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Soul as Sanctuary: Awareness of God Alone and Assembled at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville, South Carolina

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SOUL AS SANCTUARY: AWARENESS OF GOD ALONE AND ASSEMBLED AT
FREEDOM ALIVE CHURCH OF GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

A PROJECT

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

OF THE M. CHRISTOPHER WHITE SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

PAULLEATHA BRUCE

AUGUST 2022

APPROVAL FORM

SOUL AS SANCTUARY: AWARENESS OF GOD ALONE AND ASSEMBLED AT
FREEDOM ALIVE CHURCH OF GREENVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

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The active, enduring presence of God is indeed real, for it has certainly been God's presence in me, with me, and for me from this work's inception to its conclusion. I am eternally grateful to God for choosing and trusting me to execute this portion of his divine plans for me.

To my dear mother whose loving heart is my own, the late Annie Mae Bruce, I owe an incredible amount of gratitude, not only for powerfully and protectively loving my brother (Marino) and me, but for also instilling in us a penchant for learning and scholastic aptitude. My gratitude is immense for my honorable father, Pastor Paul W. Bruce, for teaching me an unparalleled stick-to-itiveness and for being my fiercest champion, selflessly sacrificing his time and heart to make sure that I had everything that I needed to be successful. To the woman who willingly placed the mantle of maternal love and nurture on her shoulders upon my mother's passing, Vernal W. Bruce, I am proud to call her my mother, too. Her example of strength, grace, and wisdom as a Christian woman are worthy of commendation.

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we have shared through the years and for their reminder to not take myself too seriously. I also acknowledge and honor my sister-in-love, Dr. Bettina M. Beech, for her shining example of groundbreaking innovation and servant leadership. Finally, my grandfather, the late Paul T. Bruce, whose fortitude and genius set the course for generations to come.

The members of Freedom Alive Church of Greenville, from the eldest to the youngest, are an integral part of the person and spiritual leader that I am and becoming. The fourteen years we have shared together have contained many ebbs and flows, yet we still stand united in our magnificent Creator and by our faith. I am honored to have been trusted to lead them, and I thank them for believing in me.

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ABSTRACT

A Christian practicum was established at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville in Greenville, South Carolina to examine and to promote the depth of influence and impact awareness of God in self, in daily living practices, and in the world at-large have on the congregants' engagement and participation in corporate worship. Utilizing Scripture and the employment of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship as spiritual practices, congregants from the generations of Silent, Baby Boomer, Xer, and Millennial were enlisted to participate in a six-week study. Upon the analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data, it was revealed that congregants' exposure to the integration of awareness of God in the creative act, awareness of God in the Incarnation, and the spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship resulted in noteworthy changes in the control group's and project participants' ability to discern and be sensitive to the presence of God that positively impacted their engagement and participation in corporate worship.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the vein of Hebraic thought, human beings do not have souls but are souls, the full integration of mind, body, and spirit. As the Trinity is noted in the Christian tradition as God in three persons, we as human beings have been constructed similarly, with mind, body, and spirit coexisting as an interdependent community. Consequently, awareness of God is a soulful matter that touches us holistically and finds its expression in our being, in our daily living, and in the world around us. It is this multifaceted expression of awareness of God that fosters human intimacy with God, influences a greater discernment of God's enduring presence, and encourages continual, human closeness and connection in kind. With this in mind, this project has served as both impetus and encouragement for congregants at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville (SC) to acknowledge and to heighten awareness of God within themselves, within their daily living practices, and in the world at-large. In my mind, it is the congregants' fruitful incarnation or embodiment of God's word and ways throughout the week that produces and supports an enriched and enlivened engagement and participation in the local assembly. Therefore, it is my sincere hope that the overarching outcome of this effort has such an indelible impact upon the congregants that it tangibly results in a faith in praxis with knowing God and being known by God at its core, irrespective of the places and environments in which they find themselves.

The implementation of this project sought to promote and to enhance greater

levels of God-consciousness that subsequently lead to the congregants' awareness of God being discernably present and active while they are both inside and outside of the corporate worship setting. To this end, it was necessary to include specific instruction and activity intended to encourage the congregants at Freedom Alive to elevate their sensitivity to and discernment of God's presence at all times. The essential starting point of this journey began with an investigation of select Old and New Testament Scriptures geared toward the congregants' discovery and increased understanding of what it means to be known by God and to know God in relationship. The interplay of such invited and heartened congregants to foster and to maintain intimate closeness and connection with God to eventualize in more consistent, profound instances of incarnation or embodiment of the Word of God. The introduction to and incorporation of the spiritual practices of meditation, prayer, and solitude served to intensify their ability to discern the presence of God within themselves, within their daily living practices, and within the world around them to consequently influence the depth of the spiritual practice of worship both alone and assembled.

Project Setting

Freedom Alive Church of Greenville is located in the county of Greenville, South Carolina near the downtown area of the city of Greenville in an area designated as the Parker District. The city and county of Greenville comprise the largest portion of the Upstate of South Carolina with an estimated population of 523,542 residents.¹ Prisma Health and Greenville County Schools are the largest employers followed by Michelin

¹ "Quick Facts," United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, accessed July 13, 2021, www.census.gov/quickfacts/greenvillecountysouthcarolina.

North America, Bon Secours St. Francis Health, Duke Energy, and local and state government employees.² Approximately fifty-two percent of the general population is female with seventy-six percent of residents identifying as primarily White followed by eighteen percent of residents identifying as African-American and nine percent of residents identifying as Hispanic or Latino respectively.³

Known as the Parker District, the community surrounding the church consists of 11,431 residents who are primarily female (fifty-one percent). The majority of the residents in this community identify as White alone (sixty-five percent) with the remaining as African-American (twenty percent) and Hispanic or Latino (twenty-nine percent) respectively. Sixty-three percent of residents in the Parker District have completed high school while fifteen percent of residents have earned a bachelor's degree or higher. The median household income is \$34,181.⁴ Despite Freedom Alive Church of Greenville being in existence since February 2008, its physical presence is new to this area due to a relocation from its original site in June 2020. To this end, all of Freedom Alive's members drive to this community to worship from varying parts of the Upstate of South Carolina, inclusive of Anderson, Spartanburg, Seneca, and Laurens in addition to those who are residents of either the city of Greenville or Greenville County.

² "Major Employers," Greenville Area Economic Development, 2021, accessed July 13, 2021, www.greenvilleeconomicdevelopment.com/business-climate/existing-business-industry/major-employers.

³ "Quick Facts."

⁴ "Quick Facts, Parker CDP," United States Census Bureau, July 1, 2019, accessed July 13, 2021, www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/parkercdpsouthcarolina,bereacdpsouthcarolina,greenvillecountysouthcarolina/PST045219.

Freedom Alive Church of Greenville was planted as Freedom Baptist Church of Greenville in February 2008 as a result of a vicious church split from another local Baptist assembly. Despite the decision of forty-two members to follow the outgoing pastor post-resignation (of which my ex-husband and I were included), the pastor decided to follow through with his intention to accept another pastorate in Palo Alto, California. Before leaving the state, he facilitated a meeting with the dissidents to determine if we wanted to formalize and operate as a new church plant. An overwhelming majority agreed while a few opposed; however, in order to be and to do so, a pastoral leader was required. Admittedly, all eyes were on me as the obvious choice, but at the time I had no interest in pastoring a church and certainly not in starting and building one. I painstakingly agreed to become the interim pastor until another was sent and/or chosen; however (as God would have it), two months later I answered the call of God and became the inaugural pastor of a new church plant.

Although the vast majority of the membership and I were deeply entrenched in the Baptist tradition with respect to such as a religious system, the rigidity of denominational polity and practice began to lose their appeal as the Spirit of God began to lead us on a path of a more liberated style of worship. While order remained, the regimentation of liturgy as we had known and accepted it to be in the Black Baptist tradition did not align with the heart of what we grew to believe God expects of us as disciples. Moreover, as a pastor who happens to be a woman, fellowship and camaraderie among other pastors and I in the area were minimal at best, which may be further

exacerbated by their “knowledge” of how the church was birthed (from scandal). After much prayer, study of the Scriptures, and urgency of the Holy Spirit, Freedom Baptist Church of Greenville became Freedom Alive Church of Greenville, a nondenominational, Christian church, in January 2016. Irrespective of this shift, membership continues to vacillate between forty and fifty members, with most of the original forty-two having departed to either return to the previous church from which Freedom Alive split, to join more established churches, or to “worship” from home. As persons become increasingly transient, this fluctuation has become par for the course; however, it is noted that as new persons arrive with hunger and passion for the things of God, those who have stayed the course are seemingly reignited and renewed in their faith and in their commitment to see God’s vision for Freedom Alive Church of Greenville continue to move from possibility to reality.

Statement of the Problem

Historically in African-American church culture, the “busyness” of church with respect to the occupation of specific titles and/or roles with accompanying responsibilities has often been overemphasized as a critical part of what it means to actively worship and serve God. With the arrival and persistence of the COVID-19 global pandemic, this widely accepted way of being, knowing, and doing church came to an abrupt halt, inviting worshippers (irrespective of culture) to experience the presence of God in new ways. For Freedom Alive’s active adult membership that is ninety-eight percent female with a near equal mix of senior (Silent and Baby Boomer), middle-aged (X), and millennial women, these past several months have proven to be challenging but

for different reasons. With the days of gathering in the physical sanctuary reduced from two to three times weekly to one (in-person worship is only held on Sunday mornings; Bible study continues to be facilitated virtually), it was noted that out of the adult membership population, the senior and millennial women were impacted the most.

For the most part, it was noted that the senior, female congregants often viewed their involvement in the local assembly as not only an opportunity to be spiritually formed, but also for social interaction and activity (service). However, being labeled as high risk for the transmission of the Coronavirus due to age and underlying health issues, incidences of social interaction and activity that in-person worship experiences and service opportunities provided for the senior women (operation of the food pantry, church beautification, etc.) became extremely limited. Moreover, having to adjust to hearing sermons through a six-inch screen on their phones either via Facebook live streaming or through a shared video of such disrupted the normalcy of what they considered to be “church,” which added further sadness and frustration as they experienced the compromise and cessation of certain freedoms that being in the physical sanctuary once afforded them.

Conversely, the millennial female congregants appeared to find the virtual space more palatable and convenient, a respite of sorts from their continuous struggle with consistent in-person worship engagement and/or attendance. While the senior, female members relished the communal and service aspects of the local assembly, the millennial female congregants tended to not share the same sentiments and/or affinity for such. For

them, it was noted that they tended to emphasize a personal connection with their spiritual leader (me), oftentimes more than they did with others in the congregation and/or, in the most extreme case, God. As a result, the absence of in-person gathering increased their requests for individual time with me through phone conversations, FaceTime, Zoom, etc. which, in my mind, gave credence to the thought that their engagement in corporate worship was not absolutely necessary when other means of access to their leader and what she had to offer with respect to spiritual formation were available.

It is to this end that this project intended to examine and to reveal the depth of influence and impact that the congregants' awareness of God in themselves, in their daily living practices, and in the world at-large had on their engagement and participation in corporate worship at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville.

CHAPTER 2

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This ministry project functioned as an examination of the depth of influence and impact the congregants' awareness of God within themselves, in their daily living practices, and in the world at-large has on their engagement and participation at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville. Since awareness of God is a soulful matter that touches us holistically and finds its expression in our lives and in the world around us, it is my contention that it is this multifaceted expression of God that powerfully fosters human intimacy with God. Moreover, it is precisely this expression that elicits and influences a greater discernment of God's abiding presence. The realization and practice of such are neither dependent on nor limited to time spent with others; however, they do have the potential to significantly enhance it in meaningful ways. Therefore, it is my belief that as a result of this project's implementation, the congregants' acknowledgement and heightening of awareness of God internally and externally have clearly and will continuously manifest in their being, knowing, and doing within and without the local assembly.

At this juncture, it is necessary to mention that in our setting, levels and frequency of engagement and participation often vary by generation but is primarily homogenous with regard to sex. Therefore, nine adult persons from within the predominately female congregation at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville served as project participants. These nine randomly selected, female participants were invited to represent the four adult generations present in the congregation: Silent, Baby Boomer, X-er, and Millennial. To

ensure equality of generational representation, two female congregants were selected and invited from each generational group with the remaining two project participants being selected and invited from the two predominant, adult generational groups within the congregation, X-er and Millennial. The nine project participants received a recruitment letter and a letter of consent that outlined this project's goals, objectives, and the responsibilities for their participation (see Appendix A, pp. 92-96). After each project goal, objective, and participation responsibility were discussed, the participants signed the recruitment letter and the letter of consent to signify their agreement.

The project participants joined the control group in the Sunday morning, corporate worship setting. The adult congregants in the Sunday morning, corporate worship setting were the control group. Both the control group and the project participants responded to a pre and post survey that assessed their awareness of God within themselves, within daily living situations, and within the world at-large and their knowledge and current practice of the spiritual practices of solitude, prayer, meditation, and worship (see Appendix B, pp. 98-104).

The assessment for this project was multi-leveled. In addition to the project participants and the control group providing responses to a pre and post survey, the project participants were required to respond to the following: pre-assessment and post session evaluations utilizing the "I Know, I Want to Know, I Have Learned" (KWL) teaching method (see Appendix B, pp. 105-109)⁵; reaction/reflection journal responses

⁵ Donna M. Ogle, "K-W-L: A Teaching Model That Develops Active Reading of Expository Text," *The Reading Teacher* 39, no. 6 (1986): 564-570, accessed January 10, 2022 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20199156>.

see Appendix B, p. 110); post evaluation of the “God in Me, God in the World Around Me” *lectio divina* retreat (see Appendix B, p. 111); and the post project facilitator’s evaluation (see Appendix B, p. 112).

The control group and the project participants engaged four sermons in the Sunday morning, corporate worship setting and one midweek lesson over a six-week period. These sermons and midweek lesson functioned as exposure to and foundation for awareness of God as essential to discover, to understand, and to practice being known by God and knowing God in relationship. The outgrowth of such is the cultivation of significant experiences of intimacy with God and incarnation of God’s word (written and spoken) individually and collectively. After engaging the sermons preached in the Sunday morning, corporate worship setting and one midweek lesson taught virtually via Zoom over a six-week period, the project participants met on Sunday afternoons for five weeks from 4:00 pm until 6:00 pm. The sixth and final session was participation in a *lectio divina* retreat in nature as a culminating activity for this project. The first two weeks of sermons and lessons focused on intimacy and incarnation. The first objective of these sermons and lessons was to provide a biblical and theological rationale of intimacy and incarnation using select Old and New Testament Scriptures to promote discovery of the meaning and value of what it means to be known by God and to know God in relationship and how they may be demonstrated in being, knowing, and doing. The second objective of such was to provide biblical methodologies and examples to assist with the building and maintenance of intimacy with God that leads to enhanced embodiment of God’s word. The next three weeks of sermons and lessons examined the

spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, and prayer. The first objective of these sermons and lessons was the exposure of these particular spiritual disciplines as means to practice heightened sensitivity and discernment of God's presence within self, within daily living practices, and within the world at-large. The second objective was the examination of biblical examples of the principles and practice of such using select Old and New Testament Scriptures to further enable sensitivity to and discernment of God's presence irrespective of time and place. The final week's sermon and the *lectio divina* retreat for the project participants served as the zenith of this project's implementation as they explored the spiritual practice of worship as an exterior revelation of awareness of God. The objective of the final week's sermon and the project participants' *lectio divina* retreat was to present biblical principles and perspectives of the dynamic existence of the interplay of the spiritual practice of worship both in and outside of the corporate worship setting. The objective of the *lectio divina* retreat for the project participants was to promote the engagement of the Scriptures in a meditative way as a means of encouragement to continue the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship as indispensable measures to heighten and deepen God-consciousness.

The first two weeks of sermons and lessons that were geared toward awareness of God in creation (intimacy) and awareness of God in the incarnation investigated texts such as Genesis 1:26-31, Psalm 139:1-6;13-18, and John 1:1-18 (see Appendix C, pp. 114-122). Awareness of God in praxis via the spiritual discipline of solitude examined texts such as Lamentations 3:25-30 and Luke 10:38-42 (see Appendix C, pp.123-127). Awareness of God in praxis via the spiritual disciplines of meditation and prayer

explored texts such as Psalm 1 and Matthew 6:5-15 (see Appendix C, pp. 128-132).

Awareness of God in praxis via worship investigated texts such as Psalm 100, Acts 1:3-5, and Acts 2:1-4 (see Appendix C, pp. 133-137). The *lectio divina* retreat in nature, “God in Me, God Around Me,” examined Psalm 139:7-12 (see Appendix C, pp. 138-140). I preached all sermons and facilitated all lessons and the *lectio divina* retreat in nature associated with this project.

Project Goal

The principal outcome of this project is that the congregants discover and gain a working knowledge of the deepness of influence that awareness of God, the sensitivity to and discernment of God’s actively abiding presence within themselves, within their daily living practices, and within the world around them, has on the quality of their engagement and participation in the local assembly. While God’s divine attributes of immutability and impassibility do not lend themselves to change because of God’s “changeless perfection and divine constancy,” humankind being created in God’s image and according to God’s likeness necessitates human change, particularly upon salvation.⁶ In my mind, to be and to become the persons who God has fashioned and designed with the fulfillment of God’s divine intentions and purposes in mind demands that humankind is consistently cognizant of God. At the end of the six-week implementation of this project, data reflect that the project participants:

⁶ Donald K. McKim, *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 133.

1. Discovered and gained a working knowledge and greater understanding of what it means to be known by God and to know God in relationship as revealed in the Scriptures.
2. Established and maintained a continual, intimate closeness and connection with God that led to increased levels of incarnation of the Word of God, written and spoken.
3. Increased sensitivity to and the discernment of the presence of God in being, in knowing, and in doing irrespective of time and/or place.
4. Incorporated consistent practices of interior disciplines of meditation and prayer and the exterior discipline of solitude to influence the exterior discipline of worship that occurs both alone and assembled.⁷
5. Increased and enriched church attendance and participation.

Project Resources

The resources that gave credence and validity to my train of thought with respect to the importance of the acknowledgement and heightening of awareness of God within self, daily living practices, and within the world at-large both alone and while assembled within the local church were surprisingly a unique, eclectic mix. Reflected in the bibliography is a comprehensive list of the bodies of writing that I reviewed that have provided both the shape and scope of this project. However, there were four works in particular that I discovered that were powerfully significant concerning how awareness of God manifests itself in person and praxis both within and without the local assembly.

⁷ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 2018).

Practicing the Presence of God, a compilation of letters, conversations, and musings (translated into English) of Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, a seventeenth century monk, served as a core resource for how awareness of God is neither to be only understood nor only experienced within the confines of the corporate worship setting. Instead, Brother Lawrence asserts that it is being with God through constant conversation and intentional communion irrespective of context (i.e., work) that builds an intimacy with God that sustains a continual sense of God's presence and involvement in our lives.⁸ It is this deeper awareness of God that puts us in touch with our human limitations and weaknesses that evidences in a desire for God and a discovery of our need for God not only internally, but also externally at any given time, place, and in any circumstance.

Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships by Curt Thompson, MD provided insight with respect to the gravity of the difference between the concepts of “knowing” and “being known.” According to Thompson, being known finds its origin in human beings first being known by God before, during, and after the creative act. While “knowledge--often understood in terms of factual information that translates into a relational power gradient between persons--does not guarantee goodness or courage or love...ultimately, then, knowledge alone does not satisfy. What does satisfy is being known.”⁹ Being known is the process in which human beings (within a relationship with God) “are kneaded and molded, lanced and sutured, confronted and comforted, bringing

⁸ Brother Lawrence, *Practicing the Presence of God* (Portland: Unorthodox Press, 2018), 2-3.

⁹ Curt Thompson, MD, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices that can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 13.

God's new creation closer to its fullness in preparation for the return of the King."¹⁰ It is in this process that we not only meet with the benefits of being known by God, but we also gain insight concerning God's desire to be known by us, which Thompson contends is mutually beneficial. To not be aware of our need to be known by God ultimately results in us not being capable of "(knowing) our own hearts," which, in my mind, limits the maturation and subsequent incarnation of "the characteristics of God's kingdom in (our lives)" that the Scriptures avail themselves to teach us.¹¹

Hailed as an exploration of the Christian practices that enrich faith in practice, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* by Richard J. Foster afforded me the opportunity to investigate the specific interior disciplines of meditation and prayer and the exterior discipline of solitude as means by which awareness of God may be acknowledged and heightened in ways that influence participation in the exterior discipline of worship within and without the local body. Since "God is working, always working, to form us and conform us and transform us into the image of Christ...God invites us to participate in this process by means of interactive relationship."¹² Therefore, the more often we employ spiritual practices of meditation, prayer, solitude, and worship, the more often we willfully place ourselves before God for further connection, communion, and conversion.

In the same vein as Foster's work, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer offered me an in-depth consideration of the

¹⁰ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 13.

¹¹ Ibid., 14.

¹² Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, xv.

disciplines of meditation, prayer, solitude, and worship, predicated by the Scriptures as the Word of God, as preparation for what it means to actively be the body of Christ. Because Jesus Christ, “truly and bodily took on, out of pure grace, our being, our nature, ourselves...we belong to him because we are in him.”¹³ In other words, the quality of our fellowship with him as human beings that significantly and directly equips us for “eternal fellowship” finds its origin in an authentic fellowship with God through the Scriptures.¹⁴ In solitude, “silence is the simple stillness of the individual under the Word of God;” in meditation, we are alone to be with and to hear the Word of God to provide “clear directions as to the steps we must take;” prayer, then, is guided by “the Word of the Scriptures,” while worship reveals if our contact with God has been authentic.¹⁵

Human

Nine female congregants selected from the four adult generational groups of Silent, Baby Boomer, Xer, and Millennial comprised the project participants. All were in agreement with the goals and objectives of this project and were noted as being enthusiastic and eager contributors to the process of reaction, reflection, and evaluation. The project participants were required to attend Sunday morning corporate worship and a Sunday afternoon series of lessons for six weeks, inclusive of the *lectio divina* retreat in nature. The remainder of the adult Sunday morning corporate worship attendees served as the control group who engaged the sermon series and midweek lesson relative to this project; however, their attendance was not mandatory.

¹³ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* (New York: HarperOne, 1954), 24.

¹⁴ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 24.

¹⁵ Ibid., 79-81, 85.

My brother, Dr. Marino A. Bruce, Associate Dean for Research for the College of Medicine at the University of Houston, assisted me with this project's statistical data.

Physical

All four sermons and five Sunday afternoon instructional sessions took place onsite in the sanctuary at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville. The one midweek lesson taught associated with this project was conducted virtually via Zoom. Each participant was provided a journal to use for notetaking and to record reaction and reflection journal entries as assigned. The *lectio divina* retreat in nature that served as the sixth session was held at McFalls Landing in Anderson, South Carolina. This location provided project participants access to Broadway Lake that is surrounded by a thick grove of trees for shade conducive for individual and whole group activity. Each participant was required to bring their journals, a bible, a portable chair, water, and a hat.

Detailed Project Summary

On Sunday, March 13, in a meeting held immediately after the corporate worship experience, I gave a brief project overview to the congregation at-large. I explained that I had randomly selected ten congregants to serve as project participants while the remainder of them would serve as the control group. I further informed them that a six-week sermon series would be preached during Sunday morning corporate worship for all to hear but that only the ten project participants would be required to meet separately for two additional hours on Sunday afternoons for additional instruction and assignments. I asked the adult members of the congregation at-large for their voluntary assistance with

respect to their completion of the pre-project survey the following Sunday. Afterward, I met with ten, randomly selected project participants to discuss and to outline the procedures and expectations for the implementation of this ministry project. To ensure representation from each adult generation, the birthdates from the church's official membership roster were used to determine each participant's generational grouping. During this meeting, the recruitment letter that contained a brief overview of the project and commitment expectations and responsibilities was reviewed and explained (see Appendix A, p. 93). Secondly, the letter of consent that outlined this project's purpose and procedures, measures enacted to ensure confidentiality, and participant expectations and responsibilities over a six-week period was distributed and discussed (see Appendix A, pp. 94-96). Each participant signed the letter of invitation to confirm their commitment to participate and the letter of consent in agreement with the terms as outlined. Prior to my collection of each signature page, each participant was asked to choose a three-digit identification number to conceal their identities and to record it in the upper right hand corner of their individual copies of their recruitment letters. To ensure confidentiality, I instructed each participant to submit their signed recruitment and consent letters to me individually on the platform at the front of the sanctuary.

On Sunday, March 20, I preached a sermon entitled "Intimacy: You Are Mine" during the morning corporate worship experience (see Appendix C, pp. 114-115). The focal text for the sermon was Genesis 1:26-31 (NRSV). This text served as an introduction to awareness of God present in the creative act by way of intimacy, an intentional closeness and connection between God and humankind that is illustrative of

the interplay of knowing and being known. Awareness of God was defined as human sensitivity to God that supports the ability to discern God's presence within self and within the world at-large that influences the belief system that drives human activity. It was shared that in the creative act, humankind being created in the image and likeness of God was humankind's exposure to God as "creator" and humans as "created," not merely to do, but more importantly to be. The intimacy of the creative act was presented as the springboard to awareness of God in that the more humankind accepts and actively participates in the closeness and connection that God shared/shares with humankind before, during, and after the creative act (being known), the more they are enabled to know God.

Upon the morning corporate worship's conclusion, the control group and the project participants completed the pre-project survey in the sanctuary. The control group respondents were asked to select silently a three-digit number as an identity code to place in the top right-hand corner of the first page of the pre-survey while the project participants were asked to record their identity codes from the previous week. Each respondent was required to submit individually their completed surveys to me on the platform at the front of the sanctuary so that the identity codes for members of the control group could be recorded. As respondents submitted their completed pre-project surveys, I wrote "yes" above their identity codes to signify their participation. Once all respondents completed the pre-project survey, I secured them in my office at the church until I left for the day.

Later, at 4:00 pm, the project participants and I reassembled in the sanctuary for lesson one, “Awareness of God in Creation: Intimacy” (See Appendix C, pp. 116-117). As the project participants entered the sanctuary, I greeted each one individually and gave them a journal to use for the project. Once everyone settled, I began the session with expressions of welcome and appreciation to acknowledge their willingness and sacrifice. Participants were then instructed to remove the “What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Have Learned” (KWL) teaching methodology chart from the folder inside their journals (see Appendix B, p.105). I introduced and explained the use of the KWL chart as a means for pre-assessment and evaluation for each instructional session. As a guide to complete the pre-assessment columns, “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know” for the first time, I asked the participants to write down what they knew about intimacy and to record any pertinent questions about concepts and ideas presented in order to gain a clearer understanding of them. The purpose of this was to gauge the participants’ understanding of intimacy as the interplay of “being known and knowing” as it relates to the act of creation, especially after hearing the sermon that was preached earlier in the day. As a result, some of the participants offered the following responses to convey their initial thoughts about intimacy:

1. Intimacy is a personal relationship that involves connection and honesty.
2. Intimacy is my relationship with God. It is me exposing all of my passions, deep secrets, and desires with the only one who I know understands me. Before, I thought it was just getting to know someone in the sexual act.
3. Intimacy is God knowing me and me knowing God in a closeness that is real and rare.
4. Intimacy is closeness in proximity with God that involves the heart and soul.

Then some of the participants voluntarily shared what they would like to know further about intimacy:

1. Are there levels of intimacy with God? If so, how do I go deeper?
2. How can intimacy with God be maintained when life challenges me?
3. Can intimacy with God be practiced?
4. How do I know when intimacy is real?

These insightful statements and questions served as an appropriate segue into the lecture that actually contained information to expand the participants' prior knowledge and to address the questions posed.

Humankind as image bearers and being created in God's likeness as a limitation for us to be like God and not God were reviewed. From there it was explained that intimacy, closeness and connection with God, aids with understanding of what being an image bearer means. It was noted that the notion of bearing a resemblance of God as an image bearer was challenging for some as they seem to struggle with how this could be, especially when sin sometimes prevailed in their lives. With this in mind, it was necessary to mention that remarkable growth and maturity in the things of God happen when intimacy with God is intentionally sought, when our communication with God and listening for God increase. This, in turn, shores up God-consciousness and mindfulness, which subsequently feeds our desire to be with God in order to be, to know, and to do what pleases God. To build upon this point, I presented a comparison and contrast of intimacy with people versus intimacy with God which led to the sharing of Curt Thompson's definition of knowing and being known. This led to another comparison and

contrast being made, this time between being known by people as opposed to being known by God. As a result, a spirited discussion ensued in which the following comments were made:

1. God is always there; he lets us know by giving us a special feeling.
2. When my desire to be loved by people is unfulfilled, I know now that God loves me.
3. When I am known, I'm recognized for who I am and who I am striving to be.

As a concluding activity, participants were asked to listen with their eyes closed to an oral reading of Psalm 139:13-18. I purposely did not preface the reading with the direct Scripture reference in an effort to prevent excessive spiritualization of their responses to the questions that followed. The purpose of this activity was for them to determine and be able to communicate how the psalmist's experience of being fully known by God touched their lives at present. After reading the passages aloud twice, the participants were asked to reveal what they heard:

1. God knows us in ways that no one else can.
2. Because God took his time to make me, I want to know more about me.
3. God shows us special care and concern.

Next, the participants were asked to share how hearing these passages made them feel:

1. I feel special because God sees me fully and completely.
2. The details about me and my life are intricate.
3. It is beautiful to know that God knows me in this way.

Once I revealed the Scripture reference, one participant remarked that she did not know that something of this nature existed in the Bible. After admitting that she rarely read passages from Psalms because they were lengthy and difficult to understand, she said that these passages helped her to understand the importance of being known by God.

Before I asked the participants to complete “What I Have Learned” on their KWL charts as an evaluation of the session, I concluded the lesson with how the depth of our intimacy God influences our awareness of God in us and around us.

On Sunday, March 27, “Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption” was the title of the sermon I preached during morning corporate worship. The focal text was the Prologue of the Gospel of John, 1:1-18 (see Appendix C, pp.118-120). In this sermon, the two-fold definition of incarnation was presented: Jesus Christ as fully divine and fully human is the embodiment of God in human flesh while incarnation for human beings is the embodiment of our belief in God concretely expressed in our being, knowing, and doing. The Prologue of John establishes the pre-existence of the Word, *logos*, prior to creation and when creation came into being. I shared that as the eternal Word, it is in Jesus Christ that God makes himself known (revelation), and it is through Jesus Christ’s death and imminent return that God works to deliver and reclaim his people (redemption). To make the connection between intimacy and incarnation as important essentials of awareness of God, I made sure to emphasize the importance of “know” in John’s Gospel. Because the first half of John (1:19-12:50) is coined as the Book of Signs, to “know,” as presented in verse 10, asserts that it is what humanity is able to “see” that incites their belief. Therefore, where there is a lack of intimacy with God, awareness

of God is virtually absent, so Jesus Christ's "own" could not "see" that he is God in human flesh. Since Jesus Christ is the full embodiment of God in human flesh and the full expression of God, he is the agency through whom those who "receive him and believe in his name" become children of God. To become children of God warrants incarnation or embodiment of our belief made manifest in our being, knowing, and doing. In short, I shared with the congregation that becoming a child of God is the basis of awareness of God being constant and persistent in our lives in that our sensitivity to and discernment of God's abiding Presence in us gives credence to God being with us.

At 4:00 pm, the project participants and I regathered in the sanctuary for session two, "Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption" (see Appendix C, pp.121-122). Before handing out copies of a new KWL chart for each participant to complete (see Appendix B, p.106), one participant commented that this day's sermon was "heavy" and expressed her desire to gain more clarity of the meaning of incarnation. Because I anticipated the headiness of incarnation as a subject matter for them, I made sure to engage them immediately in a pair activity called a brain dump, which is a means to explore various thoughts and feelings about a familiar or unfamiliar idea or subject matter without judgment. After the participants completed the "I Know" and "I Want to Know" columns on their charts, the participants were oriented into pairs. Participants were asked to close their eyes as I conducted an oral reading of Psalm 139:1-6. After hearing the passages twice, they were required to make a list of words and/or phrases they heard that were the most impactful (they were allowed to use their bibles at this point) and to record any thoughts and feelings about what these words and/or phrases revealed to them about

God and themselves. This activity was an appropriate way to build a bridge between the concept of intimacy and the concept of incarnation that involves revelation, God's self-disclosure that stimulates and heightens awareness of God. After fifteen minutes expired, each pair made a brief report. Some of the responses were the following:

1. God knows everything about me. There are no secrets. In his presence, I am completely naked. This is comforting yet intimidating.
2. God keeps his eyes on me despite the billions of people he has created.
3. Despite me thinking that I am not enough, God's presence remains.
4. The more we are known by God, the less we will depend on others to know us.

Using the voices of Irenaeus, Martin Luther, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer as resources, I began to further expound upon incarnation, its connection to intimacy, and how both promote a heightening of awareness of God that has the potential to be ever-present. While the majority of the participants were not familiar with these influencers of church history and the practice of Christianity as a whole, the presentation of them apparently shed invaluable light on their understanding of incarnation, especially Bonhoeffer's contention that God in Jesus Christ became what he had not been before (human) to make God known to us in order to redeem us. In light of this, participants made the following responses:

1. Jesus understood his assignment so that we could understand ours as his people.
2. God keeps us on his mind at all times, so God wants to be on our minds at all times, too.
3. A participant stated that this lesson has helped her to now set her expectations of people realistically.

4. A participant stated that she feels loved because she sees Jesus Christ's full embodiment of the person of God as something that he did with her in mind.

Before the participants completed their evaluation of this session with a summary of what they have learned, I gave sufficient time for us to discuss the questions that they recorded on their charts. Surprisingly, it was a consensus that the lesson as presented appropriately addressed the questions that they had.

On Sunday, April 3, I preached a sermon entitled "Don't Waste His Presence," the narrative in Luke 10:38-42 that recounts Jesus Christ's visit to the home of Martha and Mary (see Appendix C, pp. 123-124). This sermon functioned as a means to further illustrate the interconnectivity of intimacy and incarnation that supports the exterior discipline of solitude, one of the four spiritual disciplines chosen for this project to practice awareness of God. It was emphasized that doing for God (incarnation) begins with being with God (intimacy) which involves stillness before God to listen to him (solitude). Despite women being marginalized in society, Mary's posture at Jesus' feet (a posture that is usually taken by a male) to listen to him made her an exemplar for discipleship, both a hearer and doer of the word. I presented Mary's behavior as a foil of Martha's, whose decision to meet the sociocultural expectation of women in the household to be responsible for providing hospitality to guests caused her to merely welcome Jesus into her home while Mary welcomes Jesus into her heart. Mary takes advantage of God's presence to hear what she does not know while Martha wastes his presence by her desire to do what she already knows. Albeit true that Martha is right to perform such acts, the presence of Jesus Christ in her home was to serve as an impetus for her to prioritize the hearing and subsequent doing of the word of God.

Upon the participants' reassembly in the sanctuary at 4:00 pm, ten minutes were given to complete the pre-assessment columns of "I Know" and "What I Want to Know" regarding the spiritual practice of solitude (see Appendix B, p.107). To focus the lesson, the participants participated in an original, introductory activity, "Gathered Silence" (Appendix C, pp. 125-127). Participants were instructed to practice silence and stillness in community for ten minutes and to note the thoughts that came to them during this time. While engaged in this activity, it was observed that participants either had their eyes closed or had set their eyes on a particular focal point (the ceiling, floor, etc.). After the time expired, I asked for volunteers to share how being in silence in the company of others made them feel. Responses included vulnerable, lonely, focused, peaceful, and calm. Per my request, some of the participants openly shared the thoughts that occurred while they were still and silent:

1. A participant stated that during this time it was revealed that she is Martha out of habit (a reference to the day's sermon).
2. A participant shared that she realized that God desired for her to become more aware of him.
3. A participant said that quiet often gave her a feeling of loneliness, but now she knows God is there whether she feels him or not.
4. A participant admitted that until this session that she never practiced being because the emphasis has always been on doing.

Finally, the participants shared observations of their behavior while in gathered silence.

Some responses were that wondering what everyone else was thinking became a distraction, zoning out, and closing the eyes caused the mind to settle. As a segue into the lecture, I asked the participants if this activity made it possible to be with other people

and still sense God's presence within them and around them, and they consensually agreed. Building on this realization, I made the point that this can happen anywhere and at any time, even on a Sunday morning in the corporate worship setting.

Using Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* as a resource, the lecture that ensued explored the attributes and benefits of the spiritual practice of solitude as well as some truths about silence. As we reviewed each one, I was careful to allow opportunities for questions and discussion. At certain points, participants made connections between the sermon, their response/reactions to the gathered silence activity, the attributes and benefits of solitude, and some truths about silence. There was one particular truth about silence being the revealer of a possible dependence on the presence of people instead of a dependence on God within us and around us that provided an opportunity for me to read an excerpt from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together: A Classic Exploration of Christian Community* concerning solitude and silence. To this end, the participants were exposed to two warnings Bonhoeffer gave regarding those who cannot be alone versus those who prefer it: fellowship with others is not the antidote for loneliness while disdaining fellowship with others is a rejection of the divine call to be in community.¹⁶ At any rate, purposeful solitude is a practice that is centered on the awareness of being with God and God being with us in order to authentically be present in God's presence.

¹⁶ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 76-77.

We then explored Lamentations 3:25-30 as a biblical example of the practice of solitude during what St. John of the Cross coined as “the dark night of the soul,” the divinely appointed time of darkness that serves to bring us into a deeper trust and faith in God. I provided historical and literary contextual data to connect the participants to setting of the text, and from this, they were amazed to know that the poems of the book of Lamentations that served as appeals to God to end the suffering associated with the exile went unanswered by God. After this, I provided New Testament scriptural examples of Jesus practicing solitude (Mark 1:35, Mark 6:31, and Matt 26:36-46 respectively).

To conclude the lesson, I provided a mixture of examples (Foster’s and my own) of when solitude can be practiced that were followed by the question, “Where is your sanctuary inside and outside of your home?” Responses included the bedroom, the restroom (this was a popular response for those with young children and grandchildren), in the car, and in nature, such as in a nearby park. The homework assignment relative to the practice of solitude was presented (see Appendix B, p.110). After which, they were given an opportunity to ask the questions that they recorded on their KWL charts and to complete “What I Have Learned” on their KWL charts as a post-session evaluation.

On Wednesday, April 6 (due to my absence from the Sunday morning corporate worship experience April 10), I taught a midweek lesson via Zoom to the congregation at-large on the spiritual practice of meditation that used Psalm 1 as a focal text (see Appendix C, pp.128-129). Using the Foster and Bonhoeffer texts *Celebration of Discipline* and *Life Together* as resources in conjunction with wisdom extracted from

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection's *Practicing the Presence of God*, meditation was defined as a spiritual practice that is "the ability to hear God's voice and obey his word." I shared that meditation involves a willful choice to be in his presence in order to surrender our spirits and our thoughts, to be under his Word, and to listen to and for God for guidance and direction. As this discipline is practiced consistently, encounters and engagement with God become more frequent and direct that eventuate in transformation and change. I emphasized that this practice prepares our hearts to be a sanctuary for God in which intimacy and incarnation are fostered to promote significant internal and external awareness of God. I then presented a detailed analysis of Psalm 1 in which I highlighted certain aspects of Psalm 1:2, "delight in the law of the Lord," and meditation on the law "day and night," as pivotal for the movement of entire psalm. Those who are "happy" ("blessed") are those who take delight in God's "law" ("teaching") that reveals God's plans, thoughts, and intentions for those who take delight in it and depend on it as a life-giving and life-guiding source. Devotion to the word of God as the life-giving, life-guiding activity of the presence of God is what qualifies devotees to be "planted" ("rooted") in places that supply what it takes to live blessed regardless of circumstance (1:3).

On the afternoon of Sunday, April 10, the nine project participants and I gathered in the sanctuary for session four, "Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation and Prayer" (see Appendix C, pp. 130-132). After completing the pre-assessment columns of "What I Know" and "What I Want to Know" on their KWL charts (see Appendix B, p. 108), time was given to participants to share their reactions to and reflections from the homework

assignment for session three that involved a six-day practice of solitude (see Appendix B, p.110). The six participants who completed the assignment (three were absent due to emergencies; one chose not to complete the project as initially agreed) shared responses that were earnest and introspective:

1. A participant shared that at first, the time alone was intimidating because it reminded her of childhood instances where she was often alone. As she continued to practice solitude for the rest of week, she learned the difference between being alone and being lonely because she realized that God was with her.
2. A participant stated that she was able to discern between the times when she initiated solitude and when God initiated it. When she initiated solitude, she focused more on what was happening in her own heart. When God initiated solitude, she became more aware of what God had to say to her about her.
3. A participant said that the practice of solitude helped her to realize that God loves her unconditionally.
4. A participant shared that the practice of solitude caused her to reflect about what stillness really means. The more she practiced it, the more it was revealed that stillness in God's presence must be intentional.

The interior disciplines of meditation and prayer were incorporated into one lesson with one hour of instruction dedicated to each. To introduce meditation, the participants participated in a "Palms Down, Palms Up" meditation exercise practiced in the Middle Ages. They were required to sit in silence with their eyes closed. As thoughts arose of feelings, situations, etc. that warranted release, they turned their palms downward and quietly said, "Release" as they placed them into the hands of the Lord. When they were ready to receive from the Lord, they turned their palms upward.

The lesson then moved to a brief review of Foster's definition of meditation and its attributes as an interior discipline and Psalm 1 from the previous Wednesday's virtual

midweek lesson. A participant commented that after Wednesday evening's lesson she incorporated what she learned into her practice of solitude for the remainder of the week.

As a transition from meditation to instruction concerning the interior discipline of prayer, I asked participants to share their "What I Know" responses from the KWL charts that they began at the beginning of the session. Responses were that prayer is communication with God that is to be continuous and not conditional; a secret place between humans and God; a time for meaningful conversation with God; and a time to be in God's presence to share concerns and to receive direction. Using the Foster text as a reference, the lesson that ensued involved nine aspects of prayer as a spiritual discipline that begins with listening. I further expounded on the aspect of listening as the beginning of prayer with respect to how it relates to the exterior discipline of solitude and the interior discipline of meditation: intentionally being in God's presence in silence, in stillness, and under God's word allows God to fill our minds with his thoughts to direct our prayers.

We then explored the Gospel of Matthew's version of "The Lord's Prayer" in Matthew 6:5-15. Using a line by line exegesis of the prayer, it was specifically noted that "the fulfillment of God's purpose" in verses 9-10 preceded "the satisfaction of human needs" in verses 11-13. I shared that when it comes to prayer, we often put our needs first and may not ever ask for God's purpose to be fulfilled, much less our part in fulfilling it. It was determined through further discussion that the fulfillment of God's purpose through us begins with our consistent employment of the disciplines of solitude and meditation that stress being with God in stillness in order to hear and obey.

To conclude the lesson, participants employed the meditation practice, “Palms Down, Palms Up,” again, but this time prayer was added. Afterward, the homework assignment to practice the disciplines meditation and prayer for six days was given (see Appendix B, p.110) and the final column of the KWL chart, “What I Have Learned,” was completed to evaluate the lesson.

On Resurrection Sunday, April 17, I shared a message during the Sunday morning corporate worship experience entitled “The Meantime Matters” (see Appendix C, pp. 133-134). Acts 1:3-5 served as the focal text. This sermon highlighted the importance of the expectation and preparation of the disciples while *gathered* to await the arrival of the promised Holy Spirit who is sent to touch the human spirit as means of empowerment and equipment to further God’s mission *scattered*. As they obediently remain gathered in Jerusalem after Jesus’ ascension with a mandate to await “the promise of the Father,” there is a continual mediation of God’s word to which Foster’s definition of the spiritual practice of worship as the human response to God’s divine initiative when Spirit touches spirit aligns.¹⁷ In short, to receive “the promise of the Father” the specific conditions communicated by God demanded a unified connection with each other as they maintained a continual communion with God upon the ascension of Jesus Christ.

Immediately after the morning corporate worship experience concluded, the participants and I assembled in the sanctuary for lesson five, “Awareness of God in Praxis: Worship.” Before the participants completed “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know” as a pre-assessment (see Appendix B, p.109), volunteers shared their reactions

¹⁷ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 158-159.

to and reflections of the previous week's assignment to practice mediation and prayer

(see Appendix B, p.110):

1. A participant shared that she learned that prayer is not always her talking to God but listening to God instead. Through this, it was revealed to her that God's love for her is not transactional.
2. A participant shared that her practice of meditation and prayer caused her prayers to deepen and to become more personal.
3. A participant stated that she continued to practice "Palms Down, Palms Up" in addition to prayer.
4. A participant stated that "The Lord's Prayer" was a staple for her. Whenever she felt herself becoming distracted in prayer, the Spirit prompted her to pray its words to refocus her attention.

The lecture on worship (see Appendix C, pp.138-40) began with an oral reading of "The Day's Beginning," a passage in the Bonhoeffer text, *Life Together*, that outlines the contrast of Old and New Testament perspectives of the day's beginning and its symbolism (for the Old Testament, it is a time of expectation; for the New Testament, it is a time for fulfillment). I then posed the question, "With this heard, is there ever a time when worship doesn't happen?" The consensus was that worship can happen anywhere and at any time whether we are with others or not. Using the Foster text as a resource, I provided the participants with the definition and aspects of worship as a spiritual discipline. Brother Lawrence's *Practicing the Presence of God* exposed the participants to the attributes of "spiritual living" as private worship that promotes inward worship that is performed outwardly, which begins with our response to God's presence daily.

The participants engaged in a group activity that was geared toward corporate worship as a "holy expectancy." In groups of three, they were required to read the focal

text of the day's sermon, Acts 1:3-5, and Acts 2:1-4, and then answer the following questions as a group:

1. How were the disciples prepared to receive the promise of the Father?
2. What were the things that needed to be in place for the promise to be received?

The purpose of this activity was to accentuate the importance of listening and obeying the voice of God alone as preparation for gathering in unity and obedience with expectancy.

A homework assignment was made to "practice the presence of God daily" in ways that made God's presence more tangible and to assess whether or not these times of intentional worship impact their engagement and participation in corporate worship (see Appendix B, p.110). Participants were then reminded of the time and place for the *lectio divina* retreat in nature to occur the following Saturday before they completed "I Have Learned" to evaluate the session.

On Saturday, April 23, from 10:00 am until 1:30 pm, "God in Me, God in the World Around Me," a *lectio divina* retreat in nature, was held at McFalls Landing in Anderson, South Carolina (see Appendix C, pp. 138-140). This retreat served as the sixth and final session for this project. As a culminating activity designed to integrate and to encourage the continuation of the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship to further enrich God-consciousness, participants were introduced to and allowed to practice *lectio divina* as a meditative way to read and to engage Scripture.

This retreat promoted the intentional setting aside of time to be with God in nature as a means to practice mindfulness of God's presence within them and within the world around them. Participants were asked to completely silence all electronic devices and to

commit to only using them to locate and to read selected Scripture passages if they did not bring a Bible.

After prayer, a brief lecture and group practice of *lectio divina* ensued as a supportive method of the practice of the disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship. I explained the origin and definition of *lectio divina* as a meditative way of reading the Scripture that leads to prayer. I shared the process of listening for God as select Scripture passages are read either silently or aloud, intended to enable them to do two things:

1. Hear what the scripture is saying about her life right now.
2. Determine what the scripture is asking her to do.

Before the participants were given time to employ *lectio divina* on their own, we practiced it as a group using Psalm 139:7-12 as the selected Scripture:

Step 1: I read the text twice aloud.

Step 2: Without elaboration, I asked the participants to jot down the key words that they heard in the text.

Step 3: I read the text again.

Step 4: I then asked, "How is this scripture touching your life right now?" They recorded their responses in their journals

Step 5: I read the text for a final time.

Step 6: I then asked, "What is this scripture asking you to do?" They recorded in their journals.

Step 7: They were asked to pray silently.

After a brief group share of their responses, the participants were given copies of the *lectio divina* procedure for reference. They dispersed in silence and settled alone either by the lake, in the woods, or remained in the area where whole group instruction was held. The assignment was given to the participants to practice *lectio divina* and the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship for 30 to 40 minutes. Once

the participants reassembled, each participant was required to share her experience employing *lectio divina* and the spiritual practices. Their responses were to include their selected Scripture passage(s) and revelations, occurrences, etc. that arose while engaging God's word in nature. Originally, this retreat was set to only last two hours, but by the time each participant shared her experience of practicing *lectio divina* and the four spiritual disciplines in nature, an additional hour and a half had passed. The participants and I then walked together a few feet to the lake to render individual, silent prayers to God. After our silent prayers ended, we cast sticks into the lake in concert.

Upon the conclusion of the retreat activity, the participants completed an evaluation for the retreat (see Appendix B, p.111) and a post-project facilitator's evaluation (see Appendix B, p.112).

On April 24, the control group and the project participants completed the post-project survey in the sanctuary after the morning corporate worship experience (see Appendix B, pp. 98-104). The control group and the project participants submitted their surveys individually to me on the platform at the front of the sanctuary.

Project Calendar

1. March 10, 2022 Received Project Proposal Approval
2. March 13, 2022 Select, Welcome, and Administer Project Overview to Project Participants
3. March 20, 2022 Week 1: Administer Pre-Project Survey
"Awareness of God in Creation: Intimacy"
Genesis 1:26-31; Psalm 139:13-18

4. March 27, 2022 Week 2: “Awareness of God in the Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption”
Psalm 139:1-6; John 1:1-18
5. April 3, 2022 Week 3: Awareness of God in Praxis: Solitude
Lamentations 3:25-30; Luke 10:38-42
6. April 6, 2022 Virtual Midweek Lesson: Meditation
Psalm 1
7. April 10, 2022 Week 4: Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation and Prayer
Psalm 1; Matthew 6:5-15
8. April 17, 2022 Week 5: Awareness of God in Praxis: Worship
Psalm 100; Acts 1:3-5; Acts 2:1-4
9. April 23, 2022 Week 6: *Lectio Divina* Retreat: “God in Me, God Around Me” Psalm 139:7-12
10. April 24, 2022 Administered Post-Project Survey
11. May 31, 2022 Submitted Report and Analysis
12. June 28, 2022 Oral Defense
13. August 2022 Completion of Doctor of Ministry/Graduation

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

During the sixth year of the pastorate and Freedom Alive's (nee Freedom Baptist's) existence, I began to experience the stir of a desire for something new. By this point, I was divorced and bi-vocational, serving concurrently as an assistant principal at one of the middle schools in Greenville County. Surprisingly, the appropriate response to the soulful stir within was to enroll in the Master of Divinity program at Gardner-Webb University. It was during my tenure as a student in one of the required courses in the curriculum for the Pastoral Care and Counseling concentration that my consideration of what the intimacy of the Divine-human relationship meant was violently challenged. The outgrowth of intimacy within a relationship with God is not evidenced in works alone (as often emphasized in the ministry of the local church), but more so in our being from which these works originate. In other words, intimacy with God is more about who we are and who God desires for us to be in the process of becoming as our lives bear fruit. It is this introduction to intimacy with God as the dynamic interplay of being known by God and knowing God that bridged the gap between knowledge of the Scriptures and the incarnation or embodiment of them, which subsequently makes the Divine-human relationship palpable in the world at-large. This led me on a path of deep, personal reflection about the quality of my relationship with God beyond the way I had been called to serve that continues at present. In light of this, it is noted that as I continue to change, my life's movement evolves in kind, which consistently revolutionizes my study and sharing of the Scriptures. Despite our corporate worship experiences being exuberant

and lively, the disruption of COVID-19 to the regularity of such has revealed an apparent disconnect between what happens in the sanctuary in community and its prevalence in the personal, inner sanctuary of the hearts of congregants absent of it. To this end, alongside Genesis 1:26-31 and the Prologue of the Gospel of John (1:1-18) to investigate awareness of God in light of creation and the Incarnation, it is important to consult certain voices from the Patristic, Reformation, and Contemporary periods in Christian history.

Awareness of God-Creation

Genesis 1:26-31 is the portion within the first of two accounts of creation (the second being the Yahwist account in Genesis 2:4-25) that specifically addresses the creation of humankind and our contributive roles and responsibilities as they relate to the created order. It is within these passages of the sacred text that we are able to discover a firm sense of God's divine purpose for humankind that reflects evidence of God's power sharing with us as his caretaking co-creators in a concerted effort to promote the high potentiality of the things that God has made.¹⁸ Derived from the account of the Priestly writer, the creation of animals and human beings occurs on the sixth and final day of the divine, creative process that God enacts "to establish cosmic order."¹⁹ Although animals and humans share the same day of origin, only humankind is created in God's image and is granted dominion as a likelihood that "the divine image is meant to convey to humans a particular role in the world rather than a particular essence or nature."²⁰ However, it this

¹⁸ Terence E. Fretheim, "Image of God," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 3:20.

¹⁹ Theodore Hiebert, "Creation," in *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), 1:785.

²⁰ Hiebert, "Creation," 783.

very notion that appears to be debatable among scholars as to whether or not human beings as image bearers are to be considered as God's agents within the world. For Theodore Hiebert, the divine image as given to human beings qualifies them to be such in that "elsewhere in the ancient Near East, this expression identifies the bearer, often the king, as God's representative in the world. Taken this way, the divine image bestows on humans a vocation" which authorizes them to be "representatives in the world of creation."²¹ Terence E. Fretheim, on the other hand, presents a dissenting view. He asserts that the image of God as presented in Genesis 1 "is best understood in terms of creativity and relationality" that are "the most fundamental descriptors of those created in the image of God."²² In other words, being created in the image of God both "invites" and designates humankind as co-participants in the act of creation through divine "initiative," which empowers them to exercise their divinely given capacity to do so. Additionally, God uses this co-share of power as a way to convey his fidelity "to this way of relating to them" to which God will remain faithful.²³

Although Gordon Wenham seems to take into consideration both Hiebert's and Fretheim's perspectives of the meaning and significance of humankind being created in the image of God, he asserts that while both positions contain elements of truth, neither of the two (along with many others) actually "pinpoint what the image is in itself," which, in his opinion, remains elusive. Although it is true that "both God and man see, hear, [and] speak" and bear other commonalities such as rest on the seventh day, "these

²¹ Hiebert, "Creation," 785.

²² Fretheim, "Image of God," 20.

²³ Ibid., 20.

continuities between God and man do not exhaust the notion of the divine image (but could) suggest areas of similarity that perhaps the biblical writers were referring to when they used this term.”²⁴ At any rate, I am of the opinion that a clear, precise definition of the image neither adds to nor takes away from the reality that as human beings, we are God’s creatures who have not only been tasked with carrying creation forward, but who are also equally charged to remain in close intimate fellowship with God to incarnate his characteristics and attributes as we do. In other words, it is the creation narrative of humankind in Genesis 1:26-31 that exposes us to the “two main subjects of Holy Scripture, God the creator and (humankind) his creature, and sets the scene for the long tale of their relationship,” be it through the human embodiment of God’s nature, action as God’s responsible representative, or both.²⁵

With the creation of “humankind,” *adam*, serving as the final, originative act of God on the sixth day, “the narrative slows down even more to emphasize his (and her) significance.”²⁶ In the verses that precede this passage, God speaks the divine word to incite creativity; however, it is not until God speaks his desire concerning the creation of human beings in inclusive language (using terms such as “us” and “our”) that we witness an illustration of God’s self in community with other “divine beings who compose God’s heavenly court.”²⁷ In other words, it is apparent that God is not the sole occupant of

²⁴ Gordon J. Wenham, “Genesis 1-15” in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 27.

²⁷ David M. Carr, “Genesis,” *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 12.

heaven and “that the creation of humankind results from a dialogical act-an inner divine communication-rather than a monological one.”²⁸

With the terms “image” and “likeness” functioning as stimuli for much scholarly discussion and debate through the years, “image” is posited to refer to “something cut out,” a description of “an exact resemblance.”²⁹ “Likeness,” on the other hand, is to limit the full assumption of the image as identity to confirm that while we as human beings are *like* God as a reflection of his divine nature, we are *not* God.³⁰ Moreover, as humankind is created to “mirror God in the world,” to function as God’s vice-regents in relationship to animals, birds, sea creatures, and “every creeping thing” upon the earth, we are “an extension of God’s own dominion.”³¹ In this sense, “dominion” is not a particular liberty that has been granted to us to do as we desire with nature for our own advantage; instead, our onus as co-creators is to assist “every aspect of nature to attain its highest goal,” meaning we are tasked to unite with God “in the awesome task of continuing the work of creation.”³²

In 1:27, there is a notable shift that occurs that portrays God acting singularly in his creation of human beings that is reminiscent of the previous days of creation. Although God is “engaged in a relationship of mutuality within the divine realm,”³³ God creates humankind in his image alone, which “emphasize(s) the divine image in man

²⁸ Terence E. Fretheim, “Genesis,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 1:345.

²⁹ Clyde T. Francisco, “Genesis,” in *The Broadman Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1969), 1:125.

³⁰ Francisco, “Genesis,” 125.

³¹ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 345.

³² Francisco, “Genesis,” 125.

³³ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 345.

(and) specifies that women also bear the divine image.”³⁴ With the clear distinction between human beings as “male” and “female” present in the text, it indicates that “human beings became whole psychosocial organisms, not merely souls trapped inside physical bodies...created specially to be in unique relationship with their creator,” and, I would argue, with each other.³⁵ Humans designated as sexually differentiated beings in this passage previews “the blessing of fertility” to come in verse 28 that is partly concerned with the act of procreation.³⁶

Post-creation of human beings as male and female, God “blesses” them. This is a conveyance of divine “power, strength, and potentiality” as a constitution of “the integral part of the power-sharing image.” This is especially needful with respect to the specifics contained in the directives that follow that precisely address humankind’s relationship to the earth.³⁷ Emphasizing the relationship between God and human beings, God speaks his intentions for them as co-creators in that they are commanded to “be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth.” That is, procreation, the act of reproducing or begetting offspring, is a fulfillment of God’s desire for “his people to be fruitful,”³⁸ to populate the earth that is illustrative of “divine creative capabilities.”³⁹ Additionally, the divine objectives of humankind to “subdue” the earth, which specifically refers to the “cultivation” of it, and to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth,” promote God’s

³⁴ Wenham, “Genesis 1-15,” 33.

³⁵ Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 35.

³⁶ Wenham, “Genesis 1-15,” 33.

³⁷ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 346.

³⁸ Wenham, “Genesis 1-15,” 33.

³⁹ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 346.

establishment of a “power-sharing relationship with human beings” in that “God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power.”⁴⁰ By and large, this “dominion” is not to be understood as license to pillage, abuse, or to exploit but rather to rule nature “as God’s representative, treating them in the same way as God who created them.”⁴¹ In essence, as God’s image bearers, God’s nature is to be reflected within them as demonstrated by their caretaking and nurturing of that which they have been given charge to exemplify “intra-creational development.”⁴²

As a provider of vegetation as food to both human beings and animals, “God as giver” is intimately involved with his creation by supplying what is necessary to sustain life.⁴³ Finally, upon God’s divine assessment of “everything that he had made,” referring to the entire work of creation, it is lauded as “indeed, it was very good” to accent “the perfection of the final work.”⁴⁴ The use of “very good” instead of the prior use of “good” alludes to “the harmony and the perfection of the completed heavens and earth” that more accurately denotes a more appropriate expression of the character of God as their creator than each component is able to do singularly.⁴⁵

The first creation narrative ends on a high and hopeful note as God surveys his complete, perfect created order. However, as readers of Genesis, we soon discover that the “very good” of verse 31 eventually becomes compromised by the fallenness of the man and the woman in Eden which ultimately sets the course of both corruption and

⁴⁰ Fretheim, “Genesis,” 346.

⁴¹ Wenham, “Genesis 1-15,” 33.

⁴² Fretheim, “Genesis,” 346.

⁴³ Ibid., 346.

⁴⁴ Wenham, “Genesis 1-15,” 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

disruption in humankind's relationship with God, with each other, and with the environment.⁴⁶ From this point throughout biblical history and as evidenced in the culture in which we currently live, these said corruptions and disruptions are furiously frequent with consequences that run the gamut of war, violence, exile, and death. As saddening as these truths are, human beings as God's image bearers and co-creators are still tasked with God-conferred duties and responsibilities ascribed at the onset of creation, yet the execution of such has become complicated because of our lifelong struggle with sin. As such, it is "the Incarnation, God becoming human and living among humanity, (that) provides the way to redemption since humans are created in the image of the Son who becomes incarnate as Jesus Christ."⁴⁷

Awareness of God-Incarnation

Penned by an unknown evangelist, George R. Beasley-Murray contends that the Gospel of John's appearance among the others is "in a manner reminiscent of the appearance of Melchizedek to Abraham: 'without father, without mother, without genealogy'" (Heb 7:3, NRSV).⁴⁸ In other words, while this gospel bears the name "John" which has led many to speculate and to offer suggestions concerning who he may be (i.e. the traditional association with John, son of Zebedee), the identity of its author is elusive. Whatever the case, it is apparent that like the authors of the Synoptics, the Johannine

⁴⁶ Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom*, 41.

⁴⁷ Gretchen Marie Freese, "The Living Word in Daily Life: N.F.S. Grundtvig's Eucharistic Theology and Hymnody as Influenced by Irenaeus and Luther" (PhD diss., Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, 2018), 65, accessed November 3, 2021, <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/living-word-daily-life-n-f-s-grundtvigs/docview/2038477308/se-2?accountid=11041>.

⁴⁸ George R. Beasley-Murray, "John" in *Word Biblical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), xxxii.

evangelist is to be regarded as a “theologian (who) presents Jesus from the vantage point of his own theological interests and in light of the needs of his community, (whether as an eyewitness or not).”⁴⁹ For the most part, scholarship agrees that “he (or she) was a prominent and respected figure in the Johannine community who assumed sufficient authority to undertake the task of reinterpreting the tradition in the light of the crisis facing the Church.”⁵⁰ With respect to said crisis, a “reflection of debates between church and synagogue” exists in John that evidences a Jewish hostility to Christianity.⁵¹ Therefore, it is believed that by the time that the Gospel of John was written, the community to whom it was written was confronted by a similar situation.⁵² For this reason (among several others), the Fourth Gospel is often assigned a date of 90-95 CE by a general consensus of scholars which causes it to be the latest of the four gospels.⁵³

The Gospel of John begins with a Prologue (1:1-18) that declares “the cosmic pre-existence of the Word and the Word’s relationship to the world” in lieu of the birth narratives present in Matthew and Luke and the pronouncement of John the Baptist in Mark.⁵⁴ In a manner consistent with Genesis 1:1 with its use of the phrase, “In the beginning,” the Johannine writer does not refer to the act of creation per se but rather “to what existed when creation came into being, namely the Word, who was with God and who was God,” which sets the tone for this gospel as a whole being the revelation of God

⁴⁹ Beasley-Murray, “John,” xxxiii.

⁵⁰ Robert Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:920.

⁵¹ Beasley-Murray, “John,” xlvi.

⁵² Ibid., xlvii.

⁵³ Kysar, “John, the Gospel of,” 919.

⁵⁴ Gail R. O’Day, “John,” in *The New Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 9:516.

in Jesus Christ to humankind.⁵⁵ Moreover, the Word, *logos*, is presented as being in unity with God, present and active in the creation and remaining to be so in the created order.⁵⁶ According to Gail R. O'Day, the Prologue of John can be divided into four parts. In John 1:1-5, it is established that "the eternal Word is the Light and Life of Creation; John 1:6-8 contain John's (not known as John the Baptist in this Gospel) witness "to the Light;" John 1:9-13 reflect that "The Light, or Word, came into the World;" and John 1:14-18 declare that "The Word became flesh and dwells among us."⁵⁷ The Word who is both "beyond time and history in conjunction with his beginning *in* time and history (as indicated in John's witness)," captures "the role of the Word in creation and in human history" as spoken by God in the creation accounts in Genesis.⁵⁸ In other words, as the eternal Word, Jesus Christ is "the mediator or broker" of creation in that "all things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being" (John 1:3a-b, NRSV) with "life" and "light" being the tangible expressions of such in the world.⁵⁹ The eternal *logos*, Jesus Christ, who is "uncreated and imperishable" and who exists beyond the realm of time and history,⁶⁰ is responsible for the Word not remaining "outside of time and history (by entering) into a time-bound world" as the Word "with God" and as the Word "who is fully God."⁶¹ Inasmuch as humankind is created in God's image and according to his likeness, "the Logos is what is knowable of God insofar as he (God) may

⁵⁵ Beasley-Murray, "John," 10.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁵⁷ O'Day, "John," 516.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 518-519.

⁵⁹ Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Gospel According to John," *The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1881.

⁶⁰ Neyrey, "The Gospel According to John," 1881.

⁶¹ O'Day, "John," 519-520.

be apprehended and experienced.”⁶² Therefore, it is the Word that is synonymous with God’s self-disclosure as “action upon and communication with the world of humankind along with Wisdom and Spirit” that makes it possible for God to be known.⁶³

In the third part of the Prologue (John 1:9-13), the Word as “Light” has made his entry into the “world” (*kosmos*) as an expression of God. It is important to mention that “world” in this context does not refer to the whole of creation, but rather “to humanity and its domain” as the subjects of his pursuit, namely “his own.”⁶⁴ Despite humanity and the whole of creation coming into being by the Word, creation, specifically humanity, did not “know” him. “To know” in the Gospel of John is essential, for it is upon what humanity is able to know or “to see” that precipitates their belief.⁶⁵ Jesus Christ as the Word is the full expression of God “presented as the incarnation of the divine Word,” who serves as the agency through which those who “receive him and believe in his name” become children of God.⁶⁶ Because flesh and spirit are incongruously separate in nature, our ability to incarnate or to embody God is due to the indwelling of God’s Spirit made possible by belief in Jesus Christ as the full expression of God. Moreover, becoming children of God is beyond human possibility, for “it is a work wholly of God’s operation;” however, it is humankind’s welcome of the Word in faith through which the Word works, giving us the authority to become God’s children.⁶⁷ In my mind, it is this

⁶² James D.G. Dunn, “Incarnation,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 3:35.

⁶³ James D.G. Dunn, “Incarnation,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:403.

⁶⁴ O’Day, “John,” 521.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 521.

⁶⁶ Dunn, “Incarnation,” *Anchor*, 404.

⁶⁷ Beasley-Murray, “John,” 13.

indwelling of God's Spirit as mediated by Jesus Christ within us that serves as the vehicle for awareness of God being constant and persistent in our lives in that it is sensitivity to God's abiding presence *in* us that gives credence to God's being *with* us. In Jesus Christ, God has been made available to us; likewise, awareness of God within self, within daily living, and within the world in which we live are critically necessary for us to make ourselves consistently available to God in ways that empower us to embody God's nature in whatever context in which we find ourselves.

The fourth and final portion of the Prologue (John 1:14-18, NRSV) reflects the Johannine community's confession:

¹⁴And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. ¹⁵(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") ¹⁶From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. ¹⁷The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. ¹⁸No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

The necessity of the Logos "becoming something that (he) was not before," was to "participate in man's creaturely weakness" (*sarx*, "flesh") in order to reveal his glory as the Mediator of not only "revelation," but also "redemption" in continuity of the character and nature of God as such in the history of Israel.⁶⁸ It is through this act of God in Jesus Christ "pitching a tent" *temporally* in the sphere of humanity as fully divine and fully human, "full of grace and truth" that God reveals the eternal magnificence of his glory as flesh that it "might be revealed to all flesh."⁶⁹ Without this gracious and

⁶⁸ Beasley-Murray, "John," 13-14, 16.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 16.

loving action, neither the community nor the confession would exist. Therefore, it is from divine grace that grace, “the signal demonstration of God’s goodwill toward humankind in the person of Jesus Christ and the effects of that goodwill in human lives,” may be received.⁷⁰ Jesus Christ, “full of grace and truth” as fully divine and fully human is the “perfect expression” and “gracious offer” of God’s goodwill to humankind in the community of faith who as the community are recipients of “grace upon grace,” an “unending stream of divine blessings.”⁷¹ Accordingly, early Christians believed that their salvation was only made possible through and by the grace of God as “the giving of God’s self in Christ in order to effect salvation for the undeserving.”⁷² This confession, then, explicitly contrasts Jesus and Moses by stating that through Moses the law was given while grace and truth were given through Jesus Christ, “the full embodiment of God’s loving intentions toward humankind.”⁷³

Voices in Christian History

Irenaeus of Lyons

Considered as one of the authoritative teachers of the early church, Irenaeus of Lyons (130-202), a devoted follower of Polycarp and former presbyter, was elected bishop of the city of Lyons (modern day southern France) upon the death of Bishop Photinus during a persecution that occurred while Irenaeus was in Rome delivering a

⁷⁰ Stephen Westerholm, “Grace,” in *The New Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2007), 2:655.

⁷¹ Westerholm, “Grace,” 657-658.

⁷² Gary S. Shogren, “Grace (NT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:1087.

⁷³ Westerholm, “Grace,” 658.

message to the bishop.⁷⁴ Known for being a pastor who “(led) his flock in Christian life and faith,”⁷⁵ the premise of his writings, the most notable being *Against Heresies*, was to counter the heretical, “blasphemous” claims of Gnostics who, in Irenaeus’ mind, “eliminated the possibility of union with God by distorting the distinction between God the Creator and humanity, his creation.”⁷⁶ Irenaeus maintained that God created the world and human beings with loving intention and purpose in that it was God’s “desire to have a creation to love and to lead, like the shepherd loves and leads the flock,” in an effort to ensure that creation accomplishes its final goal.⁷⁷ Therefore, humankind is considered by Irenaeus to be “the crown of creation” with a freedom that lends itself to human beings “(becoming) increasingly conformed to the divine will and nature (of God)...to enjoy an ever-growing communion with our creator...eventually surpassing even the angels.”⁷⁸ In other words, the outgrowth of humankind’s communion with God as creator is divinely intended to be that the closeness and intimacy between humans and God would transcend such that exists between the angels and God.⁷⁹ While angels play a part in the communion between God and humankind, Irenaeus asserts that it is ultimately the “two hands of God,” the Word and the Holy Spirit, from which “human beings are to receive instruction and growth, always with a view to an increasingly close communion with

⁷⁴ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 1:84.

⁷⁵ Gonzales, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church*, 84.

⁷⁶ Julie Canlis, “Being Made Human: The Significance of Creation for Irenaeus’ Doctrine of Participation,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 4 (2005): 435, accessed November 3, 2021. <https://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://proquest.com/scholarly-journals/being-made-human-significance-creation-irenaeus/docview/222305497/se-2?accountid=11041>.

⁷⁷ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church*, 84.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 84-85.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 85.

God,” that support the decisive objective being ‘divinization’-God’s purpose to make us ever more like the divine.”⁸⁰ Consequently, “creation is a masterpiece of the entire Trinity, ‘formed after the likeness of God, and moulded by His hands, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit to whom also He said, Let us make man.’”⁸¹ The essence of *Against Heresies* then is to “radically delineate” the Gnostic perspective that “blurred the line between humanity and divinity (that made) some humans semi-divine” by emphasizing “humanity (as) not just ‘made,’ but (more importantly as) *being made* by a personal Creator, whose hands stay close to humanity from the beginning of creation to its completion.”⁸² Because Irenaeus championed the dissimilarity between God and humankind as “maker” and “made,” it made “giving” and “receiving” a sure and certain exchange between God and humankind that evidences a remarkable progression and depth in God and human relations that appear in “human participation in God as God,” the lifeblood of awareness of God.⁸³

For Irenaeus, it is Jesus Christ as the incarnate Word that “fulfills our humanity.”⁸⁴ Jesus Christ was not simply God’s response to humankind’s fall in Eden; instead, “the future incarnate Word was the model that God followed in making humans after the divine image.”⁸⁵ In other words, God’s “transcendence has been redefined by the incarnation, and thus is transformed into humanity’s path to union with God.”⁸⁶ Since it is

⁸⁰ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church*, 85.

⁸¹ Canlis, “Being Made Human,” 442.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid., 444.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 451.

⁸⁵ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Early Church*, 85.

⁸⁶ Canlis, “Being Made Human,” 437.

only Jesus Christ who is able to “bear the full weight of the glory of God, it is our participation in the Son that is our participation in the divine, and thus our ‘becoming human.’”⁸⁷ For it is this “mutual bearing (in which) ‘the Father bears the creation and His own Word simultaneously,’” that causes the incarnation to be “the substructure of the creation, thus allowing creation to ‘bear’ God.”⁸⁸ Fundamentally, it is in humanity’s bearing of God that God “prepares (human beings) for friendship,” dealing with them “differently at different stages in their history, though always with the ultimate goal of bringing them into communion with himself.”⁸⁹

Martin Luther

By the close of the fifteenth century, the aftermath of papal corruption and deterioration, the Great Schism, and the infighting of councils within “the conciliar movement that was formed to end the schism” left the church in turmoil and in dire need of reform.⁹⁰ Acclaimed as the pioneer of the Reformation, Martin Luther incited a movement within the Christian church that demanded a delineation of Christianity through an emphasis placed on the acceptance and the belief that the Scriptures are the Word of God intended to be evidenced in human praxis. In response to the selling of “indulgences” which were believed to either eradicate or greatly reduce time in purgatory as punishment for sin, “Luther invited an academic debate on the subject by posting, in Latin, his famous ninety-five theses on the door of the castle and university church in

⁸⁷ Canlis, “Being Made Human,” 451.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 452.

⁸⁹ Stephen Westerholm and Martin Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture: Voices from the History of Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 59.

⁹⁰ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation to the Present Day* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 2:7.

Wittenberg (Germany).”⁹¹ Despite being charged and labeled as a heretic as a result, it is from this bold move that Luther’s reformatory work began that is inclusive of translating the Bible into German and revolutionizing liturgy and conduction of worship experiences in German, which ultimately centralized the teaching and preaching of the Scriptures as the Word of God.⁹² For Luther, it is the Word of God in particular that communicates God’s will to and for human beings; therefore, “the relationship between Creator and human creature depended at critical points on the human performance of God’s will and particularly the actions prescribed by sacred ritual, both in the liturgy and in pious practice.”⁹³ Since it is through Scriptures as the Word of God that God speaks, Luther contends that “in its primary sense, the Word of God is none other than God” as supported by the initial verses of the Prologue of the Gospel of John that plainly insist that in the Second Person of the Godhead, Jesus Christ, “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.”⁹⁴ In *Luther’s Works*, he asserts that in the Prologue of the Gospel of John, Jesus, “the Son of God (is) ‘the Word of God’ who was with God, and was God, from all eternity:

From all eternity (God) has a Word, a speech, a thought, or a conversation with Himself in His divine heart, unknown to angels and men. This is called his Word. From eternity He was within God’s paternal heart, and through him God resolved to create heaven and earth...⁹⁵

⁹¹ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 200.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Robert Kolb, “The Enduring Word of God in Wittenberg,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (2016): 193, accessed November 4, 2021, <https://ezproxy.gardner-webb.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/eduring-word-god-wittenberg/docview/2315123639/se-2?accountid=11041>.

⁹⁴ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation*, 47-48.

⁹⁵ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 201

Thus, it is God as “the speaking Creator (who founded) his universe upon his Word,” so it is through Jesus Christ, “the Word made flesh,” that God “re-creates” with Jesus Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection being the tripartite conduit through which human righteousness may be enacted and restored.⁹⁶ For Luther, these are the things that are essential to Christianity in both belief and in practice to the extent that they “(flow) out of Scripture in oral, written, and sacramental forms as the place of God’s presence and the instrument of his power.”⁹⁷

Relatedly, it is the indwelling of God’s Word in us that “creates something in us and in all creation” for the purpose of spiritual formation instead of the provision of only information.⁹⁸ Albeit true that human beings are individuals, this individuality is not meant to be lived out in isolation and estrangement from God or from other human beings. Akin to Irenaeus’ “Two Hands of God” theory that stresses the Word of God and the Holy Spirit being the indispensable elements to promote and maintain communion with God, Luther “perceived human life as a continuing encounter with God’s Word, with the God who is a God of conversation and community, addressing his chosen people and delighting in their response in prayer and praise.”⁹⁹ The product of such is the realization that humans as individuals are parts of “the human continent and the territory of the church,” meaning that the human response to God’s Word that creates manifests in not only community and connection with God, but also with other human beings in

⁹⁶ Kolb, *The Enduring Word*, 193.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 193-194.

⁹⁸ Gonzalez, *The Story of Christianity: The Reformation*, 48.

⁹⁹ Kolb, *The Enduring Word*, 194.

restored relationships.¹⁰⁰ The truth of the matter is that this cannot be accomplished in the flesh without the creative activity of the Word of God in concert with the inner working of the Holy Spirit within the individual to produce faith that results in embodiment. In his work entitled, *The Small Catechism*, Luther maintains the following:

I believe that I cannot by my own understanding or effort believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in true faith.¹⁰¹

In the mind of Luther, it is the Holy Spirit who “employs the proclamation and preaching of the Lord Jesus Christ...who impresses the preaching upon the heart so that it abides there and lives,” thus changing one’s life.¹⁰² Therefore, awareness of God that is a product of one’s perpetual subjection to the Word of God and the interior work of the Holy Spirit that lead to transformation reflects in one’s faith in practice due to “the convicting power of the Holy Spirit (that) cannot help *but* produce good works.”¹⁰³

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a prolific German theologian and scholar and a twentieth century Christian martyr, is particularly recognized as one of the most erudite voices in the contemporary arena. Characterized as “high-achieving” and “well-to-do,” Bonhoeffer’s family of origin was more concerned with “civic responsibility” than they were with matters of religion; therefore, at the outset of Bonhoeffer’s pursuit of a career path in theology, it “was more philosophical than religious.”¹⁰⁴ After his intense training

¹⁰⁰ Kolb, *The Enduring Word*, 194.

¹⁰¹ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 208.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 390.

in the historical-critical approach as a widely accepted interpretative method of the Bible, Bonhoeffer discovered that he was “‘not yet a Christian,’” noting that this “‘detached’ scholarship had little to contribute to the church and the life of faith.”¹⁰⁵ Abandoning this approach to Scripture, Bonhoeffer began to develop his own method of interpretation of the Scriptures founded on “the presupposition that the Bible is ‘the book of the church.’”¹⁰⁶

In the spirit of his predecessors Irenaeus and Martin Luther, Bonhoeffer, too, became a proponent of the school of thought that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and as the Word of God, they speak to those who read and engage them, inducing a God-human encounter that is mediated through Jesus Christ. As the Mediator between humans and God, Jesus Christ as the Word embodied in flesh gracefully “took on our being, our nature, (us);” therefore, “where he is, there we are too, in the incarnation, on the Cross, and in his resurrection. We belong to him because we are in him.”¹⁰⁷ As humankind is in Jesus Christ, an enduring fellowship and communion are formed, as revelation of God in Jesus Christ leads to human embodiment, a life lived in and guided by the righteousness of God.

Bonhoeffer contends in his work *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community* that the Reformers expressed human righteousness as “‘an alien righteousness,’ a righteousness that comes from outside of us...(therefore) the Christian is dependent on the Word of God spoken to him.”¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, when human beings

¹⁰⁵ Westerholm and Westerholm, *Reading Sacred Scripture*, 390-392.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 392.

¹⁰⁷ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 24.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 22.

listen to the Word of God as it speaks, it guides and creates what God intends which lends itself to the practice of disciplines such as prayer, meditation, solitude, and worship. While all of these things may be done alone, it is Bonhoeffer's contention that this "invisible community," meaning Christianity "through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ" singularly is what undergirds the "visible community," the tangible fellowship of Christians that fosters belonging "only through and in Jesus Christ."¹⁰⁹ In both instances, it is the Word of God spoken to Christians that causes Christians to be "point(ed) outward to the Word that comes to (them)...(as they live) wholly by the truth of God's Word in Jesus Christ."¹¹⁰

Conclusion

Since God remains actively involved with humankind post the creative act, God's presence can certainly be discerned and sensed without limit, chiefly where communion and connection with God and embodiment of God's word coexist. With Jesus Christ as the mediator of the divine-human encounter experienced through the consistent engagement and embrace of the Scriptures as the Word of God, the practice of the presence of God becomes an invaluable means by which God-consciousness is enlarged and deepened. Though the Divine-human relationship is often emphasized as a critical and necessary life-giving and life-guiding source, the fundamental coaction of being known by God and knowing God is far too often ignored or overlooked, which results in an overemphasis of doing for God as evidence of said relationship. In concert with the selected Old Testament and New Testament Scriptures that serve as the basis of the

¹⁰⁹ Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 21.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 22.

theological rationale for this project, the agreement of Christian history influencers Irenaeus of Lyons, Martin Luther, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer has revealed that it is indeed the Word of God and the inner working of the Holy Spirit that cause awareness of God to be distinguishable within self, within daily living, and in the world as a whole.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL EVALUATION

This project was evaluated by pre and post-project surveys and evaluations (see Appendix B, pp. 98-104). The pre and post-project surveys utilized a combination of Likert scale-type questions and multiple choice questions to determine quantitative outcomes. The pre and post-survey results were measured by the determination of net change between the post-survey and pre-survey outcomes for the control group and the project participants respectively. It is important to note that for the Likert scale-type questions in the pre-project and post-project surveys with responses such as “Always,” “Most times,” “Sometimes,” “Rarely,” and “Never,” the most negative response was assigned a higher number; therefore, a negative net change is equivalent to a benefit of the project. The individual outcomes for the control group and the project participants were measured and displayed separately in tables (see Appendix D, pp.142-169). The open-ended questions (i.e., KWL charts using “What I Have Learned” as session evaluations, reaction/reflection journal entries, retreat and facilitator evaluations) were used to determine the qualitative results.

Quantitative Results

The pre and post evaluative instruments measured the quantitative data for this project. The control group’s and the project participants’ pre-project and post-project surveys assessed respondents’ preliminary and post-project understanding of awareness of God within self, within daily living practices, and in the world at-large and the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship.

Control Group Personal Demographic Data

The control group consisted of five congregants who responded to the pre-project and post-project survey instrument. Of the five respondents, forty percent represented the Baby Boomer generational group while the remaining sixty-percent represented the Xer generational group. The mean age was fifty-seven years. A limitation of this study was that all respondents were female. Forty percent of respondents earned a high school diploma or GED, another forty percent earned a technical or occupational certificate, while the remaining twenty percent of the respondents earned a Master's degree. The mean age of baptism for the respondents was twenty-four years. The church membership range of the respondents was from one month to fourteen years; the mean was 8.2 years. All of the respondents indicated that they attended four corporate worship experiences per month (see Appendix D, p.142).

With respect to the importance of the respondents' participation in corporate worship and their view of their study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary ranked on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest (see Appendix B, p. 97), there was no significant net change in the respondents' overall high, positive rank of the importance of their participation in corporate worship and their study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, pp.142-143).

The respondents' rank of their awareness of God and their understanding of awareness of God as meaningful and necessary on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest (see Appendix B, p. 98) reflected a significant,

beneficial net change from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, p. 143). This is to be understood as a result of awareness of God being clearly defined and reiterated throughout the sermon series and one midweek lesson associated with this project.

Control Group Pre-Project and Post-Project Survey Results

It is worth noting that the pre-project and post-project survey responses for the control group reflected marked movement in ten areas. The first four movements discussed here refer to the respondents' choices of "Always," "Most times," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never" to certain Likert scale-type questions in the pre-project and post-project surveys that reflected either the benefit or deficit of this project. The remaining six movements noted are marked differences in the control group's responses to certain multiple choice questions that may have also varied to reflect either benefit or deficit of this project.

The first area that showed the most beneficial scale movement of the four Likert scale-type questions between the pre-project and post-project surveys was in response to the statement, "Before making a major life decision such as marriage or a career change, I consult with God" (see Appendix B, p. 99). Four of the five post-survey respondents' answers moved positively (Appendix D, p.150). This is to be understood as the respondents gaining a deeper understanding of awareness of God as the interplay of intimacy with God and incarnation of God's word.

The second and third areas that reflected equal beneficial scale movement between the pre-project and post-project surveys were in response to the spiritual

practices of mediation and solitude as shown in the following statements: “As I meditate, I allow God to fill my mind with his thoughts,” and “I am able to clearly understand the times when God is calling me to be alone” (see Appendix B, p.103). In both cases, three of the five post-survey answers moved positively (see Appendix D, p.164). This is attributed to respondents gaining exposure to what solitude and meditation are as spiritual disciplines and examples of how they were evident and practiced in select Scriptures.

The fourth area that revealed significant movement between the pre-project and post-project surveys referred to the statement, “I view my participation in corporate worship as evidence of my response to God’s care and concern for me” (see Appendix B, p.104). From the pre-project survey to the post-project survey, two of the five respondents’ downshifted from “Always” to “Most Times,” while a third moved positively from “Most Times” to “Always.” It is suggested that this variance is attributed to the difference in how the respondents may have been feeling on the particular days that the pre-project and the post-project surveys were taken.

The remaining six movements to be discussed here are marked differences in the control group’s pre-project and post-project survey responses to certain multiple choice questions that reflected either the benefit or disadvantage of this project. The first three statements assessed the control group respondents’ pre-project and post-project levels of awareness of God within themselves, within their daily living practices, and in the world around them. The remaining three statements measured their knowledge, understanding, and practice of three of the four spiritual disciplines: solitude, meditation, and prayer.

It was my hope that their exposure to the sermon series and midweek lesson that served to promote awareness of God within self, within daily living practices, and in the world at-large as meaningful and necessary generated profound theological reflection.

With respect to the statement, “The time that I feel the most distant from God is when” and its corresponding answers, “I am troubled or sad;” “I am disappointed;” “I am frustrated;” “I am angry;” and “It seems as if I have been overlooked or forgotten,” (see Appendix B, p. 99), the net change from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey was significant in that only two out of the five respondents remained the same. Of the three that showed marked differences, one refused to answer this question on the pre-survey because of a dislike for the answer choices provided (see Appendix D, p.148). However, when the post-survey was administered, this same respondent selected an answer without incident. The second of the three responses progressed from when “I am frustrated” to when “I am angry,” while the third’s response changed from when “I am troubled or sad” to when “It seems as if I have been overlooked or forgotten” (see Appendix D, p.148). These changes are attributed to their exposure to the sermon series and midweek lesson that generated a deeper awareness of God in that they were able to arrive at a deeper awareness of themselves and the truth of how they felt when God seemed distant.

The second statement that reflected a notable difference that is worth discussion is “In a time of crisis such as job loss or the unexpected death of a loved one,” with the corresponding answers of “I allow myself to feel how/what I feel;” “I seek comfort and support from those around me;” “I immediately ask God why;” “I become a pillar of

strength for those around me;” and “I become distant and cold” (see Appendix B, p. 100). Two of the five respondents both moved from the pre-project survey answer, “I allow myself to feel how/what I feel” to the post-survey answer, “I become a pillar of strength around me” (see Appendix D, p.151). I found this sharp movement particularly interesting because I believe that it was a shining example of how responses can be affected by either what one has experienced between the pre-project and post-project survey administrations or what one felt on the days that the pre-project survey and post-project surveys were administered. More importantly, it gave credence to the fact that context often dictates human response.

The third statement, “When someone with whom I rarely speak needs my help,” with the corresponding answers, “I sense that it may be an opportunity to serve God by sharing my faith;” “I assess what their needs are and then decide if I am going to help;” “I listen to respond, not to understand;” “I set a mental time limit before I ‘check out;” and “I ignore their request in order to stay on schedule” (see Appendix B, p.100) reflected a mixture of positive and negative movement (see Appendix D, p.154). Two of the five respondents who chose the pre-project survey response “I sense that it may be an opportunity to serve God by sharing my faith,” selected the post-project survey responses, “I assess what their needs are and then decide if I am going to help” and “I listen to respond, not to understand” respectively (see Appendix D, p.154). Two of the five respondents’ responses showed a positive movement in that their post-project survey responses were “I sense that it may be an opportunity to serve God by sharing my faith,” in contrast with their pre-project survey responses of no response and “I assess what their

needs are and then decide if I am going to help” respectively (see Appendix D, p.154).

The interpretation of these outcomes was that it was more than likely either experiences between the pre-project and post-project survey administration or context that drove their responses.

The final three movements to be discussed here are marked differences in the control group’s pre-project and post-project survey responses to certain multiple choice questions relative to the respondents’ knowledge, understanding, and practice of the spiritual disciplines of meditation, prayer, and solitude.

Concerning the statement, “Meditation provides me with an opportunity for” with the corresponding answers of “God and me to spend time together;” “God to fill my mind with his thoughts;” “God to make his purposes for my life clearer to me;” “God to give me solutions to my problems;” and “God to give me rest” (see Appendix B, p.101), significant, beneficial net changes were noted for three of the five respondents that reflected evidence of knowledge and clearer understanding of certain aspects of meditation as a spiritual practice to generate deeper God awareness (see Appendix D, p. 158).

With respect to the statement, “When I sense change coming, prayer” and its corresponding responses of “helps me to be open with God with whatever I may feel about it;” “provides me with an opportunity to receive God’s wisdom and insight;” “helps me stay connected to God despite how I feel about it;” “provides me with an opportunity to speak against it;” and “helps me to accept whatever comes” (see Appendix B, p.102), four out of the five control group respondents showed significant, beneficial movement

from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.162). This is attributed to a marked growth in knowledge and understanding of prayer as a spiritual practice.

Finally, responses to the statement, “Being alone in silence” with corresponding answers of “gives me the opportunity to hear and to see God;” “gives me the time and space to sort out my thoughts and feelings;” “releases me from life’s concern’s and distractions;” “prepares me to stay in fellowship with God while in fellowship with others;” and “makes me afraid of what God may show me and/or tell me about myself” (see Appendix B, p.103), reflected a beneficial net change for three of the five respondents (see Appendix D, p.165). These changes evidenced a shift in perspective of solitude as a spiritual practice as a result of a clearer knowledge and understanding of such, which may be particularly attributed to their hearing of the sermon that contrasted Martha’s and Mary’s responses to Jesus’ visit to their home (see Appendix C, p.123).

Project Participants Personal Demographic Data

Nine of ten congregants who responded to the pre-project survey and post-project survey instrument comprised the participants for this study. Of the nine respondents, 11.11 percent were Silent, 22.22 percent were Baby Boomer, 33.33 percent were Xer, and the remaining 33.33 percent were Millennial. The mean age was fifty-one years. A limitation of this study was that all respondents were female. 33.33 percent of respondents earned a high school diploma or GED, another 33.33 percent earned a technical or occupational certificate, while 11.11 percent of respondents earned an associate degree, 11.11 percent completed some college coursework, and 11.11 percent earned a Master’s degree. The mean age of baptism for the respondents was seventeen

years. The church membership range of the respondents was from two and a half to fourteen years; the mean was eight years. 3.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they attended four corporate worship experiences per month (see Appendix D, p.144).

With respect to the importance of the respondents' participation in corporate worship ranked on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest (see Appendix B, p.98), the outcomes for four of the nine participants reflected a positive net change that ranged from one to two points from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.144). Regarding their view of their study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary ranked on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest (see Appendix B, p. 98), the outcomes for four of the nine participants reflected a positive net change from pre-project survey to post-project survey that ranged from one to two points (see Appendix D, p.145).

The respondents' rank of their awareness of God and their understanding of awareness of God as meaningful and necessary on a scale from one to ten with one being the lowest and ten being the highest (see Appendix B, p.98) reflected a significant, positive net change. From pre-project survey to post-project survey, seven out of nine respondents showed positive growth that ranged from one to four points in both areas (see Appendix D, p.146). This is to be understood as a result of awareness of God being clearly defined and reiterated throughout the sermon series and one midweek lesson and their consistent participation in the five-week, Sunday afternoon lesson series, completion of all related activities, and their taking part in the culminating *lectio divina* retreat.

Project Participants Pre-Project and Post-Project Survey Results

The pre-project and post-project survey responses for the project participants that reflected significant, marked movement in twelve areas is worthy of discussion. The first six movements examined here refer to the respondents' choices of "Always," "Most times," "Sometimes," "Rarely," and "Never" to certain Likert scale-type questions in the pre-project and post-project surveys that indicated either the benefit or deficit of this project. The remaining six movements noted are marked differences in the project participants' responses to certain multiple choice questions that may have also varied to reflect either benefit or deficit of this project.

Regarding the statement, "In my daily living, I experience the presence of God" (see Appendix B, p.98), seven out of nine respondents moved positively while the remaining two moved negatively (see Appendix D, p.147). Despite the downshift of two respondents, both movements, irrespective of nature, are to be interpreted as a benefit of the project. Upon the project participants' acquisition of the definition of awareness of God and understanding of the potential of its permeation within self, within daily living practices, and in the world, respondents came to the realization by post-project survey that they either rated themselves too high ("Always") or too low ("Most times" or "Sometimes") in the pre-project survey. Whatever the case, both evidenced that measures of growth have been achieved.

Relatedly, responses to the statement, "I am mindful of God's presence in my daily activities" (see Appendix B, p.100), reflected a positive movement for six out of the

nine respondents, inclusive of two notable, positive shifts from “rarely” and “sometimes” being mindful of God’s presence in their daily activities to “most times” from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey. The remaining three respondents remained the same from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.153). To recapitulate, post-project participation resulted in a gain of knowledge and understanding of how awareness of God manifested within self, within daily living practice, and in the world around them, which subsequently empowered them to make a more accurate assessment.

Six of the nine project participants’ post-survey responses to the statement, “Before making a major life decision such as marriage or a career change, I consult with God” (see Appendix B, p.99) yielded a beneficial net change while the remaining three remained the same (see Appendix D, p.150). As a result, a realization was made that increased God-awareness generated an enhanced desire for God-involvement in daily living.

With respect to the statement, “As I meditate, I allow God to fill my mind with his thoughts” (see Appendix B, p.102), five respondents reflected a beneficial net change from pre-project survey to post-project survey, with the three most notable movements from “sometimes” and “rarely” to “always” and “most times” respectively (see Appendix D, p. 157). Though generational grouping is limited to only being an identifier due to the small number of project participants, it is worth mentioning that the three aforementioned notable movements pertained to the Millennial respondents (see Appendix D, p.159).

Finally, the statement, “Before I pray, I take the time to listen for God to direct it” (see Appendix B, p.102), five out of nine respondents experienced a positive movement pre-project survey to post-project survey, with one in particular moving from “Never” to “Most times” (see Appendix D, p.161). Moreover, responses to the statement, “When I pray, I can sense God’s care and concern for me” (see Appendix B, p.102), yielded like results with five out of nine positive movements (see Appendix D, p.161). This is attributed to focused attention and participation in the lesson that exposed prayer as a spiritual discipline and the participants’ subsequent, required daily practice of such (see Appendix C, p.110).

The next two movements to be discussed here are the marked differences in the project participants’ pre-project and post-project survey responses to certain multiple choice questions that assessed awareness of God within self in the world at-large.

With respect to the statement, “The time that I feel the most distant from God is when” and its corresponding answers, “I am troubled or sad;” “I am disappointed;” “I am frustrated;” “I am angry;” and “It seems as if I have been overlooked or forgotten,” (see Appendix B, p.99), eight out of nine respondents experienced a net change from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.148). This variance is attributed to their exposure to and subsequent practice of solitude that generated a deeper awareness of God. An outgrowth of this is that they were able to arrive at a deeper awareness of themselves and the truth of how they felt when God seemed distant.

Concerning the statement, “The place where I experience God’s presence the most is” and its corresponding responses of “when I home or in my car alone;” “when I

am with other people;” “when I am in corporate worship;” “when I am in nature;” and “wherever I am” (see Appendix B, p.99), seven of the nine project participants reflected a change from pre-project survey to post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.149). While the response of “wherever I am” to where God’s presence can be discerned and sensed was the overall aim for this study, it is notable that three of the seven project participants chose the post-survey response, “when I am nature” (the remaining four of the seven chose “wherever I am”) which can be attributed to their participation in and positive response to the *lectio divina* retreat in nature (see Appendix C, pp.138-140).

The remaining four movements outlined here refer to the project participants’ responses to certain multiple choice questions that reflected noteworthy change from pre-project to post-project survey administration regarding their knowledge and understanding of meditation and solitude as spiritual practices.

In response to the statement, “Meditation provides me with an opportunity for” with the corresponding responses “God and me to spend time together;” “God to fill my mind with his thoughts;” “God to make his purposes for my life clearer to me;” “God to give me solutions to my problems;” and “God to give me rest” (see Appendix B, p.101), six of nine participants showed a beneficial net change (see Appendix D, p.158). Of the six participants’ responses that reflected a beneficial net change, four respondents’ original selections of meditation providing an opportunity for “God to make his purposes for my life clearer to me” experienced a shift towards two of the functions of meditation as a spiritual practice, “God to fill my mind with his thoughts” (three respondents) and “God and me to spend time together” (see Appendix D, p.158). The remaining two

respondents showed beneficial change in different ways in that one moved between the two functions of meditation as a spiritual practice, from “God and me to spend time together” to “God to fill my mind with his thoughts” while the other showed a drastic beneficial change from “God to give me rest” to “God to fill my mind with his thoughts” (see Appendix D, p.158).

Connectedly, the participants’ selected completions of the statement, “The practice of meditation helps me to” with one of the complementary answers of “heighten my sensitivity to God’s presence;” “focus so that I may hear God’s voice;” “remain calm despite being troubled;” “remember the Scriptures that I have read;” and “drift off to sleep” (see Appendix B, p.101), also yielded a beneficial net change from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey (see Appendix D, p.159). Five of the nine respondents reflected marked movement, with one respondent in particular who moved from the pre-project survey response of meditation assisting her “to drift off to sleep” to the post-project survey response of meditation helping her “to focus so that (she) may hear God’s voice” (see Appendix D, p.159). Both outcomes regarding meditation as a spiritual practice were characteristic of the project participants’ raised awareness and comprehension of meditation of the principles of meditation as a spiritual practice to elevate levels of awareness of God.

Concerning solitude, the project participants were required to complete the statement, “I _____ being alone” with one choice from the possible answers of “welcome,” “enjoy,” “fear,” “despise,” and “prefer” (see Appendix B, p.101). Seven out of nine participants’ responses showed a beneficial net change from the pre-project

survey to the post-project survey administration (see Appendix D, p.165). Five of these seven respondents' pre-project survey answers ranged between "welcome" (two respondents) and "enjoy" (three respondents) while the remaining two respondents chose "fear" and "prefer" respectively (see Appendix D, p.165). The post-project survey outcomes revealed that these participants received a clearer understanding of the difference between simply being alone and solitude practiced spiritually in that the two respondents who previously chose "welcome" in response to being alone chose "enjoy" by the project's end and the three participants who formerly chose "enjoy" chose "welcome" (see Appendix D, p.165). The most notable shifts in perspective concerning solitude were noted as movement from "fear" to "welcome" and "prefer" to "welcome" respectively (see Appendix D, p.165). Accordingly, beneficial net changes were noted regarding the completion of the statement, "Being alone in silence makes me feel" with one of its corresponding answers of "uncomfortable," "helpless," "open and receptive," "peaceful," and "afraid" (see Appendix B, p.103). With the most positive perspectives assigned positions between the most adverse perspective, it was noted that eight out of nine participants' responses vacillated between the most positive perspectives of "open and receptive" and "peaceful," while one participant reflected the most beneficial shift in her perspective of being alone in silence from "uncomfortable" to "open and receptive" from the pre-project survey to the post-project survey administration (see Appendix D, p. 166). To recapitulate, both outcomes evidenced the participants' elevated knowledge and comprehension of solitude as a spiritual practice.

Overall, the quantitative data of both the control group and the project participants revealed that awareness of God, the ability to discern, to acknowledge, and to be sensitive to the presence of God within self, within daily living practices, and in the world at-large, was a matter of the congregants' gaining a clear, comprehensive understanding of the meaning it and the importance of the practice of it as fundamental to the God-human relationship. The exposure to and the integration of awareness of God in the creative act, awareness of God in the Incarnation, and the spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship resulted in noteworthy changes for both groups despite the project participants receiving more concentrated, content-specific incidences of instruction. While it is undeniable that the pre-project and post-project data revealed that the project participants' beneficial growth exceeded that of the control group by a considerable margin in all areas assessed, the notable, beneficial gains of the control group symbolize the potential for further enrichment opportunities to occur. It is my hope that as the project participants share and exemplify how their engagement in this project has both impacted and transformed their awareness of God within and without the corporate gathering it will serve as impetus and inspiration to the control group and the remainder of the congregation to seek additional ways and means to extend knowledge and encourage consistent practice of the presence of God.

Qualitative Results

The open-ended questions (i.e., KWL sheet using "What I Have Learned" as session evaluations, theological reaction/reflection journal entries, and retreat and facilitator evaluations) asked of the nine project participants were used to determine the

qualitative results for this project. The goal of such was to measure the project participants' knowledge and comprehension of ideas and concepts associated with awareness of God as presented via individual interpretation and practice (see Appendix B, pp.105-109).

KWL: What I Know, What I Want to Know, and What I Have Learned Data

The purpose of the use of the KWL sheet (see Appendix B, pp.105-109) for each instructional session was to assess the project participants' prior knowledge of the topic presented (i.e., what they gained from the sermon or lesson preached or taught before the session occurred), to encourage participants to list pertinent questions to build upon and to extend knowledge, and to provide a written interpretation of what they gleaned from each session. The "L" or "What I Have Learned" was used as an evaluative tool that not only indicated how well the information was presented, but more importantly, how well the participants understood it. The following is a summary of responses given by some of the participants from the five instructional sessions:

Session One: Intimacy: Knowing and Being Known (see Appendix B, p.105)

A participant learned that intimacy with God requires openness and vulnerability. Though she is known by God, she has come to the realization that knowing God is a daily walk that demands awareness of God in her and around her. This type of intimacy is an act of love and trust between God and her that is unlike the intimacy that occurs between human beings that can be risky and mishandled.

A participant learned that intimacy with God involves mutual participation. Being known by God is God's pursuit and recognition of her and her knowing God is being in constant conversation with God and listening for God.

A participant learned that she was created with a purpose that being known by God and her knowing God will help her to execute fully.

Session Two: Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption (see Appendix B, p.106)

A participant learned that incarnation is her embodiment of Christ, his words and his ways as signs of her oneness with him. This is a result of her knowing God for herself aided by the revelation of God in Jesus Christ as the living Word that is not only with her but also within her.

A participant learned the difference between Jesus Christ's embodiment of God and human beings' embodiment of God. For human beings to embody God, it involves faith and belief that come from knowing God and being known by God. Jesus Christ had to come into the world to make God known to human beings in order for human beings to be saved and to know God.

A participant learned that the activity of the Word and the inner working of the Holy Spirit produce faith that leads to incarnation. The Word of God is meant to come alive in us in order for it to form us. When this happens, it is fulfilling God's purpose to make us like him.

Session Three: Awareness of God in Praxis: Solitude (see Appendix B, p.107)

A participant learned that being alone in silence can be used for communion with God to grow her faith and to discover the areas of herself that warrant more discipline.

Solitude is a time in which she can become more aware that God is aware of her as she learns how to become more aware of God.

A participant learned that solitude is time with God that generates more trust and vulnerability. It is a designated time that stems from intimacy with God that is designed for her to hear God more clearly.

A participant learned that solitude is a time of fellowship with God that not only helps us to grow, but also to process growth. It helps us to become more aware of God in us and to discover the ways in which God is with us.

*Session Four: Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation and Prayer
(see Appendix B, p.108)*

A participant learned that meditation is stillness before God to release her thoughts in order to listen for God while prayer as a spiritual practice requires honesty, not a lot of words.

A participant learned that mediation is actually sitting with God's word in order for it to sit within her. Prayer is an opportunity for her to approach God in a child-like, dependent manner so that she can listen to God's will in order to obey.

A participant learned that meditation as a spiritual practice requires voluntary aloneness in order to be exposed and changed. Both meditation and prayer are encounters with God meant to transform us; however, transformation is dependent on the depth of our engagement with God.

Session Five: Awareness of God in Praxis: Worship (see Appendix B, p.109)

A participant learned that if she doesn't feel more obedient to God during and after worship, then she has not truly worshipped.

A participant learned that the truth of her worship is when she acknowledges God for who God is and who she is as she is.

A participant wrote that worship is not what happens when we respond to the promptings of a worship leader. Instead, it is what happens when the Spirit of God touches our spirit.

While it was noted that a few of the evaluations of the sessions were regurgitations of points made during the lecture, most of the responses were deeply introspective. What the participants learned was expressed in a manner that revealed how what they heard impacted them personally, which, in my opinion, was evidence of substantive learning that ultimately leads to behavioral change in life and within the corporate worship setting.

Theological Reaction/Reflection Journal Responses Data

For lessons three through five that focused on the spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship, participants were assigned three corresponding writing prompts (see Appendix B, p.110) as enrichment guides to engage and practice each discipline individually. The assignment of these writing prompts served as a tool for theological reflection and life application of the principles of awareness of God via the selected spiritual disciplines for this project. The following is a summary of some of the participants' journal entries from their week-long practice of the spiritual disciplines of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship:

Solitude

A participant wrote that it was in silence that God revealed how much she had been doubting herself and his call on her life. It was then that she was encouraged by the Spirit of God that she had already been equipped to walk in her calling with integrity; therefore, she was no longer to depend on the affirmation and prompting of others before speaking or acting on God's behalf.

A participant wrote that her practice of solitude began with a prayer that God would block all distractions so that she could hear God clearly in the silence. Afterward, she heard the Spirit of God telling her that she could trust herself and that she was worthy of his love. She reflected on Psalm 139 as a reminder that God knows her completely and loves her unconditionally as his child. Peace settled over her as she accepted that she is indeed worthy of being known by God and loved by God in these ways.

A participant wrote that while practicing solitude, it was revealed that her interactions with God up to this point had been transactional instead of transformative. It was not until she made being with God in silence and in stillness a priority that she realized that she had to become more intentional with her time. Because she had been previously treating time with God as a task on her to-do list, she realized that it was rushed and unremarkable, which caused the rest of the day to be hurried and exhausting.

Meditation and Prayer

A participant wrote that she read and sat under Hebrews 6:7-8 during a period of meditation. Verse seven of this text struck her deeply, and she compared "the ground that drinks up the rain falling it repeatedly" to herself as a consistent consumer of God's

word. As such, she reflected that the Word served as consistent nourishment for the soul is what made the heart to become fertile ground. After this, she prayed that God would give her a hunger and thirst for his Word and his desires for her life and that God would open her eyes to see herself the way he sees her in order to know herself as the person God created.

A participant wrote that Matthew 6:26-30 revealed to her God's care and concern for her. Afterward, she prayed that if God is concerned about the things in nature that he created, then God's concern for her is certain.

A participant wrote that on a particular day, she spent time in nature and admired how God's world responded to the season of spring by turning green and presenting itself in an array of colors. It was then that it was revealed to her that she needed to spend more time in the Scriptures so that she could both see and to respond more to the goodness of God. She then offered a prayer of thanksgiving to God for being her Creator and for giving her life.

Worship

A participant wrote that when she experienced car trouble, she reached out to her father for assistance. The seemingly uncaring nature of his response made her upset. Instead of allowing her emotions and feelings to overwhelm her as usual, she decided to pray and ask God for advice and counsel. In that moment, she found herself being completely open with God about how she felt, and soon afterwards, she experienced God's peace. She was amazed at how her awareness of God's presence in that moment

made her feel better about the situation despite the situation remaining the same. Her choice to worship God through prayer made the difference.

A participant wrote that her engagement of the Scriptures on a particular day brought about a deeper level of worship. As she read certain words, she could feel the presence of God in them that made her deeply aware of God's activity within her.

A participant wrote that she intentionally heeded the voice and counsel of God in response to a time of transition that was occurring in her life. As she sought the presence of the Lord for direction, the Spirit of God let her know that she needed to be responsible for her part in making the transition smooth and warned her that if her heart was not in the right place, then she was not to take part in it at all.

These writing prompts were assigned as enrichment exercises to assess the depth of the participants' knowledge and application of the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation and prayer, and worship and to provide a framework to aid with their continual practice of the presence of God upon this project's conclusion. The remarkable evidence of profound self-examination and contemplation that the participants' theological reaction and reflection journal entries showed served as an invaluable assessment tool of the quality and overall benefit of this study and its lifelong impact upon their lives as believers.

“God in Me, God in the World Around Me:” *Lectio Divina* Retreat in Nature Data

The *lectio divina* retreat evaluation (see Appendix B, p.111) was used to gain further insight of the project participants' depth of knowledge and comprehension of awareness of God as the ability to discern, to acknowledge, and to be sensitive to the

presence of God irrespective of time, place, and circumstance post sermons, lessons, and enrichment activity engagement. The introduction of *lectio divina* as a meditative way of engaging the Scriptures in concert with the practice of the select spiritual disciplines for this project while in nature yielded the following summary of responses from some of the participants:

A participant shared that this retreat helped her to experience God on a deeper level through her acknowledgment that God is intentional about his plans for her life and that it is her responsibility to open herself to God and his Word in order to change. Being in nature caused her to hear God's voice louder because she met God in his environment instead of asking God to meet her in hers. After her employment of *lectio divina* as she engaged her selected Scripture passage, she was inspired to practice all of the select spiritual disciplines associated with this project that caused her to receive a greater outpouring of God's Spirit that she believed had been awaiting her all along.

A participant shared that the retreat brought awareness of God full circle for her. Being able to sit with God's word by the lake caused her to encounter God intentionally. This experience made her see her connection with God more clearly through nature. Meditation and prayer were the dominant spiritual disciplines she practiced after she employed *lectio divina* to engage her chosen Scripture passage. This allowed her to receive deeper revelation from God and more awareness of his intimate knowledge of her.

A participant shared that her learning about and practice of *lectio divina* enlivened the Scripture within her and inspired her to listen for God to reveal more of

what he had to say to her through it. She was amazed that God spoke to each of the participants' individually while they were gathered in one setting. Solitude was the spiritual discipline that she practiced the most while in nature because it gave her the opportunity to be with God in silence and in stillness without distraction.

The participants overwhelmingly agreed that this retreat inspired them to become more mindful of God's presence in their daily living and that the time alone with God in nature helped them to discern God's presence in the world around them.

Post-Project Facilitator's Evaluation

The post-project facilitator's evaluation was to assess my knowledge, skill, and overall cogency as a facilitator, to evaluate the effectiveness of the lessons, and to determine the project participants' intentions to incorporate the select spiritual disciplines as enhancements of their practice of worship alone and assembled with others (see Appendix B, p.112). The consensus of the project participants was that they strongly agreed that I was prompt, well-prepared, knowledgeable, and well-versed in each subject or topic presented, and kind and respectful throughout the duration of this project. The consensus of the project participants strongly agreed that the project lessons and activities were engaging and meaningful and that the instruction they received gave them a clearer understanding of what awareness of God means. The lessons on intimacy, solitude, and meditation and the *lectio divina* retreat in nature were deemed the most impactful in this study. No lessons were indicated as having minimal impact. The consensus of the project participants is that this project needs to be conducted beyond Freedom Alive Church to impact the kingdom of God on a larger scale. All project participants strongly agreed that

they will continue to incorporate the practices of solitude, meditation, and prayer to enhance and to enrich their practice of worship while they are alone and assembled with others.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The overarching purposes for this project were to incite and to contribute to the congregants' cognizance and capability to discern, acknowledge, and be sensitive to the presence of God in all places and at all times and to emphasize that doing for God effectively finds its origin in knowing God and being with God continually. In other words, it was my intention to aid congregants with making the discovery that the valuable connection between intimacy with God and the embodiment of God's word is what fortifies them as God's image bearers, God's creation to whom God makes God's self known and by whom God desires to be known in relationship. Instruction concerning the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship was incorporated to provide a tangible framework to enliven, to foster, and to support the deepness of closeness and connection of the Divine-human relationship. It is this type of intimacy with God that transcends what can be experienced during the Sunday morning, corporate worship experience due to consistent God-encounters throughout the week. Through my engagement with congregants in the control group and those who served as project participants, I discovered that this study has provided a fresh perspective concerning the ubiquitous nature of the Divine-human relationship in that God's abiding presence is a near and accessible reality for human beings instead of a seemingly distant, far-reaching one. My analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data revealed that the congregants, specifically the project participants, valued their involvement with this project because of the enrichment and empowerment that they received as a result. Many continue to

share testimonials with me of how their lives have been impacted and changed. As of late, it is evidenced in the corporate gathering that most persons have become more intentional about gathering consistently and are noted as being engaged with marked depths of interest and enthusiasm from the beginning of the gathering to its end.

Admittedly, this has not been the case for all, especially for those whose attendance was previously marginal. Despite this, it is my hope that what was planted as a result of their participation in this study will soon be watered so that they may begin to experience a continual flow of increase in their God-consciousness.

While our session discussions were spirited and enlightening, it was the project participants' theological reaction and reflection journal responses and their outstanding participation in the *lectio divina* retreat in nature that convinced me that this work was insightfully and influentially significant. I was made privy to the inner court of the sanctuary of their hearts and trusted with the transparent, personal intel of each as they delved into the truth of their standing with God and how they perceived God to be standing with them (or not). To witness the faith of believers (both young and seasoned) become renewed and re-energized over a six-week period is proof-positive that momentous spiritual formation has taken place. While it would have been ideal to involve the entire congregation in all of the project's lessons and activities and to convene a focus group from within it, I intentionally chose to engage the project participants separately so that they could be the evangelists among the congregation at-large concerning the necessity of awareness of God in every aspect of life. In this way, the camaraderie of the

local assembly can be further strengthened to promote a greater sense of individual responsibility and mutual accountability in an ecclesial manner. Therefore, the only things that I believe would have strengthened this project's implementation are more time and male involvement for control group and participant balance.

On a personal note, this project has progressed the interior work that began during the season of church closure due to the global pandemic. Ironically, one of the three goals in my ministry development covenant for this program addressed my desire to regularly employ the practice of Sabbath to safeguard against compassion fatigue as a minister and a disciple. Little did I know after setting this goal that eight months later, the risk of being infected by a deadly virus would create an opportunity to not only consistently practice Sabbath rest, but to also learn how to do it responsibly. While others lamented about gathering sanctions, I relished them. The time away from people brought me to the place where I could meet God and myself in earnest. I spent more time in nature and began to experience the presence of God in me and around me in ways that I would have either overlooked or downright missed due to being caught up in the hustle and bustle of life and ministry. In the words of Barbara Brown Taylor in *Leaving Church*, it was during this time that I discovered and entered a “distinct season of faith” in which I was “finding life, losing life, and finding life again.”¹¹¹ As a result of this time of self-reflection, I decided that at least twice a year (once during the winter and once during the summer), the church as a whole will close for a brief period of time so that everyone could be afforded the opportunity to engage and to encounter God differently in spaces beyond the

¹¹¹ Barbara Brown Taylor, *Leaving Church: A Memoir of Faith* (New York: HarperOne, 2006), xiii.

four walls of the church. To this end, I am of the opinion that this project implementation has educated, encouraged, and empowered congregants to accept and to use this time away from the corporate gathering wisely, so that when they return to it, they will be certain that God is truly in the sanctuary of their hearts and in the physical sanctuary when they gather.

These days, I find myself being more intentional about the avoidance of life imbalance. I courageously ask for the time and space that I need from congregants, family, and others and erect the appropriate boundaries to protect them. I seek opportunities to smile and laugh more, even in times of stillness and silence. In doing these things, I have encountered more places of life that have restored my soul.

In addition to meeting my goal of more incidences of Sabbath rest, I have experienced the development of authentic, harmonious relationships with other clergy (my second goal). While the original goal was intended for me to foster and to participate in relationships of this nature with male clerics specifically, I came to the conclusion along the way that in order for this to be authentic, God had to lead me in this effort. My current purpose community (as I like to regard them) consists of three other women and one male. Of the four, two are pastors while the remaining two are a founder and chief executive officer of an evangelistic outreach non-profit organization and a talent acquisition executive with a healthcare conglomerate respectively. Because I am one who colors outside of lines so to speak, it is of no surprise to me that my community of support beyond family is as unique and eclectic as I am. We are iron who sharpen each

other often by speaking the truth to each other in love and by holding each other accountable as we do our part to further the kingdom of God individually and collectively.

One of my purpose community partners, specifically the founder and chief executive officer of an evangelistic outreach non-profit organization, has assisted me with the successful satisfaction of my third and final goal, the gain of a richer understanding of the relationship between outreach and evangelism as an essential part of discipleship. As a result of our partnership, four of the members of her organization and she have decided to fellowship with Freedom Alive Church in the Sunday morning corporate gathering. Since then, she has facilitated three instructional sessions that compared and contrasted evangelism and outreach and explained how the two concepts work in concert to disciple while being disciplined. Consequently, her organization and the congregants at Freedom Alive Church have worked alongside each other in the greater Greenville community as agents of *missio dei*.

As the founding pastor of Freedom Alive Church, nothing brings me more joy than to see those whom I lead flourish in their faith. Therefore, it is my optimistic expectation that as a result of this project that change will continue to occur and to be sustained. As people become more aware of God's presence within themselves, it will visibly manifest in every aspect of their being, knowing, and doing as they shine their light, be the salt of the earth, and the doer of good deeds.

APPENDIX A

RECRUITMENT LETTER AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Recruitment Letter

Dear _____,

The purpose of this letter is to invite you to be one of the participants in my Doctor of Ministry project this spring. Your participation in this study is voluntary. I am hopeful that this project will have a significant impact on our corporate worship experience as we acknowledge and heighten the awareness of God within ourselves, within our daily living practices, and in the world around us. I humbly ask you for a five-week commitment to attend and to participate in a Sunday afternoon lesson series from 4:00 pm until 6:00 pm beginning **Sunday, March 20** through **Sunday, April 17** and to participate in a four-hour, Saturday retreat, **Saturday, April 23**, from 10:00 am until 12:00 pm as a culminating activity.

A pre and post survey will be administered during the first and final sessions to measure your growth and understanding of awareness of God and its impact on your engagement and participation in worship at Freedom Alive. Following each lesson, you will be asked to complete an onsite evaluative tool and to complete reaction/reflection journal entries, particularly for lessons three through five as you employ the spiritual practices of prayer, meditation, solitude, and worship.

While it is understood that schedule conflicts may occur unexpectedly, your consistent attendance and participation are necessary and appreciated. However, if at any time and for any reason you choose to no longer participate in this project, you have the option to withdraw without penalty.

Please indicate with your signature below your intent to either confirm or to deny your participation in this project.

Thank you for your consideration and willingness to assist me.

In the Lord's Service,

Paula Bruce, Pastor

I, _____, agree to participate in this study.

I, _____, will not participate in this study.

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Soul as Sanctuary: Awareness of God Alone and Assembled at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville

Researcher: Paulleatha Bruce, Doctor of Ministry Candidate
Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity

Purpose

The purpose of this research study is to examine the depth of influence and impact that the awareness of God in self, in daily living practices, and in the world at-large has on your engagement and participation at Freedom Alive Church of Greenville.

Procedure

As part of this study, you are asked to commit to being a part of a five-week, Sunday afternoon series of in-person lessons that will be held from 4:00 pm until 6:00 pm in the church sanctuary and to being a part of a culminating, two-hour Saturday retreat in nature (weather permitting). A pre and post survey will be administered during the first session and during the Saturday retreat to examine your measures of growth from the beginning of the study until its end. You may skip any question that causes discomfort and may stop the survey at any time. At the beginning and ending of each lesson, you will be asked to complete an onsite evaluative tool and asked to complete reaction/reflection journal entries as you employ the spiritual practices of prayer, meditation, solitude, and worship as presented in lessons three, four, and five. Each session (except for the retreat) will be videorecorded.

Time Required

I anticipate that this study will require about **20** hours of your time that is inclusive of the five-week lesson series (two hours each), the culminating Saturday retreat (two hours), and the time you spend employing the spiritual disciplines of prayer, meditation, solitude, and worship and recording your reactions and reflections as journal entries.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study has been completed and the data have been

analyzed, this list will be destroyed and all video recordings will be deleted. Your name will not be used in any report.

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with your participation in this study. This study may help us to understand how being known by God is an invitation for us to know God in ways that result in increased levels of intimacy with God and incarnation of God's word and will for our lives that enhance engagement and participation in the corporate worship setting. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw From the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

How to Withdraw From the Study

If you want to withdraw from the study while a lesson or activity is in progress, please tell the researcher and leave the sanctuary. **There is no penalty for withdrawing.** If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact me at (864) 884-7056 or via email at pbruce1@gardner-webb.edu

If you have questions about the study, contact:

Paulleatha Bruce
D.Min Candidate
School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb University
(864) 884-7056
pbruce1@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Robert Canoy
Faculty Research Advisor
School of Divinity, Gardner-Webb University
(704) 406-4395
rcanoy@gardner-webb.edu

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Gardner-Webb University
Telephone: 704-406-3019
Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study, and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

_____ Date:

Participant Printed Name

_____ Date:

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

APPENDIX B

PRE AND POST SURVEY INSTRUMENT, EVALUATIONS, AND REFLECTIONS

PRE AND POST SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. Age_____
 2. Sex_____
 3. Highest level of education completed
 - a. High school diploma or GED
 - b. Technical or occupational certificate
 - c. Associate degree
 - d. Some college coursework completed
 - e. Bachelor's degree
 - f. Master's degree
 - g. Doctorate
 4. At what age were you baptized? _____
 5. How long have you been a member of this church? _____
 6. How many corporate worship experiences do you attend each month? _____
 7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), the importance of my participation in corporate worship may be ranked as _____.
 8. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my view of my study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as _____.
 9. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my awareness of God may be ranked as _____.
 10. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my understanding of awareness of God as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as_____.
- 1. In my daily living, I experience the presence of God.**
1. Always
 2. Most times
 3. Sometimes
 4. Rarely
 5. Never

2. The time that I feel the closest to God is when

1. I am troubled or sad
2. I am disappointed
3. I am frustrated
4. I am happy
5. I am heard and/or seen

3. The time that I feel the most distant from God is when

1. I am troubled or sad
2. I am disappointed
3. I am frustrated
4. I am angry
5. It seems as if I have been overlooked or forgotten

4. The place where I experience God's presence the most is

1. When I am home or in my car alone
2. When I am with other people
3. When I am in corporate worship
4. When I am in nature
5. Wherever I am

5. My relationship with God serves as the foundation for my overall approach to life.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

6. Before making a major life decision such as marriage or a career change, I consult with God

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

7. When I consult with God prior to decision-making,

1. I am able to fully accept whatever God tells me.
2. I anticipate God's agreement with what I want.
3. I set a specific time limit for God to answer.
4. I consider God's silence to be consent.
5. I have already decided to do what pleases me.

8. In a time of crisis such as job loss or the unexpected death of a loved one,

1. I allow myself to feel how/what I feel.
2. I seek comfort and support from those around me.
3. I immediately ask God why.
4. I become a pillar of strength for those around me.
5. I become distant and cold.

9. In a time of conflict,

1. I seek the presence of God for ways to bring about reconciliation.
2. I communicate my feelings to ensure that I am heard.
3. I triangle others to gain support.
4. I become confrontational.
5. I avoid it by any means necessary.

10. I am mindful of God's presence in my daily activities.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

11. I am open and receptive to interruptions in my normal routine when they occur.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

12. When I am prompted to take a different approach to something I do routinely, such as take an alternate route to work or to an activity,

1. I believe that there may be something that God wants to reveal to me.
2. I take the alternate route and then Google research accidents in the area.
3. I make a mental note to canvas the area on my way home.
4. I gripe and complain.
5. I ignore it.

13. When someone with whom I rarely speak needs my help,

1. I sense that it may be an opportunity to serve God by sharing my faith.
2. I assess what their needs are and then decide if I am going to help.
3. I listen to respond, not to understand.
4. I set a mental time limit before I "check out."
5. I ignore their request in order to stay on schedule.

14. I am able to discern God's presence in the world around me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

15. When I am in nature, I can sense God's presence the most

1. Near or in water.
2. Near or in the mountains.
3. As I observe the sky and the clouds.
4. As I observe flowers and/or trees.
5. As I observe birds and/or insects (i.e., butterfly).

16. When I see tragic events happening in the world (i.e., pandemic-related deaths, natural disasters),

1. I am concerned yet able to maintain a sense of God's peace.
2. I am concerned and worry about what's next.
3. I prepare for much worse things to happen.
4. I expect the world to end at any time.
5. I become hopeless and depressed.

17. I view spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, and solitude as meaningful and necessary to foster a deeper connection with God.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

18. Meditation provides me with an opportunity for

1. God and me to spend time together.
2. God to fill my mind with his thoughts.
3. God to make his purposes for my life clearer to me.
4. God to give me solutions to my problems.
5. God to give me rest.

19. The practice of meditation helps me to

1. Heighten my sensitivity to God's presence.
2. Focus so that I may hear God's voice.
3. Remain calm despite being troubled.
4. Remember the Scriptures that I have read.
5. Drift off to sleep.

20. As I meditate, I allow God to fill my mind with his thoughts.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

21. Time alone with God

1. Helps me to discover and to become who God desires for me to be.
2. Helps me to see the good in others and in myself.
3. Helps me to maintain a positive attitude.
4. Helps me to face difficulties in life.
5. Makes me uncomfortable.

22. Before I pray, I take the time to listen for God to direct it.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

23. When I pray, I can sense God's care and concern for me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

24. When I am faced with a dilemma and unsure of the right choice to make, prayer

1. Helps to me to discern the will of God for the answer.
2. Helps me to determine the difference between God's desires and my own.
3. Helps me to imagine the outcome.
4. Helps me to focus my thoughts.
5. Helps me to calm my fears.

25. When I sense change coming, prayer

1. Helps me to be open with God about whatever I may feel about it.
2. Provides me with an opportunity to receive God's wisdom and insight.
3. Helps me stay connected to God despite how I feel about it.
4. Provides me with an opportunity to speak against it.
5. Helps me to accept whatever comes.

26. Prayer is

1. An opportunity for me to surrender to God's will and be changed.
2. An opportunity to express to God my needs and desires as well as those of others.
3. An opportunity to build intimacy with God.
4. An opportunity to only bring to God the "big things" that I cannot handle.
5. An opportunity for me to discern if others are praying for me.

27. I am able to clearly understand the times when God is calling me to be alone.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

28. I _____ being alone.

1. Welcome
2. Enjoy
3. Fear
4. Despise
5. Prefer

29. Being alone in silence makes me feel _____.

1. Uncomfortable
2. Helpless
3. Open and receptive
4. Peaceful
5. Afraid

30. Being alone in silence

1. Gives me the opportunity to hear and to see God.
2. Gives me the time and space to sort out my thoughts and feelings.
3. Releases me from life's concerns and distractions.
4. Prepares me to stay in fellowship with God while in fellowship with others.
5. Makes me afraid of what God may show me and/or tell me about myself.

31. I view my participation in corporate worship as meaningful and necessary.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

32. My participation in corporate worship is meaningful and necessary

1. When I have set aside private time to spend with God beforehand.
2. When I have a need to be in fellowship with other people.
3. When I want to begin a new week on a positive note.
4. When I am troubled and in need of God's help.
5. As a last resort.

33. I view my participation in corporate worship as evidence of my response to God's care and concern for me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

34. My participation in corporate worship is enhanced

1. When I am mindful of God's presence in my daily living.
2. When I seek to honor God with my presence, praise, and thanksgiving.
3. When I expect evidence of divine activity within it.
4. When I sense a spirit of unity within the environment.
5. When the worship plan remains consistent with little to no changes.

35. My participation in corporate worship is often influenced by

1. The encounters I have with God throughout the week.
2. How often I am able to set aside time to be with God.
3. How well I have handled the challenges I face beforehand.
4. My willingness to worship God despite how I feel.
5. My responsibility to serve on a particular Sunday.

Participant Number: _____

I HAVE LEARNED

Participant Number: _____

I HAVE LEARNED

Participant Number: _____

I HAVE LEARNED

Participant Number: _____

I HAVE LEARNED

Participant Number: _____

I HAVE LEARNED

Theological Reaction/Reflection Journal Prompts

Lesson 3: Awareness of God in Praxis: Solitude

From the writer of Lamentations 3:28, we learned that it is “good...to sit alone in silence when the Lord has imposed it.” How many times this week were you led to sit alone in silence and listen for God? **Write a two-three sentence summary for each time you practiced solitude to include what you both saw and heard during your time in silence.**

Lesson 4: Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation and Prayer

Part I:

Meditation, we have learned, is an exploration of our interior lives, the time in which we intimately and soulfully meet God to both hear and to obey him. **In a two-three sentence summary, briefly outline the times you spent in meditation this week and how your heart and your mind became an inner sanctuary for God.**

Part II:

Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, asserts that prayer, the time of communion with God, actually begins with *listening* to God in order “to think God’s thoughts after him” (33). **After the time(s) of your practice of meditation, were you then led to pray? If so, in two to three sentences, briefly describe the content of your prayers. Were they based on what you heard and/or saw in meditation?**

If you practiced the discipline of prayer separately from meditation, in two to three sentences, briefly describe the content of your prayers. Do you believe that your prayers included God’s thoughts for your life? Why or why not?

Lesson 5: Awareness of God in Praxis: Worship

Worship, we learned, is something that we both do and experience that begins with “practicing the presence of God daily” (Foster, 170). Briefly outline three to four instances this week when you do the following:

- give praise and adoration to God
- intentionally attend to the voice and counsel of God in a situation
- read and engage the Scriptures
- serve others with kindness and love

While doing these things, did God’s presence become more tangible? How did these times of worship during the week prepare you for the corporate worship gathering today?

“GOD IN ME, GOD IN THE WORLD AROUND ME:” *LECTIO DIVINA* RETREAT
EVALUATION

Please answer the following questions.

1. Age_____
2. What part(s) of this retreat did you find most meaningful?
3. How has this retreat helped you to experience awareness of God on a deeper level?
4. How did this time set aside for being with God in nature help you to be more mindful of God’s presence within yourself and within the world around you?
5. As you read your chosen Scripture passages silently or aloud, which of the spiritual practices of solitude, prayer, meditation, and/or worship were you inspired to employ? Why?
6. How do the principles of lectio divina cause you to experience God’s presence within the Scriptures in new ways?
7. This retreat has inspired me to become more mindful of God’s presence in my daily living.
 1. Strongly Agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neutral
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly Disagree
8. The time alone with God helped me to discern God’s presence within the world around me.
 1. Strongly Agree
 2. Agree
 3. Neutral
 4. Disagree
 5. Strongly Disagree

POST-PROJECT FACILITATOR'S EVALUATION

1. Age_____
2. The facilitator was prompt and well-prepared.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree
3. The facilitator was knowledgeable and well-versed in each subject/topic presented.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree
4. The facilitator was kind and respectful.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree
5. The project lessons and activities were engaging and meaningful.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree
6. The instruction I received has given me a clearer understanding of what awareness of God means.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree
7. The lesson(s) that I found to be the most impactful is/are
8. The lesson(s) that I found to be the least impactful is/are
9. I will continue to incorporate the practices of solitude, meditation, and prayer to enhance and to enrich my practice of worship while I am alone and assembled with others.
1. Strongly Agree 2. Agree 3. Neutral 4. Disagree 5. Strongly Disagree

APPENDIX C
SERMONS AND LESSONS

Week 1, Sermon 1: Awareness of God-Creation

Title: “Intimacy: You Are Mine”

Intimacy is a closeness and connection that connote knowing and being known.

Text: Genesis 1:26-31 (NRSV)

Theme: God has a desire to be known by us; we have a need to be known by God.

Activating Thought: Awareness (consciousness; sensitivity) of God is simply defined as the ability to discern God’s presence within us and around us in such a way that it influences the belief system from which we act. In other words, awareness of God’s presence begins *inwardly* (intimacy) before it can be demonstrated *outwardly* (incarnation). Its springboard is *intimacy*, the closeness and connection that we share with God in relationship in which the experience of being known by God helps us to know God. The deeper we accept and believe that we are known by God, the deeper we come to know God which shapes the belief system that drives how I think, how I feel, and how I function.

Background: Genesis is a part of the Torah or Pentateuch, the historical books of the Bible from which we gain knowledge of the creation of humankind as God’s image bearers.

Genesis as a book is a compilation of sources from an oral tradition, meaning that there isn’t a single author despite many attributing the first five books of the Bible to Moses as the author. It is for this reason that there are two accounts of creation (the second being Genesis 2:4-25).

Detailed Analysis:

^{26a}Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; *adam*-Heb for “humankind.”

“*image*” and “*likeness*”-We are exposed to God as “creator” and humankind as “created,” not just *to do* (1:26b) but *to be*.

Key Point: Being “known” by God precedes the creative act, is involved in the creative act, and remains after the creative act. Our knowledge of this alone does not satisfy us. What satisfies us is awareness (consciousness, sensitivity) of God’s presence and activity within us and around us that is revealed by the quality of our relationship with God that manifests in the quality of how we live. Therefore, we must remain in close connection and communion with God in order to know God. The more we know God, the more we accept and understand that we are known by God.

Intimacy is intentional:

- It has a purpose (a specific, intended outgrowth; destiny)

- It has a posture (a presence, a position with parts relative to a specific, intended form)

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- It involves preparation (specific intended components and ingredients that lend themselves to destiny being fulfilled)

God begins with the end in mind, the destiny that he desires for us before he makes us. God not only wants us to achieve it, but he intends for us to achieve it. How? By making us in his image (“something cut out” an description of “an exact resemblance”) and according to his likeness (limits full assumption of image, meaning we are to be like God as reflection of his divine nature and not God), we can then mirror him (“have dominion) in the world.

God’s creation of us trumps our birth.

To create is “to cause to come into being; to evolve from one’s thought or imagination,” which supersedes the biological act of conception.

To birth is to enact the process of “bearing or bringing forth.”

When we are born, it is a bringing forth of who has been created; as created, we have purpose and posture that have been prepared before we come forth. Creation is an intimate act that God intends to perpetuate in relationship with us and us with God.

Verses 27-28

^{28a}God blessed them...This blessing is a conveyance of divine “power, strength, and potentiality.” This blessing remains in force when we remain in close communion and connection with God. God literally shares his power with us to be, to know, and to do.

^{28b} “and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply...’ their doing now is an outgrowth of their creation in that they have been empowered to be God’s co-creators by populating the earth through procreation, cultivating the earth (“subdue”), and ruling nature as God would through nurturing and caretaking (“have dominion”).

Verses 29-30

God provides whatever is needed to sustain the lives of his created.

Verse 31

God lauds everything that he has made as “very good,” to indicate the “perfection of the final work.”

Conclusion: Intimacy with God satisfies God’s desire to be known by us and satisfies our need to be known by God.

Week 1, Lesson 1 Awareness of God in Creation: Intimacy

(10 min) Introduction of KWL sheet as a pre/post evaluative tool for each session

(10 min) Participants complete “What I Know” and “What I Want to Know” sections

(20 min) Group share of responses to what they know about intimacy and what they would like to know about intimacy.

(40 min) Lecture/ Class Discussion

“The Keys to Intimacy: Knowing and Being Known”

Information resource is *Anatomy of the Soul*” by Curt Thompson, MD

Know/Knowing

- Involves thinking, feeling, and acting based on “observation, inquiry, or information
- Is to recognize, to be familiar, or to be acquainted with something or someone based on experience or information.

The issue with knowing or having knowledge only is that it feeds the desire to be right (Thompson)

Being known (from a human standpoint)

- Is to be recognized; familiar
- Is to be publicly acknowledged as someone/something due to experience (or gossip), productivity (task or role), or characteristics

The issue with being known from a human standpoint is that it feeds the desire to be well-known or famous.

The blessing of being known by God is that it feeds the desire to be righteous (loving and being loved by God in relationship)

Thompson’s Definition for “Being Known:”

To be known by God “is an invitation to be terrified, to be pursued, examined, and shaken, to be loved and to have hopes and even demands placed on us.”

(30 min) Read aloud and examination of Psalm 139:13-18

“An eloquent presentation of the biblical view that human life is simply a natural, biological occurrence but is a result of the will and work of a benevolent creator.”-J. McClinton McCann

Questions: “What is this text saying to us about God’s knowledge of us?”

“How does it make you feel to be known so intimately by God?”

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Knowing God more deeply is the result of “practicing the presence of God” by

- Constant conversation with God
- Constant listening for and to God (mindfulness of his presence sustains our desire for him and his involvement in our lives)

(10 min) Conclusion and completion of “What I Have Learned” as an evaluation of the session.

Week 2, Sermon 2: Awareness of God: Incarnation

Title: Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption

Text: John 1:1-18 (Read only verses 10-13)

Theme: Though we are God's image bearers through creation, we become God's children through belief. Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God reveals himself to all, but it is only those who believe in Him as such who are redeemed. It is

Key Words

Incarnation is literally "enfleshment," the embodiment of the divine in human flesh. Jesus Christ is truly and fully God and fully human, the "enfleshment" of the eternal Word of God (logos). **Incarnation** for human beings is also embodiment, meaning what we believe is expressed concretely in our being, knowing and doing.

Revelation is God's self-disclosure to humankind; God making God's self known to us.

Redemption is two-fold: it is "the work of God in delivering His people from spiritual bondage unto himself, usually said at the expense of Christ's death," and it is the end-time deliverance and resurrection of God's people at Jesus Christ's final return (Shogren).

Activating Statement: Whenever we yield to God's pursuit of us, the more we become God's children.

Literary Analysis: The Prologue (John 1:1-18)

- Verses 1-5 establish the pre-existence of the Word and his relationship with the world. The Word existed before creation and was present when creation came into being as the Word, "who was with God and who was God." Jesus Christ, the eternal Word of God and the Revealer of God to humankind, remains present and active in the creation and in the created order. **Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God is the "Light" and "Life of Creation"** (O'Day).
- Verses 6-8 recount the unknown evangelist's (not John the Baptist's) witness to the "Light."
- Verses 9-13 tell us "The Light, or Word, came into the world."
- Verses 14-18 is the Johannine community of faith's confession: "The Word became flesh and dwells among us."

Historical Context: In the Gospel of John, there is evidence of Jewish hostility to Christianity, so it is believed that by the time this Gospel was written (90-95) that the recipients of it were facing the same crisis. Though this Gospel bears the name John, the

actual writer is unknown, but is believed to have been “a prominent and respected person” in the Johannine community of faith.

Detailed Analysis-John 1:9-13

⁹The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

As an expression of God, Jesus Christ has made his entry into the world (*kosmos*).

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¹⁰He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. ¹¹He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him.

“**World**” in this context is not the whole of creation, but is “humanity and its domain (**sphere of action, thought, and influence**). Despite the whole of creation and humanity coming into being by the Word, creation, specifically **humanity** (in **being** that evidences in **acting, thinking, and influence**) **did not know him**.

To “**know**” (to understand and to apprehend clearly with certainty) in John’s Gospel is key. Why? **For it is upon what humanity is able to know or to “see” that suddenly brings about their belief** (1:19-12:50 is the Book of Signs, when the “Word reveals himself to the world and to his own, but they don’t receive him”-Brown).

“**His own**” and “**his own people**”-Where there is a lack of intimacy, there is no awareness. Because “his own” lacked intimacy and awareness with/of God, they could not “see” that Jesus Christ is God in human flesh.

¹²But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, ¹³who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

It is through Jesus Christ that God reveals God’s self. Therefore, as the full expression of God, Jesus Christ is the agency or vehicle through which those who “receive him and believe in his name” **become children of God. To become children of God demands incarnation or embodiment, our belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God made manifest in our being, knowing, and doing.**

Becoming a child of God

- is not automatic or autonomous. It demands divine activity through the Spirit of God at the onset of our confession and belief.
- is through the indwelling of God’s Spirit made possible by belief in Jesus Christ as the full expression of God.
- is a work that is beyond human agency or human possibility (by faith, not by works alone)
- happens when we welcome Jesus Christ as the eternal Word of God in faith (through which the Word works) that gives us the authority to become God’s children.

- is the basis of our awareness of God being constant and persistent in our lives. **Our sensitivity to and discernment of God's abiding Presence in us gives credence to God's being with us.**

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Conclusion: The Community's Confession (1:14-18)

God participates in our weakness by becoming that which he was not before to reveal his glory as our Redeemer. As fully divine and fully human, Jesus is "full of grace and truth" as flesh "that it might be revealed to all flesh" (Beasley-Murray).

When we become God's children, we become recipients of "grace upon grace," a never-ending "stream of divine blessings" of "God's goodwill and loving intentions toward humankind" (Westerholm, 657-658).

Incarnation: Revelation and Redemption

Week 2, Lesson 2

Activating Strategy: Have subjects to complete “I Know” and “What I Want to Know” sections of KWL chart (10 min).

I Do: Read Aloud of Psalm 139:1-6 (ask subjects to close eyes to focus listening)

They Do: In pairs, brain dump thoughts, feelings, etc. from what they heard about themselves and about God in Psalm 139-1-6 (review of intimacy-15 min).

We Do: Discuss revelations, thoughts from brain dump (15 min)

I Do/We Do: Incarnation lecture and discussion
(Irenaeus, Luther, and Bonhoeffer) and sermon review (40 min)

Irenaeus-Humankind as “the crown of creation” with the freedom and ability to become conformed to the divine nature of God and to enjoy a never-ending communion with God. This is accomplished through the “Two-Hands of God,” the Word and the Holy Spirit

- from which we receive instruction and growth that produces close communion with God (intimacy)
- that aid in the fulfillment of God’s purpose to make us like him.

Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Word is what is necessary to “fulfill our humanity,” not just as a response to the Fall in Eden, but to secure “our participation in the divine through our participation in the Son” which makes us human.

Luther-The Word of God reveals God’s will to and for human beings and helps us to do it. The indwelling of God’s Word is creative; it forms us and not merely informs us. The activity of the Word and the inner working of the Holy Spirit produces faith that results in embodiment (incarnation).

In agreement with Irenaeus, Luther asserts that the Word of God and the Holy Spirit promote and maintain our communion with and our connection to God (a “God of conversation and community, addressing (us) and delighting in (our) prayer and praise”).

Bonhoeffer-The Scriptures are the Word of God. As they are engaged, they speak and induce a God-human encounter that is mediated by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is the

mediator between God and us. As the Word embodied in flesh, Jesus gracefully “took on our being, our nature, (us).” He asserts that wherever Christ is (in the Incarnation, on the Cross, and in his resurrection) we find ourselves because “we belong to him because we are in him.”

We Do: “What I Want to Know” Q & A (25-30 min)

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They Do: Wrap-Up-Completion of “I Have Learned” column of KWL sheet and turn in (10-15 min)

Awareness of God in Praxis: Solitude
Week 3, Sermon 3

Text: Luke 10:38-42

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. ³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. ⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me. ⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

Title: "Don't Waste His Presence"

"**Waste**"-to fail or neglect; to be careless. "**Presence**"-The Spiritual appearance of the Divine that is intended to be felt and experienced.

Theme: Being with God is absolutely necessary to know God (intimacy) and to do (incarnation) for God are the essentials of true discipleship. **How will we ever know God and what to do for God if we never sit and listen to God?**

Activating Strategy: There is more than one sanctuary, the physical sanctuary in which we now gather and the spiritual sanctuary which is the heart. Belonging (relationship), believing (intimacy), and becoming (incarnation) are capable of existing in both.

Setting the Stage: Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem, the place where he is destined to die. Our preaching text comes after "The Parable of the Good Samaritan." Like the Samaritan, women are marginalized in society; however, the Samaritan and specifically Mary in our text are exemplars for discipleship, "those who hear the word and do it." While seeing is emphasized in the Parable, hearing is emphasized here. **Hearing begins with being with God; knowing and doing in ways that please God begin with being with God. Therefore, God can be engaged at any time and everywhere, but doing often distracts us from it.**

Detailed Analysis:

³⁸Now as they went on their way, he entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home.

Again, Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem. His being received by Martha into her home exemplifies his earlier teaching of the disciples in 10:8:

Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you.

Martha is the older sister of Mary, and a homeowner. Women had no rights and were considered property and not people, yet she **owned** property. A man being welcomed into

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the home of two unmarried women without another male being present in 1st century Palestine is *unusual*.

³⁹She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying.

Another *unusual* occurrence is that Mary takes the position of a male student. In Jewish culture, rabbis did not teach women, but Jesus did/does. Both male and female disciples are called to hear the word of God.

⁴⁰But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her to help me.

One of the sociocultural expectations for women in the household is to be responsible for providing hospitality to guests. For Mary not to help Martha "brings shame upon the house" because she does not operate in the traditional role of a woman (Culpepper). Therefore, Mary appeals to Jesus for help because his word (as a male) is authoritative. "Service" (*diakonia*) is rendered as *tasks*. While Martha is right to perform acts of service, *hearing the Word of God is priority now*, especially when it comes to her home (10:11, "the kingdom of heaven has come near"). **While Martha welcomes Jesus into her home, Mary leaves everything to welcome Jesus into her heart.**

⁴¹But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; ⁴²there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

When Jesus calls Martha by name twice, it is believed to be a "mild rebuke" (Tolbert and Culpepper). **Instead of making his presence a priority by sitting and hearing the word ("the one thing"), Martha gave herself over to the distraction of duty.** Anything that we allow to take precedence over hearing the word of God disorders our lives.

Mary has chosen "the Chosen One," which eventuates in her knowing she has been chosen. **Despite what society says, her choice to listen to Jesus cannot be taken away from her.**

Conclusion: Martha attempts to tell Jesus what he should do; "Mary lets Jesus tell her what to do." Therefore, she is praised for her choice to take advantage of his presence to hear what she does not know while Martha wastes it by her desire to do what she already knows.

Awareness of God in Praxis: Solitude Lesson 3, Week 3

10 min-(They Do) Complete “I Know” and “I Want to Know” of KWL Sheet

10 min-(They Do) Activating Strategy: Gathered Silence

“For 10 minutes, we all will sit in silence together. Make notes in your journals about the thoughts, feelings, etc. that come to you.”

20 min-(We Do) Discussion of outcomes/observations

- How does being in silence make you feel?
- What did you observe about yourself when you are in a shared space with others but are unable to speak to them?
- Is it possible to be around other people and still be able to sense God’s presence within you and around you?

30 min-(I Do) The spiritual practice/discipline of solitude (lecture)

According to Richard Foster in his book, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*, the spiritual practice of solitude

- is the time “to see and to hear” in silence that helps us to be “genuinely present” in God and to God right where we are.
- is the time to assess, to change, and to focus the direction of our lives.
- is “an interior watchfulness” (Anthony of the Desert)

Some truths about silence:

1. It makes us feel uncomfortable and helpless.
2. It reveals how much we depend on words either spoken or heard to determine how we see God, ourselves, others, and the world around us (belief system).
3. It involves vulnerability and trust.
4. It fosters communion and connection with God (intimacy) as an act of listening.
5. It reveals a possible dependence on the presence of company (others around us) instead of a dependence on the presence of God (within us and around us). **Read 76-77 in *Life Together*.**
6. It is often viewed as an absence of speech instead of an opportunity to listen.

The benefits of solitude as a “listening silence” are

1. A fuller exposure to God’s presence (intimacy)
2. A deepened connection and communion with God (intimacy)
3. An opportunity to learn how to receive ourselves and others as we/they are without words (intimacy)
4. An invitation to inwardly immerse ourselves in the silence of God (intimacy)

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5. The production of “increased sensitivity and compassion” for ourselves and for others (incarnation)
6. The production of patience (incarnation)
7. An “inner fulfillment” instead of the “inner emptiness” of loneliness (96).
8. “The simple stillness under the Word of God” (Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 79)- (intimacy/incarnation)

Solitude during “The Dark Night of the Soul”

St. John of the Cross coined this phrase that is defined as a God-imposed darkness “that is to be welcomed. It is not to punish or afflict (although it may feel like it). It is to set us free” (Foster, 102). It is a divinely appointed time to lead us into a deeper trust and faith in God.

Examples are times of “lostness” (no real sense of focus or direction) and “dryness” (the “see-nothing” times in our lives).

The dark night of the soul “is one of the ways God brings us into a hush, a stillness so that he may work an inner transformation of the soul” (Foster, 102).

Scripture Reference: Lamentations 3:25-30 (verses 25-28 emphasized)

- The title as we have it is a translation of the title as it appears in the Septuagint. The Hebrew title as translated is “How?”
- The book consists of five poems that lament the first destruction of the Temple (586BC). Although the poems appeal to God to end the suffering and exile and to restore them, “God never responds.”
- The speaker of chapter 3 is an unknown man who is believed to be “a shamed and humiliated captive, reaching for hope.”

Detailed Analysis:

²⁵**The Lord is good** to those who **wait** for him, to the soul that **seeks** him.

This outlines the appropriate behavior in suffering. To “wait” and to “seek” connote expectancy (“hesed,” the “steadfast love of Yahweh”).

²⁶**It is good** that one should **wait quietly** for the salvation of the Lord.

“Quietly”-“yahal,” hope

²⁷**It is good** for one to bear the yoke in youth, ²⁸to **sit alone in silence** when the Lord has imposed it...

Acceptance of what is, “knowing that evil will not last forever because the Lord will not let evil have the last word”-Robert E. Laurin

15 min-(We Do/I Do) Solitude as a practice

Question: Where is your sanctuary inside the home and outside the home?

Solitude can occur in what Foster calls “tiny snatches of time” such as

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- When we first awaken
- During the first cup of coffee of the day, breakfast, etc.
- Driving to and from work
- Moments in nature
- During breaks
- Before we fall asleep

In the New Testament, Jesus Christ practices solitude often (Mark 1:35; Mark 6:31; Matthew 26:36-46).

30 min-(We Do/I Do)

“What I Want to Know-” Q & A

Homework assignment (Journal prompt)

Completion of “I Have Learned”

Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation

Week 4, Midweek Lesson

Psalm 1

¹Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; ²**but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and his law they mediate day and night.** ³They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper. ⁴The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; ⁶for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

Meditation as a spiritual practice “is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.” It involves

- Being in the presence of God-willfully “giving our spirits to him” and “turning our thoughts toward him to lift the soul above worldly matters” (BL, 83-84)
- Being under his Word-“alone...in doing so, it gives us solid ground on which to stand,” and it is to the Word that we “expose ourselves until it addresses us personally (Bonhoeffer, 81-82)
- Listening to God’s voice-to receive “clear directions as to the steps we must take” (Bonhoeffer, 81)
- Being **changed**-through direct, consistent encounters with the Lord.

It is an **interior discipline** (fasting, prayer, and study are the other three) that causes our hearts to become a sanctuary for God, emotionally and spiritually. Our hearts as a sanctuary for God fosters **intimacy** and **incarnation** that results in **awareness of God**, the ability to sense and to discern the presence of God within us, within our daily movement, and in the world around us.

Detailed Analysis

¹Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers; ²**but their delight is in the law of the Lord, and his law they mediate day and night.**

“Happy” is translated as “**blessed**.” Those who are blessed are those who take delight in God’s law, instruction, God’s teaching that reveals God’s plans, thoughts, and intentions

concerning those who are connected to it and depend on it as **a life-giving and life-guiding source.**

Those blessed because of their devotion to the Word that exposes them to God's presence and God's presence to them in meditation are unlike the

- "Wicked"-self-centered and self-directed
- "Sinners"-those who miss the mark or choose the wrong way
- "Scoffers"-arrogant refusers of the enlightenment of God

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Why? Because of their choice to keep the Word ever before them as source of empowerment.

³They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.

Because they choose to keep the word consistently before them, those who are connected and dependent on God for right living, are "planted" (rooted) in places of favor (sources that have a continual supply of life, what it takes to live blessed).

"Water" is symbolic of "God's life-giving instruction." To be open to it is to trust God and to entrust our lives to it.

"Prosper" is the promise to be sustained under any circumstance.

⁴The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;

The wicked are in a powerless, weakened state (impotent). As reckless renegades, they are without roots (unstable) and are insecure because of their disregard of the Word as a life-giving and life-guiding source.

⁶for the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

As the righteous, they are the center of God's attention as a reward for their choice to engage and depend on the Word. The wicked who chose to be independent of God, self-centered, and self-directed will perish because of their disconnection.

"To be with the Creator, you must yield to him what he has created."

-Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection

Awareness of God in Praxis: Meditation and Prayer

Week 4, Lesson 4

(10 min)-KW completion of KWL chart

(15 min)-Group share of week-long practice of solitude (the time “to see and to hear” in silence that helps us to be “genuinely present” in God and to God right where we are; the time to assess, to change, and to focus the direction of our lives; “an interior watchfulness” (Anthony of the Desert)

(10 min) Transition

Meditation exercise- “Palms Down/Palms Up” (Foster, 31)

- Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, and turn your palms upward
- When you think of something that you desire to turn over to God, turn your palms downward, and say softly, “Release it.” Do this as often as necessary.
- When you are done surrendering, sit with your palms upward to receive from the Lord what you ask in silence. Once you have silently made your requests known, softly say, “Palms up.”
- If time remains, sit in silence. Do not ask for anything; allow God to be with you as you allow yourself to be with God.

(25 min) Lecture/Review of Psalm 1 from Midweek lesson

Meditation as a spiritual practice “is the ability to hear God’s voice and obey his word.”

It involves

- Being in the presence of God-willfully “giving our spirits to him” and “turning our thoughts toward him to lift the soul above worldly matters” (BL, 83-84)
- Being under his Word-“alone...in doing so, it gives us solid ground on which to stand,” and it is to the Word that we “expose ourselves until it addresses us personally (Bonhoeffer, 81-82)
- Listening to God’s voice-to receive “clear directions as to the steps we must take” (Bonhoeffer, 81)
- Being **changed**-through direct, consistent encounters with the Lord.

It is an **interior discipline** (fasting, prayer, and study are the other three) that causes our hearts to become a sanctuary for God, emotionally and spiritually. Our hearts as a

sanctuary for God fosters **intimacy** and **incarnation** that results in **awareness of God**, the ability to sense and to discern the presence of God within us, within our daily movement, and in the world around us.

(5 min)-**Briefly share what you know about prayer.**

(15 min) **The Discipline of Prayer** (Foster, 33-46)

- Prayer involves listening (39)
- Prayer keeps us in consistent communion with God.

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- Prayer is a child-like, radical dependency on God with “openness, honesty, and trust” (40)
- Prayer is what changes and transforms us; however, prayer does not always change or transform situations.
- Prayer helps to come closer to “the heartbeat of God.”
“The closer we come to the heartbeat of God, the more we see our need and the more we desire to be conformed to Christ” (33).
- Prayer provides God the opportunity to reveal the truth about us (our thoughts, our words, our actions) and “to set us free from them” (33).
- Prayer involves “asking rightly” as a result of “transformed passions” (33).
- Prayer that is genuine involves “(thinking) God’s thoughts after him; (desiring) the things he desires; (loving) the things he loves; (willing) the things he wills” (33).
- Prayer teaches us to see things as God sees them.

(5-7 min) **Discussion: When and how often do you pray?**

“The Prayer Posture of Jesus”-Mark 1:35

(20 min) **The Lord’s Prayer (Matthew 6:5-15)**

“Real prayer is something we learn” (Foster, 36)

Notes from J. L. Houlden, “Lord’s Prayer” in ABD, 356-362

The Lord’s Prayer

- Originates from the Aramaic teaching of Jesus, incorporated in Q, and included in Matt and Luke
- Luke’s version is closest to Q; Matt’s version has additions “using typical language”
(lines 2, 4, and 8)
- Verses 5-9 focus on “the avoidance of verbosity and prattling and on the single-minded attentiveness to God;” the wording is concise and “simple” (358)
- The LP is consistent with Matthean themes of “reciprocity, conditional forgiveness, strict rewards and punishments” that serve the evangelist’s community’s needs “while being faithfully consistent with Jesus’ teaching as he understood it” (359)

Fulfillment of God's Purpose

Line 1 (v. 9a): "Pray then in this way: Our Father in heaven"

Symbolic of a parent-child relationship and connection

Line 2 (v. 9b): hallowed be your name"

God's holiness is his "essential attribute;" the use of "hallowed" speaks to the grand and majestic "reality" of God's presence

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Line 3 (v. 10a): "Your kingdom come."

Petition 1- The end time expectation of "Jesus, as the coming One"

Line 4 (v. 10b): "Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

This is a "moral imperative," that we obey and carry out his will in the realm where evil resides (first realm of heaven) as the angels already do (in the second realm).

Satisfaction of Human Needs

Line 5 (v. 11): "Give us this day our daily bread."

Generally accepted as a request for what is necessary to sustain life.

Line 6 (v. 12): "And forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Consistent with Matthean teaching, "Forgiveness by God (is) bound up with the Christian readiness to forgive others, (with) a spirit of mercy and generous forgiveness that are basic to discipleship."

Line 7 (v. 13a): "And do not bring us to the time of trial,"

The "time of trial" is "a period of suffering."

Line 8 (v. 13b): "but rescue us from the evil one."

The devil is declared as "the source of trials and tests that Christians have to endure." The prayer is to be delivered, to be either "released" or that the time be made short.

Conclusion: "Palms Down, Palms Up" activity again with prayer added.

Homework assignment

Completion of L of KWL chart

Awareness of God in Praxis: The Discipline of Worship Week 5, Sermon 5

Text: Acts 1:3-5 (will refer to Luke 3:15-16; Luke 24)

³**After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.**

⁴**While staying with them, he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me;**

⁵**for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.**

Title: “The Meantime Matters”

Meantime-speaks to an interval of interim; a time that exists between one event and another that involves expectation

Matters-speaks to importance and meaning.

Theme: Proclamation sets the expectation for manifestation; between proclamation and manifestation is preparation.

Activating Strategy: “The Old Testament day begins at evening and ends with the going down of the sun (the next day). **It is the time of expectation.** The day of the New Testament church begins with the break of day and ends with the dawning light of the next morning. **It is the time of fulfillment,** the resurrection of the Lord. At night Christ was born, **a light in darkness; noonday turned to night** when Christ suffered and died on the Cross. But **in the dawn of Easter morning** Christ rose in victory from the grave.”-“The Day’s Beginning” from *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Setting the Stage:

(Literary Context) As a continuation of *Luke*, *Acts* is believed to have been given its name by “later church writers to refer to the deeds of the apostles” (Brown). Interestingly enough, all the acts of the Twelve are not recorded. At least 17 chapters of Acts are dedicated to Paul and 9-10 chapters to Peter. Beyond this, Stephen, who is not an apostle, is the only other figure whose narrative is captured.

(Historical Context) For 40 days post resurrection, Jesus appears to the disciples “as preparation for the coming of the Spirit” (Brown). 40 days/years bear significance in the Bible as the story of God in that in Luke 4, Jesus spends 40 days in the desert before he

goes “in the power of the Spirit” to Galilee to begin his ministry. For 40 years, the Israelites were prepared by God to enter the Promised Land. **As a recurring theme, 40 days/years signify a period of preparation for a new beginning to come.**

Detailed Analysis: Acts 1:3-5

³After his suffering he presented himself alive to them by many convincing proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

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People

Unlike what is captured in Luke 24, Jesus does not appear to the disciples and ascend to his Father in the same day. Post crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus presents “the new manifestation of himself” to the disciples.

“Suffering”-symbolic of his faithfulness and obedience to God despite what it cost him.

“Convincing proofs”-Perhaps some doubt still existed among the disciples, so these “proofs” served as evidence of his resurrection.

“40 days”-Final instructions to prepare the disciples/apostles to continue his mission as his “chosen successors.”

“Speaking about the kingdom of God”-The kingdom of God is not clearly defined here but is inferred. The kingdom of God is God-centric, meaning God alone reigns and as “the divine choreographer of history,” God remains connected to it and remains “powerfully present to heal and restore those who trust in (him)” (Wall).

Preparation

⁴While staying (eating) with them, 1. he ordered them not to leave Jerusalem, but 2. to wait there for the promise of the Father. “This,” he said, “is what you have heard from me;

“Jerusalem”-location for Jesus’ death, resurrection, and ascension; for the disciples/apostles, it is the birthplace of the Christian movement (**gathered**) and their “departure” also as they carry out the command to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth (**scattered**).

“Wait for the promise of the Father”-Gathered. The corporate gathering is where the Spirit touches the human spirit, a continual mediation of God’s word “before Christ, during Christ, and after Christ” (evidence of obedience Acts 1:12-14) in **expectation** of the arrival of the Holy Spirit and preparation to be **scattered**.

Power

⁵for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not too many days from now.

Fulfillment of John’s prophecy in Luke 3:15-16 (read aloud). Baptism with water-“what already occurred” as **preparation** for baptism with the Spirit-“for what has yet to happen.”

Baptism with the Spirit of God

- Brings the disciples/apostles into the realm of “the prophetic ministry of Jesus”

- Gives them power to effectively minister the word of God in life and in witness of the risen Jesus.

This is absolutely necessary to carry the mission forward.

Conclusion: The meantime matters because it is preparation. It is the interim between the proclamation and the promise.

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Awareness of God in Praxis: Worship Week 5, Lesson 5

(10 min) Group Share-Outcomes from individual practice of prayer and meditation

(10 min) Completion of K and W of KWL sheet for worship

(30 min) Lecture “Worship”

Notes from Bonhoeffer, Brother Lawrence, and Foster

Read aloud OT and NT perspective of “The Day’s Beginning” (Bonhoeffer, 40)

“The Old Testament day begins at evening and ends with the going down of the sun (the next day). **It is the time of expectation.** The day of the New Testament church begins with the break of day and ends with the dawning light of the next morning. **It is the time of fulfillment,** the resurrection of the Lord. At night Christ was born, **a light in darkness; noonday turned to night** when Christ suffered and died on the Cross. But **in the dawn of Easter morning** Christ rose in victory from the grave.

With this heard is there ever a time when your current understanding of worship doesn’t happen? Why or why not?

“The Discipline of Worship” (Foster, 158-174)

Worship is when we respond to “God’s divine initiative” individually and collectively. As a **corporate** practice, worship is “to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community,” in the form of an “(invasion) of the Shekinah of God.” *Shekinah* is the immediate presence of God manifested in fire, “the glory or radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people.” **This can also happen when we are alone.**

Worship is not

- a specific technique, ritual, or form
- our response to the directives of a praise and worship leader

Worship is what happens when God’s Spirit touches ours and frees us. The things mentioned above **invite** us to worship, “but they are not **the** worship.” **God and God only is the subject of our worship.** Therefore, awareness of God (God’s presence is

understood) is to not be prioritized on Sunday; it is to be prioritized in our daily living in order to prepare us for Sunday.

“Practicing the Presence of God” (Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection, 74-82)

To practice the presence of God is “spiritual living.” It is when

- **we find companionship with God** by “talking with him humbly and lovingly at all times-not just according to some schedule”

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- **we seek God**, “particularly during times of temptation, trouble, spiritual dryness, and especially when we fall away into unfaithfulness and sin”
- **we “act thoughtfully,”** being mindful that God is with us and for us at all times
- **we constantly turn to God** with the desire that all that we are and do are “(gifts) to him.”

These things promote **inward** worship that is performed **outwardly**. Worship, then, is what we **do** that begins with our response to God’s presence **daily**.

The type of worship that pleases God, *who is Spirit*, is worship from “*honest spirits*” (us), as we worship from the humility and authenticity of “the center of our souls, a worship that only he can see.” The “truth” of our worship is when we “acknowledge that God is who God is and we are who we are.”

Corporate worship as a “holy expectancy” (Acts 1:3-5; 2:1-4)

(15-20 min) Group Activity

Reread Acts 1:3-5 (Morning Message) and then read Acts 2:1-4

Discuss the following

1. How were they prepared to receive the promise of the Father? Receive and listen to Jesus’ instructions to remain gathered to wait in Jerusalem with expectancy (the only “timestamp” they received from Jesus is “not too many days from now”) **(Acts 1:3-5)**
2. What were the things that needed to be in place for the promise to be received? Living and gathering in unity and obedience with expectancy **(Acts 2:1-4)**

“Live throughout the week as an heir of the kingdom, listening for his voice, obeying his word. Since you have heard his voice throughout the week, you know that you will hear his voice as you gather for public worship” (Foster, 163)

When we all often do this, we can have an Acts 2:1-4 experience in corporate worship often!

(20 min) Aspects of Worship (Public and Private) (Foster, 165-174)

1. God is the leader-God’s presence is alive, active, present, and powerful with and among his people. God is the one who saves us, redeems us, and teaches us how to be righteous and holy (165). **Therefore, God is to be received, revered, and honored as the subject of our worship.**

2. Worship as “an ordered way of acting and living” is what gets us before God so that we can be changed and transformed. The practices of solitude, meditation, and prayer help us “to live in a perpetual, inward listening silence so that God is the source of our words and actions.” In other words, when we constantly give our spirits to God and turn our thoughts to God, we will heighten our sensitivity of God which “cultivates the habit of allowing every conversation, every business transaction to be divinely prompted (which will) flow into public worship” (166-167).

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3. Praise leads us into worship (i.e., Psalm 100).

4. Worship demands that our entire being participates.

5. Worship requires advance preparation and an attitude of gratitude and willingness (submission).

6. Worship is a sacrifice-“Many times you will not ‘feel’ like worship. Perhaps you have had so many disappointing experiences in the past that you think it is hardly worth it...**but you need to go anyway**...desire to give God this time” (172).

7. Worship that begins in “holy expectancy” ends in “holy obedience.”

“If worship does not propel us into greater obedience, it has not been worship” (173).

(10 min) Wrap-Up

- Homework assignment
- Retreat details
- Completion of KWL for worship

Session 6: *Lectio Divina* Retreat
“God in Me, God in the World Around Me”

Purpose: The *lectio divina* retreat, “God in Me, God in the World Around Me,” is a two-hour retreat in nature that has been designed as a culminating activity for this project. During these two hours, participants will be introduced to and allowed to practice *lectio divina* as meditative way to read and to engage Scripture that promotes the continuation of the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship as substantive measures to heighten and enrich God-consciousness.

Place and Time: McFalls Landing in Anderson, SC Saturday, April 23, 2022 from 10:00 am until 12:00 pm.

(15 min) Statement of purpose and introduction

Script:

As I hope that we have learned throughout this six-week process, the depth of our awareness of God, the ability to discern and to be sensitive to the presence of God within ourselves, within our daily living, and in the world around us, is dependent on the depth of our intimacy with God that affects our ability to incarnate or embody God’s word. This retreat is dedicated to us intentionally setting aside time to be with God in nature as a means to become more mindful of God’s presence within us and around us. I ask at this time that you completely silence all of your electronic devices and commit to only using them to locate and read your selected Scripture passages if you did not bring a Bible. The only other items that you will need are your journals and a pen. Are there any questions before we begin?

Prayer:

Gracious and merciful Father, we are enjoined by your presence now to open our hearts and our minds to receive a greater awareness of you. We surrender ourselves fully to your authority as we deny ourselves of our usual activities that we engage so that we can be with you in this part of the world that you have created. We surrender to your authority as we give you the thoughts that may attempt to distract us from hearing your voice speak to us through these ancient texts that contain powerful, relevant messages for our lives today. Please reveal yourself to us in ways that show us what we need to see and teach us what we need to know. In all things, God, we give you glory and honor, and we thank

you for providing us with this opportunity to unplug from this world so that we may connect with your Spirit more deeply while simply being in it and with you. It is in Jesus' name that we pray and consider our requests heard. Amen."

(30 min) Brief lecture and practice of *lectio divina* as a supportive method of the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship.

Script:

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The phrase "*lectio divina*" is Latin terminology for 'divine reading.' It is a meditative way of reading the Scripture that leads to prayer. When I speak of 'a meditative way', I am referring to the process of listening for God as the scripture is read either silently or loud that enables us to do two things:

1. Hear what the scripture is saying about his/her life right now, and
2. Determine what the scripture is asking him/her to do.

Before I give you time to employ this on your own as you practice the spiritual disciplines that you learned as a part of this project, please listen carefully as I read Psalm 139:7-12 (NRSV) aloud for you **twice**:

⁷Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence? ⁸If I ascend to heaven, you are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there. ⁹If I take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, ¹⁰even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me fast. ¹¹If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light around me become night," ¹²even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

1. Without elaboration, what are the key words that you hear in this text?

I will now read the text again.

2. Please briefly share how this Scripture is touching your life right now.

I will now read the text for a final time:

3. What is this Scripture asking you to do?

Now that we have engaged in *lectio divina* as a group, do you have any questions concerning the process at this time?

Script

Embedded within *lectio divina* are the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship (alone and assembled with others) about which you have learned and practiced for this project. For the next 30 minutes, you will practice *lectio divina* and any of the spiritual practices using a Scripture of your choice in a place within this park alone.

(40 min) Participants disburse in silence to practice *lectio divina* and the spiritual practices of solitude, meditation, prayer, and worship.

Half-Sheet for *Lectio Divina* Practice

After choosing a Scripture, please follow the steps as outlined below.

Step 1: Read the text twice either silently or aloud

Step 2: Without elaboration, jot down the keys words that you hear in the text

Step 3: Read the text again (once)

Step 4: How is this scripture touching my life right now? Make notes.

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Step 5: Read the text for a final time (once).

Step 6: What is this scripture asking me to do? Make notes.

Step 7: Prayer

(30 min) Group Share and Closing Prayer

Script:

Now that we have reassembled, I would like to briefly hear about your experiences with *lectio divina* and the spiritual practices. As you share your responses, please make sure that they contain the following:

1. Selected Scripture passage
2. Revelations, occurrence, etc. from engaging this Scripture while in nature

APPENDIX D

DATA

Pre/Post Survey Data

Control Group Respondents Demographics (5)

1. Age-Mean is **57 years**

Silent-0

Boomer-40%

Xer-60%

Millennial-0

2. Sex

Female-100%

3. Highest level of education completed

a. High school diploma or GED-**40%**

b. Technical or occupational certificate-**40%**

c. Associate degree-**0**

d. Some college coursework completed-**0**

e. Bachelor's degree-**0**

f. Master's degree-**20%**

g. Doctorate-**0**

4. At what age were you baptized? **Mean is 24 years of age**

5. How long have you been a member of this church?

Range is 1 month to 14 years; Mean is 8.2 years

6. How many corporate worship experiences do you attend each month? **Mean is 4 Sundays**

7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), the importance of my participation in corporate worship may be ranked as _____.

Control Group (5)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
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369 (B)	10	10	0
669 (B)	9	10	<1>
957 (X)	10	10	0
518 (X)	10	10	0
473 (X)	10	9	1
Total	49	49	0

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8. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my view of my study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as _____.

Control Group (5)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	8	10	<2>
669 (B)	9	8	1
957 (X)	10	10	0
518 (X)	10	8	2
473 (X)	10	10	0
Total	47	46	1

9. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my awareness of God may be ranked as _____.

Control Group (5)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	10	10	0
669 (B)	9	10	<1>
957 (X)	10	10	0
518 (X)	10	8	2
473 (X)	10	5	5
Total	49	43	6

10. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my understanding of awareness of God as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as_____.

Control Group (5)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	10	10	0
669 (B)	9	9	0
957 (X)	10	9	1
518 (X)	10	8	2

473 (X)	10	8	2
Total	49	44	5

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Project Participants Demographics (9)

1. Age-Mean is 51 years

Silent-11.11%

Boomer-22.22%

Xer-33.33%

Millennial-33.33%

2. Sex

Female-100%

3. Highest level of education completed

a. High school diploma or GED-**33.33%**

b. Technical or occupational certificate-**33.33%**

c. Associate degree-**11.11%**

d. Some college coursework completed-**11.11%**

e. Bachelor's degree-**0**

f. Master's degree-**11.11%**

g. Doctorate-**0**

4. At what age were you baptized? Mean is 17 years of age

5. How long have you been a member of this church?

Range is 2.5 to 14 years; Mean is 8 years

6. How many corporate worship experiences do you attend each month? Mean is 3.9

Sundays

7. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), the importance of my participation in corporate worship may be ranked as ____.

Project Participants (9)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	10	9	1
135 (B)	10	10	0

326 (B)	10	8	2
777 (X)	10	10	0
712 (X)	10	10	0
426 (X)	10	8	2
128 (M)	8	6	2
218 (M)	10	10	0
118 (M)	10	10	0
Total	88	81	7

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8. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my view of my study of the Scriptures as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as _____.

Project Participants (9)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	10	8	2
135 (B)	9	9	0
326 (B)	10	10	0
777 (X)	10	10	0
712 (X)	10	10	0
426 (X)	10	10	0
128 (M)	9	8	1
218 (M)	10	9	1
118 (M)	10	8	2
Total	88	82	6

9. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my awareness of God may be ranked as _____.

Project Participants (9)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	10	10	0
135 (B)	10	7	3
326 (B)	10	10	0
777 (X)	10	8	2
712 (X)	10	7	3
426 (X)	10	9	1
128 (M)	9	5	4
218 (M)	10	7	3
118 (M)	10	7	3
Total	89	84	19

10. On a scale from 1 to 10 (1 being the lowest and 10 being the highest), my understanding of awareness of God as meaningful and necessary may be ranked as_____.

Project Participants (9)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	10	10	0
135 (B)	10	7	3
326 (B)	10	10	0
777 (X)	10	8	2
712 (X)	10	7	3
426 (X)	10	9	1
128 (M)	9	5	4
218 (M)	10	7	3
118 (M)	10	7	3
Total	89	70	19

Please circle only one response for each of the following questions.

1. In my daily living, I experience the presence of God.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	2	2	0
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	9	11	<2>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	1	1
135 (B)	2	3	<1>
326 (B)	2	1	1
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	2	3	<1>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	13	19	<6>

2. The time that I feel the closest to God is when

1. I am troubled or sad
2. I am disappointed
3. I am frustrated
4. I am happy
5. I am heard and/or seen

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	4	0	4
669 (B)	3	1	2
957 (X)	4	4	0
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	4	4	0
Total	16	11	5

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	4	4	0
135 (B)	2	1	1
326 (B)	1	4	<3>

777 (X)	4	4	0
712 (X)	5	5	0
426 (X)	4	1	3
128 (M)	5	5	0
218 (M)	3	1	2
118 (M)	4	4	0
Total	32	29	3

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3. The time that I feel the most distant from God is when

1. I am troubled or sad
2. I am disappointed
3. I am frustrated
4. I am angry
5. It seems as if I have been overlooked or forgotten

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	0	1
669 (B)	4	3	1
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	3	3	0
473 (X)	5	1	4
Total	14	8	6

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	5	<4>
135 (B)	1	3	<2>
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	4	5	<1>
712 (X)	1	3	<2>
426 (X)	3	5	<2>
128 (M)	5	2	3
218 (M)	2	3	<1>
118 (M)	1	5	<4>
Total	19	32	<13>

4. The place where I experience God's presence the most is

1. When I am home or in my car alone
2. When I am with other people
3. When I am in corporate worship
4. When I am in nature

5. Wherever I am

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	5	5	0
669 (B)	5	1	4
957 (X)	4	4	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	4	3	1
Total	19	14	5

149

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	4	5	<1>
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	5	5	0
777 (X)	5	3	2
712 (X)	4	1	3
426 (X)	5	1	4
128 (M)	5	1	4
218 (M)	5	3	2
118 (M)	4	3	1
Total	38	23	15

5. My relationship with God serves as the foundation for my overall approach to life.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	2	2	0
Total	7	7	0

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	2	<1>
135 (B)	2	2	0

326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	1	1	0
218 (M)	1	1	0
118 (M)	1	2	<1>
Total	10	14	<4>

150

6. Before making a major life decision such as marriage or a career change, I consult with God

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	3	2	1
669 (B)	2	3	<1>
957 (X)	1	2	<1>
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	2	3	<1>
Total	9	12	<3>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	3	3	0
135 (B)	2	3	<1>
326 (B)	1	2	<1>
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	3	<2>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	3	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	2	<1>
Total	12	20	<8>

7. When I consult with God prior to decision-making,

1. I am able to fully accept whatever God tells me.
2. I anticipate God's agreement with what I want.
3. I set a specific time limit for God to answer.
4. I consider God's silence to be consent.
5. I have already decided to do what pleases me.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	1	2	<1>
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	3	3	0
Total	7	8	<1>

151

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	2	<1>
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	4	<3>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	4	<3>
218 (M)	1	4	<3>
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	9	19	<10>

8. In a time of crisis such as job loss or the unexpected death of a loved one,

1. I allow myself to feel how/what I feel.
2. I seek comfort and support from those around me.
3. I immediately ask God why.
4. I become a pillar of strength for those around me.
5. I become distant and cold.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	4	1	3
669 (B)	3	3	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	4	1	3
Total	14	8	6

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	4	4	0
135 (B)	4	4	0
326 (B)	1	1	0

777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	4	<3>
426 (X)	1	4	<3>
128 (M)	1	1	0
218 (M)	1	3	<2>
118 (M)	3	5	<2>
Total	17	27	<10>

152

9. In a time of conflict,

1. I seek the presence of God for ways to bring about reconciliation.
2. I communicate my feelings to ensure that I am heard.
3. I triangle others to gain support.
4. I become confrontational.
5. I avoid it by any means necessary.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	1	5	<4>
473 (X)	5	5	0
Total	10	13	<3>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	2	<1>
135 (B)	2	1	1
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	1	0
218 (M)	1	5	<4>
118 (M)	1	5	<4>
Total	10	19	<9>

10. I am mindful of God's presence in my daily activities.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely

5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	2	2	0
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	2	3	<1>
Total	9	10	<1>

153

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	2	0
135 (B)	1	2	<1>
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	4	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	2	3	<1>
Total	12	19	<7>

11. I am open and receptive to interruptions in my normal routine when they occur.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	3	3	0
957 (X)	1	3	<2>
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	2	2	0
Total	10	12	<2>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	3	3	0
135 (B)	3	3	0
326 (B)	2	3	<1>
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	2	3	<1>

426 (X)	2	2	0
128 (M)	3	3	0
218 (M)	2	3	<1>
118 (M)	2	2	0
Total	20	24	<4>

154

12. When I am prompted to take a different approach to something I do routinely, such as take an alternate route to work or to an activity,

1. I believe that there may be something that God wants to reveal to me.
2. I take the alternate route and then Google research accidents in the area.
3. I make a mental note to canvas the area on my way home.
4. I gripe and complain.
5. I ignore it.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	1	4	<3>
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	2	<1>
Total	5	9	<4>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	1	0
218 (M)	1	1	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	9	9	0

13. When someone with whom I rarely speak needs my help,

1. I sense that it may be an opportunity to serve God by sharing my faith.
2. I assess what their needs are and then decide if I am going to help.
3. I listen to respond, not to understand.
4. I set a mental time limit before I “check out.”
5. I ignore their request in order to stay on schedule.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	3	1	2
669 (B)	1	2	<1>
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	0	1
Total	8	5	3

155

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	1	3	<2>
218 (M)	1	1	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	9	12	<3>

14. I am able to discern God's presence in the world around me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	2	3	<1>
957 (X)	2	2	0
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	2	2	0
Total	10	11	<1>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	2	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	2	3	<1>

426 (X)	2	2	0
128 (M)	2	4	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	14	21	<7>

156

15. When I am in nature, I can sense God's presence the most

1. Near or in water.
2. Near or in the mountains.
3. As I observe the sky and the clouds.
4. As I observe flowers and/or trees.
5. As I observe birds and/or insects (i.e., butterfly).

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	3	4	<1>
669 (B)	3	1	2
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	3	1	2
473 (X)	5	5	0
Total	15	12	3

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	4	4	0
135 (B)	3	3	0
326 (B)	5	3	2
777 (X)	2	2	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	3	<2>
128 (M)	1	1	0
218 (M)	1	3	<2>
118 (M)	1	2	<1>
Total	19	22	<3>

16. When I see tragic events happening in the world (i.e., pandemic-related deaths, natural disasters),

1. I am concerned yet able to maintain a sense of God's peace.
2. I am concerned and worry about what's next.
3. I prepare for much worse things to happen.
4. I expect the world to end at any time.
5. I become hopeless and depressed.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	5	<3>
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	1	0
Total	6	9	<3>

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Project Participants			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	2	<1>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	10	12	<2>

17. I view spiritual practices such as mediation, prayer, and solitude as meaningful and necessary to foster a deeper connection with God.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	6	9	<3>

Project Participants			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	2	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	1	0

777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	3	<2>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	3	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	2	<1>
Total	11	17	<6>

158

18. Meditation provides me with an opportunity for

1. God and me to spend time together.
2. God to fill my mind with his thoughts.
3. God to make his purposes for my life clearer to me.
4. God to give me solutions to my problems.
5. God to give me rest.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	2	3	<1>
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	7	11	<4>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	3	<2>
777 (X)	2	3	<1>
712 (X)	2	3	<1>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	3	<1>
218 (M)	2	5	<3>
118 (M)	2	1	1
Total	14	21	<7>

19. The practice of meditation helps me to

1. Heighten my sensitivity to God's presence.
2. Focus so that I may hear God's voice.
3. Remain calm despite being troubled.
4. Remember the Scriptures that I have read.
5. Drift off to sleep.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	2	<1>
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	2	2	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	2	5	<3>
Total	8	12	<4>

159

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	2	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	2	<1>
777 (X)	2	2	0
712 (X)	2	5	<3>
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	2	3	<1>
218 (M)	2	2	0
118 (M)	2	1	1
Total	16	21	<5>

20. As I meditate, I allow God to fill my mind with his thoughts.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	2	<1>
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	2	4	<2>
Total	6	10	<4>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	1	1
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	2	<1>

712 (X)	2	3	<1>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	4	<2>
218 (M)	1	3	<2>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	12	19	<7>

160

21. Time alone with God

1. Helps me to discover and to become who God desires for me to be.
2. Helps me to see the good in others and in myself.
3. Helps me to maintain a positive attitude.
4. Helps me to face difficulties in life.
5. Makes me uncomfortable.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	1	3	<2>
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	5	9	<4>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	2	<1>
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	3	<2>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	4	1	3
218 (M)	1	4	<3>
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	12	15	<3>

22. Before I pray, I take the time to listen for God to direct it.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	4	3	1
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	2	3	<1>
518 (X)	3	2	1
473 (X)	2	3	<1>
Total	13	13	0

161

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	1	1
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	2	2	0
777 (X)	1	3	<2>
712 (X)	2	4	<2>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	5	<3>
218 (M)	1	3	<2>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	14	24	<10>

23. When I pray, I can sense God's care and concern for me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	3	3	0
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	1	2	<1>
518 (X)	1	2	<1>
473 (X)	2	2	0
Total	8	10	<2>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	2	1	1
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	2	<1>

426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	1	3	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	10	16	<6>

162

24. When I am faced with a dilemma and unsure of the right choice to make, prayer

1. Helps to me to discern the will of God for the answer.
2. Helps me to determine the difference between God's desires and my own.
3. Helps me to imagine the outcome.
4. Helps me to focus my thoughts.
5. Helps me to calm my fears.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	2	4	<2>
Total	8	9	1

Project Participants (9)

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	2	<1>
777 (X)	2	5	<3>
712 (X)	2	2	0
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	2	2	0
218 (M)	2	2	0
118 (M)	2	1	1
Total	15	19	<4>

25. When I sense change coming, prayer

1. Helps me to be open with God about whatever I may feel about it.
2. Provides me with an opportunity to receive God's wisdom and insight.
3. Helps me stay connected to God despite how I feel about it.
4. Provides me with an opportunity to speak against it.
5. Helps me to accept whatever comes.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	3	<2>
669 (B)	2	5	<3>
957 (X)	2	2	0
518 (X)	3	5	<2>
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	9	18	<9>

163

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	3	5	<2>
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	3	3	0
426 (X)	2	3	<1>
128 (M)	2	1	1
218 (M)	3	5	<2>
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	17	22	<5>

26. Prayer is

1. An opportunity for me to surrender to God's will and be changed.
2. An opportunity to express to God my needs and desires as well as those of others.
3. An opportunity to build intimacy with God.
4. An opportunity to only bring to God the "big things" that I cannot handle.
5. An opportunity for me to discern if others are praying for me.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	1	2	<1>
Total	7	8	<1>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	3	<2>
777 (X)	3	3	0
712 (X)	3	1	2

426 (X)	1	3	<2>
128 (M)	3	2	1
218 (M)	3	3	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	17	18	1

164

27. I am able to clearly understand the times when God is calling me to be alone.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	2	<1>
669 (B)	2	3	<1>
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	2	2	0
473 (X)	2	4	<2>
Total	9	12	<3>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	2	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	2	3	<1>
426 (X)	2	2	0
128 (M)	2	3	<1>
218 (M)	2	4	<2>
118 (M)	2	2	0
Total	15	19	<4>

28. I _____ being alone.

1. Welcome
2. Enjoy
3. Fear
4. Despise
5. Prefer

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	4	4	0
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	2	2	0
Total	11	10	1

165

Project Participants			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	1	1
135 (B)	2	1	1
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	2	2	0
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	2	<1>
128 (M)	1	2	<1>
218 (M)	1	5	<4>
118 (M)	1	3	<2>
Total	12	19	<7>

29. Being alone in silence makes me feel_____.

1. Uncomfortable
2. Helpless
3. Open and receptive
4. Peaceful
5. Afraid

Control Group			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	4	4	0
669 (B)	3	3	0
957 (X)	3	4	<1>
518 (X)	3	4	<1>
473 (X)	4	4	0
Total	17	19	<2>

Project Participants			
Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	4	4	0
135 (B)	4	4	0
326 (B)	4	3	1
777 (X)	3	4	<1>

712 (X)	4	4	0
426 (X)	3	4	<1>
128 (M)	3	4	<1>
218 (M)	3	4	<1>
118 (M)	3	1	2
Total	31	32	<1>

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30. Being alone in silence

1. Gives me the opportunity to hear and to see God.
2. Gives me the time and space to sort out my thoughts and feelings.
3. Releases me from life's concerns and distractions.
4. Prepares me to stay in fellowship with God while in fellowship with others.
5. Makes me afraid of what God may show me and/or tell me about myself.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	4	<3>
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	2	3	<1>
473 (X)	1	3	<2>
Total	6	12	<6>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	4	<3>
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	3	2	1
218 (M)	1	3	<2>
118 (M)	1	4	<3>
Total	11	18	<7>

31. I view my participation in corporate worship as meaningful and necessary.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	2	0
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	2	<1>
Total	6	7	<1>

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Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	2	<1>
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	2	0
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	1	2	<1>
Total	10	13	<3>

32. My participation in corporate worship is meaningful and necessary

1. When I have set aside private time to spend with God beforehand.
2. When I have a need to be in fellowship with other people.
3. When I want to begin a new week on a positive note.
4. When I am troubled and in need of God's help.
5. As a last resort.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	3	<2>
669 (B)	1	2	<1>
957 (X)	1	1	0
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	1	0
Total	5	8	<3>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	1	3	<2>
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0

426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	2	<1>
218 (M)	1	1	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	9	12	<3>

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33. I view my participation in corporate worship as evidence of my response to God's care and concern for me.

1. Always
2. Most times
3. Sometimes
4. Rarely
5. Never

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	1	1	0
669 (B)	2	1	1
957 (X)	2	1	1
518 (X)	1	1	0
473 (X)	1	2	<1>
Total	7	6	1

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	2	1	1
135 (B)	1	1	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	2	4	<2>
218 (M)	1	2	<1>
118 (M)	2	2	0
Total	12	14	<2>

34. My participation in corporate worship is enhanced

1. When I am mindful of God's presence in my daily living.
2. When I seek to honor God with my presence, praise, and thanksgiving.
3. When I expect evidence of divine activity within it.
4. When I sense a spirit of unity within the environment.
5. When the worship plan remains consistent with little to no changes.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	2	2	0
669 (B)	2	1	1
957 (X)	1	2	<1>
518 (X)	4	1	3
473 (X)	4	2	2
Total	13	8	5

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Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	2	2	0
326 (B)	1	1	0
777 (X)	1	2	<1>
712 (X)	2	2	0
426 (X)	1	1	0
128 (M)	1	2	<1>
218 (M)	1	1	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	11	13	<2>

35. My participation in corporate worship is often influenced by

6. The encounters I have with God throughout the week.
7. How often I am able to set aside time to be with God.
8. How well I have handled the challenges I face beforehand.
9. My willingness to worship God despite how I feel.
10. My responsibility to serve on a particular Sunday.

Control Group

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
369 (B)	4	4	0
669 (B)	1	1	0
957 (X)	1	4	<3>
518 (X)	4	2	2
473 (X)	1	4	<3>
Total	11	15	<4>

Project Participants

Respondent	Post	Pre	Net Change
442 (S)	1	1	0
135 (B)	4	1	3
326 (B)	1	1	0

777 (X)	1	1	0
712 (X)	1	1	0
426 (X)	1	4	<3>
128 (M)	1	4	<3>
218 (M)	4	4	0
118 (M)	1	1	0
Total	15	18	<3>

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