

# Mentoring Maturity in Christ



*An Invitation  
To  
Faith Mentoring and Spiritual Maturity  
At  
Capchurch*

# The Mentoring Maturity in Christ Curriculum

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# Mentoring Maturity in Christ

*A Manual for Capchurch Mentors and Mentees*

## Introduction

*"I can feel guilty about the past, apprehensive about the future, but only in the present can I act. The ability to be in the present moment is a major component of mental wellness." --*

Abraham Maslow  
1908-1970, Psychologist

*I was sustained by one piece of inestimable good fortune. I had for a friend a man of immense and patient wisdom and a gentle but unyielding fortitude. I think that if I was not destroyed... it was largely because of the courage and patience of this man. I did not give in because he would not let me give in."*

Thomas Wolfe  
1900 - 1938, major American novelist

*A mentor is someone who allows you to see the hope inside yourself*  
Oprah Winfrey

### Why Mentoring?

The quotes above speak to the power of life-affirming influences [friends and mentors] and the power of making choices. Both help us live fuller and more mature lives. When it comes to following Jesus and living the Christian life, the Bible invites us and God calls us to "live a life worthy of Christ" [Eph. 4:1ff] and to finish well [Acts 20:24; James 1:4; 1 Cor. 3; Heb. 12: 1ff.]

The Bible assumes that Christians are involved in one another's lives as influences for good. Consider these scriptures [from The Message]:

Proverbs 27:17      *You use steel to sharpen steel, and one friend sharpens another.*

Hebrews 10:24      *Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshiping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.*

Galatians 6:1      *Live creatively, friends. If someone falls into sin, forgivingly restore him, saving your critical comments for yourself. You might be needing forgiveness before the day's out. Stoop down and reach out to those who are oppressed. Share their burdens, and so complete Christ's law.*

Sadly, many Christians do not seem to go very far down the road to maturity. Among Christian leaders, few finish well<sup>1</sup>. As high as 80% give up or drop out due to things like incorrectly handling finances; assuming excessive leadership privileges without accountability; unhealthy self-exaltation; or unwise sexual relationships; unresolved domestic conflicts; or losing a vision of the Christ-worthy life. Few of these leave the race of faith due to lack of knowledge. One of the key factors for those who ran well and finished well was the presence and influence of a mentor.

Spiritual maturity is not the same thing as depth of knowledge. In the Bible maturity is more associated with faith, love and obedience than it is with knowledge. The root word for “hear” in the Hebrew means “to obey”. If you really hear God then changed behaviour results. The movement from information to implementation; the transfer of knowledge to the transformation of character; the journey from believing to obeying requires more than just study. This process is helped greatly by apprenticing with a spiritual friend, a mentor, a community of faith.

Jesus mentored his inner circle of disciples to know him [and, through him, to know the Father] and to be the hands and feet of God’s love in the world. The Apostle Paul mentored Timothy, whom he considered his son in the faith, "The things that you have heard me say... entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" [2 Timothy 2:2].

Within the Christian tradition, the practice of mentoring surfaces in a number of places. One of the most prominent is in what has become known as spiritual direction, the intentional pairing of mentors with mentees for the purposes of being shaped by the Gospel of Christ learning to live all of life to the glory of God rather than recede into empty religiosity. Thomas Cahill writes<sup>2</sup> about how this life-on-life gospel mentoring began and how it “saved the gospel”,

*When the apostles and martyrs were gone and Christianity had compromised itself by becoming part and parcel of the Roman state, some men and women remembered the desert of the Jews and sought it out as the natural place for a meeting with God. These hermits and anchorites became the first Christian monks and nuns, purifying a relation that would otherwise have devolved into mere political appendage and social decoration.*

*When the medieval papacy was growing into the most splendid irreligious despotism that the world had ever known, a young man whose fun-loving friends called him “Francesco” stripped himself naked in the public square of Assisi in Umbria and dedicated his life to Christ’s poor, definitively separating true religion from pomp of any kind and giving the Western world a conscience it can never quite get rid of.*

*Through the history of the West since the time of Jesus, there has remained just enough of the substance of the original gospel...for it to be passed, as it were; from hand to hand...it has also produced, repeatedly and in the oddest of circumstances, the loving kindness of the first Christians.*

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<sup>1</sup> See the work of Dr. J. Robert Clinton on leadership at [www.jrclintoninstitute.com](http://www.jrclintoninstitute.com)

<sup>2</sup> *The Desire Of The Everlasting Hills, The World Before And After Jesus*, pp. 304-305

The long Christian tradition in spiritual mentoring includes such people as

- **John Cassian** [350-435];
- **Ailred of Rievaulx** [1110-1167, wrote *On Spiritual Friendship*];
- **Francis of Assisi** [1226, founder of the Franciscans];
- **Dominic** [1221, founder of the Dominicans];
- **Julian of Norwich** [1342-1416, English mystic, wrote *Revelations of Divine Love*];
- **Thomas a Kempis** [1471, wrote the classic *The Imitation of Christ*];
- **Teresa of Avila** [1515-1582, Spanish mystic; church reformer];
- **Ignatius of Loyola** [1556, founder of the Jesuits; wrote the classic *Spiritual Exercises*];

### Why is Cap getting into faith/life mentoring?

Because one of our God-given mandates is to help every Christian under our care grow towards Christ-like maturity. Our mission statement as a faith community is **Call, Celebrate, Change**, or more fully—**called to celebrate Christ and change lives**. Modeling and mentoring seem to be one of the best means to accomplish our mission.

### What is the goal?

In a word, **maturity**.

In a phrase, **maturity in Christ**.

Eugene Peterson writes<sup>3</sup>

*The most significant growing up that any person does is to grow as a Christian. All other growing up in preparation for or ancillary to this growing up. Biological, and social, mental and emotional growing is all ultimately absorbed into growing up in Christ. Or not. The human task is to become mature, not only in our bodies and emotions and minds within ourselves but also in our relationship with God and other persons.*

*Birth is a wonderful experience for expectant parents. But growth is marked by fatigue, anxiety, panicked late night calls to the doctor, and confused decisions regarding discipline, worried conferences with teachers, puzzling over adolescent behaviours and misbehaviours. Birth is quick and easy in comparison to growth which is endless and complex.*

*We cannot measure ourselves by examining ourselves in terms of ourselves; by examining ourselves against a non-relational abstraction such as "human potential". Nor can we abstract God into an impersonal truth apart from our hearing and responding. The gospel truth from Ephesians is that when God's calling and our walking fit, we are growing up in Christ. God calls, we walk.*

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<sup>3</sup> *Practice Resurrection*, pp. 1-49, from which significant bits are summarized

Peterson goes on to note:

*The message to Ephesians pivots on a single Greek word, axios. Axios is a word with a picture in it. An axios is a set of balancing scales where a known weight placed on one pan of scale and an unknown weight item place on the other pan. When the two items are axios—they have the same value or weight.*

*In Ephesians, axios is translated worthy. Here is Ephesians 4:1, “As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live [i.e. walk] a life worthy [axios] of the calling you have received.” The items balanced in Ephesians scales are God’s calling and human living. A better translation would be, “I beg you to walk [peripateo] worthy [axios] of the calling to which you have been called [kaleo]. When our walking and God’s calling are in balance or have the same weight, we are whole or mature—we are living responsively to God’s calling; living congruent with the ways God calls us into being. Axios, worthy—mature, healthy, robust.*

The road to maturity in Christ takes perseverance and patience. It is an unhurried process. It takes an intentional decision to believe and pursue this life. It involves participating in the life of a faith community as the context for personal growth. And most importantly, it is not something any of us are very good at.

In the Irish Christian communities [known as Celtic Christians] each person in the community had an *anamchara*<sup>4</sup> or soul friend. This soul friend was another member of the faith community who served as a spiritual companion, sounding board, guide and counsellor. It was said that *a person without a soul friend was like a body without a head*. In this way the Celtic Christian communities persevered toward maturity in Christ. It is good wisdom—every one of us would benefit from a soul friend on the pilgrimage to maturity in Christ.

### What is mentoring?

Henri Nouwen<sup>5</sup>, priest, author, spiritual counsellor and guide and sought after spiritual director during his life, defined what we at Cap are calling mentoring as:

*a relationship initiated by a spiritual seeker who finds a mature person of faith willing to pray and respond with wisdom and understanding to his or her questions about how to live spiritually in a world off ambiguity and distraction.*<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Restoring the Woven Cord, Strands of Celtic Christianity for the Church Today*, Michael Mitton; pp. 42-45.

<sup>5</sup> This manual draws heavily on the work and spiritual development theory of Henri Nouwen who studied psychology and religion in Holland, earned a doctoral degree in psychology from Nijmegen University; was trained in pastoral psychology at the Menninger Institute; taught psychology at Notre Dame and spirituality at Yale and Harvard. Nouwen departs from classical spiritual development theory [purgation, illumination, unification] as well as progressive stage theories [e.g. Piaget; Fowler; Erikson; Kohlberg]. Nouwen understood the spiritual life as responding to the Spirit’s movements in a dynamic rather than progressive way which included times [or cycles] of vacillating between unresolved inner polarities [e.g. *fear to love* then *love to fear*]. This experience continually calls us to prayer and dependency upon “God with us”. See the appendix in *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird

<sup>6</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom For The Long Walk Of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. ix

At Cap we define mentoring as spiritually experienced and mature people assisting less spiritually experienced people who belong to our faith community to grow to become like Christ. We want to help people become all that God wants them to be. Mentoring is a process more than a program. We want to be intentional about helping people grow in all areas of their lives, not just the spiritual—so mentoring in more than Bible study and prayer.

### **Mentoring at Cap is**

- ✚ Christ-centered
- ✚ Intentional, committed relationships where all areas of life are open before God for growth and maturity
- ✚ simple, volunteer, no cost
- ✚ Holds a long-term perspective—helps the mentee step back, dream, and look at all their life can be under God.

### **Who are the mentors?**

Anyone who has a passion for God, some life and faith skills, some bits of God-formed character and a willingness to walk with another person toward maturity in Christ.

### **How is mentoring different from “personal coaching”?**

Mentoring is a process that helps individuals mature in several personal areas with a long-term goal of becoming Christ-like. Coaching normally focuses on freeing a person to live more fully in the present while providing specific feedback on particular skills for the here and now. Mentors can certainly coach mentees on skill performance. However, effective mentors don't stop at this; they help their mentees step back, dream, and look at the larger picture. Further, mentors almost always share from their own lives and experiences. Coaches generally keep such sharing to a minimum. Coaches are usually paid for their services; our mentors are volunteers.

### **What is involved in Cap's mentoring relationships?**

At Cap our mentoring program is an October—June, nine month process where mentor and mentee meet with a specific purpose for the relationship and clear expectations about such things as schedule, appropriate topics; strict confidentiality; permission to speak into one another's lives; and an “ending” to the intentional part of the relationship with an option to transition to another form of relationship (e.g. ongoing informal friendship).

## Is there a mentoring curriculum to follow?

Yes, there is an online manual, *Mentoring Maturity in Christ*.<sup>7</sup> It is strongly suggested that first time mentors and mentees follow this curriculum with a healthy dose of freedom and grace rather than strict adherence. *Mentoring Maturity in Christ* has nine sections with suggested activity for each of the nine mentoring sessions from October to June. There are follow up assignments so that growth can continue between mentoring sessions. With this material you can be flexible and intentional as you address the particular growth needs that become evident in the mentoring sessions. On the website the mentoring manual will appear both as one document and as separate sections so that you can download or print only what you use.

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<sup>7</sup> Go to the CapChurch Website at [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca) and under "resource downloads" click on "Mentoring at CapChurch".

### Some Things for Mentors to Remember:

1. *You are not a parent or a counsellor.* Do not take the place of a parent or try to solve a person's emotional or psychological problems. Remember what mentoring is all about. If counselling is needed then refer.
2. *Your goal as a mentor is to walk with the person as they encounter God.* Mentoring is not a way to meet your needs for significance, but to walk with a mentee as he or she grows and becomes more like Christ. Your goal as a mentor should never be to shape your mentee into your image, but to encourage them to bear God's image more fully.
3. *God brings about change.* Mentoring is not your opportunity to implement your agenda in the life of another person. It is your opportunity to walk with another person as God shapes him into His image.
4. *Both of you get to take responsibility*--to meet on time, be prepared, be open and honest with each other, and commit to growth.
5. *Remember to agree on between session assignments.* Simple assignments help commitment to the mentoring relationship and growth.

### Some Skills for Mentors to learn and practice

1. The grace of listening
  - a. As a Mentor you are not listening to a Mentee as if you are listening to the news. You are listening to understand the mentee's experience. Listening is not evaluating. Listening is empathic more than sympathetic.
  - b. You are primarily listening for what God is doing in the mentee's experience. As you listen—ask God to give you eyes to see what He is doing.
2. The grace of speaking God's perspective into a person's life
  - a. If you try to speak into a person's life with "If I were you I would..." or "When I was your age..." you're likely to be shut out.
  - b. If someone shines a flashlight in your face, you feel confronted and threatened, but if you point the flashlight beam down the rocky trail you are treading together you're likely to be let in.
  - c. Remember the New Testament definition of prophecy-- strengthening, encouragement, and comfort [1 Cor. 14:3]. If that is not what you are doing then you are not speaking God's perspective. Consider the following:
    - i. remember a moment when you have been
      - Strengthened in God's love
      - Encouraged in God's love
      - Comforted in God's love
    - ii. What was that experience like?
    - iii. What grace was exercised by the person with you?

- iv. *Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.* [2 Cor. 1:3-4]
- d. If you feel God is inviting you to confront your mentee in a loving manner, proceed cautiously. Before you do consult with a pastor and work through *Learning to Challenge with the Skill of Immediacy*.<sup>8</sup>
3. The power of the right question—the right open-ended question can open up the heart and mind to new perspectives and new possibilities. Good questions are
- a. Open-ended
- i. They cannot be answered with a “yes” or “no.”
    - “You’ve said you want to have a healthier lifestyle. What steps do you think you should take?” [*Open-ended!*]
  - ii. Close ended questions trap a person in a corner. They give no room for creativity. They are perceived as directive, as having an agenda. Don’t use these kinds of questions.
    - “You’ve said you want to have a healthier lifestyle. Have you thought about changing your diet?” [*Close-ended!*]
- b. Do not put the person on the defensive
- i. “Why” questions make people feel like they’re on the witness stand.
    - “Why didn’t you confront your colleague when you had a chance?” [*Creates defensiveness!*]
    - “When it comes to improving your relationship with your colleague, what are some possible actions you could take?” [*Creates creativity!*]
- c. Goal-directed
- i. Understanding emotion and experience are great for the grace of listening, but here asking goal directed questions assists a person in creative decision making toward a worthy goal.
    - “Would you like to share with me how you feel?” [*Not goal-directed*]
    - “If you had to choose now, what would you do?” [*goal directed*]
4. The Basic Question for Mentoring
- a. Where are you experiencing God’s grace, invitation, and acceptance?

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<sup>8</sup> *Learning To Challenge With The Skill Of Immediacy* can be found in the Resources for Mentors on the CapChurch website [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca)

## 5. Other Questions that may be used in Mentoring relationships

- “What was that like for you?”
- “Tell me more”
- “In what areas do you need God’s provision, comfort or guidance?”
- “Where have you noticed God lately?”
- “Where do you think that God was trying to get your attention?”
- “What has happened in your life recently that has affected your spiritual life?”
- “Where are you experiencing God’s acceptance?”
- “Where do you find yourself resisting God’s invitation these days? How does that play out?”
- “How are you giving away what God is giving you? What is that experience like?”
- “What part has play and rest had in your life this past .....? Do you find yourself refreshed as a result?”
- “I’d like to hear your story about how ....”
- “If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently?”
- “What important decision are you facing?”
- “What would success in this area look like?”
- “Where have you succeeded in this area in the past?”
- “What are some of the obstacles you’ve encountered that I’ll need to be aware of?”
- “What questions have I not asked that I should be asking?”
- "What do think will happen when \_\_\_\_\_? Who [or what] would change?"  
[Changing "if" to "when"]
- "Observe what you do that you want to continue doing and describe it fully to me the next time we meet."
- "What are you doing in this area that you want to stop doing or do differently?"
- “What is the payoff for continuing to do what you are doing?”
- “If I was in your situation what spiritual counsel would you give me?”

## Housekeeping

1. A mentoring relationship is an intentional relationship requiring the commitment of the mentor and the mentee to one another and to the process. As you begin your nine month mentoring experience you are asked to acknowledge your intention and commitment to the person and the process.
2. Verbalized Contract/Expectations:
  - a. That both mentor and mentee read the Introduction, especially pages 5-8 and agree on
    - i. What mentoring is and is not at Cap
    - ii. What it means to listen
    - iii. What speaking into each other's lives entails
    - iv. Following the curriculum set forth with openness to linger on any topic as is deemed important to the maturing process.
  - b. That both mentor and mentee agree to help one another along in listening and speaking into each other's lives by being open, honest, and gracious
  - c. That both mentor and mentee agree on when to meet, where to meet, preparation for meeting and commit to be faithful to this time, only rescheduling when absolutely necessary.
  - d. That both mentor and mentee understand that when the nine month curriculum is completed there is to be a "celebration and termination" of the particular relationship formed by these contractual expectations. At this point it would be good to verbalize what you see changing in your relationship as you transition from mentor/mentee to co-members of the Cap community. Recognize and mark the transition; redefine your relationship; don't carry non-verbalized expectations past the completion of the mentoring program.
3. Confidentiality. Mentor and mentee agree that
  - a. Things spoken about in mentoring sessions will remain confidential
  - b. Mentors will be supervised and discuss the process of mentoring, and in these training sessions the mentors will be asked to speak in general terms about their experience, but not disclose details of the mentee's story. This is not a breach of confidentiality.
  - c. If an issue comes up during a mentoring session which would be better processed in a counselling or coaching relationship, the Mentor will ask the Mentee's permission to speak with a Pastor about a referral recommendation.

## Telling Your Story

*"In a way, nobody sees a flower, really, it is so small,  
we haven't time—and to see takes time,  
like to have a friend takes time"*

Georgia O'Keeffe<sup>9</sup>

God is always revealing Himself and always at work in His world and in the lives of the people He loves (which would be all of us). One of the characteristics of mature faith is the learned ability to “see God at work” in our story, in other’s stories, and amidst the chaos in the world. We see “by faith”. We see “by revelation”. We see by “listening” to God’s perspective on things.

The trailhead for this year’s pilgrimage in faith mentoring toward maturity in Christ and learning to “see God at work” is your life story. To read this topographical map by faith means listening to two things—each other’s life stories and God. Listening deeply to a life story and then to God’s perspective on that story will orient us to the journey ahead.

The summit to which we are headed to is *axios*<sup>10</sup>—a worthy, mature, healthy, robust life in Christ. We cannot get there by simply telling our life story. This would be like measuring ourselves by examining ourselves in terms of ourselves. The gospel truth from the Bible’s letter to the Ephesians is that when God’s calling and our walking fit, we are growing up in Christ. God calls, we walk<sup>11</sup>. The place to begin is to see where God has already been at work in our lives and then increasingly change course to fit into His calling.

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<sup>9</sup> O’Keeffe is a major figure in American art chiefly known for paintings of flowers, rocks, shells, animal bones, and landscapes in which she synthesized abstraction and representation with crisply contoured forms and subtle tonal transitions of varying colors

<sup>10</sup> See the *Introduction to Mentoring Maturity in Christ* and the discussion of “the goal is maturity”

<sup>11</sup> *Practice Resurrection*, Eugene Peterson; pp. 30-32

## Spiritual Exercise: Telling Your Story

1. Goals:
  - a. to help you get to know each other
  - b. to pay attention to how God has worked in your life
  - c. to discern spiritual patterns in your life
    - i. e.g. how you trust; how you resist; where you are alive; where you are stuck
2. Options for the **PERSON TELLING THEIR STORY** [just pick one]
  - a. Option #1: Genogram
    - i. Do a sketch of three generations of your family<sup>12</sup> and tell your story from there
  - b. Option #2: Five Aspects Of Life Formation
    - i. Telling one significant thing and why it is significant about your
      1. Childhood
      2. family
      3. romance[s]
      4. spirituality
      5. struggle or tragic incident
    - ii. Summarize by “how you see yourself” as a result of life so far.
    - iii. Where have you experienced God in these five aspects of life?
    - iv. Finally share what important decisions you are facing.
  - c. Option #3: Formative Events/People
    - i. Describe 2 or 3 significant events in your life and what made them significant
    - ii. Describe 2 or 3 significant people in your life and how their influence has made you who you are
    - iii. Describe how these events and people have positively or negatively impacted your faith journey
  - d. Option #4: Life Chapters
    - i. Divide your life into chapters—title each chapter
    - ii. Describe the character; dominant emotional tone; and main theme of each of these chapters and why you titled it as you did
3. For the **PERSON LISTENING TO A LIFE STORY**
  - a. Listen deeply and prayerfully
  - b. Ask the Holy Spirit to make you aware of God’s involvement in the person’s story
  - c. Do not comment on or critique the life story.
  - d. You can ask clarifying questions

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<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Meet Your Parents and the Rest of Your Family of Origin* in the *Resources for the Cap Mentoring Manual* at [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca)

- i. “Tell me more about the significance of ...”
    - ii. “What was that experience like for you?”
  - e. When the person has finished telling their story ask:
    - i. “How do you see God in your story?”
  - f. Share your affirmations of where you see God in the story you have heard and “notice God together” as you discuss what you see.
- 4. Pray together about your experience.
- 5. “Switch places” and let the storyteller become the listener and the listener the story teller.
  - a. You may want to schedule another session for this rather than do both stories in the same
- 6. Optional Assignment
  - a. Follow up this session by working through these two exercise and reporting back
    - i. *Inviting God into Your Identity Formation*<sup>13</sup>
    - ii. *God and Your Family of Origin Story*<sup>14</sup> and reporting back

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. *Inviting God into your Identity Formation* in the *Resources for the Cap Mentoring Manual* at [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca)

<sup>14</sup> Cf. *God and your Family of Origin Story* in the *Resources for the Cap Mentoring Manual* at [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca)

# Waking Up to God's Presence

The Spiritual Formation of Your Life in Christ

## *Capable Flesh*

The tender flesh itself  
 will be found one day  
 — quite surprisingly —  
 to be capable of receiving,  
 and yes, full  
 capable of embracing  
 the searing energies of God.  
 Go figure. Fear not.  
 For even at its beginning  
 the humble clay received  
 God's art, whereby  
 one part became the eye,  
 another the ear, and yet  
 another this impetuous hand.  
 Therefore, the flesh  
 is not to be excluded  
 from the wisdom and the power  
 that now and ever animates  
 all things. His life-giving  
 agency is made perfect,  
 we are told, in weakness —  
 made perfect in the flesh.

Irenaus (c. 125–c. 210)<sup>15</sup>

*Human beings may separate things into as many piles as we wish—  
 separating spirit from flesh, sacred from secular, church from world.*

*But we should not be surprised when God does not recognize  
 the distinctions we make between the two.*

*Earth is so thick with divine possibility  
 that it is a wonder we can walk anywhere without cracking our shins on altars.*

Barbara Brown Taylor<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Adapted and translated by Scott Cairns, *Love's Immensity; Mystics on the Endless Life* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2007, pp. 5–6.)

<sup>16</sup> *An Altar in The World*; Barbara Brown Taylor p. 15.

## Spiritual Formation

Henri Nouwen relates this story to illustrate what spiritual formation is all about<sup>17</sup>

*A little boy was watching a sculptor at work. For weeks this sculptor kept chipping away at a big block of marble. After a few weeks he had created a beautiful marble lion. The little boy was amazed and said: "Mister, how did you know there was a lion in the rock?"*

The sculptor had to know the lion by heart to see the figure in the marble. He saw it before he began.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, heart, refers to the essence of who we are—all physical, emotional, intellectual, moral, and volitional aspects of the human person. God is the sculptor who sees beauty in us and can sculpt us in a way that brings out all the beauty he sees in us and “knows by heart.” God sees us in ways that are not seen by others. God sees us as not only what we are, but what we can be and what we will be. The experience of salvation is a process of being formed in Christ [see Colossians 1: 21-28; 3:1-17]—of having our heart or essence reformed or sculpted in the likeness of Christ.

Since we live in a society that overvalues personal achievement and development it is easy to conceive of this process of formation from the viewpoint of accomplishing something in our spiritual lives rather than responding to God with us, God seeking us. Questions of personal achievement when it comes to knowing God, faith, and spiritual growth look like:

- How do I find God?
- How do I get to know God?
- How am I to love God?
- Who is God to me?

Better questions, questions of response and discover are:

- How do I to let myself be found by God?
- How do I to let myself be known by God?
- How do I to let myself be loved by God?
- Who am I to God?

This means that the spiritual journey of formation in Christ is one in which we cooperate with the Spirit by making room in our lives for God and responding to God’s gentle initiatives to form us. Our primary job is to pay attention to God. God’s job is to sculpt us.

Spiritual formation or **Waking Up To God Presence** is very much based on two realities

- The human condition
- The fact that God is “with us” and God works in our “capable flesh” [cf. Irenaus’ poem].

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted by Henri Nouwen in *Clowning in Rome: Reflections on Solitude, Celibacy, Prayer and Contemplation* from Thomas Hora, *Existential Meta-Psychiatry* [Seabury press, 1977].

Nouwen:

*Truly the good news is that God is not a distant God, a God to be feared and avoided, a God of revenge, but a God who is moved by our pains and participates in the fullness of the human struggle...our joys and pains...God-with-us is a close God, a God whom we call our refuge, our stronghold, our wisdom,...our helper, our shepherd, our love.<sup>18</sup>*

In another place Nouwen writes:

*The key work here [in cooperating with God in spiritual formation] is articulation. People who can identify and articulate the movements of their inner lives, who can give names to their varied experiences, [what he calls the movements of the heart with all its polarities] need no longer be victims of themselves but are able slowly and consistently to remove the obstacles that prevent the Spirit from entering.<sup>19</sup>*

That means learning to attend to your hungers for God and your resistances to embrace God as your here and now responses to God and allowing God to speak into your “capable flesh” and call you to transformation. This is no quick fix—it is a life-long journey of formation and transformation.

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<sup>18</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; p. 74

<sup>19</sup> *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. xx-xxi.

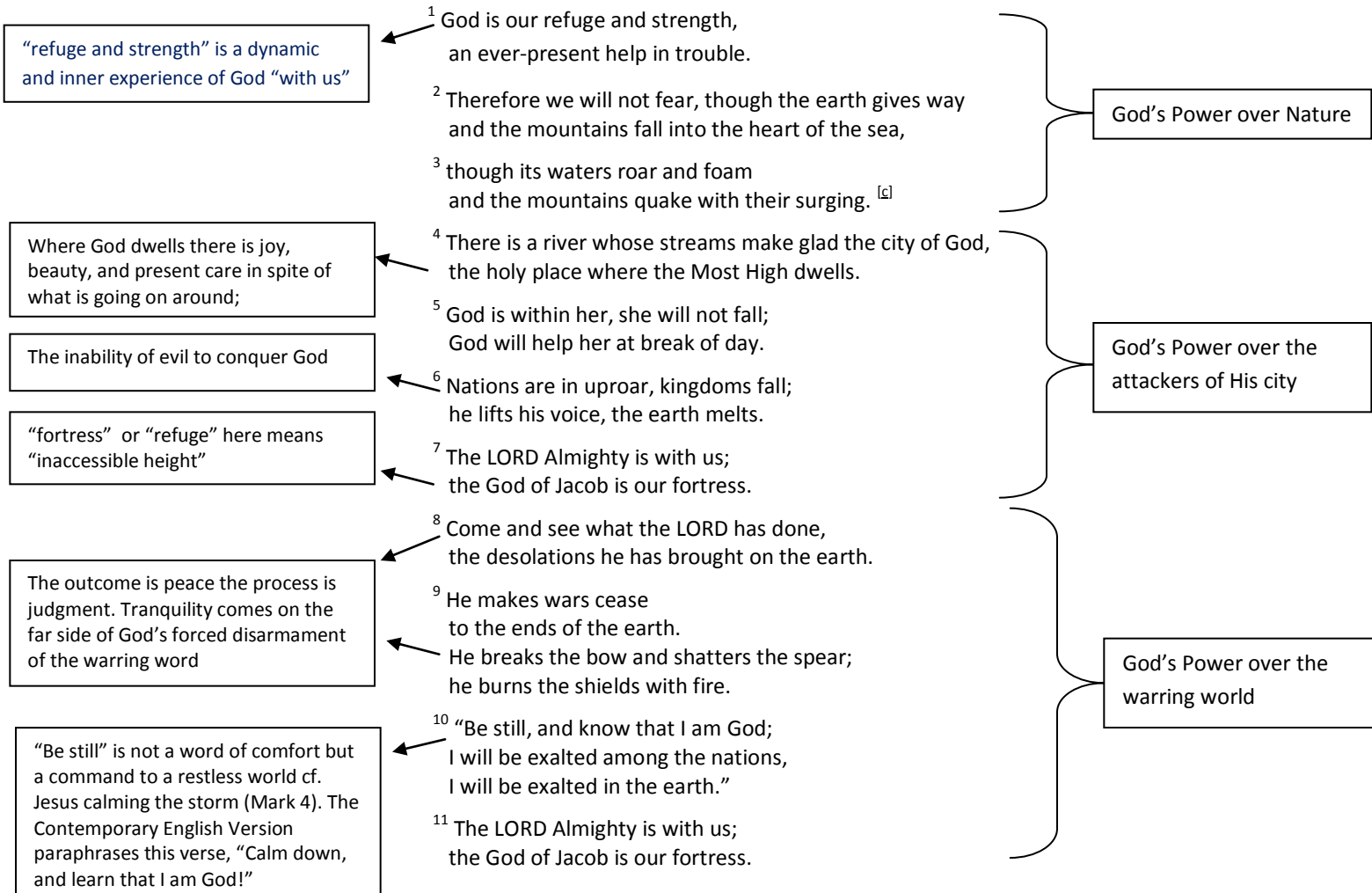
# Spiritual Exercise on Waking up to God in Your Life

An exercise to be done in the mentoring session

1. Goals:
  - a. to learn how to attend to God's presence in your life
  - b. to learn how to "see" God at work attend to God
  - c. to change your experience from "seeking" to "being found"
  
2. Your experience of God. Briefly "tell your story" of your experience with God.
  - a. How do you imagine God to be like?
  - b. What is your experience of God's absence?
    - i. How has this unwelcome or unfamiliar experience of God impacted you?
  - c. What is your experience of God's presence?
    - i. How has this experience impacted your life?
  
3. To wake up to God we first have to become aware of who we are waking up to. The Bible is the best source we have to discover who God is and ways He acts. Let's compare what we learn from Psalm 46 with how you imagine God to be like.
  - d. Read Psalm 46 aloud [from Today's New International Version]
  - e. Talk through the Psalm section by section [vv. 1-3; vv. 4-7; vv. 8-11]
    - i. What do you notice about God in contrast with earth, mountains, and sea?
    - ii. What happens where God is present in spite of what is going on all around?
    - iii. Note in v. 3 that the NT fulfillment of the "place where God dwells" is with his people wherever they are.
    - iv. Add your own insights to those listed in the margins.
    - v. Summarize by verbalizing what this Psalm teaches us about God being "with us"

## Psalm 46

*For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamoth. A song.*



#### 4. As to God "with us" consider also Jesus promise to his disciples recorded in John 14:16-17:

*And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you. [NIV]*

*If you love me, show it by doing what I've told you. I will talk to the Father, and he'll provide you another Friend so that you will always have someone with you. This Friend is the Spirit of Truth. The godless world can't take him in because it doesn't have eyes to see him, doesn't know what to look for. But you know him already because he has been staying with you, and will even be in you! [MSG]*

5. Guided meditation on Psalm 46:10 and John 14:16-17
  - a. Sit quietly
  - b. Read aloud John 14:16-17 and Psalm 46:10
  - c. All that is asked of you in this moment is that you be with Jesus.
  - d. Let these word sink into you—into your present life; your joys; your pains
    - God is your stronghold
    - God is your refuge
    - Jesus is your shepherd
    - Jesus is your wisdom
  - e. What images come to mind?
    - What life memories past or present arise? Jesus is present there. God is with you.
    - What are you doing?
    - What is Jesus doing?
    - What is Jesus saying?
    - What is clear? What is hidden?
    - Before you leave this scene, let God love you there.
  - vi. Bring this guided meditation to a close
  - f. Discuss what this experience was like.
    - Verbalize and write down brief answers as best you can to these questions. We are establishing a point of your awareness and experience of God with you that we can come back to at the end of these mentoring sessions to see what has changed.
  - g. How do I to let myself be found by God?
  - h. How do I to let myself be known by God?
  - i. How do I to let myself be loved by God?
  - j. Who am I to God?
6. Optional assignment to bring back to the next mentoring session and review briefly.
  - a. Henri Nouwen comments that there are four realities in walking with God that those who are awake to God's presence grapple with over the course of their spiritual journey. These four realities are not the full picture of who God is, but nonetheless critical to a vital relationship with God.

- b. Your assignment is to “rewrite your life story” from the perspective of these four realities about God. Use the format from the previous mentoring session—Five Aspects Of Life Formation
- i. Telling one significant thing from the perspective of these four realities about God and how it is significant/different from your first telling of your story
    - Childhood
    - family
    - romance[s]
    - spirituality
    - struggle or tragic incident
- c. Four realities about God<sup>20</sup>
- i. **God is with us**
    - God is not a distant God, but...God-with-us..a close God, a God whom we call our refuge, our stronghold, our wisdom,...our helper, our shepherd, our love
  - ii. **God is personal**
    - God is with us in a personal way. The best New Testament image of this is found in the word *Abba*, best translated *Daddy*. Here is the image of kind, gentle, and most intimate father. *Abba* does not have any connotations of authority, power and control that the world *father* often evokes. *Abba* implies embracing and nurturing love that is personal yet beyond gender limitation and that we may also experience from fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, spouses, friends and lovers.
    - This love is exemplified in the parable of the prodigal son—a story that speaks of love that existed before any rejections was possible and that will be there after all rejections have taken place. This is the everlasting love of God.
      - a. This love transcends any gender image. The return of the prodigal son implies a very feminine metaphor—it is as if the son is returning to God’s womb—where God as Mother is receiving back into her womb the one whom she made in her own image. Here is maternal love marked by the grief, desire, hope and endless waiting for her offspring who was lost.

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<sup>20</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 73-81

### iii. God is often hidden from our awareness

- One of the paradoxes of our experience of God is that he is both present and hidden. When we first experience God's presence we are sheltered from his hiddenness. As we continue in the life of faith we discover that we cannot understand or grasp all of who God is. We cannot explain God or God's presence in history.
- If we unequivocally identify God with a specific event or situation we distort the truth that God is beyond our knowing. There is a great temptation to say where God is working and not working; where He is present and not present.
- The simple fact is we don't know. We are surrounded by the unseen and the unknown. What we can say is that God is with us in the unexplainable absurdities of life.
- Prayer is the place where we embrace the mystery of God's absence in our perceptions and experience; in this "cloud of unknowing" we can still find God with us.

### iv. God is looking for us

- We do not find God. God finds us. God is the good shepherd who looks for us. God is the woman who lights the lamp, sweeps out the house, and looks for lost coin until she finds it. God is not the kind of patriarch who sits at home and expects his family to come to him. Like the father of the prodigal God is scanning the horizon for you longing to bring you home.

d. Now, "rewrite your life story" from this perspective:

- i. God is personal, with us, and looking for us
- ii. All our experiences both joyous and painful are invitations to experience God who is always there as our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble [Psalm 46:1].
- iii. Sometimes or often this invitation and the reality of God's presence may be hidden from us.

7. Optional Assignment—Buy and read *The River Within; Loving God; Living Passionately* by Jeff Imbach<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Jeff Imbach has spent many years as a pastor and spiritual director. He was the founding president of the Henri Nouwen Society in Canada and an adjunct faculty member of Carey Theological College. Jeff is co-founder of SoulStream, a ministry that provides spiritual direction training, and retreats in the Vancouver area. Jeff's other books include *The Recovery of Love and Words of Hope and Healing: 99 Sayings* by Henri Nouwen.

## Attending to God's Voice

*Prayer...is being awake to God in us... [then] we can increasingly see God in the world around us.*

*Prayer helps us stand in the presence of God with all we have and are: our fears and our anxieties; our guilt and shame; our sexual fantasies; our greed and anger; our joys, successes, aspirations, and hopes; our reflections, dreams and mental wandering; and most of all our family, friends, and enemies—in short all that makes us who we are. With all this we have to listen to God's voice and allow God to speak to us in every corner of our being.<sup>22</sup>*

Henri Nouwen

*I would rather show someone my check book stubs than talk about my prayer life...I would rather confess...that I am overly fond of Bombay Sapphire gin martinis than confess that I am a prayer weakling. To say I love God but I do not pray much is like saying I love life but I do not breathe much... [I've had an inkling] that prayer might mean something more than getting down on my knees in public or in private to address God in a way that is respectful, focused, unselfish and theologically correct enough to merit God giving up some time to listen.<sup>23</sup>*

Barbara Brown Taylor

Taylor's honest and humorous confession reveals the challenge of growing and maintaining a life of prayer. There are lots of "ways" to pray. The Book of Common Prayer lists seven different kinds of prayer: Adoration; Praise; Thanksgiving; Penitence; Oblation; Intercession; and Petition. None of these categories of prayer are for winning God's attention, but for enriching our interaction with God.

In our mentoring time we want to focus on one form of prayer which is not listed above: listening. A case can be made that listening to God is the basis of all spiritual life. The Bible certainly suggests that responding to God is the main event in a life of faith. Mother Teresa said it this way, "God speaks in the silence of the heart. Listening is the beginning of prayer."

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<sup>22</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. xvi-xvii.

<sup>23</sup> *An Altar in The World*; Barbara Brown Taylor; pp. 176-177. [Taylor is adjunct professor of spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary]

Henri Nouwen taught and practiced what he called three classic spiritual disciplines which help create space for God in our lives:

- **Looking Within To The Heart**—the practice of listening prayer
- **Looking To God In The Book**—the practice of reading the Bible in a way not to be instructed, informed or inspired, but formed into an obedient person
- **Looking to Others in Community**—where through worship and liturgy and community life the fullness of Christ is being manifested.<sup>24</sup>

In this section we will focus on the practice of listening prayer.

We said in the introduction to *Telling Your Story* that one of the characteristics of mature faith is the learned ability to “see God at work” in our story, in other’s stories, and amidst the chaos in the world. We described the trailhead orientation as learning to see God in your life story. The first waypoint on the journey to the summit of a worthy, mature, healthy, and robust life in Christ is to learn to listen to God. After you listen, you will instinctively know what and how to pray.

Listening Prayer has been practiced for centuries as a spiritual discipline among Christians who believe that God has been concerned for our relationship with Him long before we became concerned for our relationship with God. Listening Prayer is based on the belief that God speaks to us continually through Jesus Christ, through the Scriptures, through creation, and through the events of our lives. All these are initiatives God takes to make Himself known to us. Listening prayer is our response to God’s initiative.

For those who are only use to talking at God this spiritual discipline takes some time to learn. But once you learn to listen, you are likely to sense a most personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. God speaking and you listening are all about relationship.

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<sup>24</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. xviii-xix.

## Spiritual Exercise: Learning to Listen to God

1. Goals:
  - a. to learn how to quiet yourself
  - b. to learn how to attend to God
  - c. to learn how to attend to what God stirs in you and speaks to you
  
2. To be done together with the Mentor leading
  - a. Choose a scripture text for this exercise in listening prayer [from the list below]
  - b. Choose a comfortable posture
  - c. Ask God for the grace to experience His personal presence
  - d. Read a Scripture portion slowly a couple of times allowing the words to wash over you
    - i. Notice what words, phrases or images stand out or touch you
    - ii. Rest with that word, phrase, or image
  - e. Now, listen to your heart—and notice what feelings are stirred by this word, phrase, image
    - i. See the list of feeling words as needed
  - f. Speak to God
    - i. about the word, phrase, or image that caught your attention
    - ii. about particularly the feelings and the intensity of feeling that this stirred in you
  - g. Lastly, pause and listen to God
    - i. Ask God if there is anything else he wants to impress upon you at this time
    - ii. notice how God responds to you (likely with a word, phrase, or image)
  
3. Discuss this experience
  - a. Share what this experience was like for you as well as what happened [in “d”; “f”; and “g” in #2]
  
4. Consolation and desolation
  - a. Share a desolation [pick one question to answer]
    - i. *For what am I least grateful?*
    - ii. *What gave me the least life?*
    - iii. *When did I feel like I didn't belong?*
    - iv. *When did I give and receive the least love?*
    - v. *When was I saddest?*
    - vi. *What was the low point?*
    - vii. *Where did I feel most distant from God?*
  - b. Share a consolation from the last month or last week [pick one question to answer]
    - i. *For what am I most grateful?*
    - ii. *What gave me the most life?*
    - iii. *When did I feel like I belonged?*
    - iv. *When did I give and receive the most love?*
    - v. *When was I happiest?*
    - vi. *What was the high point?*
    - vii. *Where did I feel most cared for by God?*

- c. Take the your answer to “4-a” and make it the subject of listening prayer
    - i. Speak to God
      - 1. about particularly the feelings and the intensity of feeling that this stirred in you
    - ii. pause and listen to God
      - 1. Ask God if there is anything He wants to impress upon you about this desolation this time
      - 2. notice how God responds to you (likely with a word, phrase, or image)
    - iii. Discuss this experience.
5. Assignment
- a. Choose 3 scriptures and one consolation or desolation for listening prayer and journal your experience and share them at your next meeting.

## Scriptures for Listening Prayer

### Experiencing God's Love

Isaiah 55: 1-5	Come to me; listen and your soul will live.
Matt. 11:28-30	Come to me with your burdens and I will give you rest
Jer. 29:11-14	I know the plans I have for you
Psalms 139 portion	God knows me through and through
Isa. 43: 1-5	Do not be afraid, I have redeemed you
John 15: 1-17	Make your home in me as I make mine in you.
Deut. 7:7-8	I choose you. I set my heart on you and chose you... not because you are so great but because I loves you

### Meaning, Direction, Purpose in Life

Genesis 1:2-4	God looks at what He made and found it good
Psalms 8	God made us a little lower than the angels
Phil 3:1-10	If only I can gain Christ

### The reality of sin and how it affects our relationship with God

Psalms 51	Have mercy on me and create a clean heart in me
Ezek. 36:24-29	I will give you a new heart and a new spirit for your stony heart and spirit
Rom. 7:14-24	I cannot understand my own behavior
Luke 15:11-32	The father cuts off the prodigal son's confession of guilt and failure so that he can celebrate his son's return

### What it means to grow in a personal relationship with Jesus

Matt. 4:18-22	The calling of the first four disciples
Mark 4:33-41	The calming of the storm
Mark 8:27-9:1	Peter's confession, Jesus' affirmation and rebuke

## With God in Your Skin

*"One of the reasons I remain Christian is because of the seriousness with which Christian tradition honours flesh and blood...I am not sure when Christian tradition lost confidence in the body, but I have some guesses...the Greeks divided body and soul in ways that [Jesus] did not. Descartes [opposed] nature and reason...the protestant reformation with its deep suspicion of physical pleasure followed by Freud's dark insights into human sexuality. Add ...the modern scientific reduction of the body to biological matter overlaid by Victoria Secret ads and it is small wonder that so many of us are uncomfortable in our flesh."*

Barbara Brown Taylor<sup>25</sup>

One of the more profound discussions in Barbara Brown Taylor's book *An Altar in The World* is found in her chapter, *The Practice of Wearing Skin*. Consider some of the points she makes, listed here in random order. Mark the points that strike you the most and discuss them in a mentoring session. [If you want to read the entire chapter, the book is available in the public library.]

1. *I came late to the understanding that God loved all of me—not just my spirit, but also my flesh...I grew up with a lot of unanswered questions and unearned shame about my ripening body.*
2. *Our bodies have shaped our views of the world just as the world has shaped our views of our bodies*
3. *It is easier to lie with our lips than with our body*
4. *Here we sit, with our soul tucked away in this marvellous luggage, mostly insensible to the ways in which every spiritual practice begins with the body. Each of us has a unique body signature which consists not only of our distinctive physical characteristics but also our posture, our gait, our way of using our hands.*
5. *What we miss in our physical dis-ease is that our bodies remain God's best way of getting to us.*
6. *The daily practice of incarnation of being in the body with full confidence that God speaks the language of flesh is to discover a pedagogy that is as old as the gospels. Why else did Jesus spend his last night on earth teaching this disciples to wash feet and share supper...he did not give them something to think about together when they were gone—he gave them something to do—a specific way of being together in their bodies that would go on teaching them what they needed to know when he was no longer around to teach them himself. "Do this," he said not "believe this" but "do this in remembrance of me."*

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<sup>25</sup> *An Altar in The World*; pp. 35-51. Taylor is adjunct professor of spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary.

7. *In the case of the meal there were things they could smell and taste and swallow. In the case of the feet he gave them things to wash so that they could not bend over without being drawn into one another's lives. Imagine—washing a foot and asking—how did you get that scar? Does it hurt when I touch it? Your feet have more miles on them than mine. Do you ever feel like you can't go any further?*
8. *My body is what connects me to others—when the temperature outside is zero I am cold and the person next to me is cold as well—wearing my skin is not a solitary practice but one that brings me into communion with all other embodied souls. It is what we have most in common with one another. In Christian teaching followers of Jesus are called to honour the bodies of our neighbours as we honour our own—leper bodies; possessed bodies; widow bodies; orphan bodies, foreign bodies and hostile bodies. Read from the perspective of the body Jesus' ministry was about encountering those whose flesh was discounted by the world in which they lived.*
9. *By faith I understand that is not possible to trust that God loves all of me, including my body, without also trusting that God loves all bodies everywhere—the bodies of hungry children and indentured women along with the bodies of sleek athletes and cigar-smoking tycoons. While we might not have one other thing in common we all wore skin. We all have breath and beating hearts. Most of us weep, although not for the same reasons. Few of our bodies work the way we want them to.*
10. *One of the truer things about bodies is that it is just about impossible to increase the reverence I show mine without also increasing the reverence I show yours.*
11. *Daniel Berrigan, "it all comes down to this: whose flesh are you touching and why? Whose flesh are you recoiling from and why? Whose flesh are you burning and why?"*
12. *To hold a sleeping child in your arms can teach you more about the meaning of life than any than any ten books on the subject.*
13. *I find myself rebelling against any religious definition of goodness that leaves the body behind.*
14. *I am happy for practices that bring me back to my body where the operative categories are not "bad" and "good" but "dead" and "alive".*
15. *Do we dismiss the body's wisdom because it does not use word? The practice of wearing skin is so obvious that almost no one engages it as spiritual practice, yet here is a place to begin—with tears, aches, moans, gooseflesh, heat.*

## ***Good is the Flesh***

A hymn by Brian Wren

Good is the flesh that the Word has become,  
good is the birthing, the milk in the breast,  
good is the feeding, caressing and rest,  
good is the body for knowing the world,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body for knowing the world,  
sensing the sunlight, the tug of the ground,  
feeling, perceiving, within and around,  
good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the body, from cradle to grave,  
growing and aging, arousing, impaired,  
happy in clothing, or lovingly bared,  
good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

Good is the pleasure of God in our flesh,  
longing in all, as in Jesus, to dwell,  
glad of embracing, and tasting, and smell,  
good is the body, for good and for God,  
Good is the flesh that the Word has become.

## Spiritual Exercise: Wearing Your Skin to the Glory of God

1. Goals:
  - a. To learn to honour your body the way God honours it
  - b. To learn to listen to your body as part of what it means to listen to God
  - c. To offer your body as it now is afresh to God.
  
2. Listening Prayer
  - a. Do listening prayer around the lyrics; *Good is the Flesh*, by Brian Wren. Substitute “your” for “the” as you read it aloud where appropriate.
    - i. Each person read it aloud
    - ii. Listen for what stands out to you
    - iii. Ask God what he wants you to pay attention to
    - iv. Share that
    - v. Pray these things into each other’s lives.
  
3. Assignments –pick one or two of the following suggestions, do the exercise and report back
  - a. Read a summary of research findings on body image found in the article *Mirror, mirror* found on the Social Issues Research Centre [SIRC] at <http://www.sirc.org/publik/mirror.html>
  - b. Accepting the body you have: Work through the exercise, *Accepting Your Body as God’s Gift & Deciding on Your Future Sexual Self-Identity*<sup>26</sup> and discuss it in a mentoring session.
  - c. Naked praying: Barbara Brown Taylor in *An Altar in The World*; pp. 35-51; suggests that if you struggle with liking your body that you try praying in front of a full length mirror naked.
    - *Maybe you are full of loathing for your body; maybe you think you are too heavy.*
    - *Maybe you have never liked the way your hipbones stick out.*
    - *Maybe you think you are too hairy?*
    - *Maybe you have been sick or been through surgery?*
    - *Maybe staying covered up is the only way you can maintain your equilibrium?*
    - *It is always something*
    - *Whether you are sick or well, lovely or irregular, there comes a time when it is vitally important for your spiritual healthy to drop your clothes, look in the mirror and say “here I am. This is the body like no other that my life has shaped. I live here. This is my soul’s address”.*
      - i. *Offer your body to God to go on being useful to the world in ways both sublime and ridiculous.*
      - ii. *Practice some reverence for your body right there in front of the mirror.*

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<sup>26</sup> Cf. *Accepting Your Body as God’s Gift & Deciding on Your Future Sexual Self-Identity* in the *Resources for the Cap Mentoring Manual* at [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca)

d. Wash one another's feet

- i. In a mentoring session wash one another's' feet
  1. Make observations about the foot you are washing
  2. Ask questions about the life these feet have walked as you wash the foot
  3. Linger in the experience
- ii. After you have finished talk about what the experience is like to wash and be washed
  1. How does this connect you with the gospel?
  2. How does this connect you with your body?
  3. How does this connect you with each other?

e. Create a Tableau

- i. Invite 3-6 people over for the experience of creating a tableau of one of the beatitudes from the Sermon on the Mount [Matt 5]. Have 3 people take one beatitude and bring it to life by embodying it without words—arrange the people so that the tableau shows the meaning of the beatitude.
  1. When you are finished discuss what this “embodied experience” was like.
  2. Consider doing this again in your home group or in worship setting.

f. Sexuality and Relationships

- i. Read through the paper on Sexuality and Relationship called *Love Life* found on the CapChurch website [www.capchurch.ca](http://www.capchurch.ca) and discuss relevant sections in a mentoring section
  1. Go to “resource downloads”
    - a. “sexuality resources”
      - i. “relationships and sexuality”
        1. Download the PDF called ***:Love Life: Sexuality, Singleness, Relationships, and Marriage From A Christian Perspective***

## Looking to God in the Book

*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. He was with God in the beginning.*

*Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

*In him was life, and that life was the light of human beings.*

*The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it.*

John 1:1-5

To what are known as the Desert Fathers and Mothers of the fourth and fifth centuries AD<sup>27</sup> the “Word” meant three things:

- The *Living Word* which is Jesus
- The *Written Word* which is the Bible
- The *Prophetic Word* which brings God’s perspective on one’s current life and situation

Listening to the Living Word involved listening prayer which results in modeling your life on Jesus.

Listening to the Prophetic Word involved either speaking or receiving not rote, general truths from the Bible, but an immediate and specific word in collaboration with the Spirit of God which brings God’s perspective to bear on a current situation. 1 Corinthians 14:3 describes these words as bring specific *strengthening, encouragement and comfort*.

In this mentoring session we want to focus on how you listen to the Written Word or the Bible.

There is a tendency to think of the spiritual life as a life that begins when we have certain feelings, think certain thoughts, or gain certain insights. Growth in faith is not about how to make the spiritual life happen but to see where it actually is happening. We believe that God is active right now in the world and in the lives of individuals and communities. How do we learn to see? All the spiritual practices in this mentoring manual are intended to increase spiritual sight, to create space in your life for God to move and speak, yet forming a lifelong practice of looking to God in the Bible is basic to perceiving what God is doing and spiritual growth.

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<sup>27</sup> The *Desert Fathers and Mothers* were Christians, who originally fled the chaos and persecution of the Roman Empire in the third century. In Egypt, these Christian refugee communities formed at the edges of population centers, far enough away to be safe from Imperial scrutiny. In 313 when Christianity was made legal in the empire by Constantine many Christians remained in the desert communities in order to follow God in a more deliberate and individual way. As their lifestyles or work, solitude, and devotion continued, these men and women developed a reputation for holiness and wisdom.

Many individuals who spent part of their lives in the Egyptian desert went on to become important figures in the Church and society of the fourth and fifth century, among them Athanasius of Alexandria, John Chrysostom, John Cassian and Augustine of Hippo. Their writings and spirituality deeply affected both the Western and Eastern Church and still of interest to many people today.

## Learning to listen to God through Bible reading

The Bible is essentially the story of God’s dealings with humanity and the “in breaking” of God’s kingdom into the kingdoms of this world. In reading God’s story you learn of His character, His values, His vision for individuals and the world, and His ways of revealing Himself and working in the lives of people and the events of history.

Eugene Peterson writes about story in the Bible<sup>28</sup>

*[Bible] stories...map the country of our humanity, show its contours, reveal its dimensions. Mostly what they show is that to be human means to deal with God. And that everything we encounter and experience—birth and death, hunger and thirst, money and weapons, weather and mountains, friendship and betrayal, marriage and adultery—is included...in dealing with God.*

*Story... invites our participation... we feel the emotions, get caught up in the drama, identify with the characters...realize that there is more to this business of being human than we had yet explored.*

*Stories suffer from misinterpretation when we don’t submit to them simple as stories...for the biblical way is not so much to present us with a moral code and tell us “live up to this”; nor is it to set out a system of doctrine and say “Think like this and you will live well.” The biblical way is to tell a story and invite us: “Live into this—this is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world; this is what is involved in becoming and maturing as a human being.”...as we submit our lives to what we read, we find that we are not being led to see God in our stories but to see our stories in God’s. God is the larger context and plot in which my story finds itself.*

*The reader of scripture must be totally involved—heart and soul, mind and body—in the reading of scripture. We would be fools to discard the study disciplines acquired and insisted on throughout the last two hundred years which prevent us from intruding on the text; but we would be even more foolish if we let these disciplines keep us from participating in the text. We are intended to enter the world of the text, listening for resonances, alert to relationships, and most of all mindful of God for this is a living text.*

So, how do we do this? One way is to read the Bible meditatively<sup>29</sup>. The goal of meditative reading is not to gather information and “master the Bible”; to neither analyze nor criticize the Bible<sup>30</sup>, but to be mastered and challenged by God through the Bible—we seek to allow the Bible to read and interpret us. The Bible does not speak to us if we simply want to use it. If we understand that the Bible is not primarily a book of information about God but a book which is to form us and nurture us, then there is a lifetime of benefit we will receive from the Bible.

<sup>28</sup> *First and Second Samuel*; see the introduction pp. 1ff.

<sup>29</sup> Benedict of Nursia was a 6th century Christian monk who founded a monastery in Italy around 529 AD. Today those who follow his spiritual disciplines are known as Benedictines. One of the spiritual practices of Benedict was what he called the “sacred reading” or “divine reading” of the Bible known from its Latin name as “Lectio Divina”. This practice consisted of the slow and thoughtful reading of the Bible and the pondering of its meaning. In Benedictine monasteries with was meditation. Benedict taught that there was a progression form Bible reading to meditation; from meditation to prayer; and from prayer to loving regard for God.

<sup>30</sup> There is a place for this kind of Bible study, but it is not part of what we are seeking to do here.

## Spiritual Exercise: Learning to Look to God in the Bible

1. Goals:
  - a. To recognize your history and relationship with the Bible
  - b. To establish a pattern of interaction with the Bible that works for you
  - c. To have an experience in meditatively listening to God through the Bible.
  
2. Your history and relationship with the Bible
  - a. Think of your life in 5-10 year segments. How would you describe your experience with the Bible in different periods of your life?
  - b. What style of interaction with the Bible, if any, has been most formative and nurturing for you? What about that particular experience made it formative and nurturing?
    - i. Personal study
    - ii. Reading
    - iii. Lectio divina
    - iv. devotion
    - v. taking a class
    - vi. teaching
    - vii. being taught in community
    - viii. small group discussion
  - c. How would you describe your current relationship with the Bible?
  
3. Establishing a pattern of interaction with the Bible that works for you now
  - a. Read over the introductory material in *Looking to God in the Book*
    - i. What stands out to you as important, if anything, regarding establishing a meaningful interaction with the Bible in this period of your life?
  - b. In light of what you've discussed so far, what do you want from your relationship with God through the Bible to look like?
    - i. What do you need for this to take place?
  
4. An experience in meditative listening to the Bible
  - a. Do this exercise in your mentoring session. It will involve some individual time of quiet and some sharing and discussion afterward.
  - b. Open your Bible to Mark 4: 35-41
    - i. Read the passage aloud, slowly. Pause after the reading to picture the events.
    - ii. Reread the passage quietly and place yourself in the story. Notice what is happening in your body; your emotions; your spirit.
    - iii. Reread the passage a third time and pay attention to Jesus. Notice everything about what he does; he says; what is happening in his body; his emotions; his spirit.
    - iv. What from your reading jumps out at you, commands your attention?
      1. Stay with this word, image; emotion for a while—chew on it.
      2. Ask God if there is a personal word for you or a perspective on your current circumstances.

- c. When you have both finished your quiet meditative interaction with the story of Mark 4:35-41 talk through your experience [“b” above].
  - d. As you draw this experience to a close, live in the joy that God is speaking to you through the Bible.
5. Assignments—pick one of the following to do over the next month and report back in your next mentoring session.
- a. Over the next month pick stories from Mark’s gospel and do the exercise in #4 above. Keep a spiritual journal with brief notes of your experiences.
    - i. Choose a pace that is workable for you—once a week? Twice a week? Three times a week?
    - ii. Choose a time frame that is workable for you—10 minutes? 20 minutes?
    - iii. Choose a place that you will do this—coffee shop? Bedroom? Deck? Fireplace chair? Seabus?
  - b. Over the next month try doing the exercise in #4 with one of the scriptures listed in the Morning Prayer schedule at this website <http://www.northumbriacommunity.org/pray-the-daily-office><sup>31</sup>
  - c. Buy a copy of *The Spiritual Formation Bible* and read through one of the gospels using the meditative helps.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This online prayer book, *Celtic Daily Prayer* is a gift from the Northumbria Community of north-eastern England. This faith community, with members scattered around the world, has collected ancient and modern prayers. The focal point for this prayer book is the scheduled daily scripture readings with optional additional brief meditations and prayers. Recommended by Richard J. Foster, a Christian theologian and author in the Quaker tradition. He earned his Doctor of Pastoral Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary and is best known for his 1978 book *Celebration of Discipline*

<sup>32</sup> *The Spiritual Formation Bible*, in conjunction with *The Upper Room*, encourages readers to encounter Scripture in a more enlightening and personal way. Relating the Bible text to the transforming practice of meeting God in the Created Order, in Everyday Life, in Worship, Scripture, Service, and Community, this unique Bible offers hundreds of Entry Point meditations to help readers reflect on the meaning of the text. Five different styles of Entry Point articles include: Lectio divina; Ignatian: encourages the reader to allow his or her imagination to see, hear, taste, smell, and feel the story; Franciscan: emphasizes the sacred in the ordinary; Fivefold Question: prompts the reader to make the meaning of the text more personal. Quotations from Christians, old and new, encourage contemplation of the Scriptures. Available in NIV and NRSV

## Going Beyond Yourself with God

*At the very least, most of us need someone to tell our stories to. At a deeper level, most of us need someone to help us forget ourselves, a little or a lot. The great wisdom traditions of the world all recognize that the main impediment to living a life of meaning is being self absorbed.*

Barbara Brown Taylor  
*An Altar in The World*; p. 91.

*If you have a chest full of clothing, and leave it for a long time, the clothing will rot inside it. It is the same with the thoughts in our heart. If we do not carry them out by physical action after a long while they will spoil and turn bad.*

Abbot Pastor<sup>33</sup>

There is an interesting movement and progression in the following story about a day in the life of Jesus. See what you notice [Luke 6:12-19, NIV]:

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles...He went down with them and stood on a level place. A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over ...who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. Those troubled by evil spirits were cured, and the people all tried to touch him, because power was coming from him and healing them all.*

What did you notice?

Henri Nouwen comments:

*Jesus spent time on the mountain at night in solitary prayer. He came down in the morning and formed his community. Then in the afternoon, with his apostles, he went out and healed the sick and proclaimed the good news. I've been fascinated by the sequence of prayer at night, community in the morning and ministry in the afternoon. Notice the order—from solitude to community to ministry...these are the disciplines we are called to practice...communion with God...recognizing and gathering together in community...ministry or compassion in the world.<sup>34</sup>*

**Solitude, community, and ministry—this is spiritual life.** The lives of mature Christians exhibit all three. Solitude is the place we attend to God and become known as we are in our weaknesses and talents and sins, yet beloved of God. God leads people from their personal relationship with God into community and into service or ministry.

<sup>33</sup> Found in Thomas Merton's *The Wisdom of the Desert*, p.42; [New York: New Directions, 1970]; also quoted by Barbara Brown Taylor in *An Altar in The World*; p. 93.

<sup>34</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 110-111.

Community, in Nouwen's words,

*...is not loneliness grabbing onto loneliness. That can't satisfy a need that only solitude with God can fulfil. Community is "I am beloved; you are beloved; together we can create space for God and others".<sup>35</sup>*

There is much to learn in a faith community and lots of spiritual maturing that takes place. At Cap our motto is *Call, Celebrate, Change--Called to Celebrate Christ and Change Lives*. We believe that change or emerging maturity in Christ is a life-long process in which solitude; community; and ministry all play vital parts. Without community spiritual maturity is hampered.

By community we do not mean church as an organization or institution—we mean relationships with people around whom you can learn what it means to live as one of God's beloved. Community is not always comfortable place—it is *often the place where the person you least want to live with always lives*. Community is not some sentimental idealized place where everyone is comfortable, always loved and always gets along. Community is real. If you expect some sort of perfection, then you will have no end of disillusionment.

Joan Chittister<sup>36</sup> brings some valuable insights into community from the ancient Benedictine<sup>37</sup> practice of community:

*Neither communities nor families exist for themselves alone. They exist to witness to Christ and in Christ; their purpose is to draw us always into the center of life where values count and meaning matters more than our careers or our personal convenience.*

*Living with people does not by itself create community... even liking one another is not enough—we have to share a common vision: life with other persons in the Spirit of Christ to support them, to empower them and to learn from them. The work of life is concentration on God and service to one another...life without others is only half a life.*

*Community demands that we make relationships a priority; that we share ourselves, our minds, our insights, and our time with one another. Most of all, it demands that we allow the people in our lives to be who they are and grow as they can.*

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<sup>35</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; p. 114

<sup>36</sup> *Wisdom Distilled from the Daily, Living the Rule of St. Benedict Today*, Joan Chittister, pp. 39ff.

<sup>37</sup> Benedict of Nursia was a 6th century Christian monk who founded a monastery in Italy around 529 AD. Today those who follow his spiritual disciplines are known as Benedictines. One of the spiritual practices of Benedict has come to be known as the **Rule of Saint Benedict**, a book of precepts [rules of conduct] written by Benedict for monks [and later, women] living communally. Over the last 1500 years it has become the leading guide in Western Christianity for monastic living in community for many Catholic, Orthodox and Anglican Christians. Benedict sought to foster an understanding of the relational nature of human beings, and to provide a mentor to support and strengthen spiritual growth. There is no evidence to suggest that Benedict intended to found a religious order. His Rule is written as a guide for individuals and autonomous communities.

*Another function of community is to enable us to be about something greater than ourselves. Community goes astray when it begins to be seen simply as a jumping-off point for our own personal ambitions instead of an arena in which I am meant to give my gift to the rest of the human race so that we can all live better together.*

*[In community] we do not expect perfection; we expect growth, in ourselves as well as in others. Everyone hold a privileged place. There is a reverence for uniqueness. Conformity is not the end. Possessiveness goes when uniqueness is understood. The gift of individuals in our lives must be given as God gave them freely and recklessly. We don't have the master plan for everybody else's life. We learn to trust our own gifts but not for their own sake. We develop our gifts when we use them for the good of others.*

*[In community the] basics are love of God and fun and companionship on the long, dark roads of life. We have to learn to be for one another. Everything in life can't be cured or resolved or eliminated. Some things must simply be endured...borne...accepted. Community and relationships enable us to do that.*

*In community all ages live side by side and each learns from the other. Here we find out who we really are—I learn to soften hard spots and to reconcile and to care for someone besides ourselves. I learn that theory is no substitute for love. This is how relationships sanctify me—they show me where growth is for me. Alone I am what I am, but in community I have the chance to become everything that I can be.*

According to Romans 12, finding your place in the community of faith is part of God's will for your life. Placing your life before God as an offering includes your relationships and service among God's people.

*...Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering... fix your attention on God. You'll be changed from the inside out. Readily recognize what he wants from you, and quickly respond to it. Unlike the culture around you, always dragging you down to its level of immaturity, God brings the best out of you, develops well-formed maturity in you... The only accurate way to understand ourselves is by what God is and by what he does for us, not by what we are and what we do for him.*

*... we are like the various parts of a human body. Each part gets its meaning from the body as a whole, not the other way around. The body we're talking about is Christ's body of chosen people. Each of us finds our meaning and function as a part of his body... let's just go ahead and be what we were made to be, without enviously or pridefully comparing ourselves with each other, or trying to be something we aren't.*

*If you preach...; if you help, ...; if you teach...; if you give encouraging guidance...; if you're put in charge ...; if you're called to give aid to people in distress...; if you work with the disadvantaged...*

*Love from the center of who you are; ... Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good. Be good friends who love deeply...; keep yourselves fueled and aflame... Don't quit in hard times; pray all the harder...; be inventive in hospitality.*

*Bless your enemies; no cursing under your breath. Laugh with your happy friends when they're happy; share tears when they're down. Get along with each other; don't be stuck-up. Make friends with nobodies;*

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*don't be the great somebody...Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone... Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."*

*<sup>20-21</sup>Our Scriptures tell us that if you see your enemy hungry, go buy that person lunch, or if he's thirsty, get him a drink. Your generosity will surprise him with goodness. Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good.*

[The Message; selected parts of Romans 12].

## Spiritual Exercise: Going Beyond Yourself with God

1. Goals:
  - a. To better understand the role of community in your spiritual growth
  - b. To assess your rhythm of solitude, community, ministry and make adjustments
2. Discussion to be done in the mentoring session
3. Comment on the key points from the material, *Going Beyond Yourself with God*.
  - a. What jumps out at you from Romans 12?
  - b. Comment on where you have experienced these realities and which ones are yet to be experienced in community
    - i. *The main impediment to living is being self absorbed.*
    - ii. *Solitude, community, and ministry is spiritual life*
    - iii. *Community is “I am beloved; you are beloved; together we can create space for God and others.”*
    - iv. *Life without others is only half a life*
    - v. *Community demands that we allow the people in our lives to be who they are and grow as they can.*
    - vi. *Another function of community is to enable us to be about something greater than ourselves.*
    - vii. *We develop our gifts when we use them for the good of others.*
    - viii. *Everything in life can’t be cured or resolved or eliminated. Some things must simply be endured. Community and relationships enable us to do that.*
    - ix. *Alone I am what I am, but in community I have the chance to become everything that I can be.*
  - c. *Which of the above are most important for you at this stage of your faith journey?*
4. *Discuss your rhythm of solitude, community, and ministry. If you are listening to this description, receive it as it is given; don’t critique it—rather ask clarifying questions.*
  - a. *Describe what you currently do to make space for God in your life (solitude).*
  - b. *Describe your closest community of faith and how it is forming you*
    - i. *[by community of faith we mean the place where spiritual belonging happens for you whether it be family, a group of friends, a twelve-step program, a prayer group—it is people you gather with and experience that you are beloved of God; it is your spiritual home]*
  - c. *Describe where you are using your life and gifts for the good of others (your ministry).*

d. Clarifying questions can include:

- i. "Where are you experiencing God's grace, invitation, and acceptance?"
- ii. "What was that like for you?"
- iii. "In what areas do you need God's provision, comfort or guidance?"
- iv. "Where do you think that God was trying to get your attention?"

5. Optional assignment to do and bring back to the next mentoring session

- a. Find or review a favorite article or chapter or sermon or book on community. Summarize the main points and bring it back to the mentoring session and spend some time in listening prayer around what's next for you in the rhythm of solitude, community, and ministry.
- b. Next mentoring session also discuss
  - i. Who is "in" your closest faith community?
  - ii. What makes your faith community challenging?
  - iii. Which of your hard spots are currently being softened?
  - iv. Who do you need to forgive for not being God for you?

## 6. Optional Bible Study: What the Bible Says About How We Are To Relate To One Another

- a. The New Testament letters contain many ethical exhortations of life in the Spirit. The ethic of the Spirit may be summarized as the ethic of love. Love is always relational. Paul calls the Christian to a lifestyle of love and service to other Christians who share the same Spirit. The call to love is always based on the prior love of Christ for us.
- b. Read over the list of *one another* verses a couple of times. As you read, notice which ones are actions, which ones are attitudes and which ones are both. What is your initial reaction/impression?
- c. Do you see any common threads running through this list? What do you make of these commonalities?
- d. Paul's exhortations assume a particular view of who a person is and what they need to thrive in new life in the Spirit in community.
  - i. Can you sense what these verses imply about whom we are and our relational needs as Christians?
  - ii. How would you describe a group of Christians that visibly evidenced these things in their relationships?
  - iii. What would you see and hear and feel when observing their relationships? What would you not see?
  - iv. Choose an action and an attitude from the list and brainstorming how these qualities could be more present in your relationships in the week to come.
- e. What does God impress upon you from these verses?

### Selected Verses on What the Bible Says About How We Are To Relate To One Another

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Love one another (John 13:34-35)                          | 15. Serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13)                            |
| 2. Encourage one another to love and good works (Heb. 10:24) | 16. Bear one another in love (Eph. 4:2)                              |
| 3. Pray for one another (James 5:16)                         | 17. Be kind, compassionate, and forgiving to one another (Eph. 4:32) |
| 4. Bear the burdens of one another (Col. 6:2)                | 18. Submit to one another (Eph. 5:21)                                |
| 5. Be at peace with one another (I Thess. 5:13)              | 19. Do not lie to one another (Col. 3:19)                            |
| 6. Wash one another's feet (John 13:14)                      | 20. Teach and counsel one another (Col. 3:16)                        |
| 7. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love (Rom. 12:10)  | 21. Comfort one another (I Thess. 4:18)                              |
| 8. Honor one another (Rom. 12:10)                            | 22. Encourage and build up one another (I Thess. 5:11)               |
| 9. Live in harmony with one another (Rom. 12:16)             | 23. Do not grumble against one another (James 5:9)                   |
| 10. Stop passing judgment on one another (Rom. 14:li)        | 24. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)                    |
| 11. Accept one another (Rom. 15:5)                           | 25. Offer hospitality to one another (I Peter 4:9)                   |
| 12. Instruct one another (Rom. 15:14)                        | 26. Use your gifts to serve one another (I Peter 4:10)               |
| 13. Greet one another (Rom. 16:16)                           | 27. Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another (1 Peter 5:5) |
| 14. Care for one another (1 Cor. 12:25)                      | 28. Have fellowship with one another (I John 1:7)                    |

## Becoming a Wounded Healer

We are among your called  
 We have heard and answered your summons.  
 You have addressed us in the deep  
 places of our lives.  
 In responsive obedience we testify,  
 as we are able, to your truth as it  
 concerns our common life.

We thank you for the call,  
 for the burden of that call,  
 for the risk that goes with it,  
 for the joy of words given us  
 by your growing spirit, and  
 for the newness that sometimes comes  
 from your word.

We have indeed been in the counsel of your  
 Summoning spirit,  
 And so we know some truth to speak.

But we are, as well, filled with rich  
 imagination of our own,  
 And our imagination is sometimes  
 matched and overmatched  
 by our cowardice,  
 by our readiness to please,  
 by our quest for well-being.

We are, on most days, a hard mix  
 of true prophet and wayward voice,  
 a mix of your call to justice  
 and our hope for *shalom*.

Here we are, as we are,  
 mixed but faithful,  
 compromised but committed  
 anxious but devoted to you.

Use us and our gifts for  
 Your newness that pushes beyond  
 all that we can say or imagine.  
 We are grateful for words given us;  
 we are more grateful for your word fleshed  
 among us.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Called beyond Comfort Zone, on reading Jeremiah 23 in *Prayers for a Privileged People*, Walter Brueggemann, pp. 127-128

In the beginning of the previous mentoring section on **Going Beyond Yourself with God** we noted Luke 6: 12-19 where it says:

*One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him...He went down with them... A large crowd of his disciples was there and a great number of people from all over ...who had come to hear him and to be healed of their diseases...[NIV]*

And mentioned Henri Nouwen's reflection

*I've been fascinated by the sequence of prayer at night, community in the morning and ministry in the afternoon. Notice the order—from solitude to community to ministry...these are the disciplines we are called to practice...communion with God...recognizing and gathering together in community...ministry or compassion in the world.<sup>39</sup>*

And then concluded

***Solitude, community, and ministry—this is spiritual life.*** *The lives of mature Christians exhibit all three.*

Having examined in our mentoring sessions what **solitude** [Attending to God's Voice] and **community** [Going Beyond Yourself with God] can mean in your life, we want to look at **ministry**--what it would mean for you to become a wounded healer and be of service to God and to others inside the community of faith as well as those who have no experience of faith in Christ.

*Wounded Healer* is title of a 1972 book by Henri Nouwen<sup>40</sup>. The title captures the sense of Jesus life and work from the gospels and particularly from Isaiah 53. It is worth the time to read slowly Isaiah 53 and be reminded once again how it is that Jesus' wounds heal.

Here it is from The Message:

*Who believes what we've heard and seen?  
Who would have thought God's saving power would look like this?*

*The servant grew up before God—a scrawny seedling,  
a scrubby plant in a parched field.  
There was nothing attractive about him,  
nothing to cause us to take a second look.  
He was looked down on and passed over,*

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<sup>39</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 110-111.

<sup>40</sup> "Wounded healer" was also a phrase used by Carl Jung to describe the dynamic between therapist and patient when the wounds of the therapist activated memories in the patient, also called countertransference. Jung derives the term "wounded healer" from the ancient Greek legend of Asclepius, a physician who in identification of his own wounds creates a sanctuary at Epidaurus in order to treat others

*a man who suffered, who knew pain firsthand.  
One look at him and people turned away.  
We looked down on him, thought he was scum.  
But the fact is, it was our pains he carried—  
our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us.  
We thought he brought it on himself,  
that God was punishing him for his own failures.  
But it was our sins that did that to him,  
that ripped and tore and crushed him—our sins!  
He took the punishment, and that made us whole.  
Through his bruises we get healed.  
We're all like sheep who've wandered off and gotten lost.  
We've all done our own thing, gone our own way.  
And God has piled all our sins, everything we've done wrong,  
on him, on him.*

*He was beaten, he was tortured,  
but he didn't say a word.  
Like a lamb taken to be slaughtered  
and like a sheep being sheared,  
he took it all in silence.  
Justice miscarried, and he was led off—  
and did anyone really know what was happening?  
He died without a thought for his own welfare,  
beaten bloody for the sins of my people.  
They buried him with the wicked,  
threw him in a grave with a rich man,  
Even though he'd never hurt a soul  
or said one word that wasn't true.*

*Still, it's what God had in mind all along,  
to crush him with pain.  
The plan was that he give himself as an offering for sin  
so that he'd see life come from it—life, life, and more life.  
And God's plan will deeply prosper through him.*

*Out of that terrible travail of soul,  
he'll see that it's worth it and be glad he did it.  
Through what he experienced, my righteous one, my servant,  
will make many "righteous ones,"  
as he himself carries the burden of their sins.  
Therefore I'll reward him extravagantly—  
the best of everything, the highest honors—  
Because he looked death in the face and didn't flinch,  
because he embraced the company of the lowest.  
He took on his own shoulders the sin of the many,  
he took up the cause of all the black sheep.*

The New Testament has many examples of Jesus as a healer, fulfilling the Isaiah 53 description. The word for *save* in New Testament Greek, *sozo*, means *to heal*. The salvation that Jesus brings is healing in the fullest sense. To become a wounded healer is simply to become like Jesus. The spiritually mature not only look after their own wounds, but offer themselves to God to be Jesus' hands and feet to others. The question here is, "how can I be of service to God and others?"

Nouwen comments:

*The question in ministry is not, "How do I bring all these people to Jesus?" or "How do I make these people believe?" or "How do I help all these people?" Ministry happens...I am not concerned with fixing the marriage....or of convincing the [one] who doesn't believe in Jesus to have faith. I am here to say this is who I am, and this is who God is for me and to be there for others. You have to trust that if you are the son or daughter of God, a healing power will go out from you and people will be healed.*

*Ministry is the fruit of finding your gifts and offering what you have...it [does] not require professional credentials...if you are living in communion with God, if you know you are the beloved, and if you make yourself available for service, you cannot do other than minister.<sup>41</sup>*

How? Nouwen offers valuable wisdom

1. It is harder to minister alone—the culture's style of individualism and the temptation to see ministry as something "to succeed in" make being faithful to Jesus difficult when ministering alone. Better to ministry with the support, prayer, encouragement and accountability of others.
2. Be on the receiving as well as giving end—we like to be givers and find it more challenging to receive. But it is an essential part of ministry to receive the gifts of others. You won't be able to fix all the problems, change all the circumstances, or even answer all the questions of those who are weak, poor, suffering, or dying—[the little, least, lost, last, and nearly dead, to use a phrase common around Cap], but you can be with them. When someone knows that they are important enough to have your presence and that you receive from them whatever they have to offer even if it is just their pain, and then a bit of joy and gratitude begin the healing process. This is the essence of compassion as Jesus modelled it—"suffering with those who suffer".
3. Downward mobility and voluntary displacement—we live in a culture that calls us to "come up". Upward mobility—more success, more money, more "security", more attention, and the like. The gospel of Jesus turns this upside down and calls us to a **downward mobility** in our outreach service and ministry—we are called to "be like Jesus".

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<sup>41</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 130-131.

- a. **Downward mobility** is obvious from New Testament passages like Philippians 2. Consider the middle part of the passage before the first part.

Jesus example of downward mobility

<sup>5-8</sup>*Think of yourselves the way Christ Jesus thought of himself. He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that—a crucifixion.*

<sup>9-11</sup>*Because of that obedience, God lifted him high and honoured him far beyond anyone or anything, ever, so that all created beings in heaven and on earth—even those long ago dead and buried—will bow in worship before this Jesus Christ, and call out in praise that he is the Master of all, to the glorious honour of God the Father.*

Your call to follow Jesus example

<sup>1-4</sup>*If you've gotten anything at all out of following Christ, if his love has made any difference in your life, if being in a community of the Spirit means anything to you, if you have a heart, if you care—then do me a favour: Agree with each other, love each other, be deep-spirited friends. Don't push your way to the front; don't sweet-talk your way to the top. Put yourself aside, and help others get ahead. Don't be obsessed with getting your own advantage. Forget yourselves long enough to lend a helping hand.*

- b. **Voluntary displacement** is simply going where the little, least, last, lost and nearly dead are in order to be with them. We are not talking about career. We are talking about following Jesus to maturity. Your particular talents may require the pursuit of a certain career. But your life with God is never just about your career.

In the bigger picture of your life God calls you to career, to family, to wholeness, to community **and** in the midst of these things to always be on “the Jesus way”—to have an orientation, an openness to follow what the Spirit is doing among the little, least, last, lost, and nearly dead.

Nouwen comments:

*For Thomas Merton, displacement meant leaving the university and going into a monastery. For Martin Luther it meant leaving the monastery and becoming a reformer. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, it meant returning to his country from the safety of the United States and becoming a prisoner of the Nazis. For Martin Luther King Jr., it meant leaving the “ordinary and proper place” of blacks and leading a movement for civil rights. For Mother Teresa, it meant leaving the convent and starting an order to care for the “poorest of the poor”...*

*for many people, displacement means persevering faithfully in their unspectacular daily life, leaving grand fantasies aside to be faithful to their ministry in the marketplace...*

*many people are...displaced involuntarily. For them, the challenge is not moving out of "the ordinary and proper place" but making the given circumstance [a calling from God].*

*the remarkable paradox...of displacement and downward mobility is that it creates community...others are inspired to join.<sup>42</sup>*

4. Cap's Wounded Healers – currently Cap community members' minister in several different venues offering who they are and what they have in Jesus name. One of these may be for you.
  - a. **Alpha**—inviting friends to consider Christian faith and community
  - b. **Anvil Camps**—ministry to preteens and teens
  - c. **Barnabas Family Ministry**—ministry to families, single moms, moms and daughters, fathers and sons, premarriage and marriage enhancement
  - d. **Bufukhula**—compassionate friendship and community development via child sponsorships and visits to Uganda
  - e. **Cap's Compassionate Task Force**—serving Cap's disadvantaged
  - f. **The Harvest Project**—assisting people in transition with food, clothes, and counsel
  - g. **Jacob's Well**—serving the marginalized in Downtown Vancouver
  - h. **Justice Hub@Cap**--addressing root causes of injustice in a local and international selected area and supporting Cap advocates doing justice work
  - i. **Keats Camps**—ministry to preteens and teens
  - j. **Missions Team**—calling the community to go beyond themselves and supporting those who do
  - k. **Open Door**—supporting single moms in their challenges
  - l. **Operation Baby Bottle**—a fundraiser in support of local Crisis Pregnancy Centre
  - m. **Premarriage Mentoring**—mentoring couples and preparing them for covenant marriage
  - n. **Samaritan's Purse**—via the Christmas shoebox gifts for children in the developing world
  - o. **Union Gospel Mission**—serving the marginalized and mentoring children from displaced and non-intact families
5. The following spiritual exercise is intended to help you discern where God is leading you to offer who you are and what you have in Jesus name if you haven't already decided

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<sup>42</sup> *Spiritual Direction, Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 140-141.

## Spiritual Exercise: Becoming a Wounded Healer

### 1. Goals:

- a. help you discern where God is leading you to offer who you are and what you have in Jesus name if you haven't already decided
- b. to plan the next step for ministry for this season of your spiritual journey
- c. to be accountable in the mentoring relationship to follow through

### 2. Listening for God's call via the Bible

- a. Read the story of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 which defines who our neighbour is in God's eyes.
  - i. Read the passage slowly. Pause after the reading to picture the events.
  - ii. Reread the passage quietly and place yourself in the story. Notice what is happening in your body; your emotions; your spirit.
  - iii. What from your reading jumps out at you, commands your attention?
    1. Stay with this word, image; emotion for a while—chew on it.
    2. Ask God if there is a personal word for you or a perspective on whom you are called to serve.
  - iv. Discuss your experience in your mentoring session
- b. Here are some background notes to enlighten your reading of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Use them only if this enhances rather than hinders your listening prayer experience.
  - i. The road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a dangerous road in Jesus day—it was known as the Way of Blood because ambushes were common.
  - ii. Samaritans and Jews hated each other. Though they believed in the same God, the same law, and in Moses as the law giver, over their history Samaritans believed that worship should take place on Mt. Gerizim in the north, not in Jerusalem in the south. in the early decades of the first century tensions high because Samaritans had desecrated the Jewish Temple at Passover with human bones. When Jews would travel from Judea to Galilee in the north, they would travel around Samaria which was in between rather than travel through it and risk contact with Samaritans.
  - iii. For Jesus to portray the Samaritan in positive light would have come as a shock to his audience. This is nothing less than a critique of the failure of the Jewish leadership to value what God values—mercy. Here, in a great reversal mercy is performed by an outcast.
  - iv. In Jesus' culture, contact with a dead body was understood to defile one. The priest and Levite may have assumed that the fallen traveler was dead and avoided

him to keep themselves ritually clean but showing that they failed to understand mercy or the importance of neighbour love.

- v. Some commentators have suggested that the beaten man symbolizes Jesus who is rejected and left to die by the Jewish leaders. This fits well with the themes in the central section of Luke's gospel, but is not developed in the parable.
  - vi. Jesus tells the parable to answer the question, "who is my neighbour?"
  - vii. Today the story is often recast and the characters are from social groups who show disrespect and even hatred for each other. Martin Luther King, Jr., in his "I've Been to the Mountaintop" speech, described the Samaritan as "a man of another race,
- c. The parable of the Good Samaritan—Luke 10:25-37

*Just then a religion scholar stood up with a question to test Jesus. "Teacher, what do I need to do to get eternal life?"*

*He answered, "What's written in God's Law? How do you interpret it?"*

*He said, "That you love the Lord your God with all your passion and prayer and muscle and intelligence—and that you love your neighbour as well as you do yourself."*

*"Good answer!" said Jesus. "Do it and you'll live."*

*Looking for a loophole, he asked, "And just how would you define 'neighbour'?"*

*Jesus answered by telling a story. "There was once a man travelling from Jerusalem to Jericho. On the way he was attacked by robbers. They took his clothes, beat him up, and went off leaving him half-dead. Luckily, a priest was on his way down the same road, but when he saw him he angled across to the other side. Then a Levite religious man showed up; he also avoided the injured man.*

*"A Samaritan travelling the road came on him. When he saw the man's condition, his heart went out to him. He gave him first aid, disinfecting and bandaging his wounds. Then he lifted him onto his donkey, led him to an inn, and made him comfortable. In the morning he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take good care of him. If it costs any more, put it on my bill—I'll pay you on my way back.'*

*"What do you think? Which of the three became a neighbour to the man attacked by robbers?"*

*"The one who treated him kindly," the religion scholar responded.*

*Jesus said, "Go and do the same."*

### 3. Where will you serve?

- a. Where do you sense that God is calling you to be a wounded healer?
  - i. Read over the list of Cap's existing wounded healer ministries. Does one of these seem to fit with where God is leading you?

- ii. If there is something not on that list describe as fully as you can where you sense God leading you to serve.
  1. Who are the people?
  2. Where do you need to be to be with them?
  3. How do you see yourself as a wounded healer serving them?
  4. What encouragement do you need to get started or continue?
  5. What do you need to let go of in order to get started or continue?
  6. What do you sense that God will do in you as a result of this?

4. **Choosing and changing.** Change, like stopping a problematic behaviour and replacing it with a positive behaviour or starting a new venture such as caring for people or being involved in a ministry is complex. We all go through predictable stages when making these kinds of choices.
  - a. We go from "not thinking about it" to "weighing the pros and cons"
  - b. From "weighing the pros and cons" to "making little changes and figuring out how to deal with the real hard parts"
  - c. From "making little changes and figuring out how to deal with the real hard parts" to "doing it!"
  - d. From "doing it!" to "making it part of our lives".

Many people "fall off the wagon" and go through all the stages several times before the change really lasts. Doing something you haven't done before can also have an element of apprehension—the "old fear of the unknown" kind-of-thing.

5. The following suggestions are meant to assist you in responding to God's call. Use them if they help. Stop if they don't.
  - a. Break the new complex venture down into smaller bits. Which smaller bits are doable now to start?
  - b. Is what you are envisioning realistic for you? Unrealistic ideas increase apprehension. Apprehension increases the probability of nothing happening.
  - c. What do you envision satisfying about your involvement? Focusing on this will heighten motivation and action.
  - d. If there are hard realities to your envisioned ministry involvement what aspects will you look back on and say, "in spite of all that, it was worth it"?
  - e. How do you envision managing your involvement to "stay in the game" and not be overwhelmed and burnout?
  - f. Perfect ministries don't exist, and neither does perfect learning situations. How do you imagine you will respond when you encounter your first major obstacle?
  - g. Start small, baby steps. Accept God's smile on the direction you are headed and the service you are offering.

6. **Assessing where you are at**—on the grid below mark what is true for you “right now”--your reluctance/readiness/already involved status

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not ready yet									Already involved

7. Questions for where you are at

- a. If your mark is on the left side of the line:
  - i. What do you think you need before you consider getting involved?
  - ii. What is important to you in “staying where you are at”?
- b. If your mark is somewhere in the middle:
  - i. What has allowed you to come this far?
  - ii. What would it take to move further to the right?
- c. If your mark is on the right side of the line:
  - i. What have you found satisfying?
  - ii. What challenges do you have to endure? How are you doing that?
  - iii. What has worked to get you this far?
- d. If you have been involved in ministry but are currently not even on the grid don’t kick yourself, but consider:
  - i. What caused you to drop off?
  - ii. What did you learn from the experience that will help you when you give it another try?

8. Next Step

- a. As a conclusion to your discussion pick a small doable next step and decide on the who, what, when, and where of this step.

## Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion

*"When our hearts are filled with prejudices, worries, and fears, there is little room for a stranger."*

*"In my earlier life, community meant a safe and familiar place of belonging where those not like me simply were not present. I came from a Dutch Catholic family where it was clear who **we** were and who **they** were. **They** were all non-Catholics. **They** were nonbelievers. **They** got divorced or were gay. While **we** were okay because **we** believed the right teachings and lived a moral life."*

*"At Yale and Harvard...I learned from my students that God was greater than my Roman Catholic conceptions...it is a frightening thing when boundaries are pushed out and walls break down. How could the nonbeliever be more believing than the believer, the outsider wiser than the insider? How could those without resources have something valuable to share?"*

Henri Nouwen<sup>43</sup>

### Dropping Keys

A Poem by Hafez<sup>44, 45</sup>,

*The small person  
Builds cages for everyone  
He  
Sees.  
Instead, the sage,  
Who needs to duck his head,  
When the moon is low,  
Can be found dropping keys, all night long  
For the beautiful,  
Rowdy,  
Prisoners.*

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<sup>43</sup> *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 91-93.

<sup>44</sup> Despite his profound effect on Persian life and culture and his enduring popularity and influence, few details of Hafez's life [1317—1390, also known as *Hafiz*] are known. There is a great deal mythical anecdote. His collected works are to be found in the homes of most Iranians, who learn his poems by heart and use them as proverbs and sayings to this day. Hāfez left his mark on Western writers such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Goethe. Most recently, *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz the Great Sufi Master* has been translated by Daniel Ladinsky (1999). Some believe that Ladinsky has composed more than he has translated. There is no definitive version of Hafiz's collected works; editions vary from 573 to 994 poems.

<sup>45</sup> Sufism is the mystical dimension of Islam. Classical Sufi scholars define its objective as restoration of the heart and turning it away from all else but God

Here is the question for mentoring this month—does growing to maturity in Christ, hopefully reflecting more of God’s character in our lives, mean that we become more elite, pious, and exclusive, or more expansive, hospitable, generous and inclusive? Let’s first explore this issue with some definitions and a summary of the “theological debate”.

Definitions:

1. **Inclusion:** A belief and resultant behaviour that God is present in the whole world and God’s grace is also at work in some way among all people. The unevangelized may be saved if they respond in faith to God based on the revelation they have.
2. **Exclusivism:** a belief and resultant behaviour that Jesus is the only Saviour for all humanity and that it is not possible to attain salvation apart from explicit knowledge of Him.

#### The Argument for Inclusion<sup>46</sup>

1. God’s love extends to all humanity (1 Tim 2:4; Rom 11:32; 2 Pet 3:9) thereby providing hope for a substantial redemption of humanity based upon the boundless mercy of God. This stands in contrast to the traditional view that some are saved, but far from all.
2. Salvation for the world is reached by way of particularity in Jesus. God saves the many through the One. Grace is universal because it is particular. People may be saved by Christ without actually knowing the name of Jesus.
3. The Holy Spirit is working in all people and in all ages and locations. The Holy Spirit saves even where Christ is unknown. Believers are called to recognize and cooperate with work God is all ready doing when they proclaim Jesus as Saviour and Lord.
4. God accepts those who fear him, even where Christ is yet to be proclaimed. Those who have lived their life only under the influence of God’s general revelation are nonetheless able to receive the benefits provided for by the redemption of Christ. God takes account of faith in him and always sees to it that those responding to the light they have encountered Jesus Christ, whether before or after death.
5. Evangelicals have narrowed the motivation for missions down to the deliverance from wrath, making it the major reason for missions when it is not. It is a travesty to maintain that the primary motive of missions is to rescue souls from hell. The purpose of the Christian missions is far broader, and its motivation far more reaching. The deepest motive of all for Christian missions is eschatological—to see the kingdom come and God’s rule established.

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<sup>46</sup> See Clark Pinnock; *A Wideness in God’s Mercy: The Finality of Jesus Christ in a World of Religions*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Academic and Professional Books, Zondervan Pub. House, 1992

6. God is at work redemptively in the lives of all people. God is free to work salvifically in various cultural, temporal, geographical and religious contexts. That is, the particularity of salvation in Jesus is not to be equated with a restrictiveness of salvation. The gospel is about God's grace not about cognitive information about Jesus.

### The Argument for Exclusivism<sup>47</sup>

1. The following scriptures taken at face value are to be considered normative for salvation—
  - a. John 14: 6—*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*
  - b. Acts 4:12—"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."
  - c. 1 John 5:11-13—*And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.*
2. Exclusivism holds that at best we do not know for sure what God might do about the unevangelized. But unless they hear the Gospel and receive Jesus Christ as their Savior they have no hope. Exclusivists do not do teach this with any joy but only because they believe this is made abundantly clear in Scripture. This is humbling for apart from the grace of God they would be part of the unevangelized. Also it causes them to prayerfully ask the Lord what can be done to make sure there are no unevangelized on my watch.
3. Historically, Exclusivism has been the motivating factor for missions. Since the unevangelized have no hope without hearing the Gospel, then it is imperative that to obey the command of our Lord to make disciples. There is urgency because no one can believe until they hear.

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<sup>47</sup> See *The Salvation of the Unevangelized: What the Literature Suggests* by Robert A. Alstadt and Enoch Wan [a paper from the Doctor of Missiology Program at Western Seminary, Portland Oregon] published in *Global Missiology, Contemporary Practices*, January 2005.

Next let's consider one of Jesus' Kingdom parables<sup>48</sup> recorded in **Luke 14**. Here is the text from The Message with the context:

*<sup>1-3</sup> One time when Jesus went for a Sabbath meal with one of the top leaders of the Pharisees, all the guests had their eyes on him, watching his every move. Right before him there was a man hugely swollen in his joints. So Jesus asked the religion scholars and Pharisees present, "Is it permitted to heal on the Sabbath? Yes or no?"*

*<sup>12-14</sup> Then he turned to the host. "The next time you put on a dinner, don't just invite your friends and family and rich neighbours, the kind of people who will return the favour. Invite some people who never get invited out, the misfits from the wrong side of the tracks. You'll be—and experience—a blessing. They won't be able to return the favour, but the favour will be returned—oh, how it will be returned!—at the resurrection of God's people."*

### **The Story of the Dinner Party**

*<sup>15</sup> That triggered a response from one of the guests: "How fortunate the one who gets to eat dinner in God's kingdom!"*

*<sup>16-17</sup> Jesus followed up. "Yes. For there was once a man who threw a great dinner party and invited many. When it was time for dinner, he sent out his servant to the invited guests, saying, 'Come on in; the food's on the table.'*

*<sup>18</sup> Then they all began to beg off, one after another making excuses. The first said, 'I bought a piece of property and need to look it over. Send my regrets.'*

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<sup>48</sup> Throughout church history the parables have suffered from more misinterpretation than almost any other literary genre in the Bible except the Book of Revelation. The misinterpretation of the parables stems from the idea that the parables hold hidden meanings, mysteries of God, and spiritual truths which can only be uncovered by finding the meaning of every detail of the parable.

Parables generally have one main point. Do not look for meaning in the details but in the main point. The main point of the parable is in the intended response. The intended response, the "punch-line" of parable, often contains a surprise or twist the hearer did not expect.

The Kingdom parables usually start with a phrase like, "The Kingdom of God is like . . ." In these parables the whole parable, not the details, tells us something about the Kingdom of God. In other words the Kingdom of God is not like a mustard seed, merchant, or hidden treasure, but like the main point of the parable. It would be better to start reading these parables, "It is like this with the Kingdom of God . . ."

Kingdom parables usually proclaim the already/not-yet nature of the Kingdom of God. This already/not tension is normally expressed in two themes: 1) immanent judgment and 2) salvation freely offered to all. Urgency--calling for action--characterizes kingdom parables.

Parables were told to be understood. Read for the natural sense. Note the occasion of the parable. Get inside the skin of the main characters and their appropriate or inappropriate actions. Imagine how the original readers would have been pricked by the story. And most of all pay attention to the intended response or main point. For more on this see Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart in [How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth](#), (Zondervan, pp. 123-125).

<sup>19</sup>"Another said, 'I just bought five teams of oxen, and I really need to check them out. Send my regrets.'

<sup>20</sup>"And yet another said, 'I just got married and need to get home to my wife.'

<sup>21</sup>"The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'

<sup>22</sup>"The servant reported back, 'Master, I did what you commanded— and there's still room.'

<sup>23-24</sup>"The master said, 'Then go to the country roads. Whoever you find, drag them in. I want my house full! Let me tell you, not one of those originally invited is going to get so much as a bite at my dinner party.'"

### **Figure the Cost**

<sup>25-27</sup> One day when large groups of people were walking along with him, Jesus turned and told them, "Anyone who comes to me but refuses to let go of father, mother, spouse, children, brothers, sisters—yes, even one's own self!—can't be my disciple. Anyone who won't shoulder his own cross and follow behind me can't be my disciple.

<sup>28-30</sup> "Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn't first sit down and figure the cost so you'll know if you can complete it? If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you're going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: 'He started something he couldn't finish.'

### **Background notes on the parable**

1. **Setting:** Jesus was at the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath. Jesus noticed that some of the invited guests at the house were seeking the more honoured places to sit. Jesus spoke about being humble and seeking the lower position. He then spoke about inviting the poor and the crippled to dinner, even though they could not repay the host, because the host would be repaid in the resurrection
2. **Guest List and First Invitation:** It was the custom when giving a dinner, to invite a certain number of people. Those who accepted the invitation were then counted. The meal was prepared according to the number who accepted the invitation. The more people coming, the more food had to be prepared. For example, a chicken would be for 2-4 guests, a duck for 5-8, a lamb for 10-15, a sheep for 15-35, and a calf for 35-75. In other words, the amount and type of meat depends on the number of people who accept the invitation. Once an animal has been killed it must be eaten soon or else it will spoil. Therefore, to back out at the last minute would be rude. The invited guest is duty bound to attend the banquet. Also, it was considered very rude to attend a banquet if you were not invited; after all, the meal had not been prepared with you in mind.

3. **Second invitation:** is a notification to the guests that the meal is ready. The Greek word "come" means literally, continue coming. This is consistent with the custom of a double invitation. The meal has been prepared, the table set, and people notified. To back out now is an insult.
4. **Excuse #1—Buying a Field:** In the Middle East, no one buys a field without first examining it thoroughly. The springs, wells, stone walls, trees, paths, and anticipated rainfall are all well-known long before a discussion of the purchase is even begun. The excuse is a lie, an obvious one, and the guest is stating in no uncertain terms that the field is more important than his relationship with the host. In a community where interpersonal relationships are very important, this strikes even harder as an offence.
5. **Excuse #2—Buying Oxen:** Teams of oxen are sold in the Middle East in two ways. They are taken to the market place and a nearby field and there they plough the field. Anyone wishing to buy may then drive the oxen himself and examine the animals thoroughly to see if they work well as a team. The other way to buy the oxen is to announce that the team is for sale and say what day the team will be working in the field. Prospective buyers can then come to the field, watch, examine, and test them for themselves. Only after the team is examined thoroughly is a price discussed. This excuse, like the other one, is also an insult.
6. **Excuse #3—The Wedding:** In the tightly knit community of the Middle East a wedding calls for a celebration. At a celebration is food, and lots of it. The community would have been aware of the wedding and many people would have been invited. Meals would have been prepared beforehand. Therefore, the banquet would not have been scheduled for the same day as a wedding
7. **An Insulted Host:** Anger would be a natural expectation of the head of the household. He has been insulted three times.
8. **Invite Everyone Else:** The invited guests refuse to respond to the good news that the feast is ready. What then is the host to do? He cannot have a feast without guests. He then invites the unworthy, the poor, crippled, blind, and lame. He brings in the undesirables. So, he gives the command to bring in the poor, who aren't normally invited to banquets; the crippled, who cannot test oxen in the field; and the blind and lame who don't normally marry. They have no way of repaying the host. This is typical of God's grace—it is extended to those who can't repay
9. **Who's Who:** The original audience in the parable would likely have identified the **Original Guests** as the leaders of Israel who are rightfully the first to be invited; the **Lame and Poor** of the City as the outcasts within the house of Israel; and the **Guests from the Highways and the Hedges** as Gentiles.
10. **Main point of the parable--** all are invited. They have only to "count themselves in" rather than "count themselves out." God is gracious and hospitable to those on the "outside" who have no way of repaying him for His grace and hospitality.

**Reflection:**

1. What aspects of the character of God are reflected in the parable?
2. What do you think the main point of the parable is?
3. What impact does this have on the inclusion/exclusion discussion?
4. How do you choose to live now in relation to those who you would consider “outside”?
5. What would it be like to give up “being the judge” of who is “in” and who is “out” and trust that God knows what He is doing when it comes to people who need salvation?

## Spiritual Exercise:

### Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion

1. Goals:

- b. To identify where you are at on the journey to maturity in Christ as it pertains to treating people as Jesus would treat them.
- c. To see the relationship of belief and behaviour in Christian maturity.
- d. To choose godly behaviours even when theological issues are undecided.
- e. To discover how you change and grow

2. Maturing means change. Maturing in Christ means becoming more like Him in attitudes and actions. Consider this selection of exhortations from Ephesians 4 -5—they are about behaviours. One could summarize this list by saying “be filled with the Spirit and imitate God”. This list assumes that you already have “the mind of Christ” [Philippians 2]

- I urge you to live a life worthy [of the gospel]
- Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit
- Speak the truth in love
- Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God
- Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you
- Be imitators of God
- Live as children of light
- Find out what pleases the Lord...
- Do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is
- Be filled with the Spirit.

3. So the question for this session is—how can you change so that your life reflecting more of God's character?

- a. In your view of yourself, others, the world, and your purpose in life?
- b. In your actions toward yourself and others?

4. Pick one episode from your life where you are aware of change in your life

- a. Narrate the circumstance and include
  - i. What changed—belief [view of self? view of other? Etc] Behaviour?
  - ii. What did God/Spirit do to bring about the change?
  - iii. What did you do to change?

5. **Read through and discuss the following material on change. See what you can discover about yourself.**
6. Change is not a simple thing, it is complex. Humans don't change either their inherited beliefs or well practiced behaviours easily. Even with the Bible's view of change, which we've summarized in the phrase "be filled with the Spirit and imitate God," the process of change may be unclear.
  - a. You can change, but not by willpower. Psychological researchers have found that willpower is of limited use in change for most people. For example a day or two after a motivational lecture and the excitement fades and real life returns for most people. The alternative to will is skill. When specific skills are learned and mastered real change results—people can and do produce meaningful changes in their relationships; behaviours and moods.
  - b. Seven truths about changing from psychological research
    - i. Change occurs in stages. Because behaviours are complex breaking them down into smaller, self contained bits; taking baby steps; strategizing solutions to inevitable setbacks enhances change.
    - ii. Slow change is best. Change is most effective when it occurs slowly, allowing behaviours to become automatic.
    - iii. Change is frightening and is resisted because of unknown consequences. Fear increases the probability of failure. Being realistic about what to change and going at it slowly enhances change.
    - iv. Surprise spells disaster for people seeking change. Knowing more about the process; the needed skills, the steps, as well as specific positive feedback enhances change.
    - v. Punishment is *the* pitfall. Change will not be permanent if punishment is way you are rewarded. Enjoying the change; or admiring the results; or congratulating yourself enhances positive and permanent change.
    - vi. Spontaneity sabotages change. While spontaneity is wonderful for some activities, it's a sure-fire method for sabotaging change. *Change Requires Structure.* Creating a structure that is not restrictive or unhelpful enhances change.
    - vii. Practice is necessary for change. Practice makes new behaviours automatic and a natural part of who we are.
    - viii. **Which of the above "strike home" with you in your successful and unsuccessful desired change?**

- c. What style of change has already been a part of your life? You may not be aware of it but you already have made changes in your life. What “style of changing” worked for you then?
- i. Imitating a desired behaviour you saw in someone?
  - ii. Environment with models: being around a community of people that included people of whom you said, “I want to be like...”?
  - iii. Making a plan. Setting a goal and working toward it? Independently? With a coach?
  - iv. Learning a skill. Stage by stage practice and feedback from an instructor, counsellor, life coach?

### 7. Consider Henri Nouwen`s change experience:

- a. After nearly two decades of teaching at the Menninger Foundation Clinic in Topeka, Kansas, and at the University of Notre Dame, Yale University and Harvard University, Nouwen choose to leave the academic setting and live and work with mentally challenged people at the L'Arche community of Daybreak in Toronto, Canada.
- b. From his experience in the Larch community with disabled people:

*I came to realize that the difference between people with disabilities and those with different abilities just wasn't there anymore; that I could love those with physical and intellectual challenges because I had my own set of disabilities. I could be as close to people in pain because somehow they revealed my pain to me. No longer did I have to compare myself with other by carving out a little niche and distinguishing myself.*

*I finally understood that the great spiritual call is not to be different from the other but to be of the same substance and being as another, to be at one with others...we need not make comparisons and judgments about others: I am not like him or her or them, I am more, I am better, I am different from the others...we belong to the ...human race...`it is a glorious destination to be a member of the human race.`<sup>49</sup>*

*To come to that inner place of not judging in the face of the enormous variety of human experience and expressions is a long road of faith. To overcome that constant need to determine my comparative place, and to be simply who I am, can make me whole. To finally let go of that burden is one of the greatest joys and freedoms in life.<sup>50</sup>*

### c. What contributed to Nouwen`s change?

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<sup>49</sup> Quoting Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, 1966.

<sup>50</sup> *Spiritual Formation, Following the Movements of the Spirit*; Henri Nouwen with Michael J. Christensen & Rebecca J Laird; pp. 92-97.

8. **Consider the poem—*Dropping Keys*** by Hafiz found at the beginning of the chapter: *Towards Maturity: the Journey from Exclusion to Inclusion*

- a. What does the poem say about judging?
- b. What are the consequences of a lifestyle of judging?
- c. What does the poem suggest frees people to change?
- d. What is the role of the wise outsider to helping people change?

9. **Time to bring this exploration to a conclusion and continue the process of your change.**

- a. You've looked in this study some or all of
  - i. The contrast between inclusion and exclusion
  - ii. A portion of Scripture that gives one perspective on the inclusion/exclusion debate
  - iii. The Biblical view of maturity
  - iv. The process of change informed by psychology
  - v. The example of Henri Nouwen changing;
  - vi. the wisdom of Hafiz;

**b. Now enter into listening prayer**

- i. Imagine yourself in a class room with Jesus as the professor. This is a teacher student conference. Jesus is going to write on the board the most important thing he wants you to know and to do from all this discussion.
  1. What do you see appearing on the board?
  2. What do you ask Jesus from what is on the board?
  3. What does he say to you?
    - a. Pay attention to “the invitation”
    - b. Pay attention to “the next step”
- ii. When you come out of the listening prayer experience, discuss the experience in the mentoring session.

# Bringing It All Together

## Celebrating a year together

Hopefully this past year of mentoring has been a year of spiritual growth for you. What has transpired this past year is what God wanted for this period of your life. If He thought you weren't o.k. with it then he would have chosen something else. The challenges, the pains, the joys, and the plain moments all weave together under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to create growth. You may remember the Eugene Peterson quote on maturity from the introduction:

*The human task is to become mature, not only in our bodies and emotions and minds within ourselves but also in our relationship with God and other persons...Birth is quick and easy in comparison to growth with its endless and complex<sup>51</sup>.*

Our purpose in this final session is twofold—to savour what God has done this past year and bring to a conclusion the structured mentoring sessions—what some call “celebrate and terminate”. You may also find that you still have something “unfinished” from one of the previous sessions that you want to discuss before you celebrate and terminate. If so, do that in the first part of this final session and finish with some savouring of this past year and blessing one another.

Savouring simply means dwelling on something so that you can enjoy it completely. To savour what God has done this past year we will use the consolation and desolation questions.

### Savouring what God has done

1. Where in the past year's mentoring did you feel most cared for by God?
  - a. Tell or retell this experience
  - b. What would it be like for you to savour this over the next months?
2. What in the past year's mentoring were the most challenging or stretching moments?
  - a. How did they fit on the endless and complex journey to maturity?
  - b. How will you see these moments as part of God's invitation to you to be formed in Christ?
3. Where did you feel most distant from God in this year's mentoring journey?
  - a. What is similar and different in your perspective on that distant experience looking back today?
  - b. How will this experience and memory become part of your story?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> *Practice Resurrection*, p. 3.

<sup>52</sup> What Nouwen called the experience of “The Hidden God”—*The simple fact is we often don't know how God is at work in our lives. We are surrounded by the unseen and the unknown. What we can say is that God is with us in the unexplainable absurdities of life.*

## Bringing the Mentoring Relationship to a Close

1. Give some feedback to each other on what it was like to be together in the mentoring process.
  - 1.1. What was the experience like for you to be the mentor or the mentee?
    - What did you learn about trusting the Holy Spirit?
    - What did you learn about listening deeply to both God and the mentor/mentee's story?
    - What did you learn about acceptance of the other where they are at and grace to do so?
  - 1.2. How did you "find your role" during the process?
  - 1.3. What have you learned about being in a mentoring relationship that you will incorporate into future experience?
  - 1.4. Were there any uncomfortable moments? Anything to discuss or learn here?
  - 1.5. What will you most miss about these times together?
2. Redefine your relationship—from mentor/mentee to community members
  - 2.1. How do you think your relationships will change now that the mentoring sessions are completed?
  - 2.2. Where in the community life at Cap will you have an ongoing albeit different connection?
    - What might that look like?
3. Verbalize "what's next"
  - 3.1. What's next for you in terms of growth and service?
  - 3.2. Who, what, when—if you know?
4. Blessing one another
  - 4.1. A few things about blessings
    - In the Jewish tradition, every blessing prayer begins by blessing God
      - Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, by whose word all things come into being *or*
      - Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has made the works of creation *or*
      - Blessed are you, Lord our God, King of the Universe, who feeds all living things
    - To pronounce a blessing puts you as close to God as you can get. This is what God does. To pronounce a blessing is to see someone from God's perspective—you bless what is with God's mercy rather than bless what you think it should be.<sup>53</sup>
  - 4.2. Bless each other as you bring this mentoring relationship to a close.

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<sup>53</sup> *An Altar in The World*; p. 199, Barbara Brown Taylor