotional activities is that it helped me put to practice the things I have wanted to do for a long time. I still need to improve. But I am doing more than I used to. . . . During this quarter I have grown closer to God. I have learned and been reminded of the great love God has for me. (7:162)

Others were so busy working for and studying about God that they did not have time to spend with God, yet when they had to stop and spend quiet time with God as a class requirement, it was well appreciated:

I have needed this type of coaxing to get me motivated and on track to a fuller relationship with my Savior. Being back in school has solidified in my mind and heart the need for intentional effort to spend time in quiet and prayer. I have always been on the go, and had no need for quiet, but I have seen the depth of my spiritual walk when I stop and spend time in quiet and telling my deep feelings to God. (7:5)
Further feedback and accountability were provided by the reading reports and small groups, which were described as "helpful in that they provided someone to keep track of me as I went along this journey" (7:176). One student had read Foster’s book previously and also attended an undergraduate class in spiritual formation, but the information had remained at the theoretical level, and the student felt "apathetic about attending another spiritual formation class" (7:247). However there were two things that he identified as transforming "good ideas into actually doing them." First, "having the time that we are forced to do it [practice spiritual disciplines] was powerful. That helped me internalize it. I couldn’t just say, yeah, I’ve thought about simplicity today, and move on. I had to actually do it" (6:96). Second, he states that his small group kept him accountable, to the extent that issues in his life were resolved and discussed (6:96) and in the process he has grown in the discipline of honesty and accountability (7:247).

Follow-up Evaluation

In the follow-up survey taken 1 year after the completion of the class, students were asked to "check the following class activities according to their lasting value personally." The list included all the components of the Spiritual Formation Class: The Scripture meditation at the retreat, the small groups at the retreat, class lectures, understanding temperament, the 4 hours of required spiritual disciplines each week, the weekly written reports, focus groups, the final reflection paper, the metaphor and the assigned reading. The 4 hours of spiritual disciplines per week scored the highest mean of 3.18 (out of 4), with meditation at the retreat the next closest with a mean of 2.87. Again,
when percentages of respondents who gave a rating of good or outstanding to each of the activities were calculated, spiritual disciplines received the highest score of 80% followed by meditation at the retreat with 72% of the vote.

When asked to “describe some of the most significant changes in your life as a result of this class,” six of the seven themes that I identified were related to the learning about and the practicing of spiritual disciplines (see Table 14). In summary, the comments focused on:

1. The importance of the devotional life and its necessity before any other work
2. The impact of the devotional life in terms of relationship with God, trust, and appreciation of His character
3. The variety of components in the devotional life resulting in a new appreciation for meditation, a deeper understanding of spiritual disciplines, and more time and enjoyment spent in cultivating a personal relationship with God
4. The nature of worship including new perspectives on worship and a variety of worship methods resulting in deeper commitment to private and family worship and improved family time
5. Changed priorities in other areas of life resulting in consistency and discipline in relationship with Christ and a re-evaluation of priorities of school, health, church, family, and God
6. Honesty with God, self, and others resulting in living a more authentic life (22:17-22).
Table 14

**Significant Changes in Your Life as a Result of This Class**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Details of Changes</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| Importance of devotional life| Devotional time is now considered very important. Prayer life is more focused (746).  
Learned importance of devotional life (808).  
I see personal time with God and accountability a must (709).  
Importance of spending time with God and blessing that follows (714).  
Understand need for concentrated effort to build own spiritual life (720).  
Be dutiful in my devotional life—realize that my spirituality is paramount importance before any other work I engage in (730).  
Appreciated reinforcement of the devotional life (742). |
| Impact of devotional life    | Chance to experience God again also Foster and *Steps to Christ* (285).  
Confirmation of relationship with God (701).  
More disciplined life using more creative methods (703).  
Meditation—personal quiet time with God—listen to what He has to say to me in His guidance of my life (711).  
A better relationship with God and man (712).  
More trust in God (716).  
A different look at prayer and spirituality. It has enhanced my understanding of communion with God, and has given me more variety in my spiritual experience (721).  
My devotional life has increased, and my awareness of God’s mercy is stronger (732).  
Leads me to be more sensitive to the voice of God, and needs more practice and discipline (735).  
More aware of the fruits that come from concentrated time with God (736).  
More focused on spiritual matters & implications. Preaching from a different perspective (804).  
I pray more and I have a more meaningful devotion (806).  
Requirements can be a joy if you have a better relationship with God (808).  
My devotional life and my relationship with God (809). |
Table 14—Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Details of Changes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Components of devotional life</td>
<td>Appreciating meditation more; learning to listen to God better (174). I pray more often now (718). I learned importance of implementing other spiritual disciplines besides prayer &amp; Bible study (723). It disciplined me &amp; got to know a lot more about spiritual disciplines (728). Broader view of spiritual disciplines - and their purpose (729). Increased focus on meditation (738). Deeper understanding of spiritual disciplines - broader view; helped me see spiritual things differently—not like a Pharisee (740). Regular prayer journaling—habit; more consistent than ever before (741). Journaling more important; silent time with God important too (805).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>More committed to making time for dev.—private &amp; family; more focused in devotionals, ACTS praying and study Scripture (120). Saw: benefit of organized worship, different aspects of worship, how to teach others (722). Family worship changed—warm, growth of spiritual life (744). I now use a variety of worship methods (803). Family time improves; Worship to God improves (807).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changed priorities</td>
<td>A relationship with Christ requires consistency and discipline. I experienced God at a more closer distance in my life. It helped me reevaluate my priorities; theoretically they are: God, health, school, family, church. Practically they are school, church, health, family, God (731). Refocused my values—family &amp; soul-winning important. Studies important but no longer first (GPA dropped from A to A-). Wife now interested in foreign missions (741).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Honesty with God, self, and others</td>
<td>Finally I got honest with myself, and God and other people. By far the most significant factor was the required/spiritual discipline time (258). Marriage has benefitted most from the class - I became more cognizant of the fact that we both need God (717). A relationship with Christ requires consistency and discipline. I experienced God at a more closer distance in my life. It helped me reevaluate my priorities; theoretically they are: God, health, school, family, church. Practically they are school, church, health, family, God (731). I had never analyzed the time spent in my spiritual journey (737).</td>
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</table>

Evidences of Teacher Impact

In their report on spiritual development, Babin et al. (1972) came to the growing realization that “the spiritual formation and development of seminary students begins with, and is dependent upon, the spiritual formation and development of faculty” (p. 9). Although no specific questions relating to the Spiritual Formation teacher were asked, students nevertheless spoke of his role in their spiritual development, and they specifically referred to his obvious connection with God, his humility, his honesty and authenticity, and his genuine interest and concern for the students.

Connection With God

The teacher of the Spiritual Formation class in this study believes that in order to lead students into an authentic spiritually formative experience, the teacher must also have an ongoing and vibrant passion for God. In his first lecture he said that spiritual leaders must be willing to do more (even double) the requirements he or she expects of the students, “So if I’m asking you to do 4 hours per week, I need to be doing 8 hours per week” (Tape 1A, October 1999). The genuineness of his spirituality resulted in an openness and acceptance of his words:

I could accept what you had to say in class because I could sense that you were in connection with the Master. You have a deep love for God that is expressed in your prayers and sincerity. Thanks for placing me like a fish back into the waters of God’s presence, for this I am earnestly grateful. (7:74)

Honesty and Authenticity

Students were surprisingly open and honest in their weekly journal reports, as they
described their daily struggles and goals for change. For example: "I do not pray enough. To take the quality time to spend time with God is hard for me. I want to make a conscious effort to spend more time in personal prayer" (16:15). Another described the struggles he had had with his reading assignments:

Well last week I had a real problem with Foster in Celebration of Discipline, but this week he changed my thinking and helped me spiritually. Before I wasn't quite sure about how much good meditation would do me. This morning after reading Foster's book he convinced me to give it a second try. What I really enjoyed was the practical advice that he gave me. . . . I will try this tonight for the first time. Kudos for Foster this week. (16:8)

Another admitted: "I meditated for an hour, but realized I was not hearing, because I was only concentrating on what I wanted to hear" (16:49). Such honesty was a reflection of the teacher's honesty as he described both the joys and difficulties in his own journey with God. One particularly poignant example he shared in class concerned the difficult personal experience of having to pray at the funeral of a woman who had died despite the many prayers for her healing. With the honesty that is seen in Old Testament prayers, he prayed something like this:

Lord I really don't know what you're doing here. This lady seems like she should have been a person that should live. She has teenage daughters and so I'm not real happy with this, I don't understand exactly what's going on here, but I don't know where else to turn. At this time I can't turn anywhere else, I can only come to you, and so I come to you, and I just want to believe that someday you will make this plain, and that in some way you will take this brokenness and tragedy and turn it into something good. (Tape 6A, October 18, 1999)

Here was powerfully modeled for students the extent to which one can honestly share with God the entire range of one's emotions, and in their weekly journals, and most reflection papers, the newly found freedom of honest and authentic communication with God was
evident. "We have learned how to pray naturally to our heavenly Father and Friend" (7:187).

Honesty is the best policy. If things are going bad for me and I don’t feel connected to God, I do not want to go through the motions as if everything is OK. I now tell God exactly how I am feeling, even if it means telling Him that I really don’t feel like talking to Him. (7:238)

Others appreciated hearing descriptions of specific spiritual disciplines, and learned from trying them out for themselves (7:11, 12).

Humility

There was no hint in the classes that the teacher considered himself to be spiritually superior to the seminary students, although his prayers exuded love, compassion, and an intimate acquaintance with God. When encouraging or admonishing the students to participate or continue in some aspect of spiritual development, he also said that he was including himself in the challenge. He did not promote one particular method or practice, but rather encouraged students to experiment with the spiritual disciplines, in keeping with their individual learning styles and temperament type. It was as though teacher and students together were participating in a journey of learning and growth, under God’s direction.

Genuine Concern for and Interest in the Students

The teacher’s class prayers addressing specific student needs and concerns, and his availability to students outside of class, demonstrated his personal interest in seminary students and their families, as well as an awareness of and sensitivity towards the struggles
that they face. Despite the fact that class assignments were compulsory, students recognized that the teacher “has done this to help us, because he knows, and we know, that we have big problems with our personal devotions” (7:146). In this Spiritual Formation class, students seemed to recognize that the teacher was more concerned with their spiritual development than merely the completion of a set of class requirements.

**Conclusion**

Seminary students come to their seminary experience with a wide range of religious and personal backgrounds, which may nurture or hinder a developing personal relationship with God. Ignorance of the nature and purpose of spiritual disciplines affected people’s view of God, to the extent that informed reading about the spiritual disciplines resulted in a shift in both thinking and practice.

The reading opened my eyes and put in its right place the necessity and function of the Spiritual disciplines. Before reading, I thought that it was the disciplines themselves that changed us. Now I know that it is meeting God in the context of the disciplines that makes the change. As I evaluated how these readings affected me personally, I realized that much of my Christian life has been based on my efforts to find God, not realizing that God has been looking for me all along. A shift has occurred in my mind, and devotion is now not just an act to punch in the divine time card, but a true desire to be in God’s presence and be changed. I am starting to catch a glimpse of a loving God. (12:62)

The diversity of reactions (including some very negative ones) to the class requirements of practicing 4 hours of spiritual disciplines per week made the teacher’s sensitivity crucial to the success of the program. He listened empathetically to the objections, and compassionately outlined the perspective that he had gained from teaching spiritual formation classes over the years. Although students were free to choose the
format of their devotional times, there was no negotiation regarding the minimum requirement of 4 hours per week, and the teacher's uncompromising stance was due to his deep concern and interest for students to develop the habit of ministering in the presence of God.

The impact of both learning about the spiritual disciplines and practicing them impacted behaviors and attitudes in three major areas: their devotional life, their understanding of self, and their understanding of God.

Enjoyable Devotional Life and Appreciation of God

Learning about the variety of spiritual disciplines, and then practicing them, brought new life and vitality to previously tedious routines, resulting in increased enjoyment, eagerness, and greater consistency in personal devotional times. As more time was spent with God, a greater appreciation for His character was realized and communion with Him ensued. The more that was learned of God's goodness, greatness, patience, and love, the more realistic and honest the self-awareness became.

Increased Honesty and Self-Awareness

More than any other single activity, the logging of personal devotional time revealed to students not only the paucity of time spent with God, but also helped them compare time spent with God to time spent on other activities in their day. This comparison with other daily activities thus disclosed their personal underlying priorities and values for life, and many described feelings of shock, embarrassment, and disbelief that their commitment to God was so shallow. Students were faced with a reality which
most never realized existed. Although they thought about and desired a relationship with
God, they now realized that there was little intentionality in their daily lives to match these
desires. The habits of regular, organized, and planned devotional periods, which were
formed during the meeting of compulsory class requirements, were soon valued and
appreciated, as changes in their attitudes towards God and family became evident. What
may have begun as a ritual, soon became a joy and delight, and of highest priority in their
daily schedule. The impact then was noticed in restored and renewed family relationships
and a greater confidence in witnessing to God's goodness with others. The weekly
journals, focus groups, and reflection papers revealed almost unanimous student
appreciation for the requirement to practice 4 hours of spiritual disciplines per week. The
more this weekly requirement was engaged in, the more freedom there was from
compulsion, and the more enjoyable and valued their fellowship with God became.
CHAPTER 6

IMPACT OF SMALL GROUP PARTICIPATION:
CONNECTIONS AND COMMUNITY

Believers need not be limited by their own relationships to deepen their knowledge of God. God is so grand and majestic, and each relationship is so person specific that there will be much to learn about God. The fullest knowledge of God attainable by humans will only come about within a growing and God-knowing community of saints. Thus, to know God more fully cannot be accomplished without the larger community of believers.

Klaus Issler
Wasting Time With God

In what ways are small groups perceived to be a beneficial part of personal spiritual formation initiatives? What were the beginning attitudes of students to the required weekly small group meetings? How did these groups function and what was their perceived impact on the participants both short-term and long-term?

Chapter Overview

The impact of the small groups began at the retreat, and continued as a result of the weekly meetings. This chapter commences with a review of how the small groups were formed at the retreat and a description of the initial impact of the group experience at
the retreat. Weekly meetings are then described, and the use of the *Spiritual Formation Workbook* explored. Beginning attitudes towards small groups are reported and barriers to effective small group functioning noted. The impact of these small groups is gleaned from seven data sources: The retreat survey, field notes, focus groups, weekly reading reports, reflection papers, the 1-year-later follow-up survey, and interviews conducted 15 to 22 months after the class.

**Small Group Formation**

Small groups of four persons were initially formed at the retreat and then continued to meet weekly following the Spiritual Formation class lecture in the same lecture theater. Regular attendance was required, so the small group meeting was one of the four intentional learning experiences of the Spiritual Formation Class.

**Getting Started**

As described in chapter 4, the groups of four were formed fairly randomly at the retreat and began by sharing stories from a common stage in their lives. Ackerman (1994) suggests that when trying to encourage others to tell their stories, “we often feel safest talking about childhood memories” (p. 6), thus the first group interaction consisted of two non-threatening questions from childhood and one of personal taste to be shared with one other person (see Chapter 4 for detailed explanation). Next, the teacher encouraged each pair to join up with another same-sex pair, so that the same responses could be shared in a larger group of four. Thus, the small groups began in a non-formal way, with a casual, non-threatening ice-breaker activity. Few of these participants had met previously. There
were no preparatory or introductory remarks regarding small groups, neither was the type of small group identified.

Rules for Small Groups

After the first individual reflection on a scriptural passage, the same groups were invited to re-form, and it was then that the teacher announced that these groups would be the spiritual formation accountability groups for the quarter, meeting for 1 hour each week following the Spiritual Formation class. Each student received a copy of four rules for small groups (see Appendix D), in which listening, confidentiality, and equal time-sharing were encouraged, while preaching, advice-giving, and requiring people to share beyond their comfort zones were discouraged.

Small Group Goals

The guided reflection questions on the first scriptural passage became the basis for group sharing. Since each student was meditating on the same scriptural passage and reflecting on the same guided questions, a non-threatening basis for sharing was provided, and the three aims for the retreat were comfortably met:

1. Begin bonding to a small group that will furnish spiritual and social support.
2. Take time for examination of past spiritual experiences and present standing with God as you begin seminary.
3. Let God help you envision the future and discover particular areas where you need spiritual growth.
Positive Introduction to Small Group Dynamics

There was a variety of attitudes towards small groups before the Spiritual Formation Class began, ranging from enthusiastic and expectant to apathetic and fearful. However, rather than focusing or drawing attention to these negative attitudes and emotions, the teacher provided a positive small group experience by planning an effective structure for natural group sharing which was affirming, supportive, and non-threatening.

The format of the retreat allowed extended time for both individual meditation and reflection, and for group sharing, so that by the end of the day a significant amount of time had been shared by the same four people, resulting in widespread appreciation for the small group experience and, for many, a real sense of bonding.

Group Bonding at the Retreat

The group dynamics at the retreat was reported as being the most significant aspect of the retreat. The most frequently mentioned activity was that of sharing experiences in small groups and learning from others, followed by fellowship and connecting with classmates, and discussion. In the small groups, bonding and connectedness were experienced as stories and testimonies of God's leading, and blessings were told. Commonalities were shared, group members prayed together, and listeners were strengthened and encouraged. A few mentioned the sharing of similarities, being vulnerable about oneself, the establishing of the groups, the affirmation and prayer time, and the new cultural perspectives gained by getting to know students from different ethnic backgrounds (see Table 10 above).
Honesty

As the students became comfortable in honestly sharing their journey with others in a small group, they were surprised to discover how many similarities they shared with other students. They saw many more similarities than differences between themselves and fellow seminary students. Sixty responses included ideas of similarity—either in personal traits, relationship with God, or their call to ministry (being), or in experiences, struggles, or challenges either currently or previously experienced (doing).

Similarity with others

When similarities with others are recognized, there appears more bonding, greater respect and tolerance for others, and a desire to get to know each other more. There was also a degree of relief when it was discovered that other seminary students struggle with similar issues, and that everyone is a sinner in desperate need of the Savior. This was illustrated a number of times through the journey theme (5:70), a term that reminds one of incompleteness and process: “Each of us is in a spiritual journey; no one is perfect” (109). At the same time, there was also a sense of comradeship since “we’re on this journey called life together” (246).

Recognizing God’s working

Whether it was how God relates to other people, how He works through other people, or how each learns from and encourages the other, there was a sense of how important each person is to God, and to others. One student observed that he had
“learned that sharing with others in the context and mind-set of Scripture, is far more an enriching experience than without it” (5:47).

Fellowship

The word “fellowship” occurred 17 times in the data, while many responses implied the concept by using such phrases as “getting to know the other guys in my group” (156), and “starting friendships with others” (188), “forming spiritual partnerships” (265), and “uniting with my fellow class mates” (272). Two individuals especially appreciated the “inter-racial union and fellowship” (102). Discussion, listening, affirmation, and praying together were all valued ways of connecting in groups, and contributed to one of the retreat objectives: “Begin bonding to a small group that will furnish spiritual and social support” (see Appendix D for Spiritual Formation course outline). For many participants, the two came together as in the following: “Meeting God-fearing people who love the Lord and want to do His will just as I want to do His will” (117).

Oral comments spoken at the end of the day to the entire group such as, “I’ve just met three great friends” (5:1), which attracted lots of loud “amens,” and “I’ve just thought, when I get to Heaven, I’ve got three new brothers” (5:2) indicated that spiritual and social bonds had been formed.

Summary

The beginnings of openness and honesty were apparent, as students shared parts of their spiritual journey, and group members were relieved to realize that fellow seminarians
also struggled with similar issues. This was a surprising revelation for many, resulting in
the strengthening of friendship ties, and a new appreciation for the diversity found in this
international group (7:71, 73). Concerning the process of spiritual growth and learning,
one student observed, “We learn and grow well when we are in community; I learned this
at the retreat and during the small group, during moments of sharing” (7:233).

Group Processes

What happened in the small groups was affected by the people, the format, and
content of each group, and in some cases previous small group experiences. However, the
term “small group” does not have the same meaning for everyone.

Types and Functions of Small Groups

Small groups differ in purpose, function, and therefore have varying dynamics.
Kurt Johnson (1997, p. 76) suggests that most church small groups consist of sharing,
Bible Study, prayer, and mission, in varying proportions, depending on their primary
purpose, and he sees the following definition as incorporating all the necessary elements:

A small group is an intentional, face-to-face gathering of 3 to 12 people, meeting on a
regular schedule, with the common purpose of developing relationships, meeting felt
needs of group members, growing spiritually, and laying plans to lead others to accept
Jesus as Lord and Savior of their lives. (p. 75)

It does not mean that all small groups of the same type will exhibit the same characteristics
and dynamics of group functioning.

If people have been members of small groups previously, it is important for them
to recognize the differences between group types in terms of functioning and purpose so
that false expectations or fears from previous small group experiences are not transferred
to newly formed groups. Table 15 lists a variety of small groups in which different
purposes and weaknesses are identified and compared. Other divisions could have been
made on the basis of nurturing (Mary) groups versus action (Martha) groups, or a three-
way division could be: task groups, fellowship groups, and Bible study groups (Johnson,

The spiritual formation groups formed in this study were designated as “small
spiritual growth and accountability groups,” and although they may have included
some of the elements of the groups in Table 15, it was important for the students to
differentiate between the primary purpose and function of these small groups as compared
to some previous small group in which they may have participated.

Pre-Existing Barriers That Hinder Effective
Group Functioning

Unfortunate previous small group experiences or fear of the unknown can make it
difficult for people to participate comfortably in small group interaction. Reluctance to
become involved in the spiritual formation small groups was found to be the result of
shyness (7:239), especially with different ethnic groups (7:48, 225); difficulty in expressing
feelings (7:210), a lack of experience with small groups (7:9); a self-centered, inward-
focused life (7:121, 138), bad experiences with depth sharing (7:176), loss of trust due to
previous breaches of confidentiality (7:104, 105), fear of accountability groups (7:132), as
well as apathy due to previous impassive groups (7:163, 247), and the tendency to become
cought up with unimportant things (7:95).
Table 15

**Common Types of Small Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Small Group</th>
<th>Purpose/Characteristics</th>
<th>Weaknesses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fellowship groups</td>
<td>Designed for social interaction. Helpful for the new members, the lonely, singles, and those who love people.</td>
<td>They may get so caught up in social activities that prayer and Bible study are overlooked.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible study groups</td>
<td>For those who like to study the Bible in order to grow in their knowledge of a particular topic.</td>
<td>This group can develop an attitude of “we alone have the truth.” The group also needs an outreach project to maintain balance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outreach groups:</td>
<td>Designed to reach out to non-Christians, non-members, or non-attending church members.</td>
<td>These groups may focus on numerical growth rather than the spiritual growth of their members.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible study groups</td>
<td>Individuals meet occasionally to discuss their ministry, and brief study and prayer, most of the time is spent on the group task/ministry.</td>
<td>Doing the task/ministry may become more important than relationships, Bible study or prayer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pathway/redemptive friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recountaintance with Jesus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support groups</td>
<td>Designed for individuals with special needs. Members support each other by sharing struggles and solutions, Bible study, and prayer.</td>
<td>Members may concentrate upon individual needs, rather than on the power of the Holy Spirit, and being re-created in Jesus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g. Grief recovery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Divorce</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents of teenagers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prayer groups</td>
<td>Majority of time spent in praying with perhaps some Bible study and sharing. Members often have prayer partners, or prayer chains.</td>
<td>There is the danger of viewing others as unspiritual if they do not belong, or do not pray as much as the group members do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Covenant groups</td>
<td>Members balance group time between sharing, Bible study, prayer, and outreach—inviting new members.</td>
<td>May lose balance by focus on one aspect; new people always joining may prevent group bonding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>House church</td>
<td>A small group meeting in a home rather than the church building. Used where Christianity is restricted, or as an outreach strategy.</td>
<td>Can become isolated from the larger community of the church, forgetting to function within church guidelines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cell church</td>
<td>All church members belong to a cell, and all of church life occurs in the cell. Few programs, with weekly worship service often secondary to the cell life.</td>
<td>Elitist attitude may develop, with other small group models seen as invalid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabbath School action units</td>
<td>Purpose of SS is fellowship, training, Bible study, prayer, and outreach (local and global), &amp; should be done weekly.</td>
<td>Sitting in pews, and restricted time is not conducive to healthy group life, and satisfying bonding.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Positive Group Practices That Promote Healthy Group Functioning

Bill Donahue (1996, pp. 88, 89) suggests that the values of affirmation, availability, prayer, openness, honesty, safety, confidentiality, sensitivity, and accountability foster open communication in small groups, thereby promoting growth in interpersonal relationships and maturity in Christ. Conversely, individual and group satisfaction is thwarted when these values are violated. For example, in the fifth week of small group meetings, and after the reading assignment emphasizing the importance of maintaining confidence, listening without talking, and avoiding judgmental remarks, one student lamented his small group experience: “This past week I was made to feel really stupid by an off-handed statement used by a group member. My question is: ‘How do I know who to trust with some of my darkest fears, pains, and sins?’” (15:77).

He referred to this incident a few weeks later in his final reflection paper, and described his first impulse to pack his bags, blame the teacher, and leave the class permanently. However he took the calming presence of the Holy Spirit as a sign that God wanted him to continue in the group, admitting his need of help with problems. Thus a long-term fear of seeking help because of what might happen was overcome. Despite the fact that he had been apprehensive about small groups at the beginning of the class because of previous bad experiences in which confidences had not been kept, he was grateful for the progress made by the end of the quarter, and even voluntarily chose to remain in a small group for an additional quarter: “This class has helped me to open up a little bit. It has been very difficult, but it is happening. That is why I opted to stay in the
small group next quarter. I now think they are the best thing that could come my way” (7:104).

Format of Weekly Spiritual Formation Small Group Meeting

Whereas the initial small group experience at the retreat was largely structured, with specially chosen scriptural passages and reflective questions, the weekly small group meeting allowed for greater flexibility, and in some cases may have been influenced by previous small group experiences, which may or may not have been like the spiritual formation accountability groups.

D. Michael Henderson (1997, p. 14) suggests that the class meeting incorporated four of the key principles of NT Christianity: “Personal growth within the context of an intimate fellowship, accountability for spiritual stewardship, ‘bearing one another’s burdens,’ and ‘speaking the truth in love,’” thus providing a useful model for discipling.

Students were encouraged to follow Smith’s (1999) A Spiritual Formation Workbook (SFW) in their small groups but it appears that not everyone understood how to maximize the effectiveness of this book. In fact, comments indicating the least satisfaction with the spiritual formation class are related to student frustration or confusion as they endeavored to incorporate the SFW into their small groups. For this reason, the next three sections are devoted to the purpose of the SFW, the way the students read it, and possible reasons for the difficulties with the book.
The SFW was chosen by the teacher for at least three reasons:

(a) to provide instruction in the six major areas of spiritual discipline found in the life of Jesus (as identified in Smith, 1999).

(b) to increase the scope of spiritual disciplines, and

(c) to provide a suggested format for the small group meetings for those who wanted more structure in their small groups. (J. Dybdahl, personal communication, September 21, 2001)

This book was one of the required texts for the class, and designated pages were assigned each week for reading, writing a report, and giving a brief reflection on the reading.

Reading *A Spiritual Formation Workbook*

Designated as a “beginning workbook for Spiritual Formation Groups,” *A Spiritual Formation Workbook* has sections for both informational and formational reading (see Table 8 above for distinctions between the two).

**Informational reading**

Information sections are distributed throughout the book:

1. The foreword outlines seven benefits of a spiritual formation group (Smith, pp. 9, 10).

2. The introduction describes four important ingredients of the program, namely, balance, knowledge, mutual encouragement, and accountability (pp. 11-14).
3. The section on starting a group provides organizational guidelines for either working with an existing group or beginning a new one, and describes how the following eight sessions are actually “test-drive” sessions for a trial period only, after which participants will decide whether to continue meeting by commencing “regular” spiritual formation groups (pp. 15-21).

4. The order of meeting (near the end of the book) outlines a suggested format for the regular meetings, once the eight initial “test-run” meetings have been completed, since they refer to the concepts mentioned in the earlier introductory sessions (pp. 99-102).

5. Additional ideas and exercises in each of the six major dimensions of the spiritual life as lived by Jesus Christ are provided in pp. 86-98.

Formational reading

Formational reading requires more time as one relaxes in the presence of God, and takes time to hear, receive, and respond (Mulholland, 1985, pp. 54-58). In each of the introductory sessions (Sessions 1-8) exercises and scriptural passages are provided to reflect on and respond to.

1. Session 1 provides a brief overview of the Renovaré Spiritual Formation program based on the life of Jesus and His balanced spiritual life in six specific areas. Readers are invited to spend time reflecting on and evaluating their own spiritual growth patterns in each area for the purpose of identifying strengths and weaknesses, and areas for future growth. The exercise that requires the participants to plot their perceived proficiency in each of the six spiritual traditions provided the opportunity for individuals to
gain a holistic view of their spirituality, with a view to determining which areas need extra attention in order for some kind of balance to be restored. Written reflective exercises are completed after the session and shared at the beginning of the next session (Smith, 1999, pp. 31).

2. Sessions 2-7 (pp. 32-73) outline one of the dimensions of spiritual life each week, using Scripture, illustrations of how Jesus incorporated this aspect into His life, personal application questions for reflection, some guidelines and rationale for practicing the exercises, and finally some detailed suggested exercises in the particular spiritual tradition to be practiced before the next session.

3. The Periodic Evaluation (pp. 81-85) helps the small group to function effectively while meeting the needs of its members, by restoring vitality and vision to the group, by encouraging members to share their needs and concerns, and by working together on overcoming any problem (Smith, 1993, p. 81).

4. The final Introductory session, Session 8 (pp. 74-80), reviews the value of the past seven sessions in the light of the needs of an individual within the community, and the synergy that results from the strengths of the six spiritual traditions, coupled with Christian fellowship that helps maintain a balance in one’s spiritual life. The suggested order of meeting for future spiritual formation groups is then discussed (pp. 77-80), and a decision is made whether to begin a regular spiritual formation group.
How Students Read the SFW

Unfortunately, most reading reports and personal reflections on the readings do not indicate either widespread or in-depth reading of the SFW. First, less than one-third of reading reports recorded page numbers from the SFW as being read, and a quarter of those who recorded page numbers made no comments on their reading. Of those who did give a report on the reading, the most frequent comments referred to the organizational aspects of group formation. Those who commented on the organizational focus of the book were not personally energized by what they read. The closest comments of enthusiasm referred to information which they might use in future ministry.

Students commented less frequently and were less enthusiastic about the SFW reading than about the other two texts, and the limited comments were shallow and detached. There was an obvious lack of personal application of the reading, with only six students (5%) acknowledging personal responses to the reflective questions. Less than 10% of the students even referred to the four basic ingredients of the spiritual formation small groups—those of balance, accountability, knowledge, and encouragement; however, the handful of students who used the book in the way it was intended to be used gained great benefit and exuded much enthusiasm for the process, e.g., “the workbook helped me realize how Jesus Christ practiced these spiritual disciplines” (7:201), and “practicing the suggestions in the workbook helped me focus again on helping people in need” (7:12).
Possible Reasons for Less Effective Use of the SFW

Despite its valuable resources, especially in the area of practical exercises in the six spiritual traditions, as well as its engaging reflective questions, the SFW did not receive widespread enthusiastic endorsement. There are a number of possible reasons for this.

1. There was a lack of understanding of how the book was organized. Students would have benefitted from an overview of the book and an explanation of the purpose and function of the individual sections; some could have benefitted from being taught how to read such texts (6:110, 111).

2. There was an inability to see the whole picture, e.g., "How in the world can a person actually do all the exercises found in the back of the SFW? Each page would take a whole day to complete. I hope we're not supposed to be doing all of these" (15:158).

3. From the sketchy reading reports submitted, it appears that the SFW was probably read last, and, most likely, only superficially. This may indicate that students perceived it as the least valuable resource, either because they thought it contained nothing new, or because they were put off by some of the formal meeting format, and did not understand the scope of its resources. Even those who did write a "report" of their reading on the SFW tended to copy the obvious headings, without personally reacting to the text in depth.

4. It appears that even though the SFW is formational in purpose, most students read it informationally, since it was part of the reading list. This misconception may have been strengthened by the announcement that the reading of textbooks would not count in
the personal devotional time, giving some students the idea that they were not meant to personally reflect on and interact with the text, hence the comment, “It is very difficult for me to complete the reading assignment because I keep wanting to stop the reading and put into effect some of the things I am learning through the reading” (16:60).

5. Since there was a choice between using the SFW session readings (which included a Scripture passage for meditation) or another suggested Scripture passage, for the 25-minute content part of the small groups, and since each SFW session was written for an intended 60-90-minute time frame, some students became frustrated with the lack of time for in-depth discussion and sharing, while others got guilt trips because they did not get it all finished (6:78). However, it must be remembered that portions in the SFW were also part of the assigned weekly readings.

6. Not everyone understood the difference in focus and purpose between the preliminary “test-run” sessions and the regular meetings, for which the Order of Meeting chapter was designed.

7. Those who tried to use the Order of Meeting chapter before completing the seven introductory sessions did not understand the implications of some of the sections since it assumed the participants had already mastered the concepts explicated in the previous sessions.

8. A further hindrance to personal application could have resulted from the preliminary chapters which described the mechanics of running small groups. Others saw the organizational chapters as redundant since many of the principles and suggestions for small group formation had already been effectively demonstrated and experienced at the
retreat (12:84), and since one part of the book was not seen as useful, the rest of the material received a similar appraisal.

9. There were a few students who really appreciated the section on organizational details for running small groups, and got very excited about all kinds of possibilities for their future ministry. However, in the process of focusing on future ministry they missed the point that the immediate application was to be a personal one—for their own spiritual lives to be nurtured in the present time frame.

10. Others saw it “as fairly dry, because of its ‘how-to’ format,” yet since they recognized the principles as important, they hoped to use them some day in the future (16:103).

11. Another struggled alone with readings, observing that, for extroverts, reading and reacting to questions by oneself is “not real exciting.”

Conclusions Regarding the Use of SFW

Reading about how to organize small groups in the church setting at the beginning of a personal spiritual formation class may not have been the most helpful, for it put the focus on how to get other people involved in small groups, rather than focusing on the personal areas of life that could benefit from spiritual growth initiatives. Furthermore, it may have proved more beneficial to address small group organizational issues at the end of the quarter, encouraging students to formulate and assess suggestions and guidelines for organizational strategies based on their own small group experiences. Despite the difficulties with the book that some experienced due to a lack of understanding, those
students who had taken the time to become well acquainted with the function of the *SFW* were excited about the possibilities of using this book both personally and in a future church setting where there would be just one meeting per week lasting 60-90 minutes.

**Impact of the Spiritual Formation Small Groups**

In the majority of cases, the small group experience had a very positive and powerful impact in many areas, despite the confusion with the *SFW*. It appears that the initial small group formation, bonding, and small group skills learned at the retreat were so effective that any subsequent dissatisfaction or boredom with the *SFW* reading about small group organization was largely overshadowed by the positive hands-on experience of the same principles at the retreat.

**Beginning Attitudes Towards Small Groups**

The most dramatic change in attitudes was seen between initial negative attitudes towards small groups and positive attitudes at the end. Reluctance to join with strangers changed to trust; dread about small groups was turned into an appreciation for accountability; and disinterest developed into a constructive time with friends where study stresses were eased (see Table 16).

Some initial reluctance and fear were due to previous bad experiences in small groups where confidentiality had not been kept, while others were reluctant to join with strangers or had not been involved in a small group before. One who had taken an undergraduate class in spiritual formation was apathetic until he got into a "dynamite" group, which "changed his perspective amazingly quickly" (7:247, 248).
### Table 16

**Changes in Attitudes Towards Small Groups**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Beginning Attitude</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Results/Impact</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reluctant: Didn’t want to join with strangers.</td>
<td>When we put our hearts into it and were willing to bond, we began to trust each other, &amp; were blessed by fellowship &amp; prayer.</td>
<td>Helped me be accountable for my walk with the Lord, and understand what He desires us to be. (7:5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ignorant: Heard about small groups but never been part of one.</td>
<td>Not just to sit and talk but a time to share with each other how our relationship has been going with Christ.</td>
<td>It’s a time for accountability. These groups are very helpful. (7:9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very Apprehensive: Due to small group experiences with no trust.</td>
<td>The class offered me an opportunity to regain some of the trust I had lost. (7:104) My group was a safe &amp; wonderful place to share. (7:132)</td>
<td>I opened up a little bit. It has been difficult, but it is happening, that’s why I’ve opted to stay in the small group next quarter. (7:104, 132)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uninterested: If I had the choice to spend one hour, I wouldn’t have chosen the small group.</td>
<td>It was a time without stress (during classes and home it was difficult to escape school tension).</td>
<td>The small group was honestly constructive and helped with friends and with listening. (7:156)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timid: I didn’t know most people.</td>
<td>People open and friendly, we came close as we supported &amp; prayed.</td>
<td>Group became my second family; that I trust; I have different view of worship like never before. (7:239)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apathetic: I had taken a Spiritual Formation U/G class before with little impact.</td>
<td>I was not ready to grasp concepts then. The small group God led me to was dynamite.</td>
<td>I was amazed how quickly my perspective changed. I have grown in disciplines of accountability and honesty, and wouldn’t have gone to counseling except for the pact I had with my group. (7:247, 248)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dread: I’ve learned how much the Devil wanted to keep me away from a good group.</td>
<td>I’ve learned what I needed most is accountability to someone tangible: someone I can tell when I’ve messed up.</td>
<td>Spiritual Formation group really helped me in this area. Now I think I will always want to be in one and promoting them. (7:109, 191)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear: I’ve always been afraid that the sharing of my weaknesses and difficulties would hinder and not encourage those I share with.</td>
<td>My formation group has been a safe and wonderful place to share, and I learned much about myself while sharing.</td>
<td>I have overcome my long-standing fear of accountability groups. (7:131, 132)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Data from Reflection Papers, Vol. 7, Data File. Unless otherwise indicated, each row provides the same person’s comments.
Some admitted that they would not have voluntarily chosen to join a small group if it had not been required, yet its value was affirmed at the end of the class. For instance,

The small group support was honestly constructive. It helped me not just to get friends and experience in listening, but it was a time without stress (during classes and home it was difficult to escape school tension). If I had the chance to decide how to use that hour, I wouldn’t have chosen in this way, but being a class demand, I did it, and now I am happy for this. (7:156)

Self-awareness

Lawrence Richards (1973) suggests that if real fellowship is going to occur in a small group, the human identity needs to be established on two levels: “We need to experience our identity as inadequate and human. We need to experience our identity as Christ’s person, in whom Jesus lives and is working” (pp. 27, 28). Such self-awareness requires the practicing of such values as affirmation, availability, prayer, openness, honesty, safety, confidentiality, sensitivity, and accountability (Donahue, 1996, pp. 88, 89), yet at the same time, small groups can provide the atmosphere in which these values are nurtured and encouraged.

Table 17 illustrates how these values were practiced in the small groups, together with some of the perceived benefits, e.g., Affirmation and prayer were used to help the student who struggled with the need to be admired, to realize that his real value was based on his value to God. This in turn resulted in a response that placed God at the center of his life. In creating more space for God, priorities changed, a class was dropped allowing more time for God and family, and the original fear of falling grades was also resolved (7:31, 32). When the gift of confidentiality was provided by another group, a member was
### Table 17

**Self-Awareness Enhanced by Practicing Small Group Values**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Condition</th>
<th>Values Practiced in Small Group</th>
<th>Impact of Small Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BEFORE: Fearful and frustrated concerning my grades. I allowed study to press God out of my life. After: God is trying to show me of my need to be admired. If I understood the value of being valued by God, I would not have to find other relationships to serve as a back up.</td>
<td>Fortunately God placed me in contact with a wonderful group of men in my small group. I shared what was happening in my life, and they prayed for me to remember why I was at Andrews in the first place. (Prayer and Affirmation)</td>
<td>I learned God does not want to be part of my life. He wants to be my life. He must be the center of everything, and I must revolve around Him. I dropped a class to create more time for God and my family, and He added other things. My grades went up and life got simpler. (7:31, 32)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not have to hide; I have grown more open to others</td>
<td>Group sharing helped me realize we all have problems (Safety)</td>
<td>Jesus knows me and takes me as I am. (7:258)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My spiritual life was on a plateau, and I wanted to go higher</td>
<td>Praying with them and sharing once a week was something I really looked forward to (Prayer and Honesty)</td>
<td>I know that being in my small group with other young pastors is really what got me climbing again. (7:78)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am a loner who wants to spend time by myself.</td>
<td>I have learned that before I can minister to the world, I need to understand the background &amp; world views of the people. (Openness)</td>
<td>I need to be open with other ministers and not be an island. When it comes to decision making I will involve small groups so they can share the vision with larger groups. (7:87)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My tendency is to be caught up with the unimportant things in life. The group helped me prioritize and focus on the “important” things in life.</td>
<td>Group has encouraged, supported, and prayed with me in overcoming my weaknesses while making me accountable for my choices. (Accountability)</td>
<td>I have grown spiritually through my small group, and many questions and problems have been solved by discussion and prayer. (7:94, 95)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I’ve been helped with confession. (7:112). It’s hard to share my feelings with others (7:210)</td>
<td>After sharing with my group (7:112) (Confidentiality)</td>
<td>It helps me to share many details with God that I never did before. (7:112, 210)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I was undisciplined, self-sufficient and self-centered (7:121) Other people love God and serve Him the best they know, like me. (7:139)</td>
<td>When we prayed for each other and shared personal experiences, (Availability)</td>
<td>It helped me take care of other’s problems instead of being self-centered. (7:121, 138, 139, 185)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learned it was easy to kid myself</td>
<td>After several group meetings and quality time with God, hindrances to my Christian walk began to surface. (Honesty)</td>
<td>Groups were a tremendous blessing because I had to be accountable to them. (7:136)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From group feedback I’ve learned to be a more effective listener and leader</td>
<td>It’s neat to get together to discuss Scripture, life, issues and pray. (Sensitivity)</td>
<td>My small group has been a factor in my spiritual journey. (7:160)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Data from Reflection Papers, Vol. 7, Data File. Small group values are in bold face.
helped with confession, which also helped him share details with God which he had never been able to do before (7:112). When availability and prayer were modeled for an “undisciplined, self-sufficient and self-centered” individual, he learned to take care of other’s problems instead of being self-centered (7:121). A “loner” learned openness in his group, and realized that “before I can minister to the world, I need to understand the background of the people” (7:87).

Authenticity and Awareness of Others

Richards (1973) points out that Christians sometimes use their faith as an excuse for not being honest with each other, arguing that since they are supposed to be Christians, they had better not let people know what they are really like, or “they won’t think I’m much of a Christian” (p. 24). However, he argues that “to communicate the reality of God we must share our humanness . . . that inadequacy of ours which made us need Him” (p. 27). Furthermore, the denial of our humanness is destructive to relationships with other believers in at least three ways:

1. It denies the Gospel, since the Gospel is about Jesus rescuing sinners not saints. When Christians are willing to reveal weaknesses to others, the power of Christ is seen which demonstrates, not denies, the Gospel.

2. It cuts people off from others. When people feel they have to hide themselves from others, they tend to move further away from each other, fearing discovery of their real selves.
3. It cuts others off from help, since those who are struggling may be more discouraged by a seeming problem-free Christian to whom they cannot relate (pp. 26, 27).

Table 18 illustrates the process of practicing small group values with some of the areas of impact from honest sharing in a small group. For example, association with others in small groups increased tolerance for diversity, illustrating the group value of sensitivity (7:28). Prayer and affirmation brought emotional, psychological, and spiritual healing as similar experiences were shared (7:66). Accountability, confidentiality, and sensitivity all contributed to increased openness and honesty with each other (7:83, 179).

Small Group Disappointments

Not all groups were able to go to the same degree of confidentiality and depth of sharing as some would have liked. After 3 weeks of meeting in small groups, one group member reported: “I’ve felt from the beginning that our group has never really bonded” (6:6). However, 6 weeks later at the end of the quarter, he was grateful to report that three of the members had been able to share a “powerful God-moment experience” and it was because of that they decided to continue meeting the following quarter. There were a few students who reported regret that their group never got beyond the superficial level of interaction.

Why Some Small Groups Fail

Richards (1973) offers three reasons why some small groups fail, which are related to the earlier concept of the necessity of communicating the reality of our humanness and the reality of God who is able to work with and transform our weaknesses (pp. 26-30).
Table 18

Impact of Increased Awareness of Others in Small Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My perception</th>
<th>New Awareness of Others</th>
<th>Impact/results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was made aware that just as truth is manifold, so its recipients are</td>
<td>Learned how other Christians relate to God and spiritual matters.</td>
<td>This class helped me to tolerate the way other people relate to God. (7:28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diverse and need to be understood within different contexts.</td>
<td>(Sensitivity)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I was encouraged to know that other people share similar experiences with me.</td>
<td>I experienced emotional, psychological and spiritual healing as I shared my trials, burdens with another person. I believe that a small group will create a bond of unity among believers. (7:66)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Prayer and Affirmation)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It felt good to know that I had somebody thinking and praying for me</td>
<td>Everyone shared equally and I think we were all blessed by it.</td>
<td>The small groups added another aspect of accountability to my life. I knew if I hadn’t spent much time in study and prayer I would have to tell those guys. (7:83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Accountability)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People don’t realize how far they get off track until they are</td>
<td>Many significant questions, thoughts, arise from our individual study. Uncertain thoughts, questions and significant discussion pertaining to the Bible can be resolved in the group session.</td>
<td>Most questions are being answered with great satisfaction; each has benefitted from the group. (7:140, 141)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>accountable to something or someone</td>
<td>(Openness and Availability)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The group has encouraged me to study more about the Bible and to become more</td>
<td>Each member of the group shares weekly praises and needs.</td>
<td>I came home from the retreat rejoicing because my personal problems had been lifted away by prayer. (7:179)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of a critical thinker. I learned that sharing, discussing and studying the</td>
<td>(Accountability, Honesty, and Confidentiality)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bible in a small group is very significant to my spiritual growth.</td>
<td>I have learned to appreciate others more by listening, praying, supporting and learning from them.</td>
<td>As a result, I joined a different cultural group in South Bend, with much joy and peace. (7:227)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Availability)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have learned group nurture, accountability and mission.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>God has taught me how much we need each other if we are going to get on with</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>each in this sinful world.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from Reflection Papers, Vol. 7, Data File.
1. When people discuss the Bible only in generalities and fail to share either on the level of their own humanity or the reality of God empowering the life, then the possibilities of fellowship are replaced by a facade.

2. When a pattern of sharing only the positive things in a small group is established, those with deep needs and problems may hesitate to share them, for fear they would be counted as less "spiritual." This denial of humanness, over time, leads to increased concealment of the real person, so that the group experience becomes increasingly unreal. Such phoniness and hypocrisy destroys relationships and the group dies.

3. When the same failures of individuals are rehearsed week after week, without any reference to change or God’s power for the situation, then a group will become resistant to change, thus hindering forward movement (Richards, 1973, pp. 28-32).

It would have been interesting to ask students about the incidence of any of the above scenarios within their small groups. Furthermore, the three observations regarding why some groups fail would have been helpful information to pass onto the groups, for such anticipatory generalizations have the potential to assist us to know what to expect under particular circumstances (Eisner, 1998, p. 205).

Appreciation of God

Small groups were also found to be beneficial in bringing people closer to God, and to a greater understanding of His character. In the process of understanding more
about God, fresh insights into one's own character and a willingness to learn from others became apparent:

I have come to understand that God does want a relationship with me personally and does care about me. Sometimes I feel like a spiritual child when I compare my reserve to their expressed fervor and love for Christ, yet hearing them witness and class discussions have helped me to grow. (7:106)

Some learned more of the reality of God by observing the way He was working in the lives of others.

I learned that God is real. Through small group encounters, I could see Him working in all our lives. This is where trust can be nurtured as we learn how to listen and empathize. I saw that God can use imperfect people in community to work out His perfect will in our lives. (7:105)

Conclusions

Most small groups were well appreciated and many positive changes in attitude, understanding of small groups, and degrees of comfort within small groups were noted. There were a few disappointed group members, who had wished for greater openness and honesty in their groups, but as the teacher reminded everyone, trust takes longer for some to develop than others. Superficiality and having one person dominating the discussion were other concerns mentioned (6:42). However, accountability and honesty were seen to be extremely important values of spiritual formation groups, and with these values came new and deeper understandings of one's self, others, the community, and God.

For the few who really understood the intent of the SFW and were able to implement the program successfully in their groups, the rewards were rich, as the case study of Josh in the next chapter will demonstrate. There was a suggestion that some
small groups may benefit from a more frequent self-evaluation process and that a weekly meeting of a representative from each group with the teacher might provide assistance for groups that may need extra direction.

In the 1-year-later follow-up survey, small groups were listed as one of the most significant changes of their lives in regard to the good relationships that were developed, the new understanding of what small groups can be and what they can accomplish, and the love of sharing (22:19, 20). When asked about goals for the future, “getter deeper into the word in a small group,” and “continue [in an] accountability small group” were mentioned (22:27).

“The small group and retreat play an important role in developing us to be one-minded in the body of Christ. Through sharing and learning each other’s experiences we are made humble and our faith is strengthened” (7:76). Clearly spiritual formation is not a solitary activity. One student summarized the relationship between spiritual growth and the community this way:

We learn and grow well in community. I realized this at the retreat and during the small group, during moments of sharing. Even spiritual guidance is more enhanced in community as brothers and sisters share their experiences and spiritual insights. (7:233, 234)
CHAPTER 7

IMPACT ON INDIVIDUALS: CASE STUDIES, METAPHORS, INTERVIEWS, AND REFLECTION

Expecting all Christians to have a certain type of quiet time can wreak havoc in a church or small group. Excited about meaningful (to us) approaches to the Christian life, we sometimes assume that if others do not experience the same thing, something must be wrong with their faith.

Giving the same spiritual prescription to every struggling Christian is no less irresponsible than a doctor prescribing penicillin to every patient.

Regardless of our predominant spiritual temperament, all of us could learn a great deal from how others are nourished by God and others meet and love God.

Gary Thomas
Sacred Pathways

What kind of an impact did the Spiritual Formation class have on the lives of different individuals? Did participants respond in similar or diverse ways? How much influence did a person's background and previous experiences affect the reactions and responses to this class?

In chapters 4 through 6, the impact of the four intentional learning experiences (the retreat, the learning about the spiritual disciplines through classes and reading, the practice of the spiritual disciplines, and the small groups) were examined using data from the whole class. However, I wanted to explore in greater depth the experience of a few students to
gain another perspective on the impact of this class on individuals. More specifically, I wanted to see whether the overall impact of the same class would vary from person to person. This chapter considers the whole person in order to gain understanding concerning the combined effect of the intentional learning experiences on individual students.

Furthermore, I wanted to find out what the impact of the class would be for negative or discrepant cases (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 405), which could provide exceptions to, or that might modify patterns found in, the data. The first part of chapter 7 describes the experiences of 15 selected students. The identity of these participants was not known to the researcher, but data from multiple sources revealed both unique and similar aspects of their spiritual journeys. Short alphabetical pseudonyms were chosen for each of the 15 selected students, to create a personal tone, for the brief narrative. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to in-depth case studies of four individuals personally known to the researcher and whose spiritual journey was traced for a period of 22-26 months.

**Class Impact on 15 Selected Students**

The final reflection paper required of all students at the end of the quarter was a personally synthesizing exercise (see Appendix B), asking the following questions:

1. In what ways have you grown spiritually?
2. What did you learn about yourself?
3. What did you learn about God?

Although the reflection papers were not the only data used for the 15 vignettes, these personal reflections on the impact of the Spiritual Formation class did provide the
basis for the descriptions. In addition to the comments from all participants on the entire range of topics which the spiritual formation engendered, I also wanted to somehow portray some individual profiles of students. While many comments were repeated in many papers, each paper provided some unique perspectives that I did not want to lose, yet I could not profile all 107 students. It was important to have as much data as possible for these profiles, and not rely merely on the reflection papers, hence a process of elimination was executed, where students with missing codified data were eliminated. Fifteen students were identified with all data, and the 35 pages of reflection paper text data were analyzed as a convenience sample, representing 14.3% of the total number of reflection pages collected.

Short alphabetical pseudonyms were chosen for each of the 15 selected students to create a personal tone, enabling a brief character sketch to be constructed in the reader's mind. Happily this group of 15 men and women in varying age ranges included those who had and had not served as pastors, and included those who had and had not previously been exposed to a spiritual formation class. Using their exact words as much as possible, I constructed the individual profiles in an attempt to illustrate the diversity of class participants in this study.

Profile of the 15 Selected Students

Although the identities of the students were not known to the researcher, a partial profile of each student was possible because of demographic information recorded on the pre-course survey.
The group consisted of 2 women and 13 men. The women (Marie and Jill—all names are pseudonyms), as well as Dan and Vern, were in the 17-24 age bracket; the remaining 11 students were 25-39 years old. Thirteen had been SDAs for 10 years or more, while Ken was baptized 5-9 years ago, and Marie, 1-4 years ago. Seven of the 15 selected students had pastored prior to coming to the seminary, and 6 of the 15 had taken a spiritual formation class before (see Table 19 for a profile summary).

Previous Spiritual Formation Class With Pastoral Experience

Of the seven who had pastored before, Ben, Les, and Paul had also taken a spiritual formation class previously. None of these men mentioned their previous spiritual formation class, so there was no way of knowing how long ago it was taken, or what format had been used. Despite having taken such a course previously, none of the three resented doing another course, and all three were grateful for the opportunity afforded, describing how they had benefitted.

Ben said he has “grown spiritually in unexpected ways,” and that his “devotional life has taken a new shape” (7:22, 23). Les indicated that conditions were ripe in his life to grow in leaps and bounds, and that he has had the energy and commitment to spend increased amounts of time in prayer this quarter (7:171). After 10 years in ministry, Paul said he was ready to “recharge my experience and relationship with the Lord” (7:233). He was grateful for the learning opportunities through the class lectures and small group, and listed many areas of growth regarding his devotional life, his self-awareness, and his appreciation of God (see Appendix C for the full text of his reflection paper).
Table 19

Profile of 15 Selected Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Code Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Yrs SDA</th>
<th>Pastor Before</th>
<th>Yrs Pastor</th>
<th>Class Required</th>
<th>Previous SF Class</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Youth 2 summers</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>112</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>120</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Carl</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>139</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Dan</td>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>150</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Eric</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>152</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fred</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>166</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Glen</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>167</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>177</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Ken</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>5-9 yrs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Les</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>258</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>1-4 yrs</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>255</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Nick</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>25-39</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>245</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Vern</td>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data from Final Reflection Papers (Data File, Vol. 7), Pre-Course Survey (Data File, Vol. 2), and Christian Spiritual Participation Profile (Data File, Vol. 9).
Previous Spiritual Formation Class With No Pastoral Experience

A second group of three, Andy, Ken and Vern, had also taken a spiritual formation class previously, but had no pastoral experience. It appears that a one-class exposure to spiritual formation is insufficient for gaining full benefit, for Andy’s knowledge of the spiritual disciplines at the start of the quarter was, in his own words, “limited—memorizing scripture was the best that I came up with as far as spiritual disciplines that I tried to practice. But in this class what changed my devotional life was that I found there could be diversity in devotions” (7:11). Andy benefitted from “how-to” knowledge.

Ken did not say what his devotional life was like before, but he did notice that through this quarter his “relationship with God has deepened,” his “devotional time is more effective,” his “prayer life has improved,” so that he finds himself “praying spontaneously throughout the day,” and “the biggest impact has been in his relationship to his wife and children.” He also announced that the “daily discipline required by this class has been instrumental in establishing good devotional habits” (Ken, 7:165).

Vern admits that he is “not a morning person and has struggled with devotions,” but has “appreciated the small groups as well as the accountability that was required of us in class in regards to our devotional times.” He found it helpful to learn in class that he is a visual person, and says he does better with personal devotions when he can picture scenes in his mind. Vern’s personal worship style was enhanced by understanding his personal learning style (Vern, 7:191-193). Clearly, for all three persons, there was
considerable benefit in repeating a course in spiritual formation.

**Previous Pastoring Without a Knowledge of Spiritual Formation**

What about those who have experienced ministry without having a spiritual formation class? Four pastors—Eric, Fred, Glen and Nick—fell into this category. The common element in their stories was their unrealistic and distorted view of their personal spiritual lives, prior to participating in a spiritual formation class. They did not have a clear picture of their real spiritual condition, and thought that everything was going just fine.

Eric said that this quarter had been “a sharp reality check for him” because he had allowed his relationship with God to float along without much consistency. It was not until he “reread *Celebration of Discipline* that the point hit home” (Eric, 7:89-91).

Fred thought he had his act together with God.

That was until I started to keep a track of the time I spend with Him alone, and personally. I couldn’t believe how little I prayed and spent time in the Word. Being a Pastor, and seemingly constantly in the Word, or talking about it with people, or other students, blinded me to the fact of how little I spent to get filled myself. I realized how empty I was, because of the lack of time I spent personally with God. (Fred, 7:92)

Similarly, Glen had not realized how erratic and infrequent his devotional life was.

I learned I have a pretty good esteem of myself and didn’t realize how sporadic my devotional life really was. I found that where God was certainly a high priority, he wasn’t always my top priority. . . . This scared me I confess. I have learned mostly this quarter, that I have a lot of room for growth . . . growth in my love for God. I’m also aware of how God must hurt when I don’t seek him consistently every morning. (Glen, 7:108, 109)

Nick was a pastor for 4 years, but had not taken a class in spiritual formation
either. During his undergraduate years, he “had a very poor devotional life,” which extended into his first year of ministry. “As I worked towards bringing people into a deeper relationship with Jesus, I realized that I didn’t know what I was talking about.” He also found out that he is easily distracted, especially when his meditation does not have a scriptural focus (Nick, 7:198, 199).

By the end of the quarter, there was a more honest and realistic perception of their spiritual needs—accountability to someone else, and “a fear of becoming complacent in my world of passive Christianity, and preaching good news in theory, but not exemplifying it in my life” (Glen, 7:108, 109), an acknowledgment that “while going through the motions and giving a good appearance on the outside, my priorities have not always been in line with my spiritual needs” (Fred, 7:92, 93), and a realization of tremendous need. I can’t afford to continue on as I have” (Eric, 7:91). At the same time there was confidence that since they now had experienced a relationship with God for themselves, they were more able to help others in the process.

Common Issues in Reflection Papers

The purpose of selecting 15 students was to describe unique characteristics and effects of the class for them. The following six recurring issues were found in most reflection papers:

1. Beginning attitudes and fears towards the class

2. The increased awareness of spiritual deficiencies with a clearer picture of one’s true condition before God
3. The effect of learning about and practicing spiritual disciplines
4. The new levels of awareness concerning what God is like
5. The effect of others in one’s spiritual growth
6. The relationship of spirituality to the seminary and beyond.

Students’ Own Perceptions of Most Profound Impact of the Class

The final reflection paper asked all students to respond to the same three questions describing (a) how they had grown spiritually, (b) what they had learned about themselves, and (c) what they had learned about God, yet most answers described the particular aspect of the Spiritual Formation class that had the greatest impact on their lives, and for each of the 15 selected students it was something different. Participants indicated surprise at these new insights, revelations, and activities. For this reason, I have linked with each person’s name, a phrase that reflects the area of change and surprise, in an attempt to highlight the most profound impact for each person. Other characteristics and background and details are also described in order to gain a deeper understanding of the significance and meaning of these changes for the individuals concerned.

Brief Portraits of 15 Selected Students

Andy: Surprised by Devotional Variety

Andy started the quarter not knowing much about spiritual disciplines and was a bit skeptical of how they would work. His devotional life was “sporadic at best,” yet if anyone had suggested that a lack of a personal devotional life was evidence that he was not called to ministry, he would not have agreed, because he “honestly did want one.”
However what changed his devotional life was the realization that there could be diversity in devotions. "All of a sudden the devotions had life. They became more regular and I enjoyed them more. I have grown closer to God by spending more time with Him." He now understands that his temperament called for different kinds of worship toward God in the mornings and he has grown from his reading, and also from being in a small group. "They hold me accountable and sympathize with me, offering counsel from their lives as they deal with similar trials. I’ve learned that I need a spiritual group to check up on me” (Andy, 7:11, 12).

**Ben: Surprised by Emotional Expressiveness**

This international student exemplifies the seminary student who has been spiritually formed through the difficult personal and family situations encountered while at seminary. His weekly journals spoke of “agonizing” for family and friends (16:10). Yet he has grown spiritually in unexpected ways, resulting in increased intimacy with God. “My devotional life has taken a new shape, and for the first time I can easily cry out my emotions when I talk to God” (Ben, 7:22, 23).

**Carl: Surprised by Small Groups**

Working and collaborating with others in a small group resulted in a “particular area of growth” for Carl. He now sees the importance for Christians to belong to a small group, and has learned to listen more attentively to others. He has also learned that he is less inhibited with people once he gets to know them. “The assigned readings have increased my understanding of the spiritual disciplines, while the required devotional time
has assisted me in maintaining my relationship with Jesus” (Carl, 7:37, 38).

**Dan: Surprised by Seminary Readjustment**

This young man recognized that the first quarter at Andrews has been “one of transition,” and “like many others coming from a completely different environment, he has found himself “in a position of readjustment.” He admits that he has “been learning more about myself,” and with that self-understanding is the realization that “God is taking me on a journey,” and “the journey is going to be a long one filled with a vast array of testing and molding experiences” (Dan, 7:69-71). According to Cetuk (1998, p. 45), this is a valuable perspective to take, because it allows the seminary student to grow and develop and be shaped by his whole seminary experience, recognizing that being at seminary does not signify a status of having arrived, but rather signifies a time of change and growth.

**Eric: Surprised by Clear Reassessment**

Finding this quarter to be a “time of clear reassessment,” Eric suspected that it was the information learned in class that helped to give him an “objective point of reference.” He also realized after reading *Celebration of Discipline* that although he may have been putting time into his relationship with God, there was not much disciplined effort, “so he felt he barely scratched the surface.” He has “seen God as really patient, since it’s taken all these years to come to this place where I am right now.” Eric now sees that God wants his whole day, not just an hour in the morning (Eric, 7:89-91).
Fred: Surprised by Self-Delusion

In the 3 years before coming to seminary, this pastor was fooled into believing that he had his act together with God. It was not until he started to keep track of the time he spent alone with God that he realized what the relationship was really like. He could not believe how little he prayed and spent time in the Word. Being a pastor, and seemingly constantly in the Word, or talking about it with people or other students, blinded him to the fact of how little he spent to get filled himself. “I realized how empty I was, because of the lack of time I spent personally with God. I have grown spiritually in coming face to face with the reality that I was not developing my relationship with God.” Fred’s personal worship times have been a powerful means of God communicating to him—even to the point of revealing that he gives a good appearance on the outside, while being “someone totally different on the inside.” Fred has learned that “God is ever seeking to spend time with me personally, and that He loves to teach me about Himself. He loves to be worshiped, and loves it when I am in His presence, and am conscious of His presence in my life” (Fred, 7:92, 93).

Glen: Surprised by Group Accountability

Glen had also been a pastor for 3 years, and was not excited about having to be in a small group for spiritual formation class. However during the quarter, Glen learned: “what I need most is accountability to someone tangible. Someone that I can tell I’ve messed up.” In fact he says that not only will he always want to be in an accountability small group, but that he will be keen to promote them. Glen also enjoyed reading
Experiencing God and felt that he learned a lot about himself from the book and the group. He did not realize how sporadic his devotional life really was, and has felt the need of a more consistent devotional life. Glen says,

I have learned to love God more and now feel much worse than I used to when I miss ‘our’ time together. I’m also aware of how God must hurt when I don’t seek him consistently every morning. The greatest blessing of the quarter is that my wife and I are now having regular worship together. We’ve always wanted to do this. We knew it was important but somehow what we knew was important never became our daily habit. Now we have family worship that is helping us to be real with ourselves and accountable to each other. We’ve grown very much spiritually already and God is drawing us closer to each other. (Glen, 7:108, 109)

Over a period of 8 weeks, his weekly devotional time extended from a total of 96 minutes over 2 days in a week, to 310 minutes over 6 days in a week (see Table 20), and with the extra time with God came an experience of reconversion: “WOW! God really touched my soul. Oh how I have been in a desert! I have not been experiencing God! I have had a formalistic experience. It was all outward, all me! Lover of my soul, convert me!! Thank you Jesus !!!!!!!!!!!” (17:75).

Hank: Surprised by Honest Self-Examination

Here was a person who felt he did not need a spiritual formation class, since he thought he “had grown up spiritually.” However, by the end of the quarter he admitted that the “two areas I grew most were in the section of inner development, meditating and being honest about true motives.” He found meditating a hard discipline to develop and initially struggled with staying focused. However, it “opened up the avenue for me to pray, search the scriptures, and call someone either to talk, pray or give words of encouragement. It also caused me to do some in-depth examinations of myself.” Now Hank realizes he “has a lot of room for growth.” What made the difference? “I had the
Table 20

*Glen's Record of Daily Personal Devotional Time in Minutes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week#</th>
<th>Day 1</th>
<th>Day 2</th>
<th>Day 3</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>Day 5</th>
<th>Day 6</th>
<th>Day 7</th>
<th>Total time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 2</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>54</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>96 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>255 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>135 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 6</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
<td>310 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>315 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 8</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
<td>260 mins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 9</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>75</td>
<td></td>
<td>310 mins</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


bad habit of measuring my spiritual growth and maturity with those around me. God is now 'my' God,” and he has created so many options for me to communicate and maintain my relationship with him—meditating, praying, service, fasting, studying and the small group fellowship” (Hank, 7:110, 111).

**Jill: Surprised by Prayer and Praise**

As a result of the class, Jill felt her “prayer life has blossomed,” as she has learned the “importance and the potency of prayer—especially intercessory prayer.” Furthermore she has “tuned in to the voice of God and is on the constant lookout for His mighty acts.”

She has also learned to stay in a posture of praise:

Praise keeps me up. It has a resurrecting effect on me. In despair, I have to praise the Lord. In good times, I have to praise the Lord. When I can’t think of a reason, I have to praise the Lord. It helps me through the day. Furthermore, it makes the enemy uncomfortable. Moreover, the Bible says that My God inhabits
praise and so I want him to make His dwelling place with me. . . . I have also learned that God desires me, my company, and my love. (Jill, 7.123-125)

**Ken: Surprised His Family**

This man’s wife has noticed the difference in her husband. He talks of how his relationship with Christ has strengthened during the quarter, with the biggest impact being on his relationship with his wife and children. “My attitude has softened and it has been easier for me to relate with my sons with fewer personality clashes and less competition. My wife has even commented on the changes.” He finds the time spent in devotional reading is now more effective, because he “recognizes spiritual thoughts and applications faster” than he did before. Also, “my prayer life has improved. My prayers are no longer limited to specific times of the day. I find myself praying more throughout the day. Many times I begin praying silently, spontaneously, without premeditated thought” (Ken, 7.165).

**Les: Surprised by Revitalizing Growth**

Les says he has grown spiritually this quarter, because conditions were ripe for him to grow in “leaps and bounds.” There had been some previous pastoral experiences that were desert-like, and now he is “drinking his fill at an oasis.” The reading of *Experiencing God* helped Les to see that “God’s priorities” are infinitely bigger than his own. He said that his prayers are too many times self-centered; however, now instead of praying for what God’s will is for his life, Les has been intentionally trying to discover what God’s will is in general. “My prayers seem much more powerful because I know that I am praying for something that God wants, not just something I want” (Les, 7.171-173).
Marie: Surprised by Motivational Prodding

Marie knew she would not enjoy keeping track of her time with God, and stated that she did not believe that having to look at her watch and timing herself was something that should be a part of her spiritual life. However, “thinking about the four hours each week really prodded me to spend time in the Word. I never truly realized how short some of the NT books are, but I spent time this quarter reading and studying various NT books.” She said that what she enjoyed most about the quarter was simply being prodded into doing something I’ve been sad about not doing [this] for many years. . . . The time I’ve spent in prayer, meditating and other disciplines this quarter has helped me in feeling, sensing the presence of God and the presence of His angels. I have come to realize that time spent just relaxing, just thinking, just pondering, just looking at His nature is not lost time, but time gained. Time when I needed to just stop and ponder in order to clear my mind and be that much more efficient at my next task for His work. Just to stop, and be silent, and know that He is God. (Marie, 7:201-203)

Nick: Surprised by God’s Companionship

Nick was a pastor for 4 years, but had not taken a class in spiritual formation. During his undergraduate years, he admitted that he had a very poor devotional life, which extended into his first year of ministry. “As I worked towards bringing people into a deeper relationship with Jesus, I realized that I didn’t know what I was talking about.” He now says, “I actually have seen a huge benefit in regular, consistent time with Him. I’ve learned to be more still and listen to his peaceful quiet assurance. . . . God’s
companionship is obvious for the rest of the day when I invite Him to spend His day with me” (Nick, 7:198, 199).

**Paul: Surprised by Personal Applications**

For Paul, coming to seminary after 10 years of pastoring was the right time to recharge his experience and relationship with the Lord. He was grateful to find out in the class period on personality and temperament that he is a “hands-on” person, and needs God’s help to live a simple life “free from anxiety and stress.” Although he had taken a spiritual formation class previously, he saw his spiritual growth in the areas of meditation—being able to contemplate at length on a reading, and then to make concrete applications to daily life; consistency—practicing the spiritual disciplines and having a plan for each devotional session; an understanding of world view which “created a desire in me to live in His presence all the time wherever I am,” and the realization that “we learn and grow well when we are in community.” At the same time there have been specific personal weaknesses which he has learned about himself this quarter. In one of his devotions he learned that he is too sensitive and easily irritated, which negatively affects family members. He has seen that he harbors frustrations and disappointments for a long time, and needs to forgive others more readily. Paul says, “God is personal. He wants us to know Him more personally than knowing about Him. Spirituality, or a relationship with God is more important than theological knowledge” (Paul, 7:233, 234).

**Vern: Surprised by Visual Learning**

Vern is not a morning person and struggles with devotions, but he appreciated
the accountability required of the small groups and personal devotional time, recognizing that he has spent more time with God as a result of the class. The quarter had its highs and lows, yet he felt excited and in love with Jesus Christ as he watched the *Matthew* videos after Morris Venden’s meetings. However there were other times where, because he lacked time with God, he felt more “hum-drum.” He observed that not feeling excited at one moment does not mean God is not present, and he has grown in an awareness of God’s work and presence in his life. Vern was made aware that he is a visual person, and feels that meditating and visualizing in his mind would be helpful (Vern, 7:191-193).

**Summary of Observations**

When students reflected on the impact of the Spiritual Formation class, there was for each of them a different primary focus of change, often based on different past experiences. Changes in the students’ practices and/or attitudes were noted from descriptions of how they had thought or acted prior to the beginning of the class. Their answers revealed reflection on the process, the helps and hindrances, their initial fears and attitudes, changes in those fears and attitudes, their view of God, their spiritual walk, and their understanding and practice of spiritual disciplines. Underlying these changes was a more honest appraisal of themselves and their relationship with God which prompted changes in attitudes and behaviors, as well as greater self-awareness.

Practices actually perceived as being linked to the class included devotional time that is now better used; praying deeper; more relevant prayers; talking longer to God; and being more honest about freely sharing anything with God. Prayer has also become more
continuous through the day, instead of being tied to specific times, and prayer walking has begun (8:16-25).

The very process of reflecting on the course in terms of how they had grown spiritually, and what they had learned about themselves and God proved to be both synthesizing and self-revealing. By inviting students to look back in time, to see what can happen with an intervention program, they were also able to look at goals for the future, indicative of a realization that they had not yet "arrived," and that the spiritual disciplines do not give some kind of advantage or spiritual status over another Christian.

This class brought surprises—in attitude, in enjoyment levels not expected, in results not expected—e.g., it was not a waste of time as one participant had expected, but rather it provided a carefully crafted foundation for the whole seminary experience.

There were a handful of students who began the Spiritual Formation class with a regular personal devotional schedule in place, and to varying degrees the logging of the 4 hours every week helped these students with greater consistency and/or increased time spent in personal devotions. However the vast majority of the class was found in one of the following categories.

For some, the class opened up areas of their own lives they did not even know existed. For others, there was an incredible picture of the love and patience of God portrayed which they had not seen before. For still others, they knew that spending personal time with God was right, and what they wanted to do, with some even admitting sadness because they did not do it, yet they had never actually plunged in and tried.

Therefore for many participants, this class provided the initial impetus for people to take
the plunge in beginning regular personal worship, which then extended to daily worship times with either a spouse or family.

Four In-depth Case Studies

Since case studies provide the researcher with an opportunity for in-depth analysis of a phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 400), this method was chosen to explore in greater depth the experience of four individuals. I was especially interested to follow the experience of any atypical, negative, or discrepant participants over a period of time, and to report on cases that had surprising or unexpected outcomes.

Criteria for Selection

In order to gain an understanding of the variation in experiences, those selected needed to be different from each other in as many ways as possible. With 120 students from all over the world, these differences could include age, gender, ethnicity, ministerial experience, marital status, temperament, previous participation in a spiritual formation class, as well as beginning attitudes towards the class, and reactions to different intentional learning experiences during the process of the class.

To increase validity I needed to have data on these people from a variety of sources in order to corroborate the data. To give the study a longitudinal aspect, these people needed to be willing and available for interviewing in-depth interviews at least 1 year after the class was completed.

From the beginning of data collection I was conscious of these criteria, prayed for wisdom and guidance in the process, and kept a list of possible candidates. I wanted to
include any negative or discrepant cases and looked at a variety of purposeful sampling strategies including critical-case, intense-case, and extreme-case sampling. The further the study progressed, the more variation was evident in participant backgrounds and responses, so their stories are perhaps illustrative of "outliers" both in beginning attitudes and final outcomes—which were in all cases quite unexpected. Variations in each person's journey provided a richness of description, underscoring the biblical concept that each person is a unique individual. Therefore the idea of also trying to find a "typical-case" was abandoned.

Selection Process

Data were collected from verbal comments at the retreat, focus groups, the weekly journals, final reflection papers and metaphors, and in-depth interviews conducted between March and July 2001 (15-19 months after the completion of the course). At various times during the 22 months of data collection, experiences of particular students would come to my attention; however, because of the anonymous nature of all their written data, I was not able to identify their weekly data regarding the ongoing learning process.

Those four I ended up studying were ones who had been on my list of possible candidates from the outset of the study. Their initial attitudes towards and expectations of the class were very different from each other, and therefore caught my attention from the beginning. Follow-up dialogue and focus groups provided additional information, and the more I found out about them, the more obvious were their differences. By the end of the
study, these were the students I had most information on from multiple data sources. I had informal contact with the students throughout the period of research, and they were willing and available for post course follow-up interviews. Although some had already left the seminary, interviews were scheduled and taped. Later, when the text was written, I was able to conduct member checks on their profiles via email.

Profiles of the Case Study Participants

The four case study participants were different in a number of areas including demographics, religious backgrounds, years in ministry, age, temperament, cultural background, beginning attitudes and expectations for the class, and perceptions of the class impact both in the short term and long term. The four participants were male, and ranged in age from middle 20s to 40s. Two were single, and two were married with children. One became a Christian 10 years ago, another 20 years ago, while the others are from second- and fourth-generation Adventist families respectively. Although they have been given European pseudonyms, the countries in which they were either born, raised, or have served in ministry include 10 countries in the Americas, Asia, and the South Pacific. Each identified himself with a different dominant temperament profile: Seth—choleric, Marty—phlegmatic, Kevin—melancholy, and Josh—sanguine. Their personal stories reveal striking differences in their beginning attitudes towards, and expectations of, the Personal Spiritual Formation class, and the (often unexpected) impact of the various components of the course is traced. What emerged from their data was that, for each person, one of the intentional learning experiences made more of an impact than another,
and for each person it was a different one of the four (the retreat, learning about spiritual
disciplines, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and the small groups).

The one characteristic the four participants have in common is that all four worked
as pastors before coming to seminary.

Beginning Attitudes Towards the Class

It was the different beginning attitudes of Seth, Kevin, Marty, and Josh towards
the class that first sparked my curiosity. Kevin did not want to enroll in the class or attend
the retreat, yet the retreat for him was the turning point for his life, his marriage, and his
family. Marty had high expectations for the class and really wanted to get a lot out of it,
but it did not turn out as he expected. Josh had reached a personal spiritual plateau and
wanted to go further, but did not know how. He was not expecting an experiential class
in the seminary that would help his personal devotional life, nor was he anticipating the
impact of small groups on his life. Seth seemed to be the most unpromising student for
this class. He had heard bad reports of the class and was very suspicious about the
experiential aspects of the class, fearing heresy, apostasy, or worse. His change of
disposition and attitudes over the next 26 months was truly astounding.

Explanations for these differences emerged during the more than 2 years of data
collection. A student does not come to seminary *tabula rasa*, or with the same capacities
for absorbing and synthesizing new knowledge as other students. Past experiences and
significant persons all contribute to the student’s attitudes, prejudices, and perspectives,
yet these influences are not always easily or immediately recognized or acknowledged.
Kevin

Kevin had already pastored for some years, so he was rather surprised at having to take a class in spiritual formation. "Pastors are supposed to be spiritual already," he reasoned. "so why do I need this class?" When he found out that an 8-hour retreat over the first weekend was a compulsory part of the course, the battle was on, and 10 weeks after the event, the scene was still vivid in his mind:

There was a battle, no war, going on in my head the night before the Spiritual Formation class retreat. "You don't need that class. Drop it!" a voice demanded.

"Take that class, Kevin," another voice whispered.

"What do you need spiritual formation for? You are already beyond those basics. You have been a leader all your life," the other voice shot back.

"Kevin, this is more than basics, you will see it," the whisper came.

The loud voice jumped back, "You grew up Adventist, you are already spiritual, you don't need this class."

Again the small voice softly whispered, "Kevin choose to go, it will benefit you."

This went on until the morning broke. My curiosity rose to new heights, I should go explore and off I went to the retreat. My curiosity brought me to the first class, and the Spirit kept bringing me back week after week. I experienced a change in my life. The fullness was emptied out. I came to a deeper realization, I am a sinner. Jesus became very real to me. He brought me to a close, meaningful, intimate relationship with Him. (7:34)

At the end of the day-retreat Kevin made a radical announcement to his fellow students of his intention to throw his television in the trash. Was this a spur of the moment thing or did he really mean it? In fact, discarding the television made a tremendous difference to his family dynamics, and there was obvious enthusiasm for the
Lord's leading as he recounted various events in later focus groups. However, it was only 22 months after the Spiritual Formation class that Kevin actually described what prompted this momentous decision.

As the newly formed group of four shared life experiences and their biblical insights at the retreat, Kevin was awed by the depth of interaction that had developed so quickly between a group of men he had never met before. It struck him that this was something he could do with family members at home, since there were many things about his wife and children that he really did not know. Further, he realized that what he had experienced with this group was actually more satisfying than the television and movies which he had, up till then, considered to be the best part of living in "the land of the free." The group experience was so good, his eyes were opened to the possibilities of small group communication within his own family, and it was clear to Kevin that if he wanted to have this level of communication at home, his fascination with television would be the biggest hindrance to this goal, thus the television was discarded.

Small group family conversations commenced with Kevin sharing with his family insights from his seminary classes and in particular the things he was learning from the Spiritual Formation class and a Mission to the World class. New ways of praying were incorporated into family worship times, and as 10-year-old son Scott said, "It became more like conversation — acting with our friends, because that is what God is; He's friend and family, because He's our father, and He's always with us no matter what, so we like to do conversational prayer often." They liked hearing what Dad was learning in seminary "because now we know what he is studying, and now we can know what this is doing to
him and his ministry.” When I asked how this made him feel, Scott beamed and said, “It made us feel nice, because then we can learn with him, and when we go out to the mission field we know what our Dad is talking about, and that we can share it with other people, and be a team.”

The class impacted Kevin’s personal life in many ways. He acknowledged:

I didn’t know God. Yes, I feared Him, spoke of Him and to Him, trusted Him and had faith in Him, but I didn’t know Him personally. Through the spiritual disciplines I’ve grown to seek Him with all my heart, and in the process I saw myself as a despicable sinner. I’ve learned that I can converse with Jesus as a friend, as I submitted my will to His, I found forgiveness, healing and a greater desire to introduce others to my friend, Jesus.

Furthermore he has learned to be more honest and open with others through the small group accountability and sharing.

Before the class, Kevin’s seminary studies and his family were two separate entities, but now the family feel involved and part of his ministry, which led to Scott and his Mom establishing a weekly “10/40 Window Club” — a Bible club for children with the goal of preparing them to be missionaries in the 10/40 window. Starting with two children, the enthusiasm spread to 15 children ages 9-14. The club has now become a family affair as Kevin assists his son and wife. Scott says their emphasis is on Scripture reading first, so the children can learn how to read and understand the Bible for themselves, before they read what other people have written about it.

Scott felt sure these developments would never have happened at home if the television had been there, because “there would have been more interest in the television, and then there would not be time to do all these things.” To his 10-year-old mind, “TV
sometimes ruins or destroys people and families because they’re going on the answers from people on the TV, rather than getting their answers from God.”

From Kevin’s perspective, he has seen a real difference in the spiritual receptivity of his sons (the younger one is a pre-schooler), and feels that the closer family bonding has really made a difference. In place of a “tuned-out” father in front of the television, the family now looks forward to his home-coming each evening, and Scott has placed on his Dad’s screen-saver, “Dad we love you, you are a great Dad.”

When Kevin took a class on small groups, 10-year-old Scott asked the teacher if he could listen in too, and faithfully attended the 32 hours of lectures and discussions. He says he learned a lot and is eager to set up a club for neighborhood children, when the family move to their new pastoral location. The family is looking forward to serving as a missionary team, and Scott likes the way the family works together with all members involved in decision making. In the metaphor of his spiritual journey—in light of the Spiritual Formation class—Kevin sees himself as a runaway fishing canoe, and God as the master fisherman who comes searching for him.

**Kevin’s Spiritual Formation Metaphor**

The most experienced fisherman settled down one day and decided he was going to make the best canoe suitable for deep ocean fishing. He knew exactly what he wanted, and what was going to work best on long nights out in the ocean. The fisherman hand selected the finest wood for the body of the canoe; he designed the canoe and crafted it with his own hands. The finished product was beautiful and it became a prized possession. With the paddles in the fisherman’s hands, the canoe was swift and schools of fish were carried back to shore.

Then one night, the moon shone brightly. The canoe thought, “hey I’ve gone out into the ocean many times. Surely there are enough waves to get me out there.”
Little by little the canoe drifted away from the beach. The waves turned bigger. The canoe enjoyed a good ride and it was exciting to flow. Then the current grew stronger and waves were now pounding on the canoe.

"O! O! I gotta get back," said the canoe. The light from the lighthouse was dim. The clouds covered the moon. It became darker in the vast expanse of the ocean. The canoe became desperate and alone. Then the canoe heard a sound. A boat! Yes, it is the sound of a boat. Then a voice... A touch... but not any touch—it was the hands of a fisherman—not just any fisherman, but of the very fisherman that crafted the canoe. Tears. Relief. Reunion. Time together. The great fisherman is in control again. The waves calm down. Midnight has passed. It is time to fish again. The sun rises. It is daylight.

I praise my Maker, the Greatest Fisherman, for not resting until I am found once again, and for the boat he came in that night—the Spiritual Formation class had brought me and my Master back together. To God be the glory forever. (14:11)


Marty

Marty was very interested in the Spiritual Formation class and had high expectations after hearing from friends that it is one of the three best classes in the seminary. He was already engaged in a personal devotional program but was keen to learn more and go deeper with his relationship with God. Spending 4 hours per week practicing spiritual disciplines was no problem for him; however, he acknowledged that because he is "very strongly phlegmatic," his personal challenge would be to maximize his time, and become focused in his time with God. For example, he knows that if he had to pray in a room either sitting down or kneeling down, he would fall asleep, or his mind would wander, so he prefers prayer walking.

By the end of the class, he felt that "learning about new spiritual disciplines" was
the thing that helped him most, because it got him “thinking in many different directions than he would have.” However, he added that his learning style is not one of “instantaneous application—I have to really read about it, think about it and then slowly start to incorporate intentionally different things.” Journaling was something he had tried five or six times previously with gaps of between 6 months and a year before “it really took on.” Looking back, he says that maybe his perfectionist tendencies got in the way, as he was unconsciously striving for a journalistic masterpiece, instead of simply recording thoughts and ideas as they came. When he was reminded that this was just a conversation between himself and God, with no intended audience, the process became more comfortable, and it has become a regular and enjoyable part of his personal daily time with God. Since Marty learns best by doing, he finds that journaling is one of the most rewarding parts of his time with God, which has the added benefit of helping him to stay focused on God and not get distracted.

On the other hand, because he is not an auditory learner, he said he was not able to take in and remember much from the lectures, and although he understood and enjoyed them at the time, “not much really stuck.” Overheads and blackboard diagrams helped a little, but he thinks he would have remembered more if there had been more experiential activities during class time, with the teacher leading out, and the students following.

Probably Marty’s biggest disappointment was with the small group—whose members stayed pretty much on the superficial level. Based on the reports of previous students, he had been expecting a radical, life-changing group that would be in close relationship, and would share deeply, but instead he felt that the others in his group treated
the small group meetings pretty much like a class assignment. He so much wished that he had been placed with students who really wanted to go deeper with God, and feels that cultural differences are not nearly as influential as differences in levels of seriousness or interest in the process of spiritual formation. Marty was fortunate to meet up with a prayer-partner/mentor who helped fill the need for an accountability partner while attending the seminary; however, he regretted that the small group did not develop into a closely knit group, and he wished he could have known what to do to change the situation.

On the other hand, he appreciated participating in three focus groups, which functioned like a small group. Having the opportunity to discuss with others one’s personal reactions to various aspects of the Spiritual Formation class became an added learning tool for each participant, and, at the same time, encouraged and affirmed each in their endeavors.

Despite the less than satisfying small group, Marty has continued to grow and develop spiritually in unexpected ways. Although he does not see himself as having accomplished all that much spiritually, this perception is not surprising, in the light of White’s comments:

"The closer you come to Jesus, the more faulty you will appear in your own eyes, for your vision will be clearer and your imperfections will be seen in distinct contrast with his perfect character." (White, 1956, p. 64)

This concept also parallels Barber’s 1999 findings of some negative growth in his research into the impact of spiritual formation initiatives. He suggested that it is possible that some students may enter a class with a feeling of spiritual well-being, yet after being confronted
with a more realistic picture of themselves before God as a result of spending more time with God, they may see themselves in a less favorable light (p. 85).

Nevertheless since the completion of the Spiritual Formation class, Marty has continued to grow in the area of discipleship, and says that the breakthrough came after reading Jim Hohnberger’s *Escape to God* (2001) in which he realized that God wants to teach him lessons throughout the day. When he wakes up he prays, “Lord I know that there are opportunities to learn today, and today as I spend my time with you, I want you to teach me something that will show me how to face things during my day.” Previously, although he had developed the habit of spending time with God in the morning, this devotional time was not being connected to the rest of the day’s activities.

It came to me as I was thinking about my education. I was prayer journaling and I suddenly realized that I am here at the seminary to learn about a lot of practical tools that I can take out in ministry, but there is an education that the seminary can’t give me, that only You can give me, and so I said, I would like You to be my Teacher and I want to be the student, and I know that today there are going to be learning experiences that you want to teach me. I shared this with some of my friends, and that was the beginning point of this new perspective.

Marty believes that the most important thing he will take with him to his future churches is the conviction that in his churches everything revolves around the spiritual time with God every day. He is thankful that “the Lord has done a work in my heart and helped me grow in prayer.” He is especially drawn to share with new believers the importance of a balanced life that starts with spending time with God, because he knows that when that priority is first, then everything else becomes balanced.

Twenty months after the completion of the class, Marty noted that incorporating ideas from a book is extremely hard for him, and what he really wishes for is someone to
mentor him—someone experienced who could maybe walk alongside him, explaining how he does things, and to have feedback and dialogue over a period of time. He recognized that this happened in most of the small groups, but it did not happen in his. Somehow his fellow group members needed to grasp the idea that the Spiritual Formation class is not like other classes,

where you have a certain amount of assignments, do your assignments, you get your A, you graduate, you leave, and you throw away your papers.” They need to know that this class is meant to be life-transformational, and it can be if it is treated more than just another class.

When I asked him how this mentoring might happen, he mentioned a couple of ideas. First, it could be done as a second stage of this class, so that the previous year’s class could be the mentors, who could share with a small group things that they had found helpful in their spiritual journey. Second, perhaps there are people in each current class who would be comfortable in sharing their experience with a particular spiritual discipline to a small group of interested persons, thus connecting people with similar interests or learning styles. As to faculty mentoring, Marty affirmed both his appreciation for the faculty and a deep respect for their scholarship, hoping that mentoring could build bridges between scholar and student.

But they would need to have a real personal relationship with the Lord, and I would say out of the seminary if I were to choose right now, I could only think of maybe 1 or 2, that openly talk to students about their own relationship with God. It’s a vulnerable part of your life, you can only get to the deepest levels with people you know well.

(Data from Focus Groups 1, 3, 5, pp. 1-20, 47-76, 93-135, Vol. 6; Interview May 17, 2001, pp. 50-70, Vol. 3.)
Josh

For Josh, the small group experience was the beginning of an exciting and unanticipated journey which, 2 years later, has not ended. Josh began this class with the desire to go deeper into spiritual things. Prior to his arrival at seminary his devotional life had become the highest priority of his day, and he had been prayer journaling, but then he felt his devotional life had plateaued, and he wanted to know what the next step was. It seemed like the thoughts and ideas given in class were very relevant, as Josh's hearty "amens" affirmed the teacher's presentations. He was very surprised that such a practical class which could easily be shared with his church members, would be taught at the seminary.

A previous spiritual formation (undergraduate) class he had taken consisted of lectures about the spiritual life, and since there was no opportunity to be in community or to put these ideas into practice, the class was a disappointment, with no apparent spiritual growth. For this reason, Josh was expecting that, at seminary, he would have to fend for himself spiritually—like he had always done in the past, hence his enthusiasm for the class and its intentional learning experiences.

Josh asserts that "being in my small group with young pastors is really what got me climbing again. Praying with them and sharing once a week was something I really looked forward to." Josh was "pumped up" about this whole spiritual formation business, was first to sign up for the focus groups, and said that this was the area he would like to study further. After the first focus group, he stayed behind for another 20 minutes sharing with
me the content of his previous Sabbath sermon which focused on the role of the body (the church) in a relationship with God. My thought then was: Where will this all lead? and since Josh was a self-confessed “passionate and emotional sanguine,” I wondered whether this would continue or just be a passing phase, hence my interest in following his journey.

It was not a passing phase. For him, his small group was the most influential part of the class, since the group members were able to take off their masks “a little bit,” and were able to “go deep about their fears, doubts and sins.” He described his small group meetings as “awesome” and felt like he had been re-converted. In comparing his isolated spiritual life as a church pastor to the fellowship of his Spiritual Formation accountability group, Josh concluded:

I have learned that I don’t grow when I am isolated. When I wasn’t in a small group or part of the local Ministerial Association I didn’t have anyone holding me accountable throughout the week, and I didn’t have a group of guys praying for me. All these factors have taught me that growth happens in relationships which build community.

Josh clearly understood the purpose and function of the SFW, and found that following the program as outlined in the book was a great blessing. When he heard that other groups had not understood how to use it properly he called it a “tragedy,” and likened it to “having a book written by Michael Jordan on how to become the greatest basketball player in the planet, and using it wrongly.” He then explained to the focus group that the SFW was organized like a weight-training book, with a variety of exercises, so that when they are all incorporated in a balanced approach, one’s whole spiritual life is stretched and challenged. He likened the six spiritual areas (the prayer-filled life, the Spirit-filled life, the word-centered life, the virtuous life, the compassionate life, and the
incarnational life) to the various physiological systems of the body, suggesting that if any one of these areas is malfunctioning, the health of the whole body is put at risk. He made the suggestion that perhaps one person from each small group could meet with the teacher once a week to share ideas for enhancing the small group functioning, and to ensure that everyone knew how to use the workbook effectively.

As for his vision for spiritual formation in the future, Josh said, “As soon as I get out into the pastorate I need to be praying that the Lord will reveal to me who’s going to be in a small group.” He also referred to the value of small groups in other educational settings, mentioning Spenser Kagan’s co-operative learning strategies. Perhaps his most insightful comment was the plea for the seminary to teach classes on (a) how to study the Bible, and (b) how to teach people how to study the Bible, suggesting that this is one area where young people are very uncertain, and one area in which the church does not provide instruction to its teachers or pastors.

The next milestone came as a result of reading *Experiencing God: How to Live the Full Adventure of Knowing and Doing the Will of God*, (Blackaby & King, 1994), which was one of the optional texts for the class. It was not read during the class, but in the months following the class, and Josh described it as “a tool that God used to literally turn my world upside down.” He and some friends felt God calling them to live in a community a 30-minute drive from the seminary campus, for the purpose of reaching out to unchurched people, which meant selling everything and starting a new cell there. It was not an easy decision, considering the extra driving, rent, and time involvement, “but we wanted to do evangelism, so we moved.” He adds:
What has developed is what we believe the NT church did in the book of Acts, and now we are experiencing Biblical community. Our small group is not just a small group, it is a family, where there is both spiritual and emotional rehabilitation and metamorphosis.

Josh believes that one of the reasons why the disciples were so effective spiritually is because they were in biblical community, which he describes as characterized by people who are real and honest with each other, without the wearing of masks. God works through the "body" (or biblical community) to bring healing, to bring spiritual power, and to do ministry. Furthermore, he now believes that reaching a post-modern generation and growing in a biblical community happens "when I'm confessing and weeping before the Lord over somebody who I'm in relationship with and who doesn't know God." He contrasts this genuine love for the unchurched with the personal "witnessing" technique of guerilla-type warfare, "where people drop a tract and run, hoping they haven't been seen!"

He suggests that whereas a small group meeting or church is an event, living in a cell (community) is a way of life where you immerse yourself in the neighborhood, and follow Yahweh, so that one's whole life and lifestyle revolves around Jesus:

It affects what you eat, the way you worship, what you wear, what time you pray, what you bring, how you treat people, and so this issue of spirituality, when you really start to want to grow spiritually, you realize it is a lifestyle. You've got to start going to bed at a certain time to wake up at a certain time, to get your private devotional time in. So if you want to be really going to bed at a certain time, you start saying to yourself, well if I eat certain foods, it's going to affect my energy levels. I want to exercise so I can keep my mind clear, so I can hear Him. I don't [habitually] watch television because I've got things to read, and I've got things to do, and it's really a waste of time, and your whole life really starts revolving around Jesus.

Josh refers to these changes not as self-discipline, but "Jesus-discipline," which gives Josh the ability to make Him such a priority that it affects everything. The latest
area that God is "poking and prodding" is in regard to the occasional viewing of scenes of graphic violence at a friend's place, for "even though it might be true, it still affects me."

When I suggested that it sounds like everything is changing for him, Josh replied: "Especially my view of Jesus." One of his metaphors for his spiritual life is that of a small child climbing up on his Daddy's lap to spend time and express affection, and to relax in the embrace of a loving Father. This active "on-the-go" young man is learning to be a "Human-being" as well as a "human-doing," as he has come to sense the yearning that God has for His children. His other metaphor sees God as an endless mountain to explore and appreciate; the spiritual disciplines are ways to get to know God, and the Holy Spirit and Jesus assist in this process. You never reach the top, but just keep exploring and appreciating greater heights of His character.

The question that Josh is continually asking himself is: "How can I be biblically faithful and culturally relevant so I can become all things to all people, to save some?" He says that one cannot have a conversation about spirituality without talking about discipleship and personal evangelism. Otherwise, "it's like going to school to learn how to cook, but never dreaming about setting foot in a kitchen."

Living in a community has impacted Josh’s understanding of lifestyle and mission, and its connection with therapeutic counseling, and he describes the three layers that he has experienced. First, emotional healing will take place when a person becomes real with a counselor, and the counselor teaches how to think appropriately and how to receive healing. Second, an accountability group (as in the Spiritual Formation class) is an opportunity for one to take off one's mask, and explore issues at a great depth), however,
the third level is when all pretenses are peeled off, and one lives and grows in a family (cell), whose members are all struggling in different ways, and yet who pray and live out their lives together throughout all the week. Despite the fact that Josh was very impressed with the small group dynamics in his Spiritual Formation accountability group, and felt that it had done wonders for his spiritual journey, he now assigns it a level 2 grading on a scale of 1-10, as compared to his current cell experience with a level 9.

I showed Josh the graphic organizer for the Spiritual Formation class (see Fig. 2, Chapter 8), which I had developed in an attempt to portray the interrelationship between the four intentional learning experiences of the Spiritual Formation class, which together portray the theme of authenticity.

The diagram recognizes that all of life is lived in the context of God's domain, however, the retreat provided a specially focused time, reserved for two-way communication with God. With few distractions, an openness and honesty with God resulted, and prepared students for learning about the various spiritual disciplines, which in turn increased their enjoyment of time spent with God, changing previously boring devotional times into times of eager anticipation and delight. As new spiritual disciplines were incorporated, and time with God planned and recorded, new areas of self-knowledge became evident. Neglected areas of the devotional life were discovered, and the relative priorities of daily activities were revealed according to time allocation. Some registered shock at how little time they actually spent with God on a daily basis, and admitted that it was at this point that self-deception began to be dealt with. New ideas for devotional time through a variety of spiritual disciplines brought new life to previously dull and mundane...
worships, and the meditation, reflection, and prayer with God promoted continuing self-examination and honesty with oneself. The third dimension—honesty with others—was advanced in the small groups where encounters and insights about God were shared, and accountability to the group was facilitated.

Although Josh felt that the diagram was an accurate picture of the actual Spiritual Formation class under study, he was quick to see a missing dimension—that of reaching out to the unchurched while living in biblical community. He suggested adding a fourth dimension of reaching out to others, which reflects the fourth component in Mulholland's (1993) definition of spiritual formation: “Spiritual Formation is (a) a process (b) of being conformed (c) to the image of Christ (d) for the sake of others” (p. 15).

Clearly the Spiritual Formation class was the foundation for this idea, yet it has grown and developed and has extended into new territory. Josh believes God wants us to progress, and he is enjoying spending more time in listening to God and in praise and worship. No one knows where this journey is likely to end, but what is clear is that Josh is convinced that living authentic lives in biblical community has limitless possibilities for both individuals and the church. (Data from Focus Groups 1, 3, 5, pp. 1-20, 47-76, 93-135, Vol. 6; Reflection paper, pp. 78-81, Vol. 7; Interview July 25, 2001, pp. 71-96 Vol 3; Metaphor, p. 25, Vol. 14.)

Seth

Seth was the only one who was not in a focus group, yet I knew him from other contexts before the class began. I had attended the same weekend retreat prior to the
beginning of the Spiritual Formation class, and the times of solitude and meditation were
pure torture for him. He openly shared with me the antagonism he had for anything that
was not rational and logical, that he did not have time for this “airy-fairy experiential
stuff,” and that his main aim in life was to “preach the message” and convince people of
truth. Retreats were a waste of time; “we’re supposed to be advancing God’s kingdom.
We haven’t got time to sit around; we need to get busy doing the Lord’s work.”

Seth was not a “happy camper,” and there seemed to be some underlying hostility
and anger. I listened a great deal, but at that stage never got to the bottom of it.
However, Seth seemed happy to find a listening ear, and he would often talk and share his
frustration with what he perceived to be problems with the state of the church, people and
their beliefs. He was not excited about doing the Spiritual Formation class at all, and since
it was a required class, he was determined not to be hoodwinked by any possible false
teachings or heresies. In class he did his best to be tuned out, sat closest to the exit door,
and was often distracted with what was going on around him. What got through this
seemingly impossible barrier was the required practice of the spiritual disciplines.
Eighteen months later he told me more of his story and of events and people that had
shaped his life and thinking. Seth came to the seminary and to the Spiritual Formation
class with pain and disillusionment that needed to be addressed.

It was the required 4 hours of personal devotional time with God that reminded
him of happy times he had enjoyed many years earlier when he first became an Adventist
Christian and would talk at length with God under the stars at night. He had been
spiritually fed at that time, and now he was reminded of what he had been missing in his
life all these years. The journey back to a personal relationship with God began.

However, there was much to learn and much to unlearn. His conversion as a teenager was an individual decision and was supported by his rational and logical approach to Bible study, which also included some argument and debate. At times his boldness would get him into trouble as he would approach football players and say, "Hey do you know Jesus Christ? Are you saved or are you going to hell? What is your destination in life?" He also remembers getting mad with a teacher who introduced the topic of evolution, and his telling her that she was the one who came from a monkey, not he!

Nevertheless, the years of high school also included personal time spent talking with God often in nature and under the stars. When he felt a call to ministry near the end of high school, he went for a 2-to-3-day fast in the woods with some bottles of water and his Bible, as he sought God's will for his life, because he did not want to enter the ministry lightly. He recalls that in those high-school years, God was always close to him, and he had many encounters with Him. "He was always near to me, He was always there for me, He was always my friend."

Seth was looking forward to attending his first Adventist school when he began college, and the first term went well. In OT class, the teacher said to take a chapter, read it, and then write down what God tells you without using any commentaries or concordances. Since he was used to talking with God, this type of assignment where you "read and study and chew on it and read some more was great" and he wrote six papers and got an A for the class. However, the next term under a different teacher, the same strategy earned him a low grade and a tirade of comments ridiculing him for his lack of
scholarship and research and demanding to know where the footnotes were and where he got his ideas from. When Seth told him that he had read it, prayed about it, meditated on it, and asked God what the passage was about, he was adamantly told:

No, no, that's not how it works. God doesn't speak to you. You have to go out and read commentaries of professors who are theologians, who have examined the geography, and the psychology and the geology, and who have examined the historical context, and who have examined the Greek and the Hebrew, and know the background and who have studied archaeology. Now these people will bring you truth, and this is the objective truth that science brings that you can then use to read the Bible.

Since this was the method needed to get good grades, Seth put all his time and effort into trying to follow it, but in the process became "very rigid, outspoken, forthright, impetuous and highly rational," as depicted in his metaphor of a sapling bent and twisted by the Ranger, and then tied in a brace so it could not move. Seth felt that a further college class in church history set about to undermine faith and trust as it focused on problems, contradictions, and doubt. In Seth's words, the whole process was "horrible," and he turned to overseas mission service, where amongst other things he cultivated his relationship with God through journaling, prayer, and Bible study. When college was later completed elsewhere, Seth began pastoral ministry.

He remembered his previous painful schooling encounters, so began his seminary studies with some trepidation and suspicion of lecturers. This time he was not going to be wide open to new ideas, and he planned to challenge, doubt, and question everything he was taught. Since corporate formal worship had dominated his life for so long, the idea of taking personal time to listen to God and to meditate on the scriptures seemed irrational. However the breakthrough came when he found that time spent with God was really
making a difference in his character and in areas that he had been struggling with, and even though he could not explain it, he was convinced that it was making a difference in his life. He recalls the conversation he had with God during that first quiet time:

You know, Lord, isn’t it funny, it almost seems like old times, when I was back in high school, and I started remembering. I hadn’t thought about it for years. Remember Lord when you and I used to have an hour of quiet time, and in nature before—it was so good.

This dialogue brought back fond memories, and he began noticing victories directly tied to his spiritual formation accountability group, and he saw gains in his spiritual walk that truly amazed him. Furthermore Seth took up journaling again, and found suggestions from the 2000 Family Life Conference particularly helpful in working through the pain of a dysfunctional and divorced family of origin. In his weekly report, he recorded his surprise at the extent of Ellen White’s emphasis on meditation and reflection, and later acknowledged the personal benefit from time spent in solitude with God, and the value of realizing that Jesus submitted His will and His plans to God.

The Spiritual Formation class was not the only factor that made the difference for Seth, because ideas and resources from other classes had a cumulative effect. Schwarz’s dynamic bipolar church concept (1999, pp. 83-102) appealed to his formerly rigid and static view of the church, and the importance of connecting both the cognitive and experiential aspects of worship was accepted. An extended research project on righteousness by faith brought a love for the Savior and the joy of salvation not experienced before, while being coached in the experiential focus of Black preaching, with its sensitivity to the present needs and feelings of the worshipers, transformed Seth’s
thinking, preaching style, and worship attitudes. “Understanding that I am righteous because of His righteousness— THAT’S GOOD NEWS! That’s the joy I have. The joy of salvation, and though I’m a sinner, and though I fall, yet by faith I claim the righteousness of Jesus.”

Seth is a different person from the one I met more than 2 years ago. There is a genuine warmth about his personality, with an unashamed love for the Lord and gratitude for His salvation. The self-confessed arrogance and pride in his logical and rational abilities has been replaced by a humble dependence on God that was not there before, yet at the same time there is a calm assurance in His leading. Gone are the blustery speeches, and the need to convince people against their will. Worship no longer consists of merely following an order of service from a printed bulletin. “When I go to church I worship God. I speak to God, I sing to God, I listen to God, and I praise God.” His sermons are prepared with the needs of the congregation clearly in focus since he realizes that it is difficult to connect people with God using abstract discourses. Before the Spiritual Formation class, he had never meditated before, but now he affirms its value in [helping] to meet temptation and gain victory.

These days, before commencing his work for God, Seth says he goes to his church and spends a lot of time with God in the morning, going there in prayer and sitting, studying the stained glass depictions of creation, and just knowing that God is there.

It makes me more productive, more focused and gives me joy and satisfaction. Before, when I was solely a rational person, religious rituals brought me satisfaction because I thought I was meeting the requirements and pleasing God. Now I sing songs because I want to. I want those words to be my words, I want to say them to my Savior and my Jesus whom I love. And so it’s a different way

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of doing it, a different reason why I do it.

Seth still finds it difficult to believe that a choleric with such strong rationalistic tendencies could be so appreciative of spiritual practices that nurture his experiential side, but he is eternally grateful for the way God led him to see a bigger picture of salvation and worship, and the delight that He has in our company. (Data Reflection paper, pp. 15, 16, Vol. 7; Weekly Journal, pp. 13, 14, Vols. 12, 17; Metaphor, p. 3, Vol. 14; Interview, May 16, 2001, pp. 13-49, Vol 3.)

Summary of the Four Case Studies

These brief glimpses into the lives of four students describe people with different personalities (Goldsmith, 1997), spiritual temperaments (Thomas, 2000), learning styles (Taylor, 1997), different personal and spiritual backgrounds, and different beginning attitudes towards the class. Initially Kevin was self-satisfied with his life as a pastor and did not feel any need of personal spiritual nurture. Marty already had a devotional life in place, but wanted “to go deeper” in his relationship with God, expecting that the small group experience would be the avenue for this growth to take place. Josh was also looking for a deeper relationship with God, but was not expecting any classes in the seminary to help him with this, since he thought all the classes would concentrate on head knowledge. Seth was very wary and “suspicious” of any “experiential stuff” since his only measure of reality was by logic and rationality.

Impressed by the quality of sharing at the retreat, Kevin decided he wanted this kind of dialogue at home, and so disposed of the television, which then led to a very
positive home atmosphere and an outreach ministry. Marty’s high expectation for his small group did not eventuate; however, his prayer life was particularly enriched, and he was led to see that all of life is to be lived acknowledging God as the teacher, and humans, the students. For Josh, the class expanded his personal spiritual life to one that learned to value community sharing and accountability, which in turn prepared him for a commitment to a cell group, with the added focus on reaching out to the unchurched. Seth’s transformation was traced to a variety of new experiences and understandings which, together with the practicing of spiritual disciplines, dealt with the pain of the past and produced a caring and compassionate pastor with a deep love for his Savior.

Conclusion

Students came to the Spiritual Formation class as unique individuals with different needs and hopes and emotional scars both recognized and unrecognized. The intentional learning experiences both helped to identify areas of need and weakness and then provided the direction to strengthen those areas.

The impact of the Spiritual Formation class was enhanced in some cases by a variety of other experiences, including other seminary classes, other reading and vocational experiences, such as Seth being coached in the Black preaching style. There was evidence of change, re-arranging, more balance gained in the spiritual life, and growth in areas that were not previously prominent in their lives. In each case, the process and form of spiritual formation were unanticipated, yet when individuals were open to God’s leading and direction, the outcomes were truly amazing and uniquely suited to the individual.
CHAPTER 8

OVERVIEW OF STUDY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Those of us who conduct research on the spiritual lives of pastors have reason to wonder if perhaps greater attention needs to be placed on developing his [sic] closeness to God before he [sic] can exhort others to devote themselves to following the Creator. . . . Many are so overwhelmed by the task that as they turn inward for strength, rather than upward for His guidance and power, the job becomes all the more frustrating and unsatisfying.

George Barna
Today's Pastors

In order to be effective as a minister, you need to know some things, be able to do some things, but most important of all, you need to be a certain kind of person. That quality of one’s life “‘in Christ’ (being) is the foundation upon which knowledge and skills can be added in order to support an effective ministry. I believe that being is the source which sustains that ministry.

Dwight Grubbs
Spiritual Formation for Leaders

The Problem

The most frequently voiced concern of men and women who enter seminary has to do with spirituality. Despite entering seminary motivated by a commitment to God and a desire to serve their Lord in some form of ministry, Peterson (1993, p. 4) states that students find themselves “distracted or deflected from that intention at every turn.” He
further maintains that, 40 years ago, seminaries were regarded as graveyards of spirituality where men and women lost their faith. Forty years later, he has found no evidence to suggest that these claims were exaggerated. "Seminary education is dangerous—and many have lost their faith in its classrooms and libraries" (p. 4).

At the same time, students approach their pastoral training with a variety of expectations. Some look for professional tools and techniques that will equip them for all future ministerial tasks, while others seek biblical knowledge to teach others. At the same time, students assume that such a religious environment will automatically nurture their personal spirituality, and no one expects to be worse off spiritually at the completion of their theological training. Yet when assignments pile up in a full academic program, personal devotional time is often the first to be abandoned, leading to such comments as "seminary was spiritually speaking, the driest time in my life." The reality is that the seminary does not automatically nurture personal spirituality. One theological college, for example, reports that 93% of their students studying for ministry admit that they have no devotional life.

The problem is further complicated by the fact that church administrators, seminary professors, and laity have different goals and expectations for theological training. While spirituality is considered to be of highest importance by laity, professors at theological institutions regard theological knowledge as their top priority, with spirituality not even ranked among the first five priorities. Furthermore, a survey of the literature concerning theological education in the last 200 years reveals changes in culture, as well as educational, vocational, and pastoral roles which have changed both the profile of
students entering seminary and the kinds of training offered. Nevertheless, students have continued to register their wish for assistance in developing their personal devotional life, while most faculty do not feel adequately prepared or equipped to help students in this area, often providing plausible reasons in support of faculty non-involvement in the spiritual lives of their students. Seminary professor Daniel Wallace (1994) speaks of longing to get closer to God, but not knowing how to relate. The emphasis on biblical knowledge over relationship produced in him what he called a “bibliolatry.”

For me as a New Testament professor, the text is my task—but I made it my God. The text became my idol, with God becoming the object of our investigation rather than the Lord to whom we are subject. The vitality of our religion gets sucked out. As God gets dissected, our stance changes from “I trust in . . .” to “I believe that . . .” (p. 37)

Thus, for many reasons, spiritual formation is neglected, ignored, or assumed to be already present in the lives of those preparing for ministry, and intentional spiritual formation experiences have typically not been given high priority in pastoral training. To what extent, then, should a theological seminary concern itself with the spiritual formation of its students?

**Research Purpose**

The Spiritual Formation class (GSEM541) was introduced in the SDA Theological Seminary at Andrews University in 1992 to address issues of perceived declining personal spirituality among the students, and the impact of the 1999 Spiritual Formation class became the focus of this study. Student evaluations of the class in the previous 3 years had indicated increasing satisfaction, so this study sought to investigate the nature of the
impact upon students who took the class, and to discover any additional factors surrounding the class that made a difference for students. The research question was:

In what ways were the attitudes and behaviors of students in the 1999 Spiritual Formation class at the SDA Theological Seminary, Andrews University, impacted by the four intentional learning experiences:

1. the retreat
2. the learning about spiritual disciplines
3. the practicing of spiritual disciplines
4. the accountability small groups?

Research Methodology

Using a case study approach, data were collected over a period of 2 years (October 1999 - October 2001). The Spiritual Formation class of 120 seminary students from more than 40 countries was studied. This required class met for 3 hours per week for 10 weeks. The first 2-hour block of each class period was in the form of a lecture/discussion during which biblical perspectives of the various spiritual disciplines as well as related topics on spirituality, world view, and temperament were discussed. The third hour of each session was devoted to accountability small groups. An 8-hour required retreat, in which students engaged in the formational reading and reflection of Scripture, as well as small group sharing, preceded the first class meeting.

More than 2,100 pages of data, which included field notes, retreat questionnaires, weekly journal reports, transcriptions of focus groups and interviews, final reflection
papers, personal metaphors papers, and a follow-up questionnaire conducted 1 year after the class had finished, were organized and analyzed. Multiple sources were used to corroborate data for each of the intentional learning experiences.

Summary of Findings

Whereas in chapters 4-6 the impact of each of the four intentional learning experiences for spiritual formation (the retreat, the learning about spiritual disciplines, the practicing of spiritual disciplines, and the small groups) was separately explored, chapter 7 focused on the impact on individual lives, revealing uniqueness and diversity of impact among students. The next section of this chapter addresses the research question by synthesizing the main areas of impact and change in terms of attitudes and behaviors towards God, self, others, the devotional life, worship, witnessing, spiritual disciplines, and the Spiritual Formation class, using data from all four intentional learning experiences. The dynamic relationships among these intentional learning experiences are then described, and an overall theme explored.

Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Towards God

Almost all students rated the reading and meditating on three selected scriptural passages at the retreat as “helpful” or “very helpful,” as new pictures of God’s personal interest and involvement in their lives brought dramatic attitude changes towards God. Time with God became eagerly anticipated as it became an established and regular habit.
New Perceptions of God

Some were impressed with aspects of God’s character that describe His dealings with humankind—His graciousness, goodness, generosity, patience, sharing, and love, while others were grateful for His saving acts of redemption, mercy, restoration, and forgiveness for the past. Some focused on present relational aspects of His character—“He knows me, accepts me, thinks about me, understands me, is interested in me, and is my friend,” and others traced the long-term, personal interest that God has had in their lives, as they traced God’s choosing, calling, planning, leading, guiding, intervening, strengthening, and empowering in their lives. Furthermore, others gained a new appreciation for the greatness of God as they contemplated the attributes of immensity—powerful creator, omnipotence, omniscience, His changelessness and consistency, and the fact that He controls the universe. In almost all cases, these attributes of God were described in the context of His personal interest and involvement with humankind.

Two-way Relationship

In response to their new view of God at the retreat, students talked of a longing to celebrate life with Him, wanting to draw closer to God, and frequently mentioned their sense of need to spend more time with God, to reflect on His goodness, to accomplish His purpose, to cultivate His friendship, to abide in His presence, and to trust Him more. The class lectures, which gave practical examples of how to incorporate spiritual disciplines into the daily life, provided fresh ideas to vitalize devotional times as well as new
perspectives on the value and importance of such practices. The more time students spent with God, the more enjoyable and the more desirable their devotional times with God became. Furthermore, increased personal time with God helped students to see themselves more realistically and in turn helped them to be more open and honest in the small groups.

Attitudinal Changes Towards Oneself

The impact of seeing God from a new perspective resulted in students seeing themselves in new and different ways. Their experience mirrored that of the prophet Isaiah’s experience (see Isa 6:1-8), when he saw the King, high, holy, and lifted up, and lamented his own unworthy condition.

New Areas of Self-awareness

With honesty and authenticity, students saw themselves as superficial, egotistical, self-centered, weak, feeble, and timid, with shortcomings, defects, and inadequacies. They realized the need to stop relying on their own understanding, to stop over-rating their abilities and experiences, and to give up on themselves. Yet, at the same time, others spoke of their renewed confidence as a result of God’s presence and promises, with the assurance that despite “defects and folly, if I keep my eyes on Him, He will show me the way and change my heart.” Again, the lectures, assigned reading, and practicing of spiritual disciplines worked together to address the initial personal needs and deficiencies identified at the retreat, while the small groups helped to keep students on track with the
prayerful support, encouragement, and emphasis on accountability by their fellow classmates.

**Newly Recognized Areas of Need**

In addition to recognizing the spiritual need to spend more time in prayer, Scripture, journaling, and reflecting on His goodness, other areas of need came into focus as time with God increased in both quantity and quality as a result of the required 4 hours of personal devotional time. Needs in other areas of life included, for example, the need to spend more time with family, more time in the community, to let go of the TV, to learn to relate to others better, to be more humble, “to worry less, to accept my limitations and learn to forgive myself.” Sharing some of these new revelations in the small groups not only strengthened and encouraged these new goals, but also encouraged others to go deeper in their spiritual journey.

**Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Towards Others**

New perspectives about other people also began at the retreat, as students interacted with people from different cultural backgrounds. Students were surprised at the similarity of struggles that were faced by many of their colleagues, which gave way to feelings of relief, hope, encouragement, and support. Authenticity and honesty became a bonding power as group members shared their life stories and struggles.

The weekly small group meetings strengthened the bonds of those group members who were honest and authentic with each other, and although most students would not have personally chosen to be in a group with others from different cultures, life-long
cross-cultural bonds of friendship have nevertheless been formed. Tolerance and appreciation for individual differences grew as they saw the unique ways that God works on individual lives. Such deep cross-cultural spiritual bonding and friendship were attested to during a recent wedding speech given by a friend of the groom, who emphasized that it was in a small group at the Spiritual Formation retreat 2 years previously that these two young men had met. Despite their different personalities, cultures, and backgrounds, they had become close friends and had been a great source of strength and encouragement to each other. Furthermore, in one group in which group members remained at a fairly superficial level, the comment was made that cultural differences are less of a barrier to spiritual growth in small groups than are differences in desire to be open with each other and differences in desire for fellowship with God.

Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Towards the Devotional Life and Spiritual Disciplines

Prior to the class, most students did not have a consistent devotional life. Some admitted they had wished for a regular time with God but had failed in their efforts to achieve this goal. The retreat gave students a taste of the real joy and satisfaction that comes from taking time to listen and talk with God. This prompted a desire to continue the practice, setting the stage for the next intentional learning experiences of the class—that of learning about different spiritual disciplines and then practicing them for a minimum of 4 hours per week. Learning a variety of ways of spending time with God had a dramatic impact on those who had previously found devotional time boring and tedious, turning their perception of spiritual disciplines to one of excitement and anticipation, with
their time with God greatly enhanced in quality and duration, for example, from a few minutes occasionally, to daily devotions totaling more than 8 hours per week.

Despite some initial resistance to the recording of one's devotional time each week, many testified to its value in terms of uncovering self-deception, revealing needs, providing accountability, establishing habits of consistency, and assisting in the establishing of priorities and time schedules, so that by the end of the class there were no complaints about recording devotional time. Instead, a number gave grateful thanks that a habit had now become permanent, and that the motive had changed from getting a grade, to spending time with their best friend. Even the benefit of having a weekly devotional plan was seen to be beneficial as a previously “sporadic, hurried, unplanned activity, became a joyful time which is planned and time-tabled.”

Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Towards Witnessing

From a new sense of their great value to God and His personal interest in their lives as seen from His caring qualities, came the belief that they could comfortably share their testimony, be a light of the world, and have purpose in their lives. Again, this new perspective of God began at the retreat during the quiet times of reflection on Scripture and journaling, and continued during the practice of spiritual disciplines. Previous struggles with witnessing disappeared once they knew how to spend time with God; now they had something to share with others because of what God was doing in their lives, giving them confidence and joy in the process. A variety of personal outreach ministries and mission initiatives began as a direct result of this Spiritual Formation class. Students
already engaged in ministry found they had something more genuine to share with others as a result of their personal time spent with God.

**Attitudinal and Behavioral Changes Towards Worship**

While worship practices were impacted by learning new ways to communicate with God, student attitudes towards worship were also impacted by the changed view of who God is and how He relates to human kind. They learned that God can be worshiped for who He is, not just for what He does, realizing that worship occurs when one recognizes God’s presence. Tozer (1961) contends that a right conception of God is as foundational to worship as a foundation is to a temple structure, and any inadequacy will lead to a structural collapse (p. 10). Students’ new concepts of God invigorated and refreshed their concept of worship, so that instead of being a ritual to be endured, worship became a Person to be adored.

The thought presented in class that the goal of mission is worship made a profound impact on some students, as they reflected on the idea that in heaven there will be neither evangelism or mission; what will continue throughout eternity however, is the worship of God. The Bible begins and ends with worship and the goal of mission and evangelism is to bring all nations into the presence of God where they can see Him and worship Him.

Passivity in worship as shown by mere attendance at a church service was changed to the idea that worship is an active gift brought to God in gratitude by His children. Others recognized that worship can occur any time or any place that a person sets aside
time for God, and may include any interaction with God including singing, praising, meditating, giving, and praying.

Attitudinal Changes Towards the Class

Despite the fact that many students did not see the necessity of a spiritual formation class for pastors in training, the comments one year later overwhelmingly pointed to grateful appreciation for a class that changed their priorities, impressing students with the vital importance of staying connected to God, and not getting so busy that “I don’t have time for the one for whom I work… The first priority in this life is worship. Nothing else is more important than spending time in God’s presence.” Clearly student perceptions regarding both the need and the value of the Spiritual Formation class for pastors in training had radically altered to the point that they felt it was the most practical and beneficial class of the seminary; that it was essential for the seminary experience, bringing a much needed balance to the academic demands, “helping to re-capture what was slowly disappearing from my spiritual experience.” Fortunately, the final outcomes were not restricted by beginning attitudes, as one student stated “it is a testimony to the quality of this class that one with such negative feelings towards the class could receive such a blessing.” By scheduling the Spiritual Formation class in the first semester of the M.Div. program, students recognized that the seminary considers their personal devotional lives a fundamental and indispensable part of their pastoral identity and training.
Students also noticed and appreciated the balanced and integrated approach to their first semester program which included *Spiritual Formation* (personal spirituality), *Salvation* (Biblical and theological basis for God’s interaction with humankind), and *Small Group Ministry* (practical methods for sharing salvation with others). Here they saw a blending of spiritual, mental and evangelistic goals.

**The Role of the Holy Spirit**

Although this study focuses on the impact of a particular spiritual formation class, spiritual transformation of hearts and lives requires the supernatural power of the Holy Spirit, since the “man [or woman] without the Spirit of God does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God” (1 Cor 2:14). Gary Newton (2001) suggests that the Holy Spirit ministers through at least five elements of the teaching-learning process: the teacher, the learner, the Word, the participants, and the environment, and “even though we may never fully understand the complexity of his role, the teacher needs to intentionally rely on the wisdom and power of the Holy Spirit within every step of the process of preparation and teaching” (p. 129).

The role of the Holy Spirit is particularly important to religious educators of adults, since, according to James Wilhoit (1993), a key feature of adult spiritual life concerns their ability to deceive themselves and others regarding their level of spirituality, by mimicking appropriate religious behavior and vocabulary. Such extrinsic religion is often practiced unknowingly by persons who have deceived themselves into believing that their largely external religion flows from a true love to God (p. 53). And since self-
deception and self-justification stem from an inability or an unwillingness to face reality, the work of the Holy Spirit to guide into all truth is especially necessary. Wilhoit further maintains that spiritual formation is a twofold work involved in reducing the negative effects of common blocks and barriers to spiritual growth and fostering an openness to God (p. 58).

Positive Contributing Factors Beyond the Spiritual Formation Class

Openness towards God may be encouraged in many diverse ways, and although students were not asked about additional contributing factors to the impact of the Spiritual Formation class, a number of influential events, classes, and resources were independently mentioned. These included:

1. The H. M. S. Richards Lectureship Series by Morris Venden with his emphasis on the importance of maintaining a daily, personal connection with God; “a full meal, daily, and not just a bread stick on the run!”

2. The realization that television was robbing a family of meaningful dialogue, and the subsequent discarding of the television.

3. The Salvation class, taken concurrently with Spiritual Formation class, connected students to the larger picture of God’s mighty acts throughout Scripture. This class “beautifully complemented the Spiritual Formation class” by appealing to authentic living and by giving students a fresh picture of God that invites corporate and personal worship. Furthermore it provided the biblical perspective on hope, new beginnings and a new history for those struggling with present addictions or past traumas.
4. The learning of the Black preaching style by “a left-brained white preacher,” which helped him to understand and value the experiential side of one’s being.

5. An in-depth research project on righteousness by faith, which gave a new picture of God’s character.

Barriers to Spiritual Formation

Students themselves identified a number of their attitudes that had the potential to hinder spiritual formation initiatives. Some were complacent and self-satisfied, feeling that as ministers they didn’t need such a course. Some had never been introduced to the function and benefits of practicing spiritual disciplines or of meeting in accountability small groups, and were apprehensive about the unknown. Others had a distorted and negative view of the spiritual disciplines. A few admitted reticence or fear in having to move out of their comfort zone of complacency. Those who had had previous bad experiences with small groups where confidences were not kept, were uneasy about becoming involved in another small group. By far the most frequent barrier was the lack of an intentional plan to set aside regular time for personal devotions. Students initially attributed the problem to a lack of time but subsequently a problem with priorities was identified. Thus the most helpful learning experience in overcoming the lack of intentionality was the weekly requirement of four hours devotional time which was logged on a daily basis. These findings led me to conclude that one of the greatest barriers to personal spiritual formation initiatives is a lack of understanding of what is involved and a subsequent reticence to trying it out.
Overall Conclusions

In addition to conclusions regarding specific categories of people, perceptions, and processes, a larger dynamic emerged from the study, which had four parts:

1. The beginning retreat as a catalyst for change
2. The overarching theme of authenticity to which students repeatedly referred
3. The sequence and content of the four intentional learning experiences
4. A theoretical framework for the spiritual formation learning process.

The Catalyst for Change

The beginning day retreat proved to be the potent catalyst for change to occur, as it overcame some of the above barriers to spiritual formation by precipitating an encounter with God that revealed spiritual needs, by prompting a desire for change, and by providing clear evidence that spiritual formation is possible and rewarding.

Prior to the commencement of the Spiritual Formation class, attitudes concerning the compulsory nature of the class ranged from resentment, annoyance, apathy, and boredom, to curiosity, anticipation, and enthusiasm. Although many of the negative attitudes resulted from student ignorance about the nature and function of spiritual formation, the teacher did not try to remedy this student lack with a lecture about spiritual formation in the first instance. Instead, the teacher facilitated a spiritual formation experience for each student, through carefully planned retreat activities, incorporating the formational reading of Scripture, prayer, meditation, journaling, and sharing in small groups.

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The reading of Scripture formationally was an enriching experience for most, since few had read Scripture in order to commune with God by listening and responding to His word. Pastoral students more frequently read Scripture informationally, to gain knowledge about God, and in the process of trying to cover as much material as quickly as possible for a particular assignment, deeper levels of personal meaning for life application are missed.

Attending a retreat does not necessarily guarantee that students will be drawn closer to God. However, at this retreat, the combination of meditating on the specially selected passages (Isa 49:1-7; Ps 139:1-24; Isa 55), together with reflecting and journaling on penetrating and personal application guided-questions, created life-changing responses and insights. The questions for each passage had a strong impact because they invited students to re-evaluate their lives by looking back in self-examination, looking at the present to assess current trends, and looking forward to plan for future possibilities. Since the students were at the beginning of a new life transition (i.e., starting a new vocation or beginning seminary education), it was an effective time for such an evaluation. The guided-questions for the three passages accomplished this task by:

1. Focusing on the mighty acts of God
2. Portraying the inconsistency of human response to God
3. Inviting students to identify times of God’s clear intervention or interaction in their lives in the past
4. Encouraging students to think about what God would want to say to them at the present time, and to write down His conversation with them
5. Giving students time to hear what God wanted to say to them concerning their past, their present and their future, by encouraging them to remember as much as they could about the past, to think on areas of their current lives that they would like God to work on, and to claim promises for the future which God has already promised.

Many spoke of personally encountering God through this experience, which included a clear view of their own standing before God. With pretension unmasked came the relief of being honest and authentic with others, which made the transition to sharing in small groups more comfortable and meaningful than anticipated. The effect of such initial affirming experiences both with God and with colleagues in small groups provided a positive introduction to the possibilities of personal spiritual formation, as well as a desire to continue the learning process.

Overall Theme: Openness, Honesty, and Authenticity

Neither the students nor the researcher could have predicted that the overwhelming theme that came from the study was concerned with openness, honesty, and authenticity—before God, self, and others. Some seminary students begin their seminary studies with a feeling of spiritual achievement or arrival. Others come seeking tools or knowledge for a future ministry to change the lives of others. Few students think they need to be changed, nor do they expect to be personally confronted with their own standing before God, yet during the four learning experiences for spiritual formation, a recurring central theme of honesty, openness, and authenticity emerged. In gaining a clearer perception of a dependable, loving and impartial God, students saw themselves in a
more honest light that revealed their weaknesses and needs; in gaining a clearer
perspective of what God does, students recognized a deeper need for God in their own
lives. One student spoke of becoming increasingly open about his feelings, hopes, and
fears in this way:

Honesty with God and myself has not always been easy. But I know God can see past
any pretense and as I have come to know more of Him and His amazing love, I have
felt more comfortable about opening up, viewing the real me, and confessing my
faults. I have also begun to see past myself to the needs of others, and I have never
been more motivated for service than I am at this time. (7:206)

Figure 2 is an attempt to portray how each of the four intentional learning
experiences of the Spiritual Formation class work to bring about a sense of authenticity in
the life of the individual, as a result of relationships of honesty with God, self and others.
While the diagram recognizes that all of life is lived in the context of God’s domain, the
initial retreat (1) provided a specially focused time, reserved for two-way communication
with God. With few distractions, and leisurely time to explore the character of God and
His personal interest in lives, an openness to God together with a more honest appraisal of
their inner selves resulted. A sample of written retreat comments revealing some of the
areas of insights and self-examination appear in Student Comments B, Fig. 2.

Nurturing the devotional life through spiritual disciplines was aided by the learning
of new devotional ideas through readings and lectures (2), and the practicing of the 4
hours per week of spiritual disciplines (3) which led to increased honesty with oneself.
This encounter with God prepared students for learning about the various spiritual
disciplines, which in turn increased their enjoyment of time spent with God, changing
previously boring devotional times into times of eager anticipation and delight. As new
Fig. 2. Authenticity and intentional spiritual formation initiatives.

The relationship between authenticity and the four intentional learning experiences: 1. The retreat; 2. Learning about the spiritual disciplines; 3. Practicing spiritual disciplines; 4. Accountability small groups are seen in three distinct areas. The retreat led to honesty with God (described in Student Comments B); practicing spiritual disciplines led to honesty with oneself, (Student Comments C) while the small groups helped keep people honest with each other (Student Comments A).
spiritual disciplines were incorporated, and time with God planned and recorded, new areas of self-knowledge became evident (see Student Comments C, Fig. 2). Neglected areas of the devotional life were discovered, and the relative priorities of daily activities were identified according to their time allocation in a daily schedule. Some students registered shock at how little time they actually spent with God on a daily basis, and admitted that it was at this point that self-deception began to be dealt with. New ideas for devotional time through a variety of spiritual disciplines brought new life to previously dull and mundane worships, and the meditation, reflection, and prayer with God promoted a continuing self-examination. Finally, honesty with others was advanced in the accountability small groups (4) where encounters and insights about God were shared, and accountability to the group was facilitated. Some of the benefits of these small-group meetings are reflected in Student Comments A, Fig. 2.

The centrality of authenticity in spiritual formation is further emphasized by the two-way directional arrows between (a) God and the student (at the retreat), (b) between the students and their personal reflection on their learning about and practicing of spiritual disciplines and (c) between the students and other class members in the small groups.

Sequence and Content of the Four Intentional Learning Experiences

Although each person's spiritual journey was unique, there was a definite sequential and cumulative effect from the initial day-retreat which added strength, purpose, and motivation to the other intentional learning experiences. The entire retreat experience was carefully crafted to provide a balance between personal and group
reflection, with informal socializing during the midday meal. The specially chosen Scripture passages and accompanying questions were pivotal to the retreat since they connected students with the living word of God in a personalized and relevant way. The 50 minute blocks of time reserved for reflection on Scripture, meditation, and prayer at the retreat became a foundational and powerful introduction to personal conversation with God. As in any relationship, getting to know someone takes time, and most students had never spent such an extended period enjoying God’s presence. They had spent time reading about God, or preparing sermons about God, but not personally listening and talking with God. This activity resulted in a heightened appreciation for God’s character, as well as His many actions, personal interest, and intervention in their individual lives. The impact of this personal knowledge of God led to clearer self-awareness and a recognition of utter need and dependence upon God, yet at the same time, the clearer distinction seen between the divine and the human resulted in a desire to love and worship God. Furthermore, as students shared their new experiences in the small groups, others became willing to share their spiritual journey.

The heightened sense of spiritual need experienced at the retreat was an ideal prelude to the additional information, discussion, example, and illustrations about spiritual disciplines and the devotional life that were provided by the weekly lectures, small group discussions, and assigned readings. The more time that was spent practicing the spiritual disciplines, the more enjoyable the experience, and, for some, the more necessary a part of daily life it became. One of the possible explanations for the effectiveness of this class could lie in its similarity to the four aspects of David Kolb’s Experiential Learning
Theory. Learning that involves theory and experience, experimentation, and reflection presents a holistic approach to learning and may help to account for the positive cumulative impact of the spiritual formation class.

Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory

Kolb's experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984; see Figure 3) with its four modes of learning, describes a process of learning in which information is "grasped" either through the senses (concrete experience), or through thinking (abstract conceptualization), while learning is processed by reflecting on it (reflective observation) or acting on it (active experimentation). The four intentional learning experiences in the Spiritual Formation class appear to mirror Kolb's learning cycle, beginning with the concrete experience of the retreat. Opportunities for reflective observation were provided by the meditation and journaling on the guided questions; learning about new spiritual disciplines came through abstract conceptualization, while the required 4 hours of practicing spiritual disciplines furnished the active experimentation. The cycle continues with the concrete experience of the small group, followed by reflection on the week's spiritual practices, additional learning and practicing of spiritual disciplines. When both the concrete and abstract modes are used to acquire one's experience, and when one has opportunity both to reflect and act on that experience, one expands the potential to completely engage in the learning process (Kolb, 1999). Thayer (1996) implies that the biblical concept of knowledge, which includes components of both "hearing" and "doing," is congruent with Kolb's experiential learning theory which addresses both the cognitive and affective
Fig. 3. Spiritual Formation initiatives applied to Kolb’s learning theory.

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learning domains, in both reflective and active modes.

Two additional observations related to Kolb’s theory were found in the study. First, the retreat and the small group meetings individually have the potential of cycling through their own Kolb experiential learning cycle, thus enhancing the value of these two learning experiences. Second, the value of the learning cycle was increased because spiritual formation did not occur in isolation, but in the presence of God and of others. The added benefit of mutual accountability within the groups added strength to the process of habit formation as it encouraged consistent and regular devotional practice. Students felt encouraged and supported, while the intentional accountability facilitated openness and honesty. Openness and honesty within the small groups grew as individuals shared their experience with God and admitted their struggles; and in turn, the students were mutually encouraged by each other, while being inspired with God’s leading in the lives of their classmates. As demonstrated through the stories and vignettes, the spiritual journey of each student in this class was unique, thus the sharing of their journeys enriched the life experiences of fellow students.

Studying Spiritual Formation Impact

Most studies exploring spiritual formation initiatives consist of pretest and post-test inventories. Little has been done in the area of intermediate or progressive evaluation during the process of spiritual formation, hence the following conclusions regarding the study of spiritual formation are presented:

1. The very nature of spiritual growth means that, for some individuals, progress
may not be recognized at all, even though those around may have noticed changes.

2. Spiritual growth may even be evidenced by individuals feeling that they are worse or more sinful than they previously imagined because of the clearer picture they have of God’s character and the greater disparity seen between themselves and God.

3. A final end perspective may not provide many details about the small changes experienced along the way. Just because these details cannot be recalled does not mean they were unimportant, as suggested by Frank Ottati:

You may not be able to remember all the sermons you have heard in your life, yet they have contributed to your spiritual nourishment in the same way that the 76,440 meals eaten during a life-span of 70 years have contributed to your overall health, even though you may not recall the menu of any of them. (Personal communication, October, 2000)

Thus a student’s end perspective of the impact of a class in spiritual formation may overlook or ignore some of the foundational stages, which have now, almost imperceptibly, become part of daily life. Therefore, data that investigates intermediate changes are valuable for understanding a process, the details of which may be forgotten over time. For example, the retreat was very powerful at the time, and for many formed the basis of more open, honest, sharing relationships in small groups, and as a model for studying the Scriptures formationally, yet not everyone remembered the details of that initial impact a year later.

Specific Conclusions

Specific conclusions from the study concern students’ training for ministry, their attitudes towards spiritual formation initiatives, the class, the role of small groups, the process of studying spiritual formation impact, student perceptions of the seminary
experience, faculty perception of spiritual formation and the role of the Spiritual Formation teacher. The extent to which some of these conclusions may be generalizable to other people, settings, and times may depend on the degree to which these conclusions are applied to similar circumstances as this study (Johnson, 1998).

Students Training for Ministry

1. Students who train for ministry mirror the characteristics of the general population and may include those struggling with, or unconsciously affected by, addictions, psychological disorders, family dysfunction, and spiritual uncertainty. They therefore need specialized help with their own problems, before they can minister to the needs of others, and may be encouraged to seek counseling as a result of the teacher's personal or class explanation of the role and value of counseling. A small group, which provides a strong sense of trust and support, may also be instrumental in encouraging someone to seek professional help.

2. Students commencing seminary training identify with what they perceive to be a model pastor's life, even though this may not be a reflection of their own reality. The dissonance between the two is masked by the living of a double life, which eventually leads to the deluded thinking that everything is going just fine; thus they appear to be more comfortable learning how to help others with their problems than in discovering what problems they themselves need help with.

3. Pastors in training expect to receive theological knowledge and practical skills to enhance their future ministry; they do not expect to be personally confronted with any
need for personal change. Thus by focusing on external knowledge and skills in the seminary, the inner life can remain untouched.

4. Students feel relieved when they realize that fellow pastors in training are not perfect and may struggle with similar issues as their colleagues. Since there is considerable discomfort in living a double life, learning to be honest and authentic provides a sense of freedom and release. Furthermore, once a problem area has been identified and acknowledged, students feel there is a greater opportunity to work towards a solution to the problem, with the added support of praying, caring colleagues.

5. Seminary students assume that their spiritual lives will automatically grow in a "religious/biblical" environment, and that by the time they have finished their pastoral training they will be equipped to provide spiritual guidance to their congregations. On the contrary, unless students are involved in intentional spiritual formation experiences during their seminary training, their personal spiritual lives are unlikely to be enriched by the seminary experience.

6. Seminary students really do want a meaningful and consistent personal devotional life, but either do not know how, or have never experienced it as an on-going regular and enjoyable habit.

7. A consistent personal devotional life is likely to result in changed priorities and life goals, as well as enhanced relationships with other people and a more vibrant ministry.
Students and Their Relationship to Spiritual Formation

1. Most students would not voluntarily choose to take a class in Spiritual Formation, because (a) they don’t like the sound of it, (b) they didn’t like a previous class, (c) they assume they don’t need it, or (d) they think they shouldn’t need it, since they are already “spiritual,” so it appears that making it a required course is the only way that many will receive the benefits. This conclusion is contrary to Vertallier’s (1993) suggestion that spiritual formation should not be required of anyone, and should only be offered for those who are “ready for it.”

2. Students revealed a range of emotions (some negative) towards the idea of a required class in spiritual formation, yet at the end of the course they were grateful for the encouragement, even the requirement of having to do something they would not have voluntarily chosen.

3. The final outcome of the class was not dependent on initial attitudes.

4. Spiritual Formation is not a course that most students are initially excited about, which is why they need an early positive experience to capture their attention and interest.

5. Personal spiritual formation does not come automatically for students; they need and want help, but do not know what kind of help they need. Requiring a certain weekly time commitment for practicing spiritual disciplines in order to establish the habit is widely acknowledged by students as beneficial and necessary once the habits have been
established and the benefits have been experienced. Such a time commitment addresses some common barriers to spirituality such as lack of time, planning, and discipline.

6. Students who have never taken a spiritual formation class may have a distorted perception of their spirituality, thinking that everything is fine, when in fact it may not be.

7. Students begin a spiritual formation class with unique and diverse backgrounds, temperaments, learning styles, and perceived needs, yet, if they are willing, the Holy Spirit can work specifically and uniquely with each individual.

8. Students respond to different spiritual formation experiences in different ways as affirmed by Thomas (2000), in his descriptions of nine sacred pathways which he refers to as spiritual temperaments, yet there is no substitute for setting aside planned time for communicating with God.

9. Spiritual formation initiatives that help people to see themselves, God, and others in a more accurate light, assist in the process of unmasking such attitudes as self-justification and self-delusion.

The Class

1. Since students arrived at seminary with different backgrounds and at varying stages of spiritual maturity, the Spiritual Formation class played a vital role in connecting students to God and His purposes for their lives, so that their lives could be more closely lived according to His will and direction.

2. The carefully planned beginning retreat, which introduced students to ways of individually listening and responding to God, is a crucial aspect of the whole class.
3. Although students may question how a class in personal spiritual formation can be "graded," the requirements of the class are taken more seriously by seminary students because they are graded. Students report that a class evaluated with an S (satisfactory) or U (unsatisfactory) does not carry the same weight of importance in their minds as a graded class, and they are less likely to take the assignments seriously.

The Role of the Small Groups

The regular meeting of small groups as an integral part of the Spiritual Formation class has the potential of fulfilling a number of important roles in the life of the seminary student, by providing the following benefits:

1. A safe and supportive environment where personal problems and struggles can be addressed and prayed for.

2. Support and motivation for accountability issues in students' lives.

3. A welcome respite from the frantic-paced seminary life, as the larger picture of life with God is reflected upon.

4. A safe and comfortable forum where students can be helped to process and assimilate new and perhaps difficult concepts, since clarification of issues usually occurs in groups.

5. The dynamic opportunity for seminary students to share and develop personal goals and dreams for their own ministry, and to evaluate and discuss the ideas of their fellow students.
6. An appreciation for the varying responses to the same presented material which fosters tolerance for the perspective, culture, and opinions of others, while gaining new insights from the contributions of others.

Perceptions of the Seminary Experience

1. Students see the seminary experience as a frantic-paced experience to be survived temporarily, rather than an ideal laboratory in which coping skills for everyday problems are exercised and developed as valuable preparation for life beyond the seminary.

2. Life after seminary is seen as a different world, instead of a mere extension of the struggles experienced during seminary training.

3. Pastoral training which includes personal spiritual formation in the curriculum is seen as practically demonstrating the Adventist holistic approach to education which emphasizes the harmonious development of the physical, mental, and spiritual powers.

4. If the emphasis on seminary education is on the theoretical and cognitive, and the intensity and amount of reading means there is no time for a devotional life, then students will be implicitly taught that one can be a successful student or pastor without spending personal time with God.

5. Spiritual Formation class, with an emphasis on *being* rather than *doing*, is a “welcome respite from the intensity of intellectual bombardment and emotional fatigue, thus providing an opportunity to be relieved of pressure in order to focus on the priority of life—one’s connection with God.”
6. New ideas and issues raised during theological training can be confusing and bewildering for students, and they need adequate time and space to process their thoughts and questions. By focusing attention on a personal God who is dependable and changeless despite all that might be happening in students’ heads or homes, a spiritual formation class can help to provide some foundational stability and provide a safe environment for exploring issues in a small group of supportive colleagues.

7. The duration of the course was seen as a suitable length for an introductory course. A number of students wanted the experience to continue throughout their seminary training. Some suggested a cafeteria-style menu from which to choose specific areas of focus; others felt, that at the very least, there should be another class in spiritual formation at the end of their time in pastoral training, so that the basics could be reviewed for themselves, and strategies discussed for teaching spiritual formation to others in the future.

The Spiritual Disciplines

1. The term *spiritual disciplines* is viewed as a negative term especially for those who do not understand what the term means. For *spiritual disciplines* to refer to a vibrant relationship with God can seem as preposterous as coining the term *marital disciplines* to describe time especially reserved for the joys of marital relationship building such as communication, friendship, and intimacy.

2. Different people prefer different spiritual disciplines and plan their devotional time accordingly.
3. Although journaling may not be considered by all to be an actual spiritual discipline, the reflective thinking which journaling stimulates, enhances the practice of the various spiritual disciplines. Journaling is not usually easy the first time around, and for some it takes quite a bit of persistence. Some may not even attempt it if they think it is related to the school exercise of chronicling one's daily activities. Others may make 5 or 6 serious attempts, with many months in between before journaling becomes an enriching and indispensable part of one's personal time with God. Thus, dialogue with others regarding the process and patience as one practices journaling are important for some people.

The Teacher's Role

1. Since spiritual formation is a deeply personal area of one's life, the teacher's sensitivity and humility are crucial in encouraging positive attitudes among the students.

2. Students recognize and expect to see in the life of the Spiritual Formation teacher an obvious and vibrant connection with God, which becomes evident as experiences are shared, and as genuine compassion and concern for students is shown in tone, manner, and prayers on their behalf.

3. The Spiritual Formation teacher's continuous and on-going personal commitment to spiritual formation initiatives in his/her own life is crucial to the credibility and influence of the class, since students want to know how it works in practice—not just theory.

4. The transparent modeling of openness and honesty is a powerful teaching tool
for students, resulting in students also being willing to share openly and honestly

5. The Spiritual Formation teacher can listen compassionately and sensitively to
student concerns and complaints about class assignments without compromising the
intentionality of class requirements.

6. Out-of-class dialogue with students promotes deeper levels of trust and deeper
levels of spiritual awareness.

7. Students relate well to a humble, teachable, fellow pilgrim, who includes
himself/herself in the challenges he/she gives to students, instead of pretending to be some
super-human, super-spiritual person.

Implications

The most repeated student comment concerning the Spiritual Formation class was
the shocked self-revelation that although they were immersed in a "religious" environment,
and spent most of their waking hours studying the Bible or books about the Bible, they
were not spending time with God—illustrating Oswald Chamber’s observation that “we
slander God by our very eagerness to work for Him without knowing Him” (1963, p.
277). Furthermore, students learned experientially that spiritual formation does not come
automatically, but that carving out a daily time space for personal time with God can be
richly rewarding. The challenge for the Christian teacher is to find some concrete way to
portray the truth that spiritual formation initiatives must be experienced to be effective,
and that no amount of religious activities can be substituted for a personal relationship
with God. Since people constantly use metaphors as a way of making sense of their
experiences (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the key issues surrounding involving oneself in religious activities versus spending personal time communicating with God is explored through the metaphor of substituting swimming related activities and events for total immersion in the water for the sole purpose of swimming.

A life-long desire to learn to swim and being surrounded by many swimming pools and competent swimmers, cannot be substituted for the experience of plunging into the water and personally experimenting with buoyancy and flotation. Some would-be swimmers could expend much time, energy, and resources in attending lectures about swimming, watching instructional videos about the various types of swimming strokes, and even reading books about the world’s most successful swimmers, yet be unaware of the personal enjoyment to be found in the swimming pool.

Attendance at world conferences on swimming or purchasing tickets and attending Olympic swimming competitions will not assist one’s personal swimming style and ease in the water. Even the payment of a life membership to a prestigious swimming club or weekly dues to a local swimming pool, cannot be exchanged for personal contact with the water. Dipping one’s feet in the water or sitting in a tub of water can in no way replicate the exhilaration of being supported by the water as one learns to take full advantage of all that swimming can offer. A coach may be very helpful and encouraging, yet the would-be swimmer cannot escape the necessity of personally plunging into the water.

Thus, spiritual formation is more than learning a technique; it is an experience. It is “about loving the God who loves us” (Croucher, 2000, p. 13); it is “the process of opening our entire selves to God so that He can shape us” (Maxson, 1999, p. 9 ), and
"living in such a way as not to resist God's gracious initiatives" (John Wesley as cited in Grubbs, 1994, p. 23). It is about relationship.

Significant relationships cannot be formed without honest and authentic two-way communication, and people benefit from ideas about how to cultivate a comfortable friendship based on openness and honesty.

**The Paradigm Shift: From Spiritual Disciplines to Relationship Enhancers**

Using the term “spiritual disciplines” to describe a relationship with God can be a barrier to spiritual formation since it conjures up negative and oppressive images where there is no joy. Perhaps spiritual disciplines could be better thought of in terms of relationship enhancers since they “add new dimensions to one’s spiritual life.” The following descriptions of the spiritual disciplines from a positive, relationship perspective are therefore offered:

1. **Meditation**: Thinking about God and His character

2. **Prayer**: Communication with God; talking and listening

3. **Fasting**: Choosing to focus special attention on God, by intentionally relinquishing some activities, food or belongings that could become a distraction or hindrance

4. **Study**: Learning about God

5. **Simplicity**: Arranging life around a few consistent purposes (Willard, 1991, p. 170), which would involve organizing one’s priorities with God

6. **Solitude**: Delighting in the presence of God without any other human beings.
7. Submission: Honoring the other person with esteem (Eph 5)

8. Service: Working for God; giving loving gifts of service

9. Confession: Being honest with God and maybe even letting trusted others know our deepest needs and weaknesses so they can support us and hold us accountable.

10. Worship: Adoring God

11. Guidance: Seeking God's leadership and recognizing God's lordship in all areas of our lives

12. Celebration: Rejoicing in the relationship; a response of gratitude to the goodness of God, life, and others

13. Journaling: Keeping a record of the journey with one's best friend

14. Frugality: Abstaining from using money or goods at our disposal in ways that merely gratify our hunger for status, glamour, or luxury

15. Secrecy: Love and humility that hope for others to be seen in a better light than we

16. Fellowship: Enjoying the company of the other—reciprocal activities of common worship which benefit the whole body (Willard, 1991, p. 18)

17. Silence: Sharing time with God without the intrusion of verbal conversation

18. Sacrifice: Willing to give for the sake of the other

There are also a number of problems with the term spiritual formation. It gives the impression that completion is possible; you work on something until it is finished, completely formed, or mature. But an enduring relationship is something that expands, grows, deepens, and never ends. For some people participating in spiritual disciplines for
the purpose of spiritual formation has the connotation of being contrived and unnatural. Disciplines and formation can also have militaristic connotations. But the process of getting to know God and being in relationship with Him was meant to be the most natural thing in the world, thus the term *spiritual journey* or *spiritual pathway* may better reflect an ongoing, companionable relationship in which both the process of the journey and the final destination are valued.

**Recommendations**

Spirituality cannot be legislated or manufactured, since it has more to do with recognizing who God is and allowing Him to be God in all aspects of our lives, than it has to do with human endeavor. Yet without intentionally planning personal time for God, the busyness of everyday life is likely to crowd out activities that could enhance relationship building initiatives. Spiritual formation is not a program to be implemented, but a life to be lived in the presence of God for the sake of others and is something which God desires for all people. Thus, peoples’ spiritual lives seem to benefit from help with the forming of daily habits and practices through the spiritual disciplines. Spiritual formation can occur when the barriers to spiritual growth are removed and an opening of oneself to God is fostered (Wilhoit, 1993). “We should not be surprised that we all search for spiritual meaning to life. The pain of spiritual emptiness can be found in the pew, the pulpit, and the professor’s chair,” (Beckham, 1995, p. 124). Thus spiritual formation initiatives commencing with those charged with the responsibility of nurturing spirituality in others is an important place to start. Because people are benefitted when spiritual initiatives are
facilitated, the following recommendations are addressed to persons who are in position to
effect policy changes at various levels of church administration and educational
administration and training.

Two foundational principles undergird the following recommendations. Since
knowing God and eternal life have been closely linked in Scripture (John 17:3), all people
are encouraged to experience the delight in living a life that recognizes that “to
comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise of the powers of man” (White, 1882, p.
337). Second, the on-going development of openness, honesty, and authentic
relationships should be encouraged by modeling such relationships at all levels of church
organization.

To Church Leaders and Administrators

1. Church leaders and administrators need to experience for themselves the delight
in living a life that recognizes that “to comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise
of the powers of man” (White, 1882, p. 337).

2. There should be strong administrative support at all levels for prayerful study
and reflection on the importance and purpose of maintaining a close relationship with God,
so that its priority in relation to the church’s mission and message might be established.

3. Since the laity recognize spirituality as the pastor’s most important credential,
and since young people in the church, in particular, want a deeper relationship with God
and less emphasis on the peripherals of religion, church leaders need to make provision for
regular and life-changing spiritual formation experiences for their ministers and teachers,
so they can consistently model life lived in relationship with God, and effectively lead others into a similar relationship.

4. The history of theological education shows that pastoral training has struggled to keep up with all the demands placed upon it in a rapidly changing world. Since human wisdom and techniques have been shown to be insufficient to meet these challenges, the minister’s personal connection with God as the basis for ministry is therefore even more imperative.

5. Careful consideration should be given to how the “primacy of spirituality” as outlined in the *SDA Minister’s Handbook* (1997, pp. 21-26) might be nurtured in the field.

6. Small spiritual accountability groups should be encouraged at every level of administration.

7. The on-going development of openness, honesty and authentic relationships should be encouraged by modeling such relationships at all levels of administration.

To Educational Administrators

1. Christian educators need to experience the delight in living a life that recognizes that “to comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise of the powers of man” (White, 1882, p. 337).

2. Develop and implement a strategy for increasing faculty awareness of spiritual formation issues and initiatives.
3. Develop and implement a program whereby faculty are coached to the point where they can develop their own intentional learning experiences for spiritual formation in each of their classes, no matter what the subject matter.

4. Since the holistic emphasis of Seventh-day Adventist education suggests that the spiritual component of the curriculum should be as important as physical, social and mental aspects, a balance between these four components should be maintained.

5. The spiritual component of the Seventh-day Adventist school curriculum should be assessed to ensure that experiential aspects are not overshadowed by an over-emphasis on cognitive learning.

6. The spiritual lives of students should be nurtured by teachers who themselves maintain a strong personal connection with God.

7. Regular and on-going assistance and training in personal spiritual formation should be given to all staff and faculty members, since most are uncomfortable with the role of helping students in this area and feel ill-equipped for the task.

8. Small spiritual accountability groups should be encouraged at every level of school.

9. The on-going development of openness, honesty, and authentic relationships should be encouraged by modeling such relationships at all levels of administration in the churches and in the schools.
To Educators of Pastors in Training

1. Pastors need to experience living a life that recognizes that “to comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise of the powers of man” (White, 1882, p. 337).

2. A personal spiritual formation class needs to be a requirement for all pastors in training, with an on-going program in place which facilitates the growth of the student’s personal spiritual life throughout the tertiary experience.

3. Spiritual Formation class needs to be an experiential class, instead of being a series of lectures and readings about personal spiritual formation and should be taught by someone who is deeply committed to developing a consistent personal devotional life and to on-going personal spiritual growth.

4. Pastors in training need to be taught how to study the Bible both formationally and informationally.

5. Pastors in training need to take classes where they are taught how to teach other people how to study the Bible.

6. Pastors in training need to be taught effective strategies for sensitively and intentionally nurturing the spirituality of their parishioners.

7. The on-going development of openness, honesty and authentic relationships should be encouraged by modeling such relationships at all organizational levels of the denomination.
To Teachers of Spiritual Formation

1. Teachers of spiritual formation need to experience the delight in living a life that recognizes that “to comprehend and enjoy God is the highest exercise of the powers of man” (White, 1882, p. 337).

2. In order to lead students into an authentic spiritually formative experience, the teacher must have an on-going and vibrant connection with God, which is only maintained by significant amounts of personal time spent with God on a daily basis.

3. Since openness and honesty are vital components of spiritual formation, the teacher needs to be comfortable and natural in modeling this attitude at all times.

4. The teacher needs to be willing to participate with the students in a journey of learning and growth, under God’s direction, rather than pretending to be a super-spiritual person.

5. The teacher needs to model the same honesty and authenticity for students as he/she wishes to see developed in students.

6. Recognizing different individual learning styles, temperament, and spiritual pathways of students, the teacher should not promote one particular method or spiritual practice, but rather encourage students to experiment with a variety of spiritual disciplines.

7. Hands-on experience in spiritual formation needs to be provided from the very beginning of the spiritual formation class.

8. A retreat or contemplative activity with its focus on past, present, and future perspectives, should be provided before a spiritual formation class begins so that students
sense both a soul hunger, and an indication of how this hunger might be satisfied. James Prochaska (1994) asserts that long-lasting change is effected through a number of life stages (pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, recycling), and the retreat took participants through five of the six stages for change in an 8-hour period, with the "action" segment being engaged from the beginning. During the quarter, the weekly assignments and small groups revisited these stages, thus strengthening the resolve to continue after the class had finished.

9. Since spiritual formation does not automatically happen for anyone—whether student, pastor, or faculty—and since faculty have voiced their concerns at being ill-equipped to meet the personal spiritual needs of their students, seminaries are encouraged to implement intentional spiritual formation learning experiences for their faculty. This initiative would need to be an on-going experiential, formational process—not just an information workshop—but a carefully planned program which would span at least a few months, and be revisited annually.

As an example of such an intentional spiritual formation initiative for faculty, Talbot School of Theology/Biola University is currently working through a three-stage process titled Intentional Character Development Program, in which faculty are included as much as possible both in the planning and implementing of all parts of the program. The director of the program, Judy TenElshof, believes that "the program has done much to encourage the spiritual lives of faculty as well as the community and collegiality of our faculty. It has been a wonderful thing to see God working among us to bring unity of
purpose with our students" (personal communication, November 5, 2001). (See Appendix G for an overview of their current work in progress.)

10. It is recommended that the use of the term *spiritual disciplines* be replaced with a different term, for example, relationship enhancers, devotional delights, or devotional practices, to somehow reflect their positive function and potential, especially since they create space for strengthening one’s relationship with God.

**Recommendations for Further Study**

Many studies in the area of spiritual formation could be conducted in the future:

1. Conduct studies to determine effective spiritual formation initiatives for different age groups.

2. Conduct a study that evaluates the validity of the following statement in the 1997 *SDA Minister’s Handbook*: “Without the spiritual dimension, ministry will degenerate to implementation of psychological techniques, organizational methods, and motivational cheerleading. Real power in ministry springs from spirituality that comes from a personal encounter with Christ” (p. 21).

3. Research the extent to which Christian teachers at all levels are receiving help for their own personal spiritual formation.

4. Survey and evaluate the kinds of programs that are being found effective for faculty training in the area of spiritual formation.

5. Evaluate the effectiveness of a spiritual formation class and the effectiveness of intentional spiritual formation initiatives which permeate every seminary class.
6. Determine the extent to which reflecting on the process of personal spiritual formation through such avenues as focus groups, journaling, evaluating small group functioning and reflection papers increases the impact of the spiritual formation class.

7. Determine if there is any correlation between teenage perceptions of lack of honesty and authenticity among adult church members and such terms as “irrelevance, intolerance, and alienation,” which have been given by young people as the reasons for their exit from church (Dudley, 2000, pp. 60-67).

8. Conduct a study of spiritual formation concepts in the writings of Ellen White.


Finally

Spiritual formation is the process of learning to live life as it was always meant to be—living in the presence of God, with God at the center of our lives, so that who we are with ourselves and with others and the world depends on who we are with God. Appreciating and enjoying God becomes the greatest treasure, and open, honest, and authentic relationships, without mask or pretension, become the valued by-product. Thus spiritual formation initiatives commencing with those charged with the responsibility of nurturing spirituality in others is an important place to begin modeling the process of personally knowing God.

“Now this is life eternal: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent” (John 17:3).
APPENDIX A

RESEARCH APPROVAL DOCUMENTS

1. Human Subjects Review Board
2. Invitation for Student Participants
3. Invitation for Focus Group Participants
October 5, 1999

Carol Tasker
8903 Meadow Lane
Berrien Springs MI 49103

Dear Carol:

RE: APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

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On behalf of the Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) I want to advise you that your proposal has been reviewed and approved. You have been given clearance to proceed with your research plans.

All changes made to the study design and/or consent form after initiation of the project require prior approval from the HSRB before such changes are implemented. Feel free to contact our office if you have any questions.

The duration of the present approval is for one year. If your research is going to take more than one year, you must apply for an extension of your approval in order to be authorized to continue with this project.

Some proposal and research designs may be of such a nature that participation in the project may involve certain risks to human subjects. If your project is one of this nature and in the implementation of your project an incidence occurs which results in a research-related adverse reaction and/or physical injury, such an occurrence must be reported immediately in writing to the Human Subjects Review Board. Any project-related physical injury must also be reported immediately to the University physician, Dr. Loren Hamel, by calling (616) 473-2222.

We wish you success as you implement the research project as outlined in the approved protocol.

Sincerely,

Linda Thorman, Ed.D.
Human Subjects Review Board
c: Jane Thayer
Invitation for Students to Participate in Research Study.

The following statement was read to the Spiritual Formation class before lectures began on Monday, October 4, at 8:30 am and 1:30 pm. 1999.

Last year I heard about this class from some friends who were finding it very helpful. My reaction was: This class is too good to keep as a secret, and as I continued to pray for God's guidance in choosing a topic for my doctoral research, it became clear that this class should be the focus.

I would like to invite each of you to be part of this story of the impact on people's lives, as God works, because there are many Adventist colleges and universities around the world which don't have this kind of class in their curriculum.

By participating in this project you will be helping our church's future pastors in strengthening their personal walk with God.

I can promise you that when I collect written responses from you, these papers will be identified only by a 3 digit code number which you choose for yourself, so I will never know who the papers belong to, so of course there will be no real names in the final document either.

Interviews and group discussions will be on a volunteer basis, and again no names will be attached to comments. This means it will be impossible for me to obtain any information about you, that you would not want me to know.

In two weeks time, the first focus group will be held. Seminary students' time is precious, so I'm planning to conduct these over lunch and supper on 3 Mondays, and I will be providing the meals for the participants. You will receive a note about this as soon as you go out today, so you can have time to think about it. My e-mail is at the bottom of this handout, should you have any questions.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and you are free to withdraw from participation at any time. By using your personal code number on sheets and assignments handed to your teacher, you are giving permission for this data to be included in my research study, and for this I am very grateful. If you do not wish me to read a particular assignment, just leave your number code off of the top of the sheet.

Thank you for considering to participate in this study.
Focus Group Advertisement for Recruits

OPPORTUNITY

Six focus research groups will meet during the quarter to discuss the spiritual formation journey.
Dates will be on Mondays
- Oct 18
- Nov 8
- Dec 6

On each of these days one group will meet in the morning from 11:30-1pm, (after the morning Spiritual Formation small groups) and the other from 5:30-7pm (After the afternoon Spiritual Formation small groups).

The 11:30-1pm group is looking for 6-8 people who will be willing to participate in each of the 3 sessions.

The 5:30-7pm group will consist of a different group of 6-8 people each time.

Next week I will be recruiting people for the 3 morning focus groups (i.e. willing to do all 3), and I will also have a sign-up sheet for the first of the afternoon groups.) I will then call you during the week to notify you of your selection.

Focus groups are painless, fun and if you haven’t had opportunity to see one in action, this could be an extra bonus for you to see how they are done. They are a handy tool for the pastor to use in his parish. In appreciation for your valued insights, my gift to you will be a delicious box lunch/supper, which will include my son’s famous home-made bread rolls! Thank you for considering this request. Look for the sign-up sheets next week.

Sincerely,

Carol Tasker
ctasker@andrews.edu
APPENDIX B

QUESTIONNAIRES

1. Pre-Course Survey
2. Evaluation Spiritual Formation Retreat
3. Research Update with Final Reflection paper Questions
4. One-year Follow-Up Survey
Pre-Course Survey

1. What is your understanding of spiritual disciplines?

2. Do you think the practice of spiritual disciplines is compatible with a theology of salvation by grace?  Yes    No

3. Why/Why not?

4. What is your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?

5. How many years have you been a baptized SDA church member?
   Not a member    Less than 1 year    1-4 yrs    5-9 yrs    10 or more yrs

6. Have you been a Pastor?  Yes    No
   Years as a Pastor    yrs

7. This class is required    optional

8. Have you taken a spiritual formation class before?  Yes    No    Where?

9. To what extent are the following areas of seminary pastoral training important?

   Not important
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<th>Spirituality</th>
<th>Counseling skills</th>
<th>Theological Knowledge</th>
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   Vitally important
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Please turn over
Evaluation
Spiritual Formation Retreat

1. I believe such a retreat is an important part of the seminary experience.

2. To what extent was the retreat spiritually beneficial?

3. How beneficial was the meditation on Scripture?

4. How beneficial was the personal reflection?

5. How beneficial was the small group experience?

6. What did you learn about:

   (A) God

   (B) Yourself

   (C) Others

7. Describe the most significant part of the retreat for you.

8. What suggestions do you have for the improvement of future retreats?

9. Other comments:

Please turn over
1. Before this class began, you answered the following 3 questions. Would you kindly answer these same questions, now that you have completed a quarter of Personal Spiritual Formation.

What is your understanding of the spiritual disciplines?

Do you think the practice of the spiritual disciplines is compatible with a theology of salvation by grace?  Yes ___ No ___

What is your understanding of what it means to be a Christian?

2. The *Christian Spiritual Participation Profile* is attached for you to fill out (with a hard pencil - not pen) and return with this sheet. You will receive your own personal profile results in a sealed envelope with your code number. This means you can compare these results with your previous profile.

3. Your required *Reflection paper* asks for:
   - In what ways have you grown spiritually?
   - What have you learned about yourself this quarter?
   - What have you learned about God? These sections should be clearly marked.

   **Bonus points will be given for writing an additional section entitled WORD PICTURE**
   
   **Directions:** Describing your relationship with God, or the process of personal spiritual formation in terms of a word picture or a metaphor can be a very valuable way of communicating your personal experience with others. The Bible uses illustrations like the vine and the branches; the potter and the clay, the Good Shepherd and his sheep etc. Outline and explain the modern day picture/symbol that describes your spiritual life with God. *(Length should be ½-1 page).*

4. Journal writing is a very personal activity, and can therefore reflect thoughts and feelings that are normally not shared with others. However for research projects they can provide a very rich and valuable source of data. Would there be some individuals who would be willing to make their personal journals (or even parts of it) available for my research project? This could be totally anonymous by you placing it in a sealed envelope, with your code number inside, and leaving it with Kathy Ekkens for me to collect. (They would then be returned to the office secretary in another sealed envelope with your code on the front to be collected by yourself.) Thank you for considering this opportunity of sharing (anonymously) the impact of the class with the world SDA field.

   **Your CODE NO. is needed for all papers you turn in - include this sheet with your reflection paper.**

THANK YOU FOR THE WONDERFUL HELP AND ENCOURAGEMENT YOU HAVE GIVEN to this research project. It is greatly appreciated. Carol Tasker
One-Year Follow-up Survey

IT'S NOW 12 MONTHS SINCE YOU PARTICIPATED IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION CLASS.

1. Please check (✓) the following class activities according to their lasting value to you personally.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 = no use</th>
<th>1 = not much</th>
<th>2 = some</th>
<th>3 = good</th>
<th>4 = outstanding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Sabbath/Sunday retreat and scripture mediation</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Sabbath/Sunday retreat and sharing in groups</td>
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<tr>
<td>Class lectures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Understanding temperament</td>
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<tr>
<td>Required 4 hours of spiritual disciplines every week</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing your weekly report</td>
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<tr>
<td>Small groups weekly meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Taped focus group discussion (only ✓ if you participated)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing the final reflection paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Choosing a metaphor for your spiritual journey (if you did one)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Weekly required reading - Foster, Steps to Christ, Blackaby etc</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other _____________________________</td>
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</table>

2. How much has spiritual formation impacted/affected the following areas of your life?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>0 = no impact</th>
<th>1 = little</th>
<th>2 = some</th>
<th>3 = considerable</th>
<th>4 = very much</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Ministry</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devotional Time</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>People</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Priorities</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Studies</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>God</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Worship</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
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<tr>
<td>Habits</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0 1 2 3 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Briefly describe some of the most significant changes in your life as a result of this class.

(Please turn over and use the back if you need more space)

4. What are your personal spiritual formation goals for the future?

5. How do you see yourself sharing this experience with others in the future?

6. Which spiritual disciplines are most beneficial to you?

YOUR helpfulness throughout this project has been highly valued - thank you so much for your support.

Code No. ☺
(If you still remember it!!)
APPENDIX C

ADDITIONAL DATA

1. Inventory of Data Volumes 1-23

2. 6 Sample Final Reflection Papers
Contents of Data Volumes

Volume 1 Pre-proposal surveys, focus groups, pilot studies
Volume 2 Pre-Course Surveys
Volume 3 Field notes and Interviews
Volume 4 Retreat Questionnaires
Volume 5 Analysis Retreat Questionnaires
Volume 6 Focus Group Transcriptions and Analysis
Volume 7 Reflection Papers
Volume 8 Reflection Papers Analysis
Volume 9 Pre - CSPP answer sheets
Volume 10 Post - CSPP answer sheets
Volume 11 Follow Up Surveys and Analysis
Volume 12 Weekly Student Reports - Week 2
Volume 13 Weekly Student Reports - Weeks 3, 4
Volume 14 Metaphors and Analysis
Volume 15 Weekly Student Reports - Week 5
Volume 16 Weekly Student Reports - Week 6
Volume 17 Weekly Student Reports - Week 7
Volume 18 Weekly Student Reports - Week 8
Volume 19 Weekly Student Reports - Week 9
Volume 20 Dissertation organizational charts and grid references
Volume 21 Master Record of Data
Volume 22 Analysis Follow-Up Surveys
Volume 23 Dissertation Diary

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In what ways have you grown spiritually?

The first way I have grown spiritually is in my devotional life. To be honest, it was not the class that convicted me off the necessity of personal devotion, the Lord had long before impressed this upon me. However, it was the discipline of actually recording the amount of time I spend each week with God that opened my eyes to how much I am falling short of my goal. During the course of the week, it is quite easy to have devotions a couple of times for a few minutes, and then at the end of the week feel like you have spent adequate time with God. But when you can see on a piece of paper 1 ½ minutes in prayer and 1 hour of Bible study over a course of a 7 day period, it is bound to open your eyes. It is much harder when you are constantly looking at a log, to fool your-self into believing that you have spent a lot of time with God. The hard copy of spent time with God also allows me to compare with amounts of time spent in other areas like sports, t.v., studies, recreation, etc. When devotions log the least amount of time consistently something needs to change. This discipline has really helped me spiritually to be honest with myself. I have decided to continue this discipline even though the class is over, I may not always need to use it, but for now it is a great help.

I have also grown in my spiritual variety. By this I mean I have increased and diversified the ways in which I commune with God. Before this class all I did was pray and read the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. But now I try prayer a number of different ways. Now, the word study has taken on a new expanded meaning and I approach it in different ways as well. I have learned the importance of meditation.

Another large growth area for me spiritually has been in my concept of how to expand my communion with God. I don’t really know what my old philosophy was, but my new philosophy is “Always be consistent, always make it meaningful, always be honest, and experiment until you find what works best for you and God!”

What have you learned about yourself this quarter?

Ans: I struggled for some time to find and answer to this question, but I got it now. It can be summed up in the title of one of the chapters from Steps to Christ, “The Sinners Need of Christ”. The theme of this quarter for me has turned out to be that I need Christ. After self examination I realize that there is a lot of cleaning up to do in me. I realize that the call God has placed on my life is to do great things for His honor and glory. I realize that there are some mountains to overcome. I have realized that my desire to do is not enough, if not combined with the power to do in Christ. I will never be cleaned up, if I don’t have Christ. I will never accomplish great things for the honor and glory of God, if I don’t have Christ. I will never get over those mountains, if I don’t have Christ. Christ has become the focus of my devotion life. Christ said that if He was lifted up He will draw all men unto Him. I am learning to view that as a promise. A promise that if I preach Christ, He will reap the harvest. But more importantly for me, if I concentrate on Christ, if I make Him the center of everything I do, He will draw me unto Himself, which is my heart’s desire. I
have learned that I am too dependent on myself, and not dependent enough on Christ.

What have you learned about God?
Ans: I have learned that God loves me just as much as Jesus does. I don't believe that I have ever had a hard, dictating, exacting, view of God the Father. However, at the same time, I have never had a loving, warm, and sensitive picture of Him either. I can't say at this point that have that loving, warm, picture, of the Father, but I do recognize His love for me more clearly. It has been brought to my attention the love act in God sending His son to die in my place. It is so easy to focus on Jesus and miss the Father, but He sacrificed too. He gave of Himself too.

I have also learned that God is always waiting for me to commune with Him. It as if to say that each day God is waiting by the telephone for my call, or throwing pebbles at my window. And when I don't take time to talk to Him, or allow Him to talk to me, it's like telling Him I was going to call but then I don't.

Or hearing His pebbles at the window, coming over to look out the window and see Him, only to pull down the shade and walk away. I have learned that God has much to give me, if I will only ask Him for it.

Reflection Paper # 105

When I came into this class this quarter I did not know what to expect. I felt that my spirituality was fine and that this class could not really teach me anything. As the quarter went on I found that I was completely wrong. Through this class I have discovered that there are many ways in which I can become closer to God and maybe even heifer ways than I had known before taking this class.

The class began with the weekend spiritual retreat that I attended on Sabbath. I really did not want to attend. But after attending learned so much just in a few short hours of attending this retreat. The opening song service was good, but the time we spent in reading and really thinking about God's word was awesome. I had asked myself questions before when studying the Bible but never had asked myself questions and then written the answers down. I found that by writing things down I was able to more clearly understand how I really felt. It also made me think through some issues that I would not have if I did not write it down. Overall I learned that quality time alone with God is so valuable. I realized that I had not been taking enough time with the Lord. I also learned that I should regularly write reactions to scripture to gained a fuller blessing. The atmosphere also taught me that nature can teach just like the Bible can. Nature spoke to me of God's great love and awesome power.

The weekly spiritual formation report that we had to turn in was a burden at first by really kept me on track in my spiritual time. I thought that keeping a log of time or timing myself in devotions was stupid. But I have learned that it really helped me to realize
that I needed to spend much more time with the Lord. Now I can spend much more time than I could before and I am sure not to miss even one devotion. Occasionally I would miss a worship time with the Lord. But now I don’t even leave the house before I have that special time with the Lord. By stating a plan for each week it gave me a “goal” or direction in my devotions. Instead of just doing whatever I turned to in the Bible, I now had a direction in which to go in my worships.

The class has taught me so much that has helped me in my spiritual life. One major activity that I did not really involve myself in was meditation. I have learned that meditation is so valuable and even Mrs. White tells us that we should spend one hour a day meditating the events of the cross each day. I have grown in this area. I use to read verses in the Bible and just on. Now I read them and then stop and really dwell on what the writer is trying to tell. Now I really search to understand what God is saying to me. In this area I have gone from nothing to someone who now really tries to meditate on the word of God.

I have also enjoyed the small groups that we have been having. I had always read about and heard about small groups, but had never been a part of them. I have learned that they are truly valuable. The groups are not just a time to sit and talk but a time to share with each other how our relationship has been going with Christ. It is a time for accountability. These groups and groups like them are very helpful.

Overall I have grown closer in my walk with the Lord this quarter. I have found so many new things that I have tried and they have worked. I spend more time in the mornings in worship and it is not only more time but better quality time. I believe that a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ is why we were created. And if we do not have a strong relationship with Him we are really missing out. It is my desire to have that close walk with the Lord. I have learned new things like meditation, fasting, solitude, confession, and submission. All of these things that we have studied have influenced my walk with the Lord. I plan to take these ideas and methods with me and even teach the truth of them to others. I also plan to continue the small group and even start others. I have learned a great deal and plan on continuing what I have learned.

I have already answers the questions that we are required to answer here in this paper, but I wanted to really make them clear here at the end also.

**In what ways have I grown spiritually?**

- I have grown spiritually by spending more time with the Lord each day. I have learned by spending more time what God’s plan is for my life and how He wants to use me. My relationship with Him has grown and continues to do so.

**What have I learned about myself this quarter?**

- I have learned that I need a structure in my devotional life. It has become clear to me that without structure I forget or don’t have the kind of worship God’s wants from me.
What have I learned about God?- I have learned that God never misses an appointment. Every time I go to spend time with Him, He is there. I have also learned that He has been very patient with me and given me grace.

Reflection Paper #145

This quarter has been one of tremendous spiritual insight and introspection as a result of taking this course. I must admit that I was highly skeptical about many of the course requirements that I received at the beginning of the quarter. It seemed as though the professor was trying to legislate spiritual growth. I also felt violated to a degree, by the required logging of the content and duration of our devotional time. Prior to the retreat I esteemed that venture into the wilderness to be highly irrelevant and unnecessary. Many of my worst fears about attending the Seminary were being actualized, and this course seemed to be the catalyst for all. It can be easily derived that my perception of what would take place during this quarter was not something to look forward to. However, it is a testimony to the quality of this class that one with such a negative outlook could receive such a blessing from this course.

One exercise that really helped me to experience growth this quarter was the reading of the book “Celebration of Discipline” by Richard Foster. I had a minimal knowledge of what spiritual disciplines were, and my perception of their purpose was not very good. Foster conveyed in terms that are impeccably clear, that spiritual disciplines are not done as a means to achieve salvation. Foster explains that the exercise of spiritual disciplines are meant simply to place the individual in a position to encounter God. Thus with this internalized I was able to practice many of the spiritual disciplines with a lot more freedom and enthusiasm. One discipline in particular which helped me to experience growth was the discipline of “Solitude”. I was a man who was always on the go. I was always surrounded by commotion, even in worship. I would always have music going, or I would even pray out loud to repel the silence. As a result of practicing silence and solitude, I feel as though I have become a great deal more familiar with the voice of the Holy Spirit. This was a major break through in my spiritual development.

I also found a great deal of joy in the fellowship that took place during the small group meetings during class. This was a Mecca experience for one as sheltered as myself. I had to this point in my life, a very small amount of interaction with Adventist of different ethical persuasions. Thus it was to a degree difficult during small group meetings to open up and disclose personal or confidential information about myself. I found the brothers in my group to be very endearing, friendly, and full of the Holy Ghost. We were able to open up and share many personal things. We also encouraged one another in the Lord, through reflections of what had taken place the previous week. I truly valued that time with my brothers and I plan to continue it next quarter.

This has been a wonderful quarter for spiritual growth. By God’s grace I was able to be drawn closer to my God and my fellow man. These strides are congruent with the two great commandments given by Jesus. I am truly thankful for the new experiences and insights that I gained this quarter as a result of this class.
Reflection Paper # 107

How have I grown spiritually?
Perhaps the most helpful thing this class has helped me accomplish is to get my devotional life organized. The simple discipline of writing out a plan for the week and then sticking to it was most helpful.

Also I came to seminary hoping to “mature” in my relationship with Christ. I have always had a very simple and trusting relationship. I thought this was not good for a pastor to be. I had to be sophisticated and educated. I have learned I was wrong. I found myself drifting further and further away from God. Keep it simple is the best way.

God can not be analyzed and explained. All He asks is to have faith and believe. To master those two skills is the greatest asset any pastor can posses. My life is complicated and I wear a lot of “hats” so it is nice to have my relationship with God be simple.

I can’t say that I have made a major change in my spiritual life. But I have become more aware of it. I am more intentional in what I do. I plan ahead and then look forward to my time with God. Yet I still have flexibility.

What have I learned about myself this quarter?
I have learned to look at life in perspective. Things that were so important before I realize now are only busy work. When I am right with the Lord everything else falls into place. I tend to worry and force things to happen. Unfortunately they don’t work out like I plan. I need to simply let God lead. I have had so many things out of control in my life this quarter that I have had to totally life one day at a time. This is something new for me because I usually try to plan well in advance. I am not there totally but I am learning to trust God when He says, “I know the plans I have for you. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you...” It still is hard. I don’t like to be out of control. It sometimes seems like a constant battle to give up control. But when I do I find that life is so much easier and things work out much better than I ever planned.

What have I learned about God?
I don’t understand God!!! I have come to that conclusion. We try to put God in a “box” and we pick Him to pieces, trying to analyze Him. God is bigger than our explanations. He is greater than our theories. It is good that I can’t explain God. This use to really bother me. This was an answer I was going to get in seminary. God is bigger than that and this is the reason He is God. It must be this way. It is okay if I don’t have all the answers. Often people don’t need answers, they just need the experience. All we can know about God is what we experience with Him.

What I do know about God is that He has my best interest in mind. He always gives me what I need but not always what I want. I am learning from hindsight that He always answers my prayers. Even the ones that don’t turn out the way I asked, He has given me what I needed. This has to do again with the whole control thing. I have to give God control of my life so that He can work in it. Thankfully God is patient and never gives up on me. That is the most amazing thing about God.
Reflection Paper # 139

This quarter here at Andrews University can be described as one of transition. Like many others coming from an environment completely different from this one, I have found myself in the position of readjustment. Spiritually, this quarter has brought me into a sharper focus of what God wants me to do with my life. Being surrounded by men and women who likewise desire to enter into professional ministry has served as an affirmation and encouragement for me to eagerly pursue the will of God in my life.

Spiritual Growth

Though I cannot say that I have seen substantial growth in my spirituality during this quarter, I do see that my brief time here is nurturing and fostering greater personal spirituality. At my arrival here I was taken aback to see young men and women who earnestly desired to walk in the fear of the Lord witnessed in their lifestyles. The professors in my classes in most cases have exuded a genuine spirituality evidenced in their daily prayers and their lectures. My ministerial colleagues with whom I associate encourage me to live a life of holiness and in their own lives provide exemplary examples. The sincere Christian fellowship and the general spiritual atmosphere here have served to bring me to my knees in a desire to live a life more in harmony with the teachings of Christ. I am learning more about prayer, devotion, and personal worship. I find myself making more earnest attempts to stay in communion with God throughout the day and throughout the week.

Learning about Self

However, I have also been learning more about myself I can see God taking me on a journey and the necessity of cultivating a genuine, uncompromising relationship with Him. I can see that I am far from the point where God wants me to be. I am coming to realize that the journey before me is going to be a long one filled with a vast array of testing and molding experiences. God is showing me my imperfections and the things in my life that I need to submit to Him. He is showing me about the dangers of personal pride and competition and the need to cultivate feelings of unity and comradery. He is showing me the need for honesty and integrity and the need to eradicate being judgmental and critical. God is showing me my faults this quarter and urging me to submit to Him and make an earnest effort to change combined with faith in His sanctifying power.

Learning about God

God has also been teaching me about Himself He has been teaching me that He is faithful and trustworthy. Throughout this quarter, God has intervened on my behalf on numerous occasions. He has been proving to me that He can be trusted to provide for my temporal needs. God is constantly keeping me and making sure that I am never without. My tendency is to try to plan and organize things so well that they cannot fail. However, God has shown me that in areas where my plan fell short. He was still able and willing to provide. I try to remember God’s recent acts of faithfulness in my life so that in times
when my faith is thin, I can look back and see that I have come thus far by His hand. God is showing me his patience with me. Though I am not what He yet desires for me to be, He is still patiently molding me, teaching me, instructing me. This quarter I have been making an effort to listen to Him and allow Him to change me from the inside out.

Overall, I can say that I am optimistic concerning the work of God in my life here at the seminary. These next few years are truly going to be for me years of training. However, it is not so much academic training, but spiritual training. There are so many lessons that I can see that God is desirous of teaching me. Many times I am simply not willing or not able to handle what He desires to show me. But nonetheless, like a loving parent, He is molding me so that the potential which He has placed within may be actualized.
Paul’s Reflection Paper (7:233-234)

Spiritual Formation I

Reflection Paper

What a blessing to me it has been to me to be part of this class! At the right time, from ten years in the field, to have time to recharge my experience and relationship with the Lord early in the Seminary. I thank God for the opportunity to learn through the lectures of Jon Dybdahl and the small group. The main areas, in which I have grown spiritually, by His grace, are:

(a) To be able to meditate for sometime on what I have read or heard. Also to interact with what I am reading by making concrete decisions and applications in relation to my devotional readings to affect my daily life.

(b) The importance of consistency in my practicing the spiritual disciplines and to have a “rule” or plan for each devotional session.

(c) My world view about God, that He is real and active in this live, and how He works in His creation created a desire in me to live in His presence all the time wherever I am. All other things, if I have this personal God, will fall in the right places.

(d) We learn and grow well when we are in community. I realized this at the retreat and during the small group, during the moments of sharing. Even spiritual guidance is more enhanced in community as brothers and sisters share their experiences and spiritual insights.

On the other hand, there are several things that I have learned about myself during this quarter. These include the following: (i) during one of my devotions, I discovered that I am too sensitive and become easily irritated and then lose control of my emotions. Usually this negatively affects my family members. I harbor frustrations and disappointments for a long time, and healing delays. (ii) I need to forgive others more easily and readily than I do now. (iii) Once I have a vision, a goal. I am good at pursuing it till it is realized. I have a lot of godly courage that is not easily discouraged by negative circumstances. (iv) From one lecture in class, I learned that I am a “hands-on” type of person. I like practical things or work more than deskwork. And that (v) I need God’s help to live a simple life that is free from anxiety and stress.

In addition, I have learned some things about my God, and these are:

1. God never forces His way through but He waits on us to create a space for Him to work.

2. That God is personal. He wants us to know Him more personally than knowing about Him. Spirituality, or a relationship with god is more important than theological knowledge.

3. He was there in my past, even when it was all dark, working out things for my good and for His glory. Though sometimes it may seem as if He is delaying, He is never late!
APPENDIX D

SPIRITUAL FORMATION CLASS MATERIALS

1. Course Outline GSEM 541 Spiritual Formation Fall 1999
2. Spiritual Formation Weekly Report
3. Retreat Handouts 1-3
4. Rules for Groups
I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course invites the student to develop his/her understanding and practice of the spiritual life so that ministry may more intentionally take place in the context of God's presence.

II. COURSE OBJECTIVES

A. Lead the students to analyze themselves in light of spiritual perspectives;

B. Introduce the student to the history, literature and concepts of devotional theology;

C. Introduce the student to the practice of the spiritual disciplines;

D. Relate Adventist theology to the practice of the spiritual life:

E. Introduce and model spiritual retreats and small spiritual growth groups;

F. Create in the student a desire to live closer to God and to embark or continue on the spiritual journey.

III. COURSE CONTENT AND SUGGESTED OUTLINE OF READINGS

10/4 Introduction to class
The Call for an Adventist Spirituality
Taking Spiritual Inventory
10/11 Developing a Spiritual World View
Importance of “Rule for life”
S.D.A. Doctrine – Second Coming
Reading: COD chap. 1. (or SD Foreword and chap. 1
or EG chap. 1, 2)
SC, “The Knowledge of God”
SFW, IX, X, 1-10, 13-19, 77-82
Small group: Mark 9:14-29 or SFW

10/18 Temperament. Personality and Spirituality
Development and transformation theory
S.D.A. doctrine – Sabbath
Reading: SC, “What to Do with Doubt”
SFW, 20-24, 65-67
Small group: Luke 10:38-42 or SFW

10/25 Worship – the Recognition of Grace, the Gate to Communion
S.D.A. doctrine Sanctuary
Reading: COD, chap. 11 and 13. (or SD chap. 5 or EG chapter 3,4)
SFW, 25-31, 68, 69
SC, “Rejoicing in the Lord”
Small group: Rev. 5:6-14 or SFW

11/1 Confession and Repentance
S.D.A. doctrine – Three Angels Message: Judgment
Reading: COD, chap. 10, (or SD chap. 6, 13 or EG chap. 5-7)
SC, “Sinners Need of Christ,” “Repentance,” and “Confession”
SFW, 54-64
Small group: 1 John 1:8-10 or SFW

11/8 Prayer and Meditation I
S.D.A. doctrine – Wholistic View of Person
Reading: COD, chap. 2 and 3, (or SD, 4, 8 or EG 8-10) SC, “The Privilege of Prayer”
SFW, 32-38, 70, 71
Small group: Luke 11:1-13 or SFW

11/15 Prayer and Meditation II
S.D.A. doctrine – God as Creator
Reading: COD, chap. 7 and 8, (or SD, chap. 10 or EG, 11-13)
SFW, 39-46, 72, 73
SC, “Growing up into Christ”
Small group: 1 Sam. 2:1-11 or SFW
11/29  Spiritual Scripture Learning and Journaling, Guidance
S.D.A. doctrine – Spirit of Prophecy, Holy Spirit
Reading: COD, chap. 5, 12, (or SD chap. 2, 3, 11 or EG chap. 14-16)
SFW, 47-53, 74, 75
SC, “The Test of Discipleship”
Small group: Psalm 1 or SFW

12/6  Community, Service, Simplicity, Fasting
S.D.A. doctrine – Health, Life Style
Reading: COD, chap. 46, 9, (or SD chap. 7, 9, 12, or EG, chap. 17-19)
SC, “The Work and the Life”
Small group: Luke 18:15-30 or SFW

IV. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

A. Textbooks

Required:


NOTE: Students are to read Celebration of Discipline unless they have previously read it well. If they have read Celebration of Discipline carefully, they may choose one of the following two books:


White, Ellen. Steps to Christ. (SC)

2. Recommended:

Spiritual Formation Bible. (NIV), Zondervan, 1991. (SFB)
B. Spiritual Retreat

In order to introduce students to the value of spiritual retreat, discipleship, small groups, and bonding to like-minded spiritual pilgrims, all students are required to take part in a one-day spiritual retreat. This class cannot be passed unless there is full participation in the retreat. Details of the retreat are furnished in a separate document. The student has the choice of either Sabbath, October 2, or Sunday, October 3. The retreat lasts from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. The retreat will be the time we form small discipleship groups which will meet throughout the quarter.

C. Reflection Paper

Each student is to write a reflection paper which synthesizes their quarter-long spiritual experience. In what ways have you grown spiritually? What have you learned about yourself this quarter? What have you learned about God? This paper is to be 2-3 pages in length, typed, double-spaced. Due: December 14.

D. Practice of the Spiritual Disciplines

The student will spend four hours each week in the practice of spiritual disciplines. Factors that should be kept in mind are:

1. You are free to complete the four hours doing whatever devotional things such as Bible reading, prayer, etc. that you find valuable. Your class reading will give you some new ideas. This is a wonderful opportunity to experiment with new ways of meeting God. Since prayer is so crucial for the Christian, we urge that students try to spend 1 to 2 hours weekly in prayer.

2. Unless there is some special reason for change, the four-hour time period should be spread out over at least four days during the week.

3. At the beginning of each week, you should decide what your specific daily “rule” or plan is for each time you have devotions and write it down. More information will be given in class on this practice.

4. You should keep a careful log of your time with God. A sheet will be provided for this. Make sure for each devotional time you have you record:
   a. Date
   b. Time (duration)
   c. A brief 1-2 sentence summary of how things went. Did you follow your rule?
5. While for some it may seem a bit artificial to keep track of devotional time, it helps us stay honest to ourselves and God, and in the end most students thank us for the experience. Doing this is a time-honored practice devoted Christians have often followed.

E. Weekly Report

Students should purchase or copy report forms that should be turned in every week (beginning with October 11) prior to the start of class. Each report has two parts:

1. **A report for spiritual disciplines.** Make sure each week you give your weekly “rule” or plan and you write in each time you have a devotional time and include date, time (duration) and a 1-2 sentence response.

2. **A report on the weekly reading assignment.** Be sure to completely fill in the form! The summary can be in any form that is understandable. The evaluation response can include what impressed you in either a positive or a negative way.

**NOTE:** Reports should be typed or written legibly and must be complete. Late reports will receive a substantial cut in grade.

F. Class Attendance and Interaction

Class attendance and participation is required and vital. Only one absence is permitted. Each class session (excluding the first) will have a small discipleship meeting the final hour. Faithful attendance at the group is important.

G. Final Exam and Notebook

There will be no final exam but at the time of the final a notebook containing all class notes and weekly reports should be turned in. Grades will be given based on order and completeness.

V. EVALUATION

A. The final grade will be computed on the following basis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading Reports</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spiritual Disciplines</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflection paper</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Notebook</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(10 points each week)

(12 points each week)
B. The following scale will be used for determining the final grade:

- A  94- 100%
- A-  90-93%
- B+  87-89%
- B   83-86%
- B-  80-82%
- C+  77-79%
- C   73-76%
- C-  70-72%
- D+  67-69%
- D   63-66%

C. Class time allotments: a total of 90 hours should be spent on a 3-hour class. For this class the following numbers were used to calculate the 90 hours:

- 27 hours - in class time
- 32 hours - personal spiritual formation
- 2 hours  - reflection paper
- 16 hours - reading and reports
- 8 hours  - retreat
- 5 hours  - preparation of note book
- 90 hours
Weekly Spiritual Formation Report  DATE _____________  CODE No. ___

I. Spiritual Disciplines. Be sure to include date, time (duration), Brief summary/evaluation (1-2 sentences) for each session.

My "Rule" or plan for each session this week is:

Day 1.

Day 2.

Day 3.

Day 4.

Day 5.

Day 6.

Day 7.

Total time _____________
II. Reading Report

1. Books and pages read:

2. Total time spent:

3. Summary

4. Evaluation/response
God's Hand in My History Part I

Perusing the Past


2. Then. Who is the one called in v. 3 "my servant" and "Israel" (literally "God strives")? Note carefully what is said here about this servant's past. In what ways has God worked for the servant in the past? Has this servant always been what he/she should have been (note v. 4)? Write down all the ways God has acted in the history of His servant.

3. Now. Can you identify with the servant? Did God call you from the womb and name your name (v. 1)? Have you ever "labored in vain" or "spent your strength for nothing" (v. 4 RSV)? Has God worked in your past? Sit quietly, perhaps with eyes closed, and recall your past pilgrimage. Reenter your past and trace those key points where God has acted for you. Recall even those times when you weren't sure where God was. Write down as much as you can of your personal specific story of God's work in your past.

"We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history." Life Sketches, p. 196.
Pondering the Present

1. **Read** thoughtfully Psalm 139:1-24

2. **Then.** Make a list of all the things the Psalmist says God knows about his present life. What does this lead him to think and do? Ponder the awesomeness of God’s knowledge. How do you think the realization of God’s knowing all this affected the Psalmist’s present life and decisions?

3. **Now.** Sensing that God knows all about us, what do you think would be His evaluation of your present life? In this time of reflection and quiet, picture yourself in God’s presence. Knowing that He knows all about you, yet loves you tremendously, honestly face your present. Record in writing what you think is His as well as your evaluation of your present. Where are you now?

4. **Write down** three things that you think God would like you to work on in your spiritual life this coming year. One good way to do this is to think of one thing directly related to your devotional life or relationship with God. Write down a second thing related to human relationships - a spouse, child, parent, friend, sibling, etc. Lastly write down something that has to do with your relation to the physical realm—diet, exercise, addictions, use of time, recreation, etc.
God's Hand in My History Part III

Facing the Future

1. **Read** carefully Isaiah 55.

2. **Then.** For the Israelites who seek the Lord, what are all the things specifically promised for the future (note especially vss. 10-13)? Look again at the promises found in the first Isaiah passage we studied and note especially Isaiah 49:6, 7. Write down the promises from these two passages in a list and think about them. Try to sense how a discouraged Israelite would have felt when he/she read them.

3. **Now.** Relax in quietness in God's presence. Meditate on some of the things you'd like to see God do in your future. Claim some of these promises for yourself. Don't worry about impure motives—God can help you deal with these later. Allow yourself to dream what might take place by God's power in your life. What would you like to see happen? Write down your hopes, dreams, and plans for your future.

“If the future looks somewhat clouded, hope on, believe on. The cloud will disappear, and light shine again.” *IT* p. 663.
Rules for Groups

1. Do not preach or give advice. Listen empathetically.

2. Maintain confidentiality. Things shared in the group should not go outside the group.

3. Give roughly equal time to all group members. Do not have one or two monopolize.

4. Let people share naturally. Do not force people to share or do things they don’t feel comfortable doing.
APPENDIX E

HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS

1. Course of Study for Ministers 1870

2. Advanced Bible School Course Offerings 1943
Course of Study for Ministers.

We, the undersigned, committee, appointed March 26, 1870, by the "Minister's Lecture Association of S. D. Adventists," to suggest a yearly course of study for ministers, recommend the following course for the present year:

I. **Bible Subjects.**
1. Thoughts on the Revelation.
2. History of the Sabbath.
5. Works on the Sanctuary and 2300 days.
6. Resurrection of the Unjust.
7. Sermon on the two Covenants.
8. Commandment to restore and build Jerusalem.

II. **General Reading.**
In addition to the daily study of the Bible, we recommend the following special course of reading:
1. Mosheim’s Ecclesiastical History.
2. Rollin's Ancient History.
3. Dobney on Future Punishment.
We recommend Dobney as a model for style of candid and impartial argument.

III. **Educational Works.**
In addition to the above, it will be necessary for many to study the elements of English Grammar. And here we would recommend the "Elementary Grammar on the synthetic method, by J. M. B. Sill, Welch's Analysis, and Quackenbos' Course of Composition and Rhetoric; especially that portion of this latter work which treats of punctuation, the proper use of capital letters, and such information as will enable one to correctly prepare manuscript for the press. Under this head we also recommend careful practice in penmanship. All will be expected to bear examination on these points.

We trust that all the ministers will, with us, make this a subject of prayer, and endeavor to realize their responsibility in the sight of God, to show themselves approved unto God, workmen that need not be ashamed, remembering that they must soon give account of their stewardship.

G. H. Bell, U. Smith,

**Note.** From James White, et al., Course of study for ministers. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 10, 1870, p. 64.
From Shirley Welsh's *History of The Advanced Bible School, 1934-1937*

### COURSE OFFERINGS.

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<td>Hoffman</td>
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<td>222 The Reformation to 155</td>
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<tr>
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<td>The Reformation from 1546 to 1563</td>
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### 1936 Session

### Bible

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<td>The Catholic Church in Contemporary Europe</td>
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### Biblical languages

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### Religious Education

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<tr>
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APPENDIX F

SDA SPIRITUAL FORMATION INITIATIVES

1. Conceptual Model for Theological Education from writings of E.G. White

2. Selected list of SDA articles on Personal Spirituality and/or Theological Education

A Conceptual Model From Ellen G. White

Ellen G. White is considered the cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and was a prolific writer, an able lecturer, and a wise counselor (Neufeld, 1976, p. 1584). Table 23 exhibits a complex model designed from researching some of her writings. She penned the following lines:

Too little attention has been given to the education of young men for the ministry. We have not many years to work, and teachers should be imbued with the Spirit of God and work in harmony with his revealed will, instead of carrying out their own plans. We are losing much every year because we do not heed the counsel of the Lord on these points. (White, 1948f, p. 136)

Ellen G. White wrote much concerning the ministry but from this researcher’s findings she did not write in any one place a conceptual model for theological education. Therefore a search was made for information she penned on Theological education. What follows is a condensation of what this researcher considered her major concepts concerning theological education.

Prerequisites and Qualifications

White (1957) stresses the importance of superimposing theological education upon a solid foundation of common education (p. 539; 1948c, p. 503; 1948e, p. 583). She recognizes the home environment as fundamental in the educational process and devotes much of her writings to providing counsel concerning elementary, high school,

1Ellen G. White lived between 1827 and 1915. Her publications have been reprinted many times. Dates appearing in parentheses refer to reprint publication dates—except for the 1892 edition of Gospel Workers.
Table 23
A CONCEPTUAL MODEL FOR THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION
CURRICULUM DESIGNED FROM THE
WRITINGS OF ELLEN G. WHITE

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<thead>
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<td>A broad education foundation which develops:</td>
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<td>A. Spiritual qualities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Christlike character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Physical stamina and strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Intelligence and mental discipline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Social outreach</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theological Education</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Basic Curriculum Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Conversion of each student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Thorough and accurate Biblical understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teaching students to think for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Education in the practical art of soul-saving</td>
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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ministerial education: the most important training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Ministerial education: as short as possible</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Curriculum Concepts</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Studies to encompass all of Scripture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Knowledge of theology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Development of student's personal religious experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Close relationship between staff and students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Field education an integral; part of training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Health education essential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Basic training best within students' own cultural environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary subjects</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dedicated Ministerial Service
and college education. These important educational agencies may produce men with essential ministerial qualifications. Writing concerning ministerial qualifications, White (1948c) states:

In the estimation of self-made ministers it will take but a small pattern to fill the bill and make a minister. But the apostle placed a high estimate upon the qualifications necessary to make a minister. (p. 706)

Ministerial qualifications that appear important to White are:

1. Spiritual Qualities

She calls for "a higher and more spiritual standard for the ministry" (1948d, p. 442). These spiritual qualities include a daily conversion, consecration, and a love for souls (1948a, pp. 31, 63—66, 111).

2. Christlike Character

Spiritual decisions inculcate and develop a Christlike character of moral worth and integrity. Under the title "Minister(s): Characteristics desired in," the compilers of the Ellen G. White Comprehensive Index, Vol. 2, list almost one hundred qualities of character that ministers and those contemplating the ministry should cultivate (1962, pp. 1734-1737). Perhaps the finest summation of these character traits were penned in a general statement:

The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.

But such a character is not the result of accident: it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love.
to God and man (White, 1952, p. 57).

White (1943e) states that men who exhibit the character traits of sacrifice and service are called to the ministry.

By toil and sacrifice and peril, by losses of worldly goods, and in agony of souls, the gospel has been borne to the world. God calls young men in the vigor and strength of their youths to share with Him self denial, sacrifice and suffering. If they accept the call, He will make them His instruments to save souls for whom He died. But He would have them count the cost, and enter upon their work with a full knowledge of the conditions upon which they serve a crucified Redeemer. (pp. 86-87)

The hallmark of this character is that it is Christlike. She wrote:

By giving His life for the life of men, He would restore in humanity the image of God. He would lift us up from the dust, reshape the character after the pattern of His own character, and make it beautiful with His own glory. (1941, p. 157)

3. Physical Stamina and Strength

White's viewpoint is that men in poor physical health will not be able to carry the responsibilities, bear the heavy burdens, and face constant demands required of ministers. Health is of prime importance for "vigor of mind depends largely upon vigor of body" (1948a, p. 423), and a person with such health is better able to express and control his emotions in communicating with others. On physical stamina White (1948a) states:

... physical laziness, unfit a man to be a minister. Those who are preparing to enter the ministry should train themselves to do hard, physical work; then they will be better able to do hard thinking. ... When a crisis comes that demands active well developed physical powers and a clear, strong practical mind; when difficult work is to be done, where every stroke must tell; when perplexities arise which can be met only by wisdom from on high, then the youth who have learned to overcome difficulties by earnest labor can respond to the call for workers. (pp. 106-7)

4. Intelligence and Mental Discipline

White (1948e) states that educated men who have disciplined minds and who are conversant with the procedures of scholarship, its methods, and principles are required in
this day and age to present the everlasting gospel (p. 528). Contemporaries of White observed apparently successful gospel workers with little education, but she countered that they "might have attained a greater measure of success, and might have been more efficient laborers, if at the very start they had acquired mental discipline" (White, 1948a, p. 92). A further reason presented for the necessity of an intelligent ministry is the ability to counter the philosophies of an educated world (White, 1948d, p. 415).

5. Men of Social Outreach

White wanted to see in the gospel ministry persons who saw real value in all human beings, who were genuine in their interest of people, who were sympathetic and understanding, and who could appreciate individual differences in persons and reach them for Christ.

People are easily reached through the avenues of the social circle. But many ministers dread the task of visiting; they have not cultivated social qualities, have not acquired that genial spirit that wins its way to the hearts of the people. It is highly important that a pastor become acquainted with the different phases of human nature. (White, 1948d, p. 266).

She suggests that one of the most practical methods of developing this social personality, as well as being one of the very best ways in which persons can obtain a fitness for the ministry, is by selling gospel literature (White, 1948a, pp. 96-97).

Although five qualifications have been listed in this subsection, all are interdependent and interpenetrating to equip persons for the gospel ministry.

Olsen (n.d.) noted four basic curriculum objectives established by White, which he states apply "to every student, whether ministerial or otherwise" (p. 8). These basic curriculum objectives are:

1. The conversion of each student (White, 1957, pp. 11-12, 30, 61, 68, 167, 253-54,

3. Training students to think for themselves (White, pp. 1957, pp. 434; 1952, p. 17)

4. The education of students in the art of practical soul-saving (White, 1957, pp. 263—431, 545, 547)

Olsen (n.d.) concludes by stating,

Putting these four objectives together, we might summarize by saying that the kind of student we wish to graduate is a truly converted, thoroughly indoctrinated, original thinking soul-winner. This applies to every student, whether ministerial or otherwise. Our objectives should be the same for all. (p. 8)

Two general theological curriculum concepts propounded by White are noteworthy. Firstly, the most important training to be given in colleges is the education of youth for the gospel ministry (1948f, p. 135). Secondly, the training should be thorough, yet as short as possible (1948e, p. 503; 1948e, pp. 61, 156).

White also proffers specific curriculum concepts worthy of note.

1. White (1948a) makes it clear that persons trained for the ministry should not only be conversant with "every line of prophetic history and every lesson given by Christ" (p. 98) but all of scripture. She suggests that ministers who have a limited knowledge of the Bible grieve the Holy Spirit (White, 1948a, p. 98). White (1948d) observes:

A great injury is often done our young people by permitting them to commence to preach when they have not sufficient knowledge of the Scriptures to present our faith in an intelligent manner. Some who enter the field are mere novices in the Scriptures. (p. 405)

Not only does White (1952) emphasise the importance of understanding the Word of God as a whole and book by book but states the importance of seeing "the relation of
its parts" (p. 190).

2. White (1952) writes that students should be taught the great themes of scripture (p. 190). She advises that instruction in theology should be simple (1946, p. 223) but also writes that “a knowledge of theology as taught in the leading institutions of learning would be of great value” (1948c, pp. 583–84) to ministers preparing to work for the educated and in meeting error. Further, she suggests the memorization of Bible passages (1948e, pp. 342, 501, 556) and laments the fact that some ministers were so deficient in Bible knowledge that it was difficult for them to quote a text of scripture correctly from memory (1948a, p. 105).

3. For White (1948g) theological insights were not to remain in cognitive domains but to be translated into personal, spiritual responsibilities such as prayer, worship, and missionary outreach (pp. 147–48).

4. Ideally, theological educators and their students should spend time together outside normal classroom activity (1957, p. 211).

5. Field education should be considered a part of theological education (White, 1948a, p. 76; 1948f, p. 322; 1948h, p. 237).


7. Basic theological education is best received in one’s own country (White, 1948f, 136–37).

8. Besides instruction in Scripture, ministerial students should understand the sciences (White, 1948a, pp. 105–6), as well as homiletics, etiquette, and social skills (1892, pp. 86–87; 1948d, p. 406), business training (1948g, p. 147), agriculture (1923, p.
home management (1952, pp. 197, 216), church history (1892, p. 98), teaching principles, pastoral work (1943e, p. 256), English, and if possible, other languages (1959, p. 194). These interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary subjects were not to detract, however, from scriptural studies which were to dominate the curriculum.
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Selected List of SDA Articles: Personal Spirituality and/or Theological Education


Dederen, R. The role and function of the SDA Theological Seminary in the shaping of the SDA ministry. Unpublished paper, no. 013776. Adventist Heritage Center, James White Library, Andrews University, Berrien Springs, MI.


*Practical experience for Seminary students*. (1984, Fall). *Focus, 4*.


APPENDIX G

OTHER SPIRITUAL FORMATION INITIATIVES
Encouraging Faculty Involvement

Faculty training in encouraging spiritual formation in seminary students has been in the following phases.

**Phase I: Understanding the Need for Spiritual Formation**

1. Had chapel and faculty retreat speakers develop the theme of Spiritual Formation and Character Development.
2. Presented research on the needs of today’s seminary students.
3. Asked a team of theologians to meet weekly for a semester to write a document on the theological foundations of spiritual formation out of which the components of The Intentional Character Development Program would flow.

**Phase II: Understanding the Student need for Faculty Mentors as Role Models of Spiritual Formation Disciplines**

1. Had the faculty themselves in groups of ten for 2 1/2 hour sessions for five weeks experience and discuss components of the Intentional Development Program.
2. Fall Faculty three day retreat focused on mentoring students.
3. Asked for faculty volunteers to mentor groups of 5 to 8 students each semester for which they were remunerated. An overnight spiritual retreat with their students was a part of the commitment.
4. All faculty were required to include a spiritual formation component in the core classes they taught. They were given guidance and help in doing this at the faculty retreat. This helped the Intentional Character Development Program to be woven into the whole of the seminary instead of being a program along side of the other seminary curriculum.

**Phase III: Developing an Assessment Process for all students in Spiritual, Cognitive, Physical, Relational, and Moral Development after 18 units of study.**

This is in the process of being developed by a team of faculty.
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY
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