NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

SACRED INTEGRATION:
THE INTEGRATION OF CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER PRACTICES IN CORPORATE WORSHIP

A THESIS IN THE PRACTICE OF MINISTRY

PRESENTED TO THE FACULTY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN SPIRITUAL FORMATION AND DISCIPLESHIP

by
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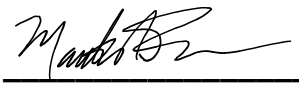
Dissertation Title: Sacred Integration: The Integration of Contemplative Prayer Practices in Corporate Worship

Date of Defense: March 9, 2022

We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.



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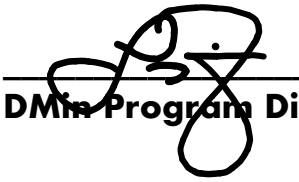

DMin Program Director, Levi Jones

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI
MAY 2022
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation is submitted with deep gratitude for those who have made the doctoral study and dissertation writing possible.

To my husband Jaron, the ultimate champion who believed, encouraged, celebrated, and willingly held down the fort so I could read and write. This would not be possible without you. I love you. Now, on to new adventures together.

To our son, Quentin, whose glad heart, love of life, and sensitivity to the Spirit are a constant source of hope and encouragement. You are our blessing and joy.

To Matt Rundio, who, as my faculty advisor, has served as cheerleader, encourager, reader, and constructive critic. Your encouragement has kept me in the program and in the writing seat over the past three years. You taught me that iron bums get degrees, and you cheered me on when I needed it most. The completion of this dissertation is to your credit. I am indebted to you.

To Connie Wilson, whose willingness to serve as a second reader, provided just the feedback and companionship for the journey that I needed. Thank you for your investment in me.

To Our Cohort– I imagined our journey would be different, that our interactions would be more in person and less digital. All the same, the richness of this journey with you amid the challenges of a pandemic has been invaluable.

To My DMin “Support Group” (Gabriela ‘Gaby’ Espinoza, Cari Nimeth, and Esteban Trujillo), who have walked every step of the way with me via Facebook Messenger. You have been direct answers to my prayers in a season of life that was in many other ways rather lonely at times. You have been three of the greatest gifts of this journey. I am forever grateful.

To Crossroads Church, my beloved, diverse, intergenerational church family in Hamilton, NZ. I am writing these acknowledgements having bid you farewell to move back to the US just a few weeks ago. I am so grateful for your openness to exploring new things in our faith journey together. You have given me a great gift as your pastor. Thank you for allowing me to lead you in these prayer practices as a part of our corporate worship, and for allowing them to shape your lives with Christ. You are forever in my heart.

To God who provides endless ways and means of communion between God and people. May Christ's church be a people who seek God with their whole hearts and find God revealing Godself in the gentle whispers, through music and art, scripture, breath, Examen, imagination, and so much more.

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Sacred Integration:
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"How can I learn to discern the voice of God?" "How can I pray?" "Is there more to prayer than asking God for things?" These are questions that I have heard repeatedly over the years of pastoral ministry from some of my most long-standing church members. In a Protestant context where most prayer modeled in congregational settings are expository prayers of a petitionary nature; it naturally follows that the prayer lives of our congregants are often one-dimensional and lackluster. This dissertation seeks to address that issue by integrating contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship. This equips the church with the tools and practices for listening to and discerning God's voice, both in corporate worship and in daily life. The result is the foundation for a robust prayer life and genuine communion with God. The practices explored in the context of corporate worship in this dissertation include: *Lectio Divina*, *Audio Divina* & *Visio Divina*, Examen, Breath Prayer, Imaginative Prayer, and Jesus Prayer. These practices do not supersede other elements of liturgy but enrich that which is already taking place and enable the members of the gathered assembly to develop a comprehensive breadth of spiritual formation.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Contemplative Prayer– Contemplative prayer is a means of praying in which one seeks communion or relationship with God. In contemplative prayer, the pray-er postures herself or himself as a listener to the Spirit. The pray-er may choose to speak in response to the Spirit, but words may not be necessary.

Contemplative Prayer Practices– Means of practicing or participating in contemplative prayer including but not limited to silence, solitude, meditation, centering prayer, *Lectio Divina*, *Audio Divina*, *Visio Divina*, Examen, imaginative prayer, breath prayer, and praying in nature.

Corporate Worship–Corporate worship is the gathering of people for the purpose of worshiping God. It typically involves singing, scripture reading, preaching, prayer, giving of tithes, and celebrating the Eucharist. The movements of corporate worship include welcome, invitation, response, and sending forth for ongoing discipleship and service in the world.

Expository Prayer– Praying words that come to mind spontaneously, which may include petition, supplication, thanksgiving, or intercession. In a corporate worship setting, a pastor may pray for the needs of the congregation and for their time together. Often referred to as the pastoral prayer, this type of prayer involves pre-written or spontaneous words prayed by the pastor or other participant at a designated point in the service.

Frontier-Revivalist Tradition– (Also known as Frontier Model, Frontier Tradition or Frontier-Revival Tradition.) This term is introduced by James White, author of *A Brief History of Christian Worship* among other works. The Frontier Revivalist Tradition describes traditions of Christian worship that came into being on the American frontier west of the Appalachian Mountains, especially through the camp meeting movement and revivalism. It emerged in an effort to reach people on the expansive frontier. Little emphasis was placed on traditions, rituals, or sacraments, while a high value was placed on spontaneity. Frontier-Revivialist worship is marked by pragmatism and freedom from set forms of worship found in service books. A typical three-part order of service dominates this tradition: (1) a song service, (2) sermon, and (3) response time for new converts, which may take place in the form of an altar call or a song after the sermon.

CHAPTER ONE

HOW THEN SHOULD WE PRAY?

Chapter one will articulate the problem this dissertation aims to address by reframing one of the questions most asked of me in my experience in pastoral ministry in the Church of the Nazarene: "How can I know if God is speaking to me and how can I learn to hear God's voice?" It will give a cursory overview of the contemplative prayer practices of the historical church, note the stark absence of such practices in Protestant traditions, particularly Wesleyan-Holiness traditions and the Church of the Nazarene specifically, and explore the historical basis for such a glaring omission. Further, chapter one will illustrate that while there is a positive movement toward sacramental worship, particularly intentional practice of the Eucharist, worship is still lacking an important component of spiritual formation. Without a robust toolbelt of contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship, we are failing to equip the masses, or even simply our local congregations, with the tools to learn to listen to and discern the voice of God.

The Church of the Nazarene is a Protestant Christian denomination. Shaped by the teachings of John Wesley and Methodism, the Church of the Nazarene emerged from the Holiness Movement in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Church of the Nazarene shares roots with other Evangelical Protestant traditions. The Church of the Nazarene is a part of the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition of which there are about fifteen other denominations. It is from this locale that this dissertation is written. However, the implications of this work extend to the broader spheres of Evangelicalism and other Protestant traditions.

I am the lead pastor of a small congregation within the Church of the Nazarene. I have shared life with this particular community for six years and with another faith community for the previous seven years. These communities are located in two different Western countries with diverse cultural representation. Over the course of those years, I have come to learn some of the questions that church goers and community members regularly ask across a range of cultures. One such question was echoed in a Facebook post by a young adult who was a member of my previous church. She and her family worshiped with us regularly, she attended our church's youth group, I personally provided academic and leadership mentoring, and she recently graduated from one of our Nazarene Universities. “Does prayer really matter? Why do some people say their prayers are answered while others suffer terribly?” she asked, reflecting on the fact that some cheerfully claimed their prayers had been answered when their house was spared in a storm, while the neighbor’s house was damaged beyond repair. “How do we know God hears us? How can we hear God? What is the point of praying, anyway?”

For all intents and purposes, this young adult had been given all the tools that the Church of the Nazarene has to offer. She had been shaped by regular engagement in worship services for at least five years before moving on to one of our flagship universities, where she is now employed. And yet, she doesn’t know how to pray, let alone how to listen for and discern the voice of God. She is questioning whether prayer really matters or if it is worthwhile at all. This is not an isolated predicament. I have had adults, kids, and everyone in between ask me, “How can I know when God is speaking to me?” Or, “I’ve been saying a lot of words to God, but how do I know God is listening?” Or, “I prayed for my mom, but she didn’t get better. Am I not faithful enough?”

These are tough questions. Many of them come without easy answers. Yet, one thing has become clear to me over the past twelve years in pastoral ministry. Our prayer life in the Church of the Nazarene is anemic. We are shaping a people, who for all our best intentions, have a very narrow perspective of prayer and thus lack the skills or the tools to learn to listen to and discern the voice of God. However, it does not have to be that way. We are a part of a rich Christian tradition with a long history of faithful people who have written and modeled extensively about the ways we can encounter God in prayer.

Certainly, as Fr. Thomas Keating writes, "Prayer is a large umbrella. There are many kinds of prayer and many ways of expressing it. Fundamentally, it is a response to God's invitation to turn our minds and hearts to him."[1] This project focuses on specific practices that help beginners and seasoned pray-ers alike answer some of these provoking questions about prayer and listening to God.

The Gifts of the Past

In the earliest days of the church, the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, broke bread, prayed, and shared all they had in common.[2] In fact, from the beginning, the followers of Jesus, "all joined together constantly in prayer."[3] As Jews, it is likely that their rhythms of prayer would have included the schedule[4] and prayers that had been passed down to them including the Psalms, as well as the prayer that Jesus had taught them.[5] James F. White

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[1] Father Thomas Keating, *The Heart of the World: An Introduction to Contemplative Christianity* (New York, NY: Crossroad Pub., 2008) Kindle Location 608.
[2] Acts 2:42
[3] Acts 1:14
[4] The Jewish prayer schedule consists of morning prayer, afternoon prayer, and evening prayer.
[5] Matthew 6:9-13

observes, “Christians may have turned the world upside down but in the form and content of their worship, it was still recognizable as a Jewish world.”[6] Certainly, we do not know all the details of their prayer life, but we do know that the Apostle Paul continued to encourage the believers to pray without ceasing.[7]

It is also possible that the early followers of Jesus had picked up on Jesus’ habit of going off to pray alone. The Gospels tell us that Jesus “often withdrew to lonely places and prayed”[8], got up very early in the morning, left the house, and went to a solitary place to pray[9], and sometimes spent the entire night in prayer.[10] Fr. Richard Rohr says, “[Jesus’] form of prayer when he goes off to the desert is what we’d call contemplative prayer, where you rewire this mind so everything you do is connected in loving union.”[11] Cynthia Bourgeault suggests that it is a type of contemplative prayer called centering prayer that is recorded in the Gospels as having taken place in the Garden of Gethsemane on the night before Jesus’ crucifixion. In this prayer, Jesus consents to the presence and action of God with the words, “Not my will but thine be done.”[12] While little is known about Jesus’ prayer life or that of his early followers, the churches planted by Jesus’ apostles and those of the first century after the resurrection continue to serve as the gold standard for the Christian imagination, Christian worship, and prayer.[13]

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[6] James F White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 15.
[7] 1 Thessalonians 5:17
[8] Luke 5:16
[9] Mark 1:35
[10] Luke 6:12
[11] Richard Rohr, *What is Contemplative Prayer? Why is it so needed?* Posted by Reunion January 11, 2018, YouTube video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0o5J0-8OA0.
[12] Cynthia Bourgeault, “Re-Patterning Our Life,” February 6, 2017, https://cac.org/re-patterning-life-2017-02-14/.
[13] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship, 13.*

However, it did not take long for the regular prayer practices of the early church, both corporate and individual to begin to change. "What happened is that our word prayer that Jesus uses a lot, the Bible uses a lot, had already been cheapened, trivialized two centuries into Christianity. It became a functional, problem-solving, practical thing. To pray meant to make announcements to God, to tell God what you needed, it was a transactional thing," says Rohr.[14]

Certainly, by the time Christianity became a legal religion in 313 AD and the official religion of the empire in 380 AD, the fledgling church had undergone major changes. James White writes, "Suddenly their furtive assemblies had become public convocations. It was necessary to re-envision worship with a new sense of scale. Simple ceremonial was replaced with elaborate performances."[15]

However, all was not lost. With the advent of Christendom, there was a shift from martyrdom to monasticism.[16] In the early part of the fourth century, monasticism sprang up almost simultaneously in Egypt, Syria, Palestine, and Cappadocia, becoming the guardian of much of Christian spirituality from that point to this day.[17] Sincere seekers found their ways to communities in the desert where, in various forms, they shared "the same fundamental dedication to the search for God through silence, solitude, simplicity of lifestyle, and a discipline of prayer."[18] It was here that the word "contemplation" came to be used to describe the way the monastics were praying, communing, and communicating with God. Rohr suggests,

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[14] Rohr, "What Is Contemplative Prayer and Why Is It so Needed? with Fr. Richard Rohr," YouTube.
[15] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 42.
[16] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 53.
[17] Keating. *The Heart of the World*, Kindle location 80.
[18] Keating, *The Heart of the World*, Kindle location 83.

"[Contemplation is] not saying prayers. It's living in a constant unitive union with God and everything around you, so whatever you do is a prayer."[19]

Similarly, Keating describes this type of prayer by saying, "Contemplative prayer is a deepening of faith that moves beyond thoughts and concepts. One just listens to God, open and receptive to the divine presence in one's inmost being as its source. One listens not with a view to hear something, but with a view to becoming aware of the obstacles to one's friendship with God."[20] Specific ways of developing these skills were developed by various contemplatives over time and their reflections on the contemplative life shaped the monastic community and the broader church. Monastic communities began to practice and name rhythms that lead to action or expression of virtues. They came to understand the rest that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 11:28 as freedom from compulsively doing their own will and satisfying their ego.[21]

A means for praying the people's office[22] consisting of prayers, Psalms, and hymns was developed.[23] By about 337 AD Eusebius of Caesarea said, "Rightly, it is no ordinary sign of the power of God, that throughout the whole world, in the churches of God, hymns, praises and truly divine delights are offered to God at the morning going forth of the sun and at evening time."[24] Epiphanius of Salamis, John Chrysostom, Egeria and others encouraged all people to engage in prayer, confession, or singing a Psalm in the morning and in the evening.

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[19] Rohr, "Contemplative Prayer," YouTube.
[20] Fr Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation (*New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), Loc 175.
[21] Keating, *The Heart of the World*, Kindle location 257.
[22] White, 53. Also called the cathedral office, this pattern is highly repetitious. It includes hymns and prayers in the morning and Psalms and prayers in the evening. The *Apostolic Constitutions* recommended Psalm 63 in the morning and Psalm 141 each evening.
[23] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 52.
[24] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 52.

Over the centuries that followed, monasticism offered a great gift to Christianity. Basil developed a set of rules for regulating daily life, shaping the lives of thousands of primarily eastern Christians from the fourth century onward.[25] The desert fathers and mothers, John Cassian, Chrysostom, and others in the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries began practicing breath prayers and praying the Jesus Prayer[26] as a means of praying continuously.[27] By about 530 AD, Benedict of Nursia, relying on sources they had been using for some time, produced what became the Rule of St. Benedict.[28] Benedict codified a pattern of seven daily offices and one night office[29], and provided that the entire 150 Psalms be sung every week. This led to the development of *Lectio Divina*, a practice of praying with scripture. In the 14th century, the author of the Cloud of Unknowing paved the way for what we now call centering prayer, and Julian of Norwich embraced the love of God our Mother. In the 16th century, Ignatius developed prayer practices that involved guided imagery and the prayer of Examen.

These practices and rhythms were good and certainly formational. Unfortunately, however, ordinary people could not follow routines that involved prayers seven or eight times a day. Gradually, the people's office began to disappear from people's lives all together. As James F. White articulates, "What was happening as the popular religion of the people's office slipped out of sight was that daily prayer had become professionalized with monks taking it over. Eventually local clergy followed monastic practices but left little prayer of a public nature for the

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[25] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 53.
[26] "Jesus Prayer." Jesus Prayer - New World Encyclopedia. Accessed October 30, 2020. https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Jesus_Prayer.
[27] John R. Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality*, *an Ecumenical Anthology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010) 118.
[28] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 54.
[29] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 54. White writes that Benedict's daily offices were as follows: "Vespers at the end of the day, compline before bedtime, nocturns or vigils or matins early in the morning, lauds at daybreak, prime shortly thereafter, terce about nine, sext about noon, and none about three."

ordinary folk."[30] While the liturgies and practices of the day were well-suited for meditation and contemplation, they were not practical for those who were raising a family.[31] As a result, monks remained the only model for daily public prayer. While we will see a return to teaching contemplative prayer in the next section, the Protestant church, specifically the Church of the Nazarene, needs a means for teaching contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship in order to equip congregants with the tools to learn to listen to God in midst of the cacophony of noise in the contemporary world.

The Practices of the Present

From the time of the Reformation, through the period of Enlightenment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the American Holiness Movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, contemplation stayed under the surface, hidden away in small pockets and monasteries. Rohr suggests that the fighting that took place between the Catholics and the Protestants and then between various Protestant groups after the Reformation was the death of contemplation because people cannot be contemplative if they are fighting.[32]

In the twentieth century, Fr. Thomas Merton observed that Christianity did not teach contemplation anymore and so he began to actively teach contemplative prayer through his writing. Merton and his contemporaries like Fr. Thomas Keating were keenly aware that part of their role in the monastery was to share the spiritual life with the world.[33] Keating said of his work *The Heart of the World*, "This book emerges from the conviction that the tradition of

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[30] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 54.
[31] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 54.
[32] Rohr, "Contemplative Prayer," YouTube.
[33] Rohr, Richard, "Renewal of Contemplative Christianity," September 17, 2018. https://cac.org/renewal-of-contemplative-christianity-2018-09-17/

Christian spirituality and mystical wisdom needs to be presented today as an integral part of the proclamation of the Gospel and of Christian education. It is news to most of our contemporaries that there is such a thing as a Christian spirituality that can be experienced."[34]

By the 1960s, the Catholic church recognized that they had a problem. Few of the laity knew the prayers or understood the liturgy of the church, which until that time was still spoken in Latin. In the major changes invoked by Vatican II, one hope was that the laity too would be encouraged to recite the divine office. Though even then the office was neither particularly accessible nor well-taught.[35]

Yet, under the leadership of Merton and Keating and others, awareness of contemplative prayer began to grow. Protestants began to seek out direction from Catholic counterparts.[36] Henri Nouwen, followed later by authors Richard Foster, Richard Rohr, and Cynthia Bourgeault, began writing and teaching for the masses on contemplation, making it widely accessible across traditions and demographics. Practices like *Lectio Divina* and centering prayer came to the forefront, along with silence, solitude, breath prayer, Christian meditation, and others.

The explosion of contemplative prayer on the religious scene is evidenced in the popularity of Richard Rohr's work and the success of his Center for Action and Contemplation, the vast number of books on the market related to spiritual formation, prayer practices, and contemplative prayer, and the increasing number of organizations training and resourcing spiritual directors. Simultaneously, there has been a marked return to liturgical practices in worship among millennials. This return has been influenced by author Robert Webber in much of

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[34] Keating, *Heart of the World,* Kindle location 63.
[35] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 152.
[36] Chris Armstrong and Steven Gertz, "Got Your 'Spiritual Director' Yet?," ChristianityToday.com, *Christianity Today* (April 1, 2003), https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2003/aprilweb-only/4-28-51.0.html.

his work, including *Evangelicals on the Canterbury Trail* [37], as well as James White, who began to apply the principles of Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy to the Protestant Church in "A Protestant Worship Manifesto."[38]

The Lack of Contemplative Prayer Practices Among Nazarenes

The Church of the Nazarene, as a Wesleyan-Holiness denomination born out of the American Holiness Movement, was shaped by Methodism and Frontier-Revivalism. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement along with his brother Charles, emphasized sacramental worship, hymn singing, means of grace, conversion, and the pursuit of Christian perfection.[39] What James White calls the Frontier Tradition, began to develop as people settled west of the Appalachian Mountains in the United States. As this tradition emerged in an effort to reach people on the expansive frontier, little emphasis was placed on traditions, rituals, or sacraments, there was little use for resources such as the *Book of Common Prayer*, and a high value was placed on spontaneity. For the Frontier Tradition, or Frontier-Revivalist Tradition, the camp meeting, consisting of music, preaching, an altar call, extemporaneous pastoral prayer, and the collection of an offering, was at the heart of worship and practice.[40] It was in this camp meeting and revivalism that the American Holiness Movement was rooted.[41]

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[37] Winfield Bevins, "Young, Restless, and Liturgical: Young Adults and the Search for Identity," *Liturgy* 35, no. 2 (April 10, 2020): pp. 18-24, https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1080/0458063X.2020.1739476, 18.
[38] Robert E. Webber, "What We've Learned Along the Way: Reformed Worship Through Twenty Years of Liturgical Change," *Reformed Worship* (September 2005), https://www.reformedworship.org/article/september-2005/what-weve-learned-along-way-reformed-worship-through-twenty-years-liturgical.
[39] Dirk Ray Ellis. *Holy Fire Fell: a History of Worship, Revivals, and Feasts in the Church of the Nazarene* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 56-57.
[40] White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship,* 146.
[41] Ellis, *Holy Fire Fell*, 56.

Like most Evangelical churches, the order of worship for the Church of the Nazarene has been primarily shaped by the Frontier Tradition with primary emphasis on three components: (1) a song service, (2) sermon, and (3) response time for new converts in the form of an altar call or a song after the sermon.[42] In this vein, the traditional Nazarene worship service includes congregational singing, preaching, and an opportunity for response. It also includes an extemporaneous pastoral prayer for the needs of the congregation and the receiving of an offering. Historically, spontaneous prayer or testimonies may have also been included. In more recent years, a song of response has become more common than an altar call in typical weekly services. Eucharist is taken on a quarterly basis, at minimum.[43] "The holiness streams that eventually merged to form the Church of the Nazarene sought worship structured after a revivalistic model that was spontaneous and free," Ellis writes.[44] Though John Wesley both highly valued the liturgical practices of his Anglican roots, regularly used the *Book of Common Prayer*, and was shaped profoundly by his extensive reading of the mystics, the Church of the Nazarene retained none of these.[45] Instead, the denomination placed the highest value in the sermon as the pinnacle of worship leading to a dramatic altar call in which people experienced the dramatic salvific work of God.[46]

As such, the constitutional guidebook for the Church of the Nazarene known as the *Manual*[47] reflects minimal guidance for liturgy and zero instruction on the prayer life of the

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[42]James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, KY: Westminster / John Knox Press, 1989), 177.
[43]*Manual of the Church of the Nazarene: History, Constitution, Government and Ritual* (Kansas City, MO: Nazarene Publishing House, 2017), https://2017.manual.nazarene.org/, 515.4.
[44] Ellis, *Holy Fire Fell*, 56.
[45] Ellis, *Holy Fire Fell*, 55.
[46] Ellis, *Holy Fire Fell*, 6.
[47] *Manual of the Church of the Nazarene*

church. The complete absence of written prayers outside the sacraments and rituals section is telling. No instruction is given to liturgical prayers correlating with seasons of the church year, and no mention is made of means of contemplative prayer, applications of various prayer practices, or guidance for contemplation. As the *Manual* serves as the governing document for the denomination, this could possibly be understandable. However, this is not merely an absence in the *Manual*.

The Church of the Nazarene has a hymnal titled *Sing to the Lord* that is comprised of hymns and congregational responsive readings based on scripture.[48] The hymnal also includes The Apostles' Creed[49], The Nicene Creed[50], and the Collect for Purity from The Book of Common Prayer simply titled "Almighty God."[51] "Christ Be with Me: A Benediction" based on St. Patrick's Breastplate is included at the end of the book and is the only reading attributed to a saint.[52] The hymnal designates some sections as Advent; Birth; Suffering, Death, Atonement; and Resurrection. Other sections fall under headings such as Invitation; Testimony; and Holiness. The sections are not ordered according to the church year, nor are other prayers included beyond the responsive readings. While the responsive readings, many of which are excerpts from the Psalms, lend themselves to *Lectio Divina*, no mention is made of this practice nor instruction given. *Sing to the Lord* and other worship resources are published for the Church of the Nazarene by an arm of its publishing house, The Foundry Publishing, which is well over 100 years old and formerly operated under the name Nazarene Publishing House. Historically, The Foundry's primary focus has been on developing commentaries, preaching resources, choral music, and

[48] *Sing to the Lord: Hymnal* (Kansas City, MO: Lillenas Publishing Co., 1993).
[49] *Sing to the Lord: Hymnal*, 8.
[50] *Sing to the Lord: Hymnal*, 14.
[51] *Sing to the Lord: Hymnal*, 58.
[52] *Sing to the Lord: Hymnal*, 783.

small group resources for Sunday school, age level worship, and other discipleship settings. In more recent years, the publishing company has produced materials related to worship, liturgy, and seasons of the church year such as Advent and Lent. There have also been an increasing number of offerings with a prayer emphasis. Typing "prayer" in the search box on the publishing house's website results in a smattering of resources published through the years that mention prayer of some type, including some devotional materials, one book of fixed-hour prayer, and a single seven week study for youth published produced in 2019 titled *Prayer: Spending Time with God*."[53] There are two new resources directly related to prayer to be released in 2022: *Praying with Jesus: Meditations on the Lord's Prayer,*[54] designed to be a church-wide study with accompanying children's and youth materials, and a book titled *The Praying Pastor*.[55] However, a children's resource published in 2021 titled *My Life with Jesus* seems to be the first work introducing readers to *Lectio Divina*.[56] Yet, even in the categories of Sunday School, small group, and discipleship, there are no other resources available for instruction on or use of contemplative prayer practices. As a result, we should not wonder why our young people are not learning to pray, our adults are struggling to learn how to discern the voice of God, and our corporate prayers are dry and one-note.

Clearly, resourcing, instruction, and opportunities for contemplative prayer practice within the Church of the Nazarene are lacking. In order to introduce and practice a variety of modalities for prayer, I propose that church leaders, including both clergy and laity, integrate

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[53] "The Foundry Publishing - Ministry Resources & Curriculum." The Foundry Publishing. Accessed October 30, 2020. https://www.thefoundrypublishing.com/prayer-9780834138001.html.
[54] Michael E. Lodahl, *Praying with Jesus: Meditations on the Lord's Prayer* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2022).
[55] David A. Busic, *The Praying Pastor: Learning to Lead from Your Knees* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2022).
[56] James Abbott et al., *My Life with Jesus: 365 Devotions for Kids* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Kids, 2021).

contemplative prayer practices into the corporate worship gathering. This creates opportunities for the greatest number of congregants across all ages and demographics to grow in the depth and breadth of their prayer life.

Too Much Talking

It is my observation that in prayer meetings across North America and in many Western countries around the world, there are some common themes. Prayers abound for broken hips and bad relationships. There are prayers for financial troubles and for sheep who have gone astray. The lists of needs are long, and the words used to pray for them are longer. Among some groups I have been a part of, the louder and longer a person prayed, the better. As a Nazarene pastor, Timothy Brooks knows this to be true. He writes, "And so often, our prayer life is about us speaking and—I hate to say it—treating God a bit as if he's a genie. It's as if our Bible is our lamp, and if we rub it well enough, God will hear our prayers and respond."[57]

At a gathering of Nazarene pastors in New Zealand, I observed a pastor in a medical crisis fainting in the midst of a district gathering. The other pastors did not budge from their seats to help the man, support his wife, or call for medical help. Instead, they stood up and with their hands in the air began praying loudly in chorus invoking the name of Jesus such that when I, after observing that no one else was going to, called the emergency helpline, I had to leave the room to hear the person on the other end of the line. Was the pastor moaning? I could not hear. Was he able to respond to my commands? He could not hear me over the din of the others. Yet, the other pastors were convinced that louder and longer is better.

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[57] Timothy Brooks. *The Transformational Power of Worship* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2020) 51.

Unfortunately, because it is all we have seen modeled for us by the pastors, prayer group leaders, and Sunday school teachers of our Frontier-Revivalist Tradition, wordy extemporaneous prayers listing our requests to God are the only type of prayer the vast majority of our congregants know. Our kids learn that prayer is asking God for things, and possibly saying thank you for other things, because that is what we model for them in our evening prayers as a family and around the dinner table. Our teenagers and adults have only had the opportunity to observe this type of prayer during youth groups, prayer meetings, and Sunday worship services. Within the framework of the Nazarene tradition, this reinforces the idea that truly holy people know how to generate words for long, moving prayers in front of an audience at a moments' notice. It seems these are prone to be exactly the type of prayer Jesus warned against.[58] It is critical, if we hope to equip individuals and church communities with the skills to listen for the voice of God and pray by any means other than extemporaneous prayers, that our church leaders model such practices in corporate worship.

John Cassian, a Christian monk who lived from c. AD 360 – c. 435, and countless others, teach us intercession and supplication are not bad. We are called to intercede on behalf of our needs and others. This is one way in which God desires for us to partner in God's work in the world. Cassian instructs us that the apostle notes four types of prayer: supplication, prayers (promise), pleas on behalf of all people, and thanksgivings.[59] "The Lord himself deigned to

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[58] Matthew 6:5-8 "And when you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by others. Truly I tell you, they have received their reward in full. But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you. And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him."

[59] John R. Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: an Ecumenical Anthology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010) 116.

initiate those four types of prayer and He gave us examples of them… A state of soul more exalted and more elevated will follow upon these types of prayer. It will be shaped by the contemplation of God alone and by the fire of love, and the mind, melted and cast down into this love, speaks freely and respectfully to God, as though to one's own father.[60]

However, as Cassian alludes, that is not the sum total of a rich and meaningful prayer life. Contemplative prayer offers us another way. It is a way that is neither louder or longer or filled with too many words. It is also a way that does not see God as our genie in a lamp or measure our worth by the perceived positive success of our prayers. Theologian John Coe says, "Contemplative prayer is the act and experience whereby our human spirit opens to and attends to the indwelling Spirit of Christ, who is continually revealing himself to us and bearing witness to our spirit that we are children of God, loved by God in Christ."[61]

Richard Rohr teaches that once we learn contemplation, the other aspects of our prayer life can come into alignment. "Once you have learned contemplation, prayer of adoration and thanksgiving and joy will come before just asking for things. Not that there's anything wrong with asking for things, but when prayer becomes simply talking God into things and asking God for things, you know what stays center stage? The ego. Now God is my personal servant that I can get to stop the hurricane in Texas. That doesn't create highly enlightened and loving people." [62] In that vein, Fr. Thomas Keating reminds us that God is not a generous grandfather in the sky who gives us what we want and takes away what we do not want based on our whims. "God has

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[60] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality,* 117-118.
[61] John Coe, "The Controversy Over Contemplation AND Contemplative Prayer: A Historical, Theological, and Biblical Resolution," *Journal of Spiritual Formation & Soul Care* 7, no. 1 (2014): 150.
[62] Richard Rohr, "What Is Contemplative Prayer and Why Is It so Needed?" YouTube.

not promised to take away our trials, but to help us to change our attitudes toward them. That is what holiness really is," says Keating.[63]

Good, but not Enough

Over the course of recent decades, there has been an increased interest in sacramental worship and a return or rediscovery of the liturgies that Wesley valued among some members of the Church of the Nazarene. Thinkers, theologians, pastors, and laity have formed Facebook groups, books have been published on the topic of worship via The Foundry and other Wesleyan publishers, dissertations have been written on the role of liturgy in worship and spiritual formation, and on a practical level, many churches are partaking of the Eucharist with weekly intention. At the last General Assembly of the Church of the Nazarene held in 2017, the Article of Faith regarding the Lord's Supper[64] and the ritual of the Lord's Supper[65] were changed to reflect a more robust theology and liturgy around the Eucharist. Likewise, it aligns more closely with a Wesleyan perspective. The *Manual* states, "The Lord's Supper should be administered at least once a quarter. Pastors are encouraged to move toward a more frequent celebration of this means of grace."[66] These are signs that some leaders in the denomination are sinking their roots deep into the fertile soil of Christian tradition.

In the forward he wrote for Timothy Brooks, Brannon Hancock says, "Too often, the formation power of worship is eclipsed by a utilitarian approach that is concerned more with relevance and results than with a renovation of the heart (to borrow a phrase from Dallas

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[63] Keating, *Human Condition*, Loc 144.
[64] *Manual*, paragraph 13.
[65] *Manual*, paragraph 700.
[66] *Manual*, paragraph 51.4.

Willard), the long game of cultivating holy habits through consistent, faithful personal and corporate practices."[67] Brooks goes on to describe the importance of intentionality in worship planning and practice. "Pastors of churches in the twenty-first century, similarly, are invited to imagine how we can orient our people around the slaughtered Lamb so that our worship time together invites our people to depart—or scatter—while imagining how they will remain oriented toward the slaughtered Lamb, following the Lamb wherever it goes."[68]

These are good and important conversations. Dirk Ellis[69], Brannon Hancock[70], Brent Peterson[71], Timothy Brooks[72], Matt Rundio[73], and other Nazarenes have embraced the idea that what we do in worship shapes us as individuals and as a body and how we live out our love for neighbor. The liturgical gifts of the church should not be devalued or taken lightly. Ellis writes, "Emphasizing doctrinal standards while overlooking the implications of unchecked liturgical patterns creates a paradox. This is because the weekly practices of corporate worship affect the beliefs and actions of the members… One's true worship and love for God manifest themselves in one's relationship with others."[74]

In his work developing lay education around his church's model of worship, Nazarene Pastor Matt Rundio cites Benedictine priest and liturgical scholar Aidan Kavanagh, who makes

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[67] Brooks, *Power of Worship,* 8.
[68] Brooks, *Power of Worship,* 11.
[69] Dirk Ray Ellis. *Holy Fire Fell: a History of Worship, Revivals, and Feasts in the Church of the Nazarene* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2016).
[70] Brannon Hancock, *The Scandal of Sacramentality: The Eucharist in Literary and Theological Perspectives* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014).
[71] Brent Peterson, *Created to Worship* (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012).
[72] Brooks, *Power of Worship*.
[73] Rundio, Matthew A. "Education for Liturgy in Christian Formation at Scottsdale First Church of the Nazarene," DMin Diss., Nazarene Theological Seminary, 2016.
[74] Ellis, *Holy Fire Fell,* 3.

the point that prayer and belief are intertwined. Rundio writes, "An old saying speaks to the importance of prayer and worship: 'the law of prayer founds the law of belief.' In other words, what we pray forms us into people who believe certain things and act in particular ways. Pay close attention to what sort of people we might become by praying these prayers (and the others throughout the service). We also might want to consider what sort of God the prayers assume."[75]

I would suggest it is here that there is still a tremendous shortfall in the spiritual formation of our faith communities, for as wonderful as we find the conversations around liturgy, worship, and Eucharist in some of our forward thinking and intuitive congregations, these still do not necessarily point faith communities to contemplative prayer, give instruction on contemplative prayer practices, or provide opportunity for exploration of contemplative prayer practices in worship. This is particularly of concern because just as the monks who held the faith of the church were formed by both liturgy, Psalms, sacraments, and mysticism, John Wesley too was formed by the practice of liturgy, the reading of the Psalms, the receiving of the sacraments, and the reading of mystics in his early days.[76] While Wesley's relationship with contemplatives and mysticism became somewhat complicated, Wesley's foundational understanding that the purpose of religion is to love God and to love neighbor was in fact shaped by his reading of mystics such as Francis de Sales, Monsieur de Renty, and others.[77] The contemplative work of Thomas á Kempis and one of John Wesley's most significant mentors, William Law, was especially formative for the Wesleys.[78] Not only are the works of these people good for reading,

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[75] Rundio, "Education for Liturgy in Christian Formation at Scottsdale First Church of the Nazarene," 68-69.
[76] Kenneth J Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1993): 299.
[77] Kenneth Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," 300.
[78] Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality,* 318.

the very practices that they employed in their personal and communal spiritual formation are critical to the spiritual development of laity and clergy alike. As Keating writes, "Spiritual development is the birthright of every man and woman, not only of cloistered monks and nuns."[79]

In a sense, no matter how deep we sink our roots into the liturgical life of the church, we are still deficient if we fail to explore and engage the contemplative practices of our tradition. If we seek to truly answer the questions of the people in our congregations regarding what prayer is and how we can learn to discern the voice of God, we must provide the tools for engaging in contemplative prayer. Because worship is so fundamentally formational and shapes our identity at its very core, I propose that we not only need to teach contemplative prayer practices, but we need to do it in the context of corporate worship. In turn, we can expect that not only will our people begin to find answers for some of their basic questions, we can anticipate an inner work of grace that leads to outer signs of transformation, such as actively serving others and "works of mercy," a process that is truly Wesleyan.

Keating says, "As our capacity for listening grows, so does our understanding of his message. Our relationship to Christ, to our neighbor, and to ourselves all begin to take on a different perspective."[80] In fact, as Keating describes, interior experience results in action. "It is designed to soften up our self-centered dispositions, to deliver us from what is compulsive in our motivation, and to open us up completely to God and to the genuine service of others."[81]

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[79] Keating, *Heart of the World,* Loc 83.
[80] Keating, *Heart of the World*, Loc 248.
[81] Keating, *Heart of the World*, Loc 207.

Keating reminds us that like Mary of Bethany who sat at the feet of Jesus, it is not enough for us to listen to Jesus' words with our ears and reflect on them with our reason as we might be prone to do during a sermon. Listening and thinking is good. These are the first baby steps of getting to know Jesus. However, "As we reflect on the Word of God and the humanity of Jesus, we begin to listen with the ears of our hearts."[82] It is this type of listening with the ears of our hearts that we have a responsibility to foster within the people in our congregations. If we fail to provide a robust toolbelt of contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship, then we fail to attend to the spiritual formation of our faith communities in such a way that they learn to listen to and discern the voice of God.

This chapter has sought to provide a basis for this dissertation by articulating the desire of many people in our church community's questions around prayer, the rich history of Christian tradition in the sphere of contemplative prayer, and the shortage of literature and resources about prayer in the Church of the Nazarene. It affirms the value of corporate worship and begins to build a foundation for why contemplative prayer practices should be integrated into corporate worship in the twenty-first century in order that pastors and lay people alike may experience transformative communion with God and, as a result, with neighbor.

[82] Keating, *Heart of the World*, Loc 398.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Much has been written about contemplative prayer and its role in the spiritual life by ancient and contemporary writers, thinkers, theologians, and pilgrims. These illustrate a prayer life that is vibrant, deep, and varied. While contemplative prayer is rarely mentioned in evangelical contexts, it is a critical component to spiritual formation and life with God, as has been demonstrated from Walter J. Burghardt, who is known for saying, "Contemplation is a long, loving look at the real." Burghardt writes, "Contemplation, my friends, is not a luxury; it is the mark of a lover; it is the mark of a Christian."[83] This literature review is surveying contemplative figures found in scripture, the early church, and the twentieth and twenty-first centuries as a means of discerning the role of contemplative prayer in corporate worship. As my context is Wesleyan in nature, I will also be surveying some of the sermons and writings of John Wesley.

Scriptural Basis for Contemplative Prayer

There is a strong scriptural basis for contemplative prayer. We see this evidenced through the words of the prophets, the psalmists and other wisdom literature authors, and the life of Jesus. The following section will give a cursory overview of four individuals, plus Jesus, whose lives and words demonstrated mystical and contemplative qualities. Each of these people exemplify both contemplation and action, allowing their interaction with God to shape how they lived and moved in the world.

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[83] Walter Burghardt, "Contemplation: a Long Loving Look at the Real," *Church* 5 (1989): 18.

Moses

Moses, the beloved son of Hebrew parents raised by Pharaoh's daughter, was hiding in the wilderness when he encountered God in a transformational way. As Moses journeyed through the wilderness as a part of his ordinary routines, he saw a bush that was on fire. Upon taking a moment's further notice, Moses observed that the bush was indeed on fire but not burning up. By slowing down, paying attention, and leaning in, Moses heard the voice of God address him in the stillness of that moment. The narrative surrounding Moses's divine calling suggests that God honors attentiveness and God is present to those who take time to pause and notice.[84]

This wilderness encounter, however, was not the end of Moses' mystical communion with God, but only the beginning. It was this encounter that propelled Moses to action in the world. 20th century theologian Pascal Parente writes, "It is true that mysticism implies infused contemplation and, therefore, a certain degree of passivity in prayer, but from such contemplation and union with God a fire is kindled in the soul which only the most daring and heroic deeds for the glory of God and the salvation of immortal souls can appease in any measure. The true mystics have always been most active apostles, like St. Paul, St. Benedict, St. Augustine, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena, St. Teresa of Avila, etc. Passivity in prayer does not imply passivity in life in general, nor inactivity."[85]

This concept is foundational for Moses and for contemplatives down through the ages. In fact, Richard Rohr suggests that Moses' encounter with the burning bush and subsequent confrontations with Pharaoh in order to free God's people is the foundational scripture for

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[84] Victoria Emily Jones, "The Art of Contemplative Seeing (as Modeled by Moses)," *Art & Theology*, January 26, 2016, https://artandtheology.org/2016/01/24/the-art-of-contemplative-seeing-as-modeled-by-moses/.
[85] Pascal P Parente, "Ascetical and Mystical Traits of Moses and Elias," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (April 1943): 185.

teaching the essential relationship between spirituality and social action, a connection that is often forgotten but cannot be denied. "Moses takes spirituality and social engagement together from the very beginning," writes Richard Rohr. "As Moses hides his face from the burning bush, God commissions him to confront the pharaoh of Egypt and tell him to stop oppressing the enslaved Hebrews."[86]

Well after the burning bush and the freeing of God's people from Pharaoh, God invited Moses on Mount Sinai with him. There, God revealed Godself to Moses in the cloud. Moses had been begging God to show him God's glory.[87] "And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But,' he said, 'you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.' Then the Lord said, 'There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen.'"[88] When Moses came down from the mountain, his face was radiant because he had been with the Lord.[89] Moses continued to commune in God's presence on a regular basis, covering his face with a veil when he spoke to the people, so they would not be distracted by his radiance.[90]

Elijah

[86] Richard Rohr, "Face to Face Knowing," Center for Action and Contemplation, December 6, 2016, https://cac.org/face-face-knowing-2016-05-15/.
[87] Exodus 33:18
[88] Exodus 33:19-23
[89] Exodus 34:29
[90] Exodus 34:33-34

Perhaps even more than Moses, Elijah combined the active and the contemplative life.[91] In Elijah we see patterns of asceticism, rest, a dark night of the soul, longing for God's presence, seeing God, and being sent out into the world in action. Elijah was a man of fiery action, but he was also a man who drew near and listened to God, keeping nothing from God, but also responding in faithful obedience. That did not mean all was easy for Elijah. "I have had enough, Lord," Elijah cried in his dark night of the soul. "Take my life; I am no better than my ancestors."[92] God responded by nourishing Elijah with a snack and some rest and then leading Elijah on a journey to Mount Horeb. God listened to Elijah's complaints and responded by revealing God's presence.[93] However, God's presence did not bring about an earthquake or a storm. It was not loud or mind-blowing. It was a quiet gentleness that met Elijah in the silence.[94] This meeting God in silence and quiet gentleness, even while in pain and fear and exhaustion, exemplifies contemplative prayer.

Parente reflected on Elijah's journey with these words, "With the rigors of an ascetical life, [Elijah] combined mystical elevation of the purest nature. He, too, was subjected to the purifying action of "the Dark Night of the soul" before being elevated to mystical union and knowledge on Mount Horeb. In addition to pain caused by the defection and apostasy of the ten tribes of Israel, he had to suffer relentless persecution from the civil authority."[95]

In a speech on October 7, 2020, Pope Francis said, "Elijah is the man of contemplative life and, at the same time, of active life, preoccupied with the events of his time… We need Elijah's spirit. He shows us that there should be no dichotomy in the life of those who pray: one

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[91] Pascal Parente, "Ascetical and Mystical Traits of Moses and Elias," 188.
[92] 1 Kings 19:4
[93] 1 Kings 19:11
[94] 1 Kings 19:12
[95] Pascal Parente, "Ascetical and Mystical Traits of Moses and Elias," 188.

stands before the Lord and goes towards the brothers to whom He sends us. Prayer is not about locking oneself up with the Lord to make one's soul appear beautiful: no, this is not prayer, this is false prayer. Prayer is a confrontation with God and letting oneself be sent to serve one's brothers and sisters."[96] As Pope Francis illustrates with the life of Elijah, in prayer we experience transformational communion with God that results in being sent out in the world as agents of God's love and grace.

Like Moses, Elijah's prayer life and communion with God grew over time, reaching the pinnacle as God revealed Godself to him. Pope Francis says,

> [God] manifests Himself not in the storm, not in the earthquake or the devouring fire, but in "a light murmuring sound" (v. 12). Or better, a translation that reflects that experience well: in a thread of resounding silence. This is how God manifests Himself to Elijah… God comes forward to meet a tired man, a man who thought he had failed on all fronts, and with that gentle breeze, with that thread of resounding silence, He brings calm and peace back into the heart.[97]

For Elijah, as for many throughout scripture, the life of prayer is marked by moments of exultation and moments of low spirits, joy and sorrow, hope and pain. Pope Francis suggests this is what prayer is: letting ourselves be carried by God.[98]

The Psalmists

David, King of Israel, "man after God's own heart,"[99] was the author of nearly half of the Psalms. If ever there is a place in scripture where we see the contemplative nature of the inner

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[96] Pope Francis, "Pope's Message: Elijah Is a Man of Contemplation and Action," *St. Louis Review* (Archdiocese of St Louis, October 15, 2020), https://www.archstl.org/popes-message-elijah-is-a-man-of-contemplation-and-action-5832.
[97] Pope Francis, "Pope's Message: Elijah Is a Man of Contemplation and Action."
[98] Pope Francis, "Pope's Message: Elijah Is a Man of Contemplation and Action."
[99] 1 Samuel 13:14

life with God, it is in the wisdom literature. In these texts we find expression of every human emotion and the deepest longings of the soul, including lament, praise, longing, and celebration.

David's journey as a contemplative began long before he was king. As a shepherd who spent his days in solitude with his sheep and perhaps his harp or another small instrument, he had well-developed muscles for the silence and solitude of the contemplative. His heart was tuned toward the heart of God from a young age. As a result, his songs, and those written by others in the book of Psalms, are used, as Sister Therese Elias from Mount Saint Scholastica once said to me, "to strum on the chords of our hearts, stirring within us prayers that we did not yet know we needed to pray." So, it is out of one's silence and contemplation that ideas, images, revelations, tunes, and sometimes words bubble to the surface, becoming the means by which we experience communion with God. In this communion, we catch glimpses of God's heart for us and for the world, and we reveal our heart to God and ourselves.

Thomas Merton writes that the Psalms, "are in some mysterious way an expression of 'states of mind' that belong to God."[100] It may seem scandalous that such sad and pain-filled words may belong to God. Merton goes on to suggest, "If we may believe St. Augustine and the experience of mystics, this mystery is the key to the psalter. If we can penetrate it, we can find God in the psalms. If we cannot penetrate it, then the words of [Isaiah 29:11-12] will be verified in our regard: 'The vision . . . shall be unto you as the words of a book that is sealed…'"[101] In other words, Merton's writing suggests that coming to understand the Psalms is a profound means by which the very heart and vision of God is opened to us.

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[100] Thomas Merton, "Psalms and Contemplation," *Orate Fratres,* 24, no. 8 (July 1950): 347.
[101] Merton, "Psalms and Contemplation," *Orate Fratres*, 347.

It has been said that the Psalms are the prayer book of Jesus or the prayer book of the scriptures. J.W. Gregg Meister said he knows this to be true because "Jesus prayed them, and as the risen Christ He told us to look for Him in the Psalms."[102] The words of the psalmists that are echoed throughout Jesus' teaching and prayers and were on Jesus' lips on the cross when he said "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me" (Psalm 22:1, Matthew 27:46) and "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Psalm 31:5, Luke 23:46).

Similarly, Dietrich Bonhoeffer suggests that the Psalms are the prayer book of the scriptures. Through the Psalms we see the prayers of Jesus. Bonhoeffer writes, "It is a great grace that God tells us how we can speak with, and have community with, God. We can do so because we pray in the name of Jesus Christ. The Psalms have been given to us precisely so that we can learn to pray them in the name of Jesus Christ."[103] Bonhoeffer goes on to propose that the prayers of David were spoken in him by the future Messiah, writing, "It is none other than Christ who prayed them in Christ's own forerunner, David."[104] In other words, the prayers prayed by David and the psalmists have been prayed in Christ and by Christ since they were first uttered.

While the psalter is a prayer book composed of words, the very rhythm of the prayers beckons one to contemplation. *Selah*, a phrase often inserted in the middle of a psalm is a call to stillness and quiet reflection. The words of the Psalms "demand a quiet and restful soul, which can grasp and hold to that which the Holy Spirit there presents and offers."[105]

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[102] J.W. Gregg Meister, *Psalms: The Prayer Book of Jesus* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse COM, 2019), 1.
[103] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together and Prayerbook of the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), https://stpaultampa.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Introduction-to-the-Psalms.pdf, 2.
[104] Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 3.
[105] Bonhoeffer, *Prayerbook of the Bible*, 4.

Even more explicitly the Psalms call those who pray to the practices of contemplative prayer. Stillness, waiting, silence, and solitude echo throughout verses such as, “Be still and know that I am God,” (Psalm 46:10), “Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him,” (Psalm 37:7) and, “For God alone my soul waits in silence; for my hope is from him” (Psalm 62:5 NRSV). These contemplative practices are the rhythms of prayer that shaped the lives of the psalmists and the lives of Jesus, and it is to these rhythms that the contemporary church is called.

Jesus

We cannot explore the role of contemplative prayer in scripture without exploring the role of contemplative prayer in the life of Jesus. While we do not know all of the intimate details of Jesus’ prayer life or his inner life with God, we do know that he went to solitary places to pray.[106] He admonished people to go in their room to pray alone[107] and not to keep on babbling like pagans with many words.[108] As we pray, we should be at peace because God knows what we need before we ask.[109]

Through prayer, Jesus embraced the salvific mystery of God which God destined before time began[110], not by his own human power, but by dwelling in communion with God, taking on the work of the Father.[111] As a result, Jesus was able to embrace the cruciform life of death, resurrection, and second coming. The practice by which Jesus took on the mind of God is contemplative prayer in which Jesus sought union with the Father, so as to become one with the

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[106] Luke 4:42, Mark 1:35
[107] Matthew 6:6
[108] Matthew 6:7
[109] Matthew 6:8
[110] 1 Corinthians 2:7 “No, we declare God’s wisdom, a mystery that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.”
[111] John 5:19

Father[112] and to fully embody the Father's will.[113] This is evidenced in Jesus' practice of going to quiet places to pray and his intense prayer of surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane.[114] Jesus' communion with the Father shaped how he lived and moved in the world. No word or deed of Jesus' took place outside the bounds of the union that he shared with the Father.

Jesus longed for his friends and all of those who came to know him to experience relationship with God and the world in the same way. Through communion with God in contemplative prayer, Jesus modeled and invited his followers into a relationship with God that transforms how they view and engage with the world. Henri Nouwen reflected, "'I come from above,' Jesus told his disciples, 'and I want you to be reborn from above so that you will be able to see with new eyes' (John 3:3[115]).This is what spiritual theology is all about—looking at reality with the eyes of God."[116] This sanctifying work of looking at reality with the eyes of God is more than just a change of perspective. It is a transformational communion with God. John Wesley calls this a renewal of the heart, the formative capacity through which repentance, faith, and holiness of heart and life take place.[117]

One of the profound and unique traits of Jesus' life is his union with God, a theme which is particularly highlighted throughout the Gospel of John. In John 10:30, Jesus explained that he and the father are one.[118] This union is a model for the relationship available between Christ and humanity through the Spirit. Jesus invites all of humanity into that very relationship. He

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[112] John 10:30
[113] John 6:38
[114] Matthew 26:36, Mark 1:35, Luke 4:42, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:28, Luke 22:39-44
[115] John 3:3 "Jesus replied, "Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again."
[116] Nouwen Henri J M., Rebecca Laird, and Michael J. Christensen, *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 9.
[117] Clapper, Gregory S. *The Renewal of the Heart is the Mission of the Church: Wesley's Heart Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 7.
[118] John 10:30

illustrates this fusion with the imagery of a vine and branches in John 15:1-10. Jesus goes on to promise that his followers will bear much fruit if they are willing to live in communion with Christ and remain in his love as he has kept the Father's commands and has remained in the Father's love.[119] In John 17, Jesus describes this unique union with God by saying, "...Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."[120] He prays that all who believe in him will experience this union, saying, "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."[121] In the life of Jesus, just as in our lives, this union is forged through time spent in contemplative prayer in the forms such as silence, solitude, listening, praying scripture (*Lectio Divina*), centering prayer, and Christian meditation.

Paul further outlines this unique relationship in 1 Corinthians 2, referencing the prophet Isaiah when he says, "Who has known the mind of the Lord so as to instruct him?"[122] and then continuing on to say, "But We have the mind of Christ."[123] We are invited to receive the gift of the mind of Christ. The challenge is that the mind of Christ stands in complete antithesis to the mind or the wisdom of the world. It is only by living in communion with Christ in the Spirit that we can begin to take hold of the wisdom of God. It is in doing so that we become what John Wesley deems "Altogether a Christian" in which every thought and action is defined by love of God and love of neighbor, manifested in a faith that purifies the heart and yields repentance and good works.[124]

Paul

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[119] John 15:5, John 15:9-10
[120] John 17:20
[121] John 17:21
[122] 1 Corinthians 2:16, Isaiah 40:13
[123] 1 Corinthians 2:16
[124] Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart,* 9.

The Apostle Paul wove significant threads of prayer, contemplation, and unity with God in Christ through his letters. Certainly, it seems, something mystical happened during Paul's Damascus Road experience that not only changed the entire trajectory of Paul's life but also instilled a mystical understanding of communion with God. In his letters, Paul uses language like "slave to God," not in a demeaning way, but as a means of articulating the intimacy of his relationship with God. In *Galatians 2:20,* Paul announces that he has been crucified with Christ and the life he now lives is the life of Christ.[125] In statements such as these and many others, Paul maintains an element of mysticism in his relationship with Christ Jesus.

David T. Ejenobo, a New Testament scholar in Nigeria, suggests that the hiddenness Paul describes in Colossians 3:1-3 "implies a life of mystical unification with the Holy Spirit." However, this is not reserved for people who attain holiness just before they die. Ejenobo writes, "The moment a person considers himself to have died and raised with Christ, his life is deemed by Paul to be so different that he has to 'mind the things of the Spirit.'"[126]

Paul's letters give significant insight on this topic. Cynthia Bourgeault describes Ephesians 3:16-19 as the charter of contemplative prayer.[127]

> I pray that out of his glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled with the very nature of God.[128]

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[125] David T Ejenobo, "The Mystical Element in Paul's Theology of the Holy Spirit: an African Interpretation," *The Asia Journal of Theology* 23, no. 1 (April 2009): 70.
[126] Ejenobo, "The Mystical Element in Paul's Theology of the Holy Spirit," 71.
[127] Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Ingram International Inc., 2004), 18.
[128] Ephesians 3:16-19

Contemplative prayer is the space in which we allow God through the Spirit to fill our inner being in such a way that we begin to grasp the love of Christ and are filled with the very nature of God rather than our own human nature. In the kenosis passage, Paul uses similar language to the church in Philippi, writing,

> Make my joy complete by being of a single mind, one in love, one in heart and one in mind. Nothing is to be done out of jealousy or vanity; instead, out of humility of mind everyone should give preference to others, everyone pursuing not selfish interests but those of others. Make your own the mind of Christ Jesus: Who, being in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped. But he emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, becoming as human beings are; and being in every way like a human being, he was humbler yet, even to accepting death, death on a cross.[129]

In Philippians 2, Paul illustrates the ways that Jesus allowed himself to be emptied of his own desires, thoughts, ideas, and tendencies in order to be filled with that of God. This posture of humility is what allowed Jesus to accept death on the cross. In the self-emptying act of kenosis, Jesus was emptied of his own will and became fully receptive to God's divine will. The act of kenosis is not reserved for Jesus alone. Rather, it is the embodiment of the character of God who poured out Godsself for the creation of the world and everything in it. In a similar fashion, humanity is invited into the mystery of kenosis by which the process of emptying oneself of one's own will and desires results in the infilling of divine grace by the Spirit and ultimately union with God. Surrendering any jealousy, vanity or selfish pursuit and taking on the mind of Christ Jesus takes place in the space allowed for contemplative practices and results in the transformation of mind, heart, and action.

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[129] Bible, *The Jerusalem Bible* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1971), Philippians 2:3-8.

Richard Rohr suggests that the self-emptying surrender that Paul describes in the kenosis passage is both what takes place in and results from contemplative prayer. Rohr writes, "Contemplative prayer is a practice of self-emptying. At its most basic, contemplation is letting go—of our habitual thoughts, preferences, judgments, and feelings."[130] This takes place through practices such as centering prayer, the Jesus Prayer, *Lectio Divina, Audio Divina*, *Visio Divina*, Breath Prayer, the prayer of Examen, and Imaginative Prayer in which the mind and heart are shaped by and begin to take on the shape of the mind of Christ. The resulting action is the embodiment of the work of Christ in the world. These are common themes in Paul, who writes not only letters of instruction, but gives testimony to his own union with God in Christ, in hopes that all people will seek to attain it and the Kingdom of God will be revealed through people as a result.

While we do not know the intricacies of each person in scripture's relationship with God, we can gather strong contemplative, mystical, and ascetic overtones from these and many others. Jacob visioned a ladder to heaven (Genesis 28). Jeremiah engaged in the ascetic practice of laying on his side for 390 days bearing the sin of Israel (Ezekiel 4). Ezekiel, Isaiah, and John of Patmos experienced dramatic prophetic visions. Not the least of these is Mary the mother of God, who with the heart of a true contemplative, "treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). It was the contemplative nature of each of these that compelled them into action, birthing new movements of God, and ultimately Christ into the world.

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[130] Richard Rohr, "Bias from the Bottom: Week 1 Summary," Center for Action and Contemplation, March 14, 2016, https://cac.org/bias-bottom-week-1-summary-2016-03-26/.

Prayer in practices of early church traditions

Contemplative prayer did not stop with the advent of the early church. In fact, as discussed in Chapter One and as is admonished in Paul's letters quoted above, there is evidence that early Christians followed in the way of Jesus in seeking regular times of what we would consider contemplative prayer[131] and solitude. These practices nurtured the kind of community described in Acts 2:42-45 in which "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common." The apostle's power to act was the direct result of the infilling of the Holy Spirit within them that took place through regular and intentional rhythms of prayer, waiting, and stillness, infilling, and response.

In fact, the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost came at just such a time. While the believers hiding in the upper room did not know at the time what they were waiting for, they were gathered in corporate contemplative prayer marked by stillness, waiting, and longing for the promised presence of God. Then, filled with the Spirit, they were moved to action. Peter, compelled to address the crowd, invited all who could hear to repent, be baptized, and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.[132] About three thousand were added to their number that day.

Even as Christianity moved from the margins of society to the mainstream of politics and culture with the onset of Christendom, women and men sought meaningful communion with

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[131] As Jewish believers in Jesus, the Apostles continued to practice the rhythms of prayer that had shaped their entire lives and culture. This included praying three times a day, morning, noon, and evening, typically at the temple if possible. In addition, they would have learned from Jesus the rhythm of going off alone to pray as modeled in passages such as Matthew 26:36, Mark 1:35, Mark 14:32, Luke 5:16, Luke 6:12, Luke 9:18, Luke 9:28, Luke 11:1, and Luke 22:39.

[132] Acts 2:38

God, giving up marriage, privilege, and comfort in order that they may hear and know God's voice and serve God fully. As monasticism sprang up in the early part of the fourth century, "contemplation" came to be used to describe the way these seekers were praying, communing, and communicating with God. There are lessons and themes from their lives, writings, and prayers that can profoundly shape our own prayer lives, expanding our capacity to discern God's presence, listen to God's voice, and respond in action today. The following is a survey of select contemplatives who offer frameworks and practices that can significantly shape the way we pray, discern, and are moved to action individually and corporately.

Emmelia, Macrina the Younger (327-379), and the Cappadocian Fathers

The work of the Cappadocians in preserving the church in the form of monasteries during the early days of Christendom when the role of the church was drastically changing is as relevant in the secular age[133] of the twenty-first century as it was in the fourth century. While the monastic model that Macrina and subsequently the rest of her family nourished on her family's land is not the focus of this research, communion and participation with God through contemplative prayer is a central focus. In order to sprout spiritual grain, we must nourish the spiritual life wherever people gather and help people, beginning with the congregations right in front of us, to become "attuned to an imitation of the existence of the angels."[134] Macrina the Younger was the daughter of Basil the Elder and Emmelia, a mother deeply committed to the spiritual formation of her

[133] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2018). In his book, A *Secular Age,* philosopher Charles Taylor espouses how the Western world gradually moved from the advent and height of Christendom to the secular age in which we now live.
[134] Carla D. Sunberg, *Uncommon Virtues: Seven Saints Who Shaped Our Faith* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Publishing, 2018), Loc. 534.

children. Carla Sunberg writes, “Emmelia is rightfully called the mother of saints. Mother of Saint Basil of Caesarea and Saint Gregory of Nyssa, along with Saint Macrina, Saint Naucratius, Saint Theosebia, and Saint Peter of Sebaste, she is honored for her virtue of parenting. No other woman since her time has had six children officially recognized as saints.”[135] Along with their friend Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa became known as the Cappadocian Fathers.

However, it was Macrina the Younger who, when her brother Naucratius died, provided emotional stability for her mother. When her father died, Macrina encouraged her mother to sell their goods and move to the family estate on the River Iris. Sunberg writes that it was here, with other companions, they led a life of complete service, consecrating themselves to God. “Strict asceticism, zealous meditation on the truths of Christianity, and prayer characterized daily life within this community.”[136] Macrina converted a portion of the property into the first monastery for women, while Peter oversaw the men, all under the direction and vision of his sister.[137]

This life of contemplative prayer and service was transformational for Emmelia and Macrina. Macrina’s brother Gregory described them as an ever-increasing participation with God. “Just as by death souls are freed from the body and released from the cares of this life, so their life was separated from these things, divorced from all mortal vanity and attuned to an imitation of the existence of the angels.” He went on to explain that “although living in the flesh . . . they were not weighted down by the allurements of the body, but, borne upwards in midair, they participated in the life of the celestial powers.”[138] For Emmelia and Macrina, a sustained life

[135] Sunberg, *Uncommon Virtues*, Loc. 490.
[136] Sunberg, *Uncommon Virtues*, Loc. 576.
[137] Sunberg, *Uncommon Virtues*, Loc 573.
[138] Sunberg, *Uncommon Virtues*, Loc 525.

of contemplative prayer fostered transformation and freedom that allowed for communion and ultimately union with God, transforming their inner lives, their relationships, and their work in the world. The result of their discipline in prayer and lived virtue was a clearer reflection of the divine image. Self-denial and contemplative prayer were hallmarks of Macrina's life. As she lived out of that communion with God in an era where Constantine's conversion was drastically changing the role of Christianity in the world, she held space for the sacred, influenced her brothers and her community, and shaped the church for centuries to come and even to this day.

Macrina's only extended theological writing was preserved in Gregory's *On the Soul and Resurrection*. Of the resurrection Macrina compares the spiritual life to sprouting grain,

> The virtuous life as contrasted with that of vice is distinguished thus: those who while living have by virtuous conduct exercised husbandry on themselves are at once revealed in all the qualities of a perfect ear, while those whose bare grain… has become degenerate and hardened by the weather…will, though they live again in the Resurrection, experience very great severity from their Judge, because they do not possess the strength to shoot up into the full proportions of an ear…[139]

It is evident from Macrina's writing that she had come to understand that in order to fully flourish in Christlikeness, she had to completely embrace the virtuous life. This is not an act that she could do by her own will, but rather only by Christ in her. Much like Paul's description of kenosis, Macrina's understanding of the virtuous life contrasted with a life of vice involves the self-emptying of any selfish desire and the infilling of the Spirit. In allowing for such infilling, one is revealed in perfection like a perfectly ripened grain shooting up to the fullness of its rich, sweet, nutritious proportions. Those who do not allow space for such complete surrender and

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[139] Tyson, 90. The full version of this piece can be found in Gregory of Nyssa and Philip Schaff, "On the Soul and Resurrection," in *Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1988), 464-468.

infilling are left to be dry and hard grains. True, these still experience the resurrection, but they miss out on the opportunity to flourish as richly as God intends and desires.

What Macrina knew and gave her life to is the reality that there is more to the Christian life than that of dry grain holding out for the resurrection. Rather, there is a life of rich flourishing available to those who live in full surrender to the life of Christ. The depth of this richness is revealed in and through contemplative prayer by which one comes to experience life with Christ, is nourished by Christ, and is filled to flourishing with the mind and heart of Christ.

Benedict of Nursia ~ Lectio Divina (c. 480-550)

St. Benedict's development of the sacred reading of scripture known as Lectio *Divina* has resulted in a practice that is integral to monastic life and personal contemplative prayer practice across many traditions.

St. Benedict was born the son of a Roman noble in Nursia, which is modern day Italy. His sister, Scholastica, became a saint in her own right. Upon being sent to Rome for formal education, Benedict experienced religious conversion. Benedict was disgusted with the way of life in Rome and withdrew from the city to live as a hermit.[140] It did not take long for him to become known as a holy man of God. People traveled to see him and to receive instruction. He and Scholastica established communal monasteries at Monte Casino. St. Benedict's *Rule* grew out of life in that community.

In her work, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality for the 21st Century*, Sister Joan Chittister writes, "There are three dimensions of the treatment of prayer in the Rule of Benedict

[140] John R. Tyson, *Invitation to Christian Spirituality: an Ecumenical Anthology* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124.

that deserve special attention. First, it is presented immediately after the chapter on humility. Second, it is not a treatise on private prayer. Third, it is scriptural rather than personal. Prayer is, then, the natural response of people who know their place in the universe. It is not designed to be a psychological comfort zone though surely comfort it must. And lastly, it is an act of community and an act of awareness."[141] These three dimensions frame the posture of those who pray. This framework, which emphasized the humility, the communal nature, and the scriptural nature of prayer undergirds the value of practicing *Lectio Divina* in a corporate setting.

In her reflections on Benedict's *Rule*, Chittister emphasizes the role of listening to one another, sitting silently in God's presence, and pondering things. She suggests that those qualities may be what is most profoundly absent in a century filled with information but lacking in Gospel reflection. Chittister writes, "The Word we seek is speaking in the silence within us."[142] In other words, the very thing we most long for, the very presence of God in Jesus that our souls crave, the very Word Incarnate we desire to hear is already speaking. However, in order to begin to hear that which our spirits desire, we must first create space to sit with the silence within us. The rhythms that allow us to attend to the silence within us and the Word being revealed there are practices of contemplative prayer which lend themselves to silence, solitude, listening, discerning, and which result in faithful response.

The balance of work and prayer is critically important to the Benedictine way. As Chittister describes it, "Benedictine life is immersed in the sanctity of the real and work is a

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[141] Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: a Spirituality for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2010), 101.
[142] Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 2006), 61.
"Make no doubt about it, the ability to listen to another, to sit silently in the presence of God, to give sober heed, and to ponder is the nucleus of Benedictine spirituality. It may, in fact, be what is most missing in a century saturated with information but short on Gospel reflection. The Word we see is speaking in the silence within us. Blocking it out with the static of nonsense day in and day out, relinquishing the spirit of silence, numbs the Benedictine heart in a noise-polluted world."

fundamental part of it. The function of the spiritual life is not to escape into the next world; it is to live well in this one… Work and prayer are opposite sides of the great coin of a life that is both holy and useful, immersed in God and transfiguration of the commonplace, the transformation of the ordinary that makes co-creators of us all."[143] In this balance, prayer shapes one's work and one's work shapes one's prayer. The result is co-creation with God in the redemption and flourishing of all things.

In this vein, it is important to note that contemplative prayer is not contemplation for the sake of contemplation alone but for the sake of the transformation of the world. This rings true from a Wesleyan perspective as well as a Benedictine one. As Wesley articulates, all of the Means of Grace are important. Those means include prayer and works, faith and practice, all of which should be held together. The renewal of the heart and life that Wesley espouses is for the sake of the world and is evidenced in our work, whether tending the gardens, teaching children, or tending the sick.[144] It is both holy and useful. In chapter 48 of his rule, Benedict wrote, "Idleness is the enemy of the soul. Therefore, the community ought to be employed in manual labor at certain times, at others, in spiritual reading."[145] Benedict's admonition for "spiritual reading" led to the development of what we now call *Lectio Divina*. The four basic steps of *Lectio Divina* (as given by Guigo II, the 9th prior of Grande Chartreuse monastery from 1174-80) are *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*. These translate to Read, Meditate, Pray, and Contemplate.[146] This is a practice that is as relevant and useful to the church today as it was

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[143] Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: a Spirituality for the 21st Century*, 211.
[144] Clapper, *The Renewal of the Heart,* 29.
[145] Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict: A Spirituality*, 211.
[146] David Rathel, "Introduction to Lectio Divina," Systematic and Historical Theology at St Andrews, March 7, 2018, https://theology.wp.st-andrews.ac.uk/2018/03/07/introduction-to-lectio-divina/.

1500 years ago. Benedict's framework for *Lectio Divina* allows individuals and communities to pray with scripture in a practice that allows for silence, sacred listening, and communion with God. Such practice allows people to encounter the Word Incarnate through the Holy Scriptures, transforming souls and the resulting work of the people.

Benedictine's understanding of work and prayer becomes for us a model through which we learn what it means to be made co-creators with God. The sacred reading of scripture through *Lectio Divina* uniquely and profoundly shapes our work, allowing the living Word to speak into our lives. It is a practice that continues to prove relevant and powerful in an age when many people find reading scripture daunting and hearing God's voice seems unattainable.

Julian of Norwich (1342-c. 1423)

Julian of Norwich's contemplative nature is anchored in an understanding of God as the ultimate nurturer motivated by love. Norwich's understanding of prayer is significantly more expansive than a means of communicating wants and needs to God. Rather, it celebrates a fullness of joy and unity with God. This understanding of prayer was shaped by Norwich's illness as a young woman, subsequent divine revelations, and years of prayerful discernment.

In 1373, thirty-year-old Julian of Norwich, an anchoress for a church in Norwich, England, became seriously ill. She desired three wounds—contrition, kind compassion, and steadfast longing toward God, saying that she desired to suffer with God. On the fourth night of her illness, she took the rites of the Holy Church, thinking she was about to die. As she gazed upon a crucifix held by a priest, she experienced the first of sixteen showings. Julian did not die.

In fact, she recorded the showings and began meditating on them. Years later, she began to experience revelations, or particular insights, about the showings, writing,

> And from that time that it was shewed I desired oftentimes to learn what was our Lord's meaning. And fifteen years after, and more, I was answered in ghostly understanding, saying thus: Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing? Learn it well: Love was His meaning. Who shewed it thee? Love. What shewed He thee? Love. Wherefore shewed it He? For Love. Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same. But thou shalt never know nor learn therein other thing without end. Thus was I learned that Love was our Lord's meaning.[147]

Julian of Norwich's revelations provide vivid imagery for the contemplative. She reflected on the image of a hazelnut given to her in the first of the showings. As she pondered what this small thing may be and how it should last, she sensed that it lasts because God loves it. Norwich wrote, "And so All-things hath Being by the love of God. In this Little Thing I saw three properties. The first is that God made it, the second is that God loveth it, the third, that God keepeth it."[148]

Norwich reflects that we do not have ease of heart and mind because we rest in things that are so little, yet God cares for the hazelnut. Our God is all-mighty, all-wise, and all good. God is the very rest, and it pleases God that we rest in Him. Norwich prayed, "God, of Thy Goodness, give me Thyself: for Thou art enough to me, and I may nothing ask that is less that may be full worship to Thee; and if I ask anything that is less, ever me wanteth,—but only in Thee I have all."[149]

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[147] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), http://www.ccel.org/ccel/julian/revelations.html, 96.
[148] Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, 6.
[149] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love*, 6.

Of prayer Julian of Norwich writes, "Prayer is a right understanding of that fullness of joy that is to come, with accordant longing and sure trust."[150] She goes on to write that prayer unites or makes one's soul one with God.[151] To be united to God is the deepest desire of God for God's people and for people who truly love God. Norwich celebrated God's tender love that all should be saved, acknowledging that sin is the cause of pain, but "all shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well. These words were said full tenderly, showing no manner of blame to me nor to any that shall be saved."[152]

Ignatius of Loyola ~ Examen & Imaginative Prayer (1491-1556)

St. Ignatius' prayer practices, specifically the prayer of Examen and imaginative prayer, are meaningful in a corporate worship setting and the prayer life of the individual.

St. Ignatius of Loyola was born Iñigo de Loyola in the Basque region of northern Spain in 1491. He spent much of his young adult life preparing to be a courtier and soldier. His autobiography says he was "given over to the vanities of the world" and primarily concerned with "a great and foolish desire to win fame."[153] He was not particularly interested in religious observances.

Following an injury to his leg, which did not heal properly, Iñigo was convalescing at his family castle in Loyola where his sister-in-law gave him two books to read, one on the life of Jesus and the other on the lives of the saints.[154] While these were not the types of books that

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[150] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love,* 46.
[151] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love,* 46.
[152] Julian of Norwich, *Revelation of Divine Love,* 31.
[153] St. Ignatius, "The Autobiography of St. Ignatius," ed. J. F. X. O'Conor (Benziger Brothers, December 14, 1899), https://d2y1pz2y630308.cloudfront.net/15471/documents/2016/10/St.%20Ignatius-The%20Autobiography%20of%20Ignatius.pdf, 7.
[154] James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: a Spirituality for Real Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2012), 12.

Iñigo typically read, he was soon captivated by the idea of the saints and began to wonder if he too could emulate them. Following his recovery and against the wishes of his family, Iñigo gave up the life of a soldier and committed himself fully to God at the age of thirty-one.[155]

Ignatian spirituality is characterized by the following things: finding God in all things, becoming a contemplative in action, looking at the world in an incarnational way, and seeking freedom and detachment.[156] Ignatius wrote the Spiritual Exercises, a series of meditations, prayers, and practices to help people deepen their relationship with God, particularly within the context of an extended retreat.[157] Ignatius popularized a way of praying called the Examen, which he called a General Examination of Conscience.[158]

> There are five points in this method
>
> I. The first point is to give thanks to God our Lord for the favors received.
>
> II. The second point is to ask for grace to know my sins and to rid myself of them.
>
> III. The third point is to demand an account of my soul from the time of rising up to the present examination. I should go over one hour after another, one period after another. The thoughts should be examined first, then the words, and finally, the deeds in the same order as was explained under the Particular Examination of Conscience.
>
> IV. The fourth point will be to ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults.
>
> V. The fifth point will be to resolve to amend with the grace of God. Close with an *Our Father*.[159]

The awareness of God in all things and at all times that St. Ignatius teaches is a gift that allows seekers to begin to see God's presence and in turn begin to hear and discern God's voice

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[155] Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, 13.
[156] Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything*, 10.
[157] St Ignatius, "The Spiritual Exercises," Ignatian Spirituality, January 18, 2021, https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/.
[158] St. Ignatius, "Louis J. Puhl, SJ Translation - The Spiritual Exercises: St. Ignatius of Loyola," trans. Louis J Puhl, The Spiritual Exercises | St. Ignatius of Loyola, 1951, http://spex.ignatianspirituality.com/SpiritualExercises/Puhl#c02-1234, 024.
[159] St. Ignatius, "Louis J. Puhl, SJ Translation, 024.

and movements. While five hundred years old, this form of contemplative prayer continues to prove relevant, practical, and profound for spiritual formation. There are many variations on the Examen today, yet each continues to help the seeker to pay attention to the ways God has been near and the times God seemed distant, identifying God's presence and the reasons one may need forgiveness. The Examen can be undertaken personally or be led in a group, with the leader guiding participants through the prayer practice.

In addition, Ignatius' practice of imaginative prayer, which is particularly suited for the Gospels, uses scripture to engage the senses and the mind, revealing God's word and insights to the contemplative. Kevin O'Brien, writes, "Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our imagination as through our thoughts and memories. In the Ignatian tradition, praying with the imagination is called contemplation. In the Exercises, contemplation is a very active way of praying that engages the mind and heart and stirs up thoughts and emotions."[160] While Imaginative prayer can be used by the individual it is also well-suited to group prayer practices where the leader guides a group of seekers through the practice, allowing the Spirit to speak to each heart individually.

Teresa of Avila (1518-1582)

St. Teresa of Avila's understanding of prayer and the interior life with God lends a depth and richness to the discussion of prayer that most people from evangelical-related traditions have not considered. Her work helps build an imagination for the type of communion with God that is available to those who seek.

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[160] Kevin O'Brien, "Ignatian Contemplation: Imaginative Prayer," Ignatian Spirituality, accessed May 18, 2021, https://www.ignatianspirituality.com/ignatian-prayer/the-spiritual-exercises/ignatian-contemplation-imaginative-prayer/.

St. Teresa of Avila was born in Spain to a wealthy merchant family. Her parents likely had Jewish heritage and converted to Christianity prior to the Spanish Inquisition. St Teresa's parents were devout and provided her with a religious education. In 1537, she made her profession to the Carmelite nuns against her father's wishes. St. Teresa struggled with her health throughout her life. In 1539, she suffered from a mysterious collapse for three days. She remained paralyzed for three years following the collapse.[161]

In 1557, after what she described as a meeting of grace with the suffering Christ, St. Teresa experienced her decisive conversion. The Confessions of St. Augustine were a great encouragement to her, in part because Augustine had been such a sinner himself.[162] The following years were filled with visions and raptures and a new level of contemplative prayer life. St. Teresa sought to bring about reformation in the Carmelite order, which had become increasingly lax.

In all her major works, *The Life*, *The Way of Perfection*, and *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa wrote about prayer. In *The Life*, St. Teresa described prayer using the image of the four waters, or the four methods for watering a garden, as an illustration for one's prayer life. These include drawing water from a well, the water wheel, a running stream, and rain. The prayer life begins with a vocal and discursive method in which the person praying is doing a lot of the work by talking. With each subsequent water source, it evolves to something more mystical, not attained by human power, which St. Teresa refers to as types of mental prayer.[163] St. Teresa

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[161] Peter Cannata, "Teresa of Jesus (Teresa of Avila, 1515-1582)," Order of Carmelites, accessed May 18, 2021, http://carmelnet.org/biographies/TeresaAvila.pdf.
[162] St. Teresa, *Life of St. Teresa of Avila, Including the Relations of Her Spiritual State, Written by Herself,* trans. David Lewis (London: Burns & Oates, 1962), 7-9.
[163] Jordan Aumann, "Library: St. Teresa's Teaching on the Grades of Prayer," Catholic Culture, accessed May 18, 2021, https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?id=7725.

wrote, “For mental prayer in my opinion is nothing else than an intimate sharing between friends; it means taking time frequently to be alone with Him who we know loves us. In order that love be true and the friendship endure, the wills of the friends must be in accord…”[164]

St. Teresa also illustrates the varying depths of prayer and the inner life with God through the imagery of castles or mansions. *The Interior Castle*, St. Teresa’s last work, describes seven mansions. Each mansion represents an increasing intimacy with God, as God Himself dwells in the interior castle. The door to entry into this castle and each of its mansions is prayer. The type of prayer that St. Teresa describes is contemplative prayer, a state of being still, quiet, reflective, and attuned to the Presence that becomes known in silence. She is particularly known for describing the practice of centering prayer.

Of Mansion V, St. Teresa writes, “…what becomes of this silkworm… when it is in this state of prayer, and quite dead to the world, it comes out a little white butterfly. Oh, greatness of God, that a soul should come out like this after being hidden in the greatness of God, and closely unite with Him, for so short a time—never, I think, for as long as half an hour.”[165] Here St. Teresa makes the observation that a few moments in God’s presence, certainly less than half an hour, can lead to a flourishing of the soul much like a butterfly emerging from a cocoon. When communities regularly make space for such moments in their lives together, what emerges is a church that, having been fully cocooned in the presence of God, is thereby transformed into a community that reflects God’s image in word and deed.

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[164] St. Teresa, *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila Vol 1: the Book of Her Life, Spiritual Testimonies, Soliloquies* (Washington, D.C.: Institute of Carmelite Studies, 1987), 67.
[165] St. Teresa of Avila, “Interior Castle,” in *Interior Castle*, vol. Mansion V, Ch 2, n.d.

For someone who wrote so extensively about the depths of centering prayer and communion with God, prayer had not always come easily for St. Teresa. She wrote, "During eight and twenty years of prayer, I spent more than eighteen in that strife and contention which arose out of my attempts to reconcile God and the world."[166] Even her confessors struggled to help point St. Teresa to the kind of prayer life she desired.[167] Yet, she did not give up, thus experiencing spiritual growth through continual pursuit and self-sacrifice. Most people give up before experiencing Union with God or feel unworthy of God's time and attention and thus never begin, but St. Teresa writes, "Never does He weary of giving and never can His mercies be exhausted: let us, then, not grow weary of receiving."[168]

Francis de Sales ~ Imaginative Prayer & Guided Meditation (1567-1622)

The work of St. Francis de Sales offers both imaginative prayer and guided prayers that he developed for those for whom he provided spiritual direction. These practices took place in corporate and solitary settings. Both practices are engaging and formational modes of contemplative prayer in the twenty-first century as well, as they create space for stillness, silence, listening, and response, fostering communion between God and people.

St. Francis de Sales was born to an affluent family in the town of Annecy located in the Duchy of Savoy between the borders of France and Spain. It was a volatile time and place in history in political and religious realms. Martin Luther had nailed his Ninety-five Theses to the church door in 1517, marking the beginning of the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

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[166]Wendy M Williams, "St. Teresa of Avila: Friend of God," *Duke Divinity School Review* 44, no. 1 (January 1, 1979): 25.
[167] Williams, "St. Teresa of Avila," 25.
[168] St.Teresa, *Life*, 189.

Additionally, French reformed theologian, John Calvin, had died just three years before St. Francis de Sales was born. The Catholic church and French government were deeply intertwined in a convoluted and corrupt knot involving religious conflict and colonization. The king of France had enormous powers to dispose of the church's wealth and used the offices of the bishops, abbots, and other positions within the church to provide sinecures for his faithful followers. This meant that the lords of the church were usually politicians or power grabbers rather than faithful followers of the Gospel.

As a young man, St. Francis de Sales was an avid learner and a student leader. He participated in an in-depth study of Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. Around the age of 20 years old, he was swept off his feet by a tremendous personal "encounter of the intimate love of God."[169] Wendy M. Wright describes St. Francis' vision of a world of interconnected hearts. "The heart of God connected to human hearts through the gentle, humble heart of Jesus and the human heart joined together in loving relation as they become what they are intended to be—at one with and in the heart of God."[170] This vision of interconnected hearts is exactly what transpires in and through contemplative prayer. Through Jesus, the human heart is connected to the very heart of God, which allows people to connect to and become at one with one another as God intended. This is good news for the community of God who engages in the practices of contemplative prayer together. Not only are individual hearts connected to God through Jesus, the hearts of the individuals are connected to one another in loving relation. It is a practice that transforms the life of the community together.

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[169] Wendy M. Wright, *Francis de Sales and Jane De Chantal* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 2017), 14.
[170] Wright, *Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal*, 15.

St. Francis de Sales' motto was "Live Jesus." Through his vision and experience, he came to the belief that to live Jesus was to live a life of love. He guided his directees in such a way that they too "cultivated a more habitual awareness of the divine presence" of God.[171] Through imaginative prayer and guided meditations, St. Francis helped his many directees encounter the voice of God in prayer, whether they were committed laity or devoted clergy. These works became the foundation of his book, *Introduction to the Devout Life*, which he wrote as a spiritual guide and resource for ordinary people living ordinary lives in the world. St. Francis wrote,

> Almost all those who have written concerning the devout life have had chiefly in view persons who have altogether quitted the world; or at any rate they have taught a manner of devotion which would lead to such total retirement. But my object is to teach those who are living in towns, at court, in their own households, and whose calling obliges them to a social life, so far as externals are concerned.[172]

In other words, St. Francis was not merely concerned with shaping the prayer lives of those who were able to separate themselves from the demands of daily life in order to give themselves fully to spiritual work without distraction or interruption. Rather, his aim was to teach ordinary people who were experiencing the demands of family, work, and social commitments how to encounter God in the rhythms of their daily lives through contemplative prayer that engaged the imagination and guided their meditation. This created accessible ways for people to foster rhythms of silence, listening, reflection, and response. These rhythms not

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[171] Wright, *Francis de Sales and Jane de Chantal,* 50.
[172] St. Francis de Sales, *An Introduction to the Devout Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2002), https://ccel.org/ccel/desales/devout_life/devout_life.toc.html. Preface.

only shaped the inner lives of his devotees, they shaped their families, their work, and their engagement in society.

In *The Devout Life*, de Sales reflects on the thoughts of St Gregory Nazienzen, one of the Cappadocian Fathers, that "feeble hearts let themselves be carried hither and thither by the varying waves of sorrow or consolation, as the case might be, like the shells upon the seashore." [173] He reflected that other saints came to experience the Divine Presence through the stars, a stream, or even a chicken's wings and wrote, "Thus it is, my daughter, that good thoughts and holy aspirations may be drawn from all that surrounds us in our ordinary life. Woe to them that turn aside the creature from the Creator, and thrice blessed are they who turn all creation to their Creator's Glory."[174] St. Francis was committed to attending to the sacred revealed in nature and present in ordinary routines of life, as a result becoming increasingly attuned to God's presence in all things.

One such way that St. Francis encouraged people to dwell in ever increasing awareness of the Divine Presence is through the concept of gathering a spiritual bouquet in which after a time of prayer, contemplation, or silence, one gathers up the images, thoughts, and nuggets of truth that one wants to hold onto and contemplate throughout the day. St. Francis wrote, "At the end of your meditation linger a while, and gather, so to say, a little spiritual bouquet from the thoughts you have dwelt upon, the sweet perfume whereof may refresh you through the day."[175] St. Francis' guided meditations and imaginative prayers are still relevant and useful for seeking and hearing the voice of God in prayer today. In some ways, his meditations build on the

[173] St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life*, XX.
[174] St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life*, XIII.
[175] St. Francis de Sales, *Devout Life*, IX.

imaginative prayers of St. Ignatius. The practicality and applicability of the modes of contemplative prayer that he encouraged lend themselves to those who experience the demands of ordinary life.

Russian Peasant "The Pilgrim"~ The Jesus Prayer (19th Century)

The Jesus Prayer of the Russian peasant remains one of the simplest and most profound prayers of the church. It can be introduced as one mode of breath prayer and as a stand-alone practice. In a corporate setting, it can serve as a centering prayer, as a part of a broader prayer practice, or as a regular part of the liturgy.

Upon attending church, the Russian Pilgrim heard that the scripture says to pray without ceasing[176] and to pray in the Spirit on every possible occasion.[177] The pilgrim was deeply troubled because this felt impossible to him. He began to seek out spiritual guides who talk to him about prayer, saying things like, "This is a continuous aspiration… Ask God to teach you to pray continuously."[178] However, answers like that left the pilgrim wanting, so he continued his search.

Finally, the pilgrim met an elder who taught him the Jesus Prayer. The elder said, "The ceaseless Jesus Prayer is a continuous, uninterrupted call on the holy name of Jesus Christ with the lips, mind, and heart; and in the awareness of His abiding presence, it is a plea for His blessing in all undertakings, in all places, at all times, even in sleep. The words of the Prayer are: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'[179] This prayer is to be repeated frequently while inhaling

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[176] 1 Thessalonians 5:17
[177] Ephesians 6:18
[178] Anonymous 19th Century Russian Peasant, *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*, Kindle Edition (Magdalene Press, 2017), 5.
[179] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 9.

and exhaling with a relaxed breath. The first half of the prayer is prayed while inhaling, while the second half is prayed while exhaling. The elder then began to provide spiritual direction for the pilgrim from the Philokalia, which provides insight into many things in scripture.

When the elder died, the pilgrim decided to move on. Unable to find work because of an injury to his arm from childhood, the pilgrim walked and repeated the Jesus Prayer.[180] Eventually, he began traveling in the direction of Siberia, walking by night and reading the Philokalia by day.[181] Along the way, the pilgrim encountered hardships, such as being mugged, attacked by a wolf, and arrested and flogged, but he took each incident as an opportunity for learning and growth. At one point, after helping a woman who had a bone stuck in her throat, the pilgrim wrote, "…people began to regard me as a prophet, a doctor, and a wise man; they began coming to me with their problems from all sides. They brought me gifts and showed me respect and deference. I took this for a week and then I became afraid that distraction and vainglory would ruin my spiritual life so I left that place secretly by night."[182] From Siberia, the pilgrim journeyed to Jerusalem, encountering many hermits and holy people, hospitality and rejection. As he did so, he grew in his inner life with God and in his capacity to teach others along the way.

The Jesus Prayer is a practical and accessible means of prayer in our contemporary world. Its meditative qualities are celebrated across Christian traditions. It is a foundational example of a breath prayer, in which simple words of prayer or scripture are repeated to the slow inhale and exhale of breath. This type of prayer, which is both centering and meditative, is accessible for all people and at all times, reminding the person praying that God is near.

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[180] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 14.
[181] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 16.
[182] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 47.

Further, the Jesus Prayer can have beneficial psychological effects. In 2017, Martina Rubinart published a study detailing the effects of twenty-five minutes of saying the Jesus Prayer on interpersonal sensitivity, anxiety, tension, and fatigue. Rubinart writes, "Overall results indicate that the Jesus Prayer may be a relevant practice among Catholics both for well-being and spiritual purposes."[183] Mental health professor K.A. Bingaman suggests that in the complex and demanding world in which we live, "religious beliefs alone may not be enough to alleviate stress and anxiety."[184] However, a daily contemplative practice can efficiently and effectively "unwire the neural pathways of a dysfunctional emotional reaction." In a similar fashion, study around Centering Prayer developed by Thomas Keating and his colleagues indicate that it is an effective mindfulness practice for improving mental and emotional well-being.[185] The Jesus prayer is a much older meditative practice with the capacity to shape the human spirit toward God and the mind toward wholeness. As the pilgrim discovered, it is a great means of purifying one's heart. This has a profound psychological impact on healing one's personality as well.[186]

The anonymous author of *The Way of a Pilgrim*, whether the pilgrim himself or someone else, has provided a gift to the world through generations and across languages. This practice is beneficial as a part of corporate worship and as a means of prayer in which lay people of all ages can engage. The author of *The Way of a Pilgrim* quotes St. Gregory Palamas saying, 'Not only should we fulfill God's commandment to pray in the name of Jesus Christ unceasingly, but we

[183]Marta Rubinart, Albert Fornieles, and Joan Deus, "The Psychological Impact of the Jesus Prayer Among Non-Conventional Catholics," *Pastoral Psychology* 66 (January 1, 2017): 487.
[184] Rubinart, "Jesus Prayer Among Non-Conventional Catholics," 488.
[185] Rubinart, "Jesus Prayer Among Non-Conventional Catholics," 488.
[186] Rubinart, "Jesus Prayer Among Non-Conventional Catholics," 489.

should also show this method of prayer to everyone: to the religious, to lay people, to the wise and the simple, to men and women and children."[187]

Contemplative Prayer in the 20th and 21st Centuries

Though public interest in contemplative prayer has waxed and waned over the course of church history, it has proven to be a necessary and increasingly vital component of spiritual formation. This is, perhaps, even more true in the secular age, a time when the line between the sacred and the secular has faded, the sacred has been crowded out, and all has become secular.[188] Philosopher Charles Taylor and theologian Andrew Root make the case that in the secular age in which we find ourselves, we live in an immanent frame in which it is hard to see God. In fact, in the immanent frame, seeing is believing.[189] "We are encouraged to keep God as background, rarely seeing him move, arrive, and act, because our attention is drawn to the immanent."[190]

Commonly held belief in and awareness of the sacred have gone by the wayside along with the ascetic practices of the saints. However, prayer continues to be at the heart of this issue. Root writes, "There seems to be one clear way to avoid observation blindness, a way even to encounter the event of God's speaking as the direct movement of receiving and giving ministry. This is the way of prayer. Prayer is something few people in the immanent frame have been taught."[191] Yet, all is not lost. Contemporary contemplatives continue to point the way to experiencing God in the midst of the secular age and in spite of the immanent frame. The authors

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[187] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 41.
[188] Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 42.
[189] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 271.
[190] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age,* 271.
[191] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age,* 273.

who will be drawn from in this section are Thomas Merton, Thomas Keating, Henri Nouwen, Parker Palmer, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, Jan Johnson, Cynthia Bourgeault, and Barbara Holmes.

Thomas Merton (1915-1968)

Thomas Merton's work brought contemplative prayer to the forefront in the twentieth century, making it both widely known and deeply applicable.

Merton was a Trappist monk known for his exploration of contemplation, as well as issues of economic injustice, violence, racism, and nuclear arms, themes that appeared in his novel *My Argument with the Gestapo* and continued throughout his career. Richard Foster suggests, "Thomas Merton has perhaps done more than any other 20th century person to make the life of prayer widely known and understood."[192]

For Merton, the question was not just "What is important?" According to Henri Nouwen, Merton's questions were, "What is peace? What is justice? What is love? Are we ready for this? And especially, what is my place in the middle of this chaotic and noisy world?"[193]

In his book *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Merton uses the Gospel parable of the sower as a metaphor for his task of sowing "seeds." In 39 short chapters or "seeds," he lays the groundwork for what he hopes will bear fruit in the spiritual life of his readers. Merton understands the reader is tempted to struggle to "achieve" union with God. However, the true task is simply recognizing the union which has already happened in the form of the "true self"

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[192] Richard J. Foster and Emilie Griffin, *Spiritual Classics: Selected Readings on the Twelve Spiritual Disciplines* (New York,, NY: HarperOne, 2007), 17.
[193] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Encounters with Merton: Spiritual Reflections*, Kindle Edition (Bandra, Mumbai: St. Pauls, 2009), Loc. 612.

and move away from the "false self" made up of selfishness and egoism that resist and obscure that realization.

Merton wrote,

> Contemplation is also the response to a call: a call from Him who has no voice, and yet who speaks in everything that is, and who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of his. But we are words that are meant to respond to him, to answer to him, to echo him, and even in some way to contain him and signify him... He answers himself in us and this answer is divine life, divine creativity, making all things new. We ourselves become his echo and his answer. It is as if in creating us God asked a question, and in awakening us to contemplation he answered the question, so that the contemplative is at the same time, question and answer.[194]

So, we can understand contemplative prayer as that which allows us to respond to the call planted deep within us in creation, echoing and responding to the Creator as we were intended from the beginning. In the echo and the answer, we then become a reflection of the Creator to the world.

Merton also believed that the church desperately needs the contemplative if it hopes to embody the Kingdom of God. In his work, *Contemplative Prayer*, he wrote that in reality as it is played out in the world, churches were not built for worship,

> … but to establish more firmly the social structures, values and benefits that we presently enjoy. Without this contemplative basis to our preaching, our apostolate is no apostolate at all, but mere proselytizing to insure universal conformity with our own national way of life …. Without contemplation, she [the Church] will be reduced to being the servant of cynical and worldly powers, no matter how hard her faithful may protest that they are fighting for the Kingdom of God.[195]

In this line of thinking, if we hope to hear God, we must become contemplatives in response to God's call. This is not just an individual act of solitude. This is what the church

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[194] Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (Seoul: Catholic Publishing House, 2005), 3.
[195] Thomas Merton and Nhất Hạnh, *Contemplative Prayer*, Kindle Edition (New York, NY: Image, 2014), 116.

desperately needs if it hopes to be anything other than a mere reflection of the broken societal framework we encounter and uphold in the world. Further, contemplative prayer should not be limited to what Merton describes as "a small class of almost unnatural beings and prohibited to almost everyone else."[196] Though many Christians have no idea what is available to them in their relationship to God, a vibrant inner life with God is not limited to a small group. In addition, these are not practices that invoke strange phenomena. Instead, infused contemplation, or contemplative prayer that is integrated into daily life, is a powerful means of sanctification. Nothing is more effective for increasing our love for God and for coming to know God.[197] It profoundly shapes how we love God and love others, which is the fundamental basis for holiness.

Thomas Keating (1923-2018)

Thomas Keating developed a practice called "centering prayer" as a Christian practice for strengthening one's interior silence and developing increased sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit.

Keating was a Cistercian monk in the Benedictine tradition who spent his life studying the religions of the world. He is known for this development of centering prayer, which comes out of the Christian tradition found in *The Cloud of Unknowing* and the writings of St. John of the Cross.[198] Keating writes, "It is a preparation for contemplation by reducing the obstacles caused by the hyperactivity of our minds and of our lives."[199] The actual work of Centering

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[196] Foster, *Spiritual Classics*, 17.
[197] Foster, *Spiritual Classics*, 18.
[198] Thomas Keating, *Intimacy with God An Introduction to Centering Prayer*, Kindle (New York, NY: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2020), Loc. 96.
[199] Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Loc 98.

Prayer is consenting to God's presence and action within us.[200] When we participate in Centering Prayer, we begin knowing God's presence is already there. All we have to do is consent.

This consent takes on the form of waiting on God. Keating writes, "Waiting on God in the practice of Centering Prayer strengthens our capacity for interior silence and makes us sensitive to the delicate movement of the Spirit in daily life that led to purification and holiness."[201] The practice of Centering Prayer is not purely for the sake of our own spiritual lives, but for that of those we encounter in the world. Keating suggests, "The Scriptural Model of Spirituality emphasizes developing union with God here and now and working in service of those in need."[202]

Henri Nouwen (1932-1996)

Henri Nouwen's work extensively explores his own inner life with God and offers many avenues to encounter God through prayer, including Lectio Divina, Audio Divina, Visio Divina, centering prayer, and more.

Educated by the Jesuits, Henri Nouwen spent much of his life writing extensively about his personal journey. He had much to say about the role of prayer and community in spiritual formation and discernment. He encouraged Lectio Divina as a means of Biblical meditation, as well as Visio Divina, writing his entire book *The Return of the Prodigal Son* on Rembrandt's painting by the same name. Nouwen did not see prayer so much as something to be ticked off the list of productivity. Nouwen suggested that prayer is wasting time with God, writing, "But if we can detach ourselves from the idea of the usefulness of prayer and the results of prayer, we

[200] Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Loc 501, 523.
[201] Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Loc 409.
[202] Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Loc 331.

become free to 'waste' a precious hour with God in prayer. Gradually, we may find, our 'useless' time will transform us, and everything around us will be different."[203]

It is from this place of humility in contemplative prayer that we can begin to discern God's presence and God's guidance. As the editors of *Discernment* wrote, "God is always speaking to us—individually and as the people of God—at different times and in many ways: through dreams and visions, prophets and messengers, scripture and tradition, experience and reason, nature and events."[204] This, however, does not take place solely in nor does it result in isolation. Nouwen suggests that spending time alone with God in prayer leads inevitably to community with God's people, and then to ministry in the world.[205]

Nouwen articulates a fundamental component of this dissertation: spiritual formation takes place within community. "Spiritual formation is an exercise not of private piety but of corporate spirituality. We do have personal experiences of spiritual formation, but together we are formed as the people of God. Communion with God, community with others, and ministry together can be envisioned as component parts of a wheel."[206] Elsewhere Nouwen's work reflects the idea that prayer, discernment, and community go hand-in-hand. "Living in Christian community offers concrete ways to make choices that support discernment—deep listening for the way and will of God."[207] This then illustrates that community has a role in contemplative prayer and contemplative prayer has a role in the life of the community. In order to learn to lean in, listen for, and discern the voice of God in prayer, the people of God need to practice contemplative

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[203] Henri J.M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 19.
[204] Nouwen, *Discernment*, vii.
[205] Nouwen, *Discernment*, 10.
[206] Nouwen, *Spiritual Formation*, 100.
[207] Nouwen, *Discernment*, 13-14.

prayer in community. In doing so, they become co-listeners and discerners for one another as they are formed together as the people of God.

Parker Palmer (1939—)

Parker Palmer, an educator and author who writes about topics of spirituality as well as education and leadership, articulates the important role that quiet spaces for the soul have on the entirety of a person's life. As a Quaker, the concept of quiet spaces, solitude, and silence have great significance for Palmer and are key themes in his work. However, he writes from the perspective that the goal is not a compartmentalized private life with God, but living and moving in the world as whole, integrated people. Quiet spaces for the soul shape one's movement in the world. Palmer is careful to clarify that wholeness does not mean perfection. It means acknowledging that brokenness is a part of life, but it can be a seedbed for new life.[208]

In his book, *A Hidden Wholeness*, Parker explores themes of the role of a circle of trust in welcoming the soul, finding silence in a noisy world, and cracking open the divided life. Parker likens the soul to a wild animal, writing,

> The soul is like a wild animal—tough, resilient, savvy, self-sufficient and yet exceedingly shy. If we want to see a wild animal, the last thing we should do is to go crashing through the woods, shouting for the creature to come out. But if we are willing to walk quietly into the woods and sit silently for an hour or two at the base of a tree, the creature we are waiting for may well emerge, and out of the corner of an eye we will catch a glimpse of the precious wildness we seek.[209]

While the thing we most long for is a safe place for our soul, Parker notes that in our culture, community often means a group of people who go crashing through the woods together, scaring

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[208] Parker J. Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: the Journey toward an Undivided Life: Welcoming the Soul and Weaving Community in a Wounded World* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass/Wiley, 2008), 5.
[209] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 58-59.

the soul away.[210] This can happen in many ways, such as through environments that force us to put on masks to hide our truest selves or communities that drown out the quiet soul with too much noise and busy-ness. Unfortunately, as Palmer goes on to say that when we catch a glimpse of the soul, we're able to participate in bringing about healing in our world, even as we experience our own "hidden wholeness."[211] However, we need others to join us on the journey to help us create safe spaces for the soul and discern our inner teacher's voice. Some people have experienced what Palmer calls "circles of trust" with small groups. Palmer suggests, "By reflecting on the dynamics of these small-scale circles of trust, we can sharpen our sense of what a larger community of solitudes might look like-and remind ourselves that two people who create safe space for the soul can support each other's inner journey."[212] The point is that we must continually be working toward a community that fosters one another's inner journey.

This concept of creating quiet spaces in which the soul might be glimpsed and safe circles of trust to nurture wholeness is important to this conversation because this is precisely the type of community the church should be facilitating. It is my intent that vocabulary, practical tools, and spiritual muscles for this type of environment would be initiated by integrating contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship. By laying a foundation in corporate worship that normalizes and fosters quiet waiting for glimpses of the soul, as well as safe communities of trust, the church community can empower community members to experience the wholeness of an undivided life. Together, we can listen to the voice of the Spirit, undergirding one another on the journey.

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[210] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 59.
[211] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 54.
[212] Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness*, 59.

Richard Foster (1942—)

Richard Foster's exploration of the spiritual disciplines offers a lens through which to view prayer as a part of one's holistic spiritual life. It does not stand alone as the solitary or singularly most significant part of a person's spiritual life. However, prayer, silence, and solitude are integral parts of the inward disciplines and therefore play important roles in the outward disciplines.

Richard Foster is also a contemporary theologian in the Quaker tradition. In his book, *Celebration of Discipline*, in which Foster reflects on inward, outward, and corporate disciplines, Foster writes,

> We must not be led to believe that the Disciplines are for spiritual giants and hence beyond our reach, or for contemplatives who devote all their time to prayer and meditation. Far from it. God intends the Disciplines of the spiritual life to be for ordinary human beings; people who have jobs, who care for children, who must wash dishes, and mow lawns. In fact, the Disciplines are best exercised in the midst of our normal daily activities.[213]

Foster's perspective on the significance of the spiritual disciplines in the lives of ordinary people harkens back to St. Francis De Sales, who was committed to the spiritual formation of ordinary people with everyday responsibilities. For some, there may be a tendency to disregard the voices of priests, monks, and nuns who have given their lives to prayer as unrelatable or impractical. Like Palmer, however, Foster is married and has a family. He has a job and social commitments. The spiritual disciplines are woven through, give shape, and are shaped by all of those things. They are not out of reach, but rather the framework for daily life.

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[213] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2018), 1.

While not all of Foster's spiritual disciplines are contemplative in nature, they are all disciplines, inward and outward and communal, that help us explore the inward life and to live lives of service as a result. Yet, these do not all come naturally, nor are they all instinctive. Foster writes, "We simply do not know how to go about exploring the inward life. That has not always been true. In the first century and earlier, it was not necessary to give instruction on how to "do" the Disciplines of the spiritual life."[214] Foster goes on to suggest that the Disciplines were such an integral part of the general culture that children grew into young adults knowing and practicing them. That is not the case today.[215]

Foster is careful to point out that spiritual formation involves taking on a series of spiritual practices that open us to God's work in our lives. However, it is not the disciplines themselves that do the transformation. Rather, they open our hearts to allow God to shape us.[216] Foster writes, "Perhaps we could think of spiritual formation as a pattern, a series of concrete actions that will gently move us toward transformation in Christ… The transformation in us is God's work. It is a work of grace… not through our own doing but as pure gift."[217]

Even so, sometimes God feels hidden from us. In his book, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home*, Foster reflects on the role of lament as a means of prayer when journeying through what St. John of the Cross called "the dark night of the soul." "Sometimes it seems as if God is hidden from us. We do everything we know. We pray. We serve. We worship. We live as faithfully as we can. And still there is nothing—nothing! ...God is always present with us—we

[214] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3.
[215] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 3.
[216] Foster, *Spiritual Classics*, xiii.
[217] Foster, *Spiritual Classics*, xiii.

know that theologically—but there are times when he withdraws our consciousness of his presence."[218]

One way we cope with a sense of God's absence is through lament. We find significant evidence of this spiritual practice in scripture in places such as the Psalms, Lamentations, Job, and more. Foster continues, "The lament Psalms teach us to pray our inner conflicts and contradictions. They allow us to shout our cries of forsakenness in the caverns of abandonment and there the echo returns to us over and over until we recant of them, only to shout them out again. These psalms give us permission to shake our fist at God one moment and break into doxology the next."[219] This type of prayer is important for the contemplative in personal and corporate settings and should not be overlooked when exploring contemplative prayer practices.

Dallas Willard (1935-2013)

Prolific writer and philosopher Dallas Willard has written extensively about prayer and the inner life with God. Specifically in his work, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God*, he makes some points that are relevant to this discussion. Willard suggests, "Our failure to hear His voice when we want to is due to the fact that we do not in general want to hear it, that we want it only when we think we need it."[220] There is an important element of truth to this. Often people want to hear God's voice in a certain way, at a certain time, communicating a certain, pre-determined message. However, this is why learning to pray through multiple prayer practices and with the support of the community is critically important.

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[218] Richard Foster, *Prayer - Finding the Heart's True Home*, Kindle (Hodder & Stoughton General Div, 2012), 30.
[219] Foster, Prayer: *Finding the Heart's True Home*, 41.
[220] Dallas Willard and Jan Johnson, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), Loc 4052.

Such practices and rhythms, especially contemplative practices, quiet the heart and tune the ears toward the voice of God, not just when we think we need it, but regularly and consistently.

Willard quotes comedian Lily Tomlin, who says, "Why is it that when we speak to God we are said to be praying but when God speaks to us we are said to be schizophrenic?"[221] Such a response from ourselves or others to someone's claim to have heard from God is especially likely today because of the lack of specific teaching and pastoral guidance on such matters.[222] This is an important point to this argument. Most people do not know how to discern God's presence or influence in their own lives and thus treat those who claim to with a level of scorn. As the resident theologian and spiritual guide in the community, it is important that the pastor offer guidance and instruction on contemplative prayer and hearing from God, not only in the occasional small group setting, but to the whole body.

Willard reflects on how people throughout scripture encountered God—through waiting, through long periods of solitude and silence, and through a gentle whisper. He writes this in observation of Jesus: "The union Christ had with the Father was the greatest that we can conceive of in this life—if indeed we can conceive of it. Yet we have no indication that even Jesus was constantly awash with revelations as to what he should do. His union with the Father was so great that he was at all times obedient. This obedience was something that rested in his mature will and understanding of his life before God, not on always being told 'Now do this' and 'Now do that' with regard to every detail of his life or work."[223] To listen to God in prayer, does

[221] Willard, *Hearing God*, Loc 259.
[222] Willard, *Hearing God*, Loc 257.
[223] Willard, *Hearing God,* Loc 1112.

not mean to receive daily instructive memos, but rather to be shaped by a life in communion with God.

Our communion with God provides the context for our communication with God.[224] Willard writes, "Specifically, in our attempts to understand how God speaks to us and guides us we must, above all, hold on to the fact that learning how to hear God is to be sought only as a part of a certain kind of life, a life of loving fellowship with the King and his other subjects within the kingdom of the heavens."[225] As such, learning how to hear God is a part of our life with God and our life in community. Both are deeply intertwined and should not be bifurcated.

Jan Johnson (1952—)

Jan Johnson's work explores her journey with some of the questions that prompted this dissertation: Is there more to prayer than our non-stop talking to God? How do we connect with God?

Teacher and author Jan Johnson worked closely with and has been significantly shaped by the work of Dallas Willard. In her work, *When the Soul Listens*, Johnson begins, in part, by reflecting on the way extemporaneous prayers filled with requests for God left her feeling dry and separated from God. Johnson writes, "Prayer became a mental chore. I was not truly interacting with God. Prayer was just my non-stop talking until I got to the end of the lists. I longed to know how to connect with God."[226] She found the nourishment and relationship with God she longed for through spending time with God in contemplative prayer.

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[224] Willard, *Hearing God,* Loc 558.
[225] Willard, *Hearing God,* Loc 514.
[226] Jan Johnson, *When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer*, Kindle (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2017), Loc. 299.

It is important that we understand that contemplative prayer is not reduced to hearing God's voice or receiving directives from God, but rather living with Christ in the midst of contemplative practices so they can shape one's life with God.[227] While it is the avenue by which we can begin to discern God's presence and guidance in our lives, it is, more importantly, the means by which God can tell us we are beloved.[228] Further, it is an important means by which we participate in relationship with the Triune God.

Johnson defines contemplative prayer as, "prayer in which we still our thoughts and emotions, and focus on God's own self in an unhurried way. The stillness of contemplative prayer helps make us aware that God is truly with us and allows us to hear when God chooses to nudge, guide, direct, or even challenge us."[229] This working definition of contemplative prayer is helpful and down to earth. Johnson suggests that in the chaotic world in which we live, contemplation reminds her that, "the God who holds the universe together can also hold me together."[230] This relational approach to life with God allows one to make prayer a place of meeting God in an interactive way.[231] We are more likely to hear from God in our quiet listening posture.[232] "[Contemplative prayer is] simply being with God and listening whenever God may choose to speak to us."[233]

Johnson's work is a helpful guide for moving evangelicals from long-held traditions of extemporaneous prayers toward the expansive life with God that is fostered through contemplative prayer. Perhaps a key takeaway for the sake of this project is that we are often left

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[227] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 344.
[228] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 879.
[229] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 390.
[230] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 397.
[231] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 423.
[232] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 661.
[233] Johnson, *When the Soul Listens*, Loc 675.

asking questions that are far too simplistic such as those mentioned in chapter 1, "How do we know God hears us? How can we hear God? What is the point of praying, anyway?" According to Johnson, there is far more to experience in contemplative prayer even than simply learning to hear and discern the voice of God. This listening and discernment shapes how we live in the strong and unshakable kingdom of God even now. This involves putting on the character of Christ. Drawing on Mark 9:35, this involves a willingness to be very last and the servant of all, living in a posture of humility and service to others.[234]

Cynthia Bourgeault (1947—)

Cynthia Bourgeault is widely known as a contemporary contemplative. Her contribution to this discussion draws seekers deeper into life with God.

Cynthia Bourgeault is an Episcopal priest, theologian, and Christian mystic who has worked closely with Richard Rohr in developing the Center for Action and Contemplation. In her book, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening*, Bourgeault quotes philosopher Piero Ferrucci, who wrote,

> Prayer is not a request for God's favors. True, it has been used to obtain the satisfaction of personal desires. It has even been adopted to reinforce prejudices, justify violence, and create barriers between people and between countries. But genuine prayer is based on recognizing the Origin of all that exists, and opening ourselves to it… In prayer we acknowledge God as the supreme source from which flows all strength, all goodness, all existence, acknowledging that we have our being, life itself from this supreme Power. One can then communicate with this Source, worship it, and ultimately place one's very center in it.[235]

[234]Jan Johnson, "Savoring God's Word A Meditation on Matthew 5:38-42; Mark 9:35-37," Jan Johnson, accessed January 19, 2022, http://janjohnson.org/pdf/First-Last.pdf.
[235] Cynthia Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer and Inner Awakening* (Ingram International Inc., 2004), 3.

Bourgeault reminds readers that St. John of the Cross said, "Silence is God's first language."[236] She writes, "Somewhere in those depths of silence I came upon my first experiences of God as a loving presence that was always near, and prayer as a simple trust in that presence."[237] That is what we desire for our congregants and faith communities as we begin to allow for what Bourgeault calls "interior rearrangement" to take place in which one's deeper, more authentic self is revealed, and one can begin to "reach out to the world with the same wonderful, generous vulnerability that we see in Christ."[238]

Barbara Holmes

Barbara Holmes offers the perspective of the contemplative life of an African American and the many ways that plays out in her context. Her voice is important because it is critical that we do not draw the circle around contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship too narrowly.

Barbara Holmes is a Black spiritual teacher, activist, and author who focuses on African American spirituality. In her book, *Joy Unspeakable*, Holmes focuses on contemplation as an "important, taken-for-granted worship legacy in the historical black church."[239] This work focuses in part on the reductionism that has taken place within the black church and is continually perpetuated by the dominant culture.[240] Spiritual formation, specifically contemplative prayer, has many forms. It is unfaithful and unfair to reduce our understanding of

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[236] Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 1.
[237] Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 5.
[238] Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer*, 17, 38.
[239] Barbara Ann Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Fortress Press, 2017), Loc. 101.
[240] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, Loc 316.

the black church to singing, preaching, and a chorus of "Amen" responses without paying attention to the contemplative practices integrated in the life and worship of the black church.

Holmes reflects on times she was expected to sit on the front porch and read in the afternoons as one of the ways her parents instilled reflective practices within her. "My sojourns on the front porch taught me that meaningful spirituality required my full attention, that there might be times when mystery would descend and brace me as an intoxicating surprise. However, during 'ordinary' times, the attention of mind and body was a choice I could make."[241] This is a helpful framework for understanding the discipline and blessing of contemplative practice. However, Holmes notes, "Contemplative practices still exist in the Protestant black church, but they have not been embraced and nurtured as necessary and important aspects of worship. The lack of contemplative abiding time creates a restless longing in the people."[242]

The contemplative practices that Holmes defines are holy abiding,[243] communion with God,[244] and spiritual centering, even in the midst of danger.[245] At the center of these practices is the role of the community. Holmes writes,

> The key to contemplation in the black church seems to be its emergence as a communal practice. Although European mystics and contemplatives often lived in community, they tended to focus on the individual experience of encountering the divine presence. African American contemplatives turned the "inward journey" into a communal experience. In this ethnic context, the word contemplation includes but does not require silence or solitude. Instead, contemplative practices can be identified in public prayers, meditative dance movements, and musical cues that move the entire congregation toward a communal listening and entry into communion with a living God.[246]

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[241] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, Loc 342.
[242] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 213.
[243] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 443.
[244] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2253.
[245] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 1494.
[246] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 879.

Contemplative practices in the African American church can take on many different forms including dance,[247] play as reflected in children's participation in worship and imitation of adult worshipers,[248] the mourners' bench,[249] baptism by water and the Holy Spirit,[250] ecstatic heartfelt singing,[251] and prayer.[252]

In order to nurture contemplative practices in the church, Holmes makes a case for moving away from a model that idolizes the star preacher to a model of the guided and empowered congregation. Holmes' shift toward the lay priesthood of believers includes the following: guided meditation led by a different worship leader during each worship gathering; a shift from general rituals to rituals specifically created to address specific problems, such as sickness, loss, or calling upon the Holy Spirit; and making use of creative and performing arts, such as mime, liturgical dance, and poetry, and visual arts.[253] This framework is a helpful jumping off point for any church longing to integrate contemplative practices in the life of the community.

Holmes articulates that the shared experience of communal liturgies are critical to spiritual formation. Holmes writes, "These acts of shared contemplation move individual mystical events from the personal and private toward the public and pragmatic. Accordingly, the inward journey transcends the private imagination to become an expanded communal

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[247] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2069.
[248] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2121.
[249] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2134.
[250] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2174.
[251] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2187.
[252] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2150.
[253] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 2325.

testimony."[254] Holmes's insights here are profound and we should embrace this communal element of spiritual formation as a critical piece of the discussion for spiritual formation. This is one reason why contemplative prayer practices are an essential component of our corporate worship, and our corporate gathering essential to our contemplative lives.

Contemplative Prayer for the Wesleyan Tradition

The Wesleyan Tradition, of which the Church of the Nazarene is a part, is most heavily influenced by the work of eighteenth-century theologian John Wesley, who together with his brother Charles, is considered the founder of the Methodist movement. John Wesley pursued and preached *orthokardia*, which takes place through the Means of Grace, one of which is prayer, specifically contemplative prayer. Through full participation in the Means of Grace, including but not limited to contemplative prayer, we may become contemplatives in action as championed by Ignatius and promoted by modern contemplatives such as Richard Rohr. In this light, while Wesley did not use the term "contemplative prayer", the breadth of Wesleyan Christian tradition makes significant room for contemplative prayer practices.

John Wesley (1703-1791)

John Wesley was a theologian and evangelist whose ministry gave rise to a revival in the Church of England and ultimately to the establishment of the Methodist church. His work is relevant to this discussion as the Church of the Nazarene, in which I serve, is a Wesleyan-Holiness denomination, born out of the American Holiness Movement in the early 1900s.

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[254] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 126.

Wesley was quite ecumenical in nature. His mother's heritage was Puritan, he grew up in the Church of England, spent time with the Moravians, and read extensively across Christian traditions. A survey of John Wesley's diary from 1732 to 1733 reveals the names of Christian mystics such as Francis de Sales, Monsieur de Renty, Francois Fenelon, Castaniza, and others. He was known to have read Thomas à Kempis and was greatly influenced in his early years by William Law. Kenneth Collins writes that these and similar writings no doubt helped Wesley to see the end or purpose of religion, which is nothing less than the love of God and neighbor.[255] Holiness, as Wesley would come to firmly believe, largely influenced by these theologians and writers, was in its essence, love.[256]

However, Wesley critiqued some of these same insights in his personal spiritual struggle as he wrestled with the proper relation between the instrumental and material elements of the Christian faith.[257] Wesley rejected the quietism of the Moravians, which led them to focus solely on the inner life and not also on works or service. This ultimately led to Wesley's split from the Moravians, but practice of spiritual formation within the context of community remained extremely formational for Wesley. Wesley also denounced his friend and mentor William Law's embrace of Jakob Boehme's brand of mysticism. However, he held tightly to his heavily asterixed copy of Christian Perfection, which shaped major themes for Wesley's Methodists, including the belief that, "Forms and hours of prayer are acceptable but more is needed, for that prayer which 'openeth the gates of heaven stops not at forms and manuals of devotion, but is a

[255] Kenneth J Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1993): 300.
[256] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 119.
[257] Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," 300.

language of the soul.'"[258] In other words, the liturgy, rhythms, and practices of prayer foster a prayer life that should not be limited to words and rituals, but nurtures a language of the soul in which communion with God takes place.

Wesley also rejected the mystical order of salvation that is expressed as purgations, illumination, dark night of the soul, and union.[259] Wesley suggested that the dark night of the soul was a detour along the way to holiness and was not a suitable means of grace. However, it is important to note that Wesley did not use the term dark night of the soul in the same way as John of the Cross and the Christian mystics who followed Cross, who view it as an apophatic purgation process. Instead, Wesley uses the language of darkness, such as in his sermon "The Wilderness State" as imagery for sin and ignorance.[260] This distinction is significant, leaving a tension that remains unresolved.

It is also important to note that like Julian of Norwich and Francis de Sales, who have been referenced previously in this work, Wesley began from a place of understanding that God is love and to be made holy is to love as God loves. Further, the inner work of the heart that takes place through the Means of Grace is what shapes a person into Christlike love of God and neighbor.

According to Wesley, the Means of Grace are the avenues by which God provides grace to God's people. Wesley defines Means of Grace as "outward sign, words, or actions ordained of God, and appointed…to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey…preventing

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[258] Wesley D. Tracy, "The Wesleyan Way to Spiritual Formation: Christian Spirituality in the Letters of John Wesley," Wesleyan-Holiness Digital Library, January 1, 1987, https://www.whdl.org/wesleyan-way-spiritual-formation-christian-spirituality-letters-john-wesley, 40.
[259] Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," 309.
[260] Collins, "John Wesley's Assessment of Christian Mysticism," 310.

[prevenient], justifying, or sanctifying grace."[261] In other words, as Henry Knight writes, they are the normal ways by which God meets people.[262] Through the Means of Grace, we grow in love of God and neighbor. Prayer, silence, scripture reading, and meditation fall into the category of instituted means of grace.

Wesley suggests that the heart is the locus for God's action in the human.[263] What happens in the heart is at least somewhat under our control. In our God-given freedom as humans, we can determine and therefore are responsible for, the frame, the contents, the intentions of our heart.[264] The renewal of the heart, and ultimately life, was Wesley's orienting concern.[265] This takes place through the Means of Grace, beginning with prevenient grace which is at work before we are even aware of God at work in our lives.

In *Responsible Grace*, Randy Maddox writes, "Wesley's theology is a practical theology because it was about 'nurturing and shaping the world-view that frames the temperament and practice of believer's lives in the world.'"[266] Wesley operated from the understanding that *orthokardia*--the right heart-- was bound together with and the genuine product of orthodoxy and orthopraxy.[267] Wesley preached, "I would rather it said faith is 'productive of all Christian *holiness'* rather than of 'all Christian *practice'*; because men are so exceeding apt to rest in 'practice', so called, I mean in *outside religion*, whereas *true religion* is eminently seated in the heart, renewed in the image of him that created us."[268] Wesley's viewpoint is that true religion

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[261] Henry H. Knight, "Means of Grace," in *Global Wesleyan Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Albert Truesdale (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2013): 316-317, 316.
[262] Knight, "Means of Grace," 316.
[263] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 20.
[264] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 18.
[265] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 28.
[266] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 91.
[267] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 92.
[268] Clapper, *Renewal of the Heart*, 94-95.

begins in the heart where one is renewed in the image of the Creator, that one might reflect the image of the Creator to the world. The true reflection of the image of God is holiness and is evidenced in love of God and love of neighbor. This is the very transformative work that takes place in contemplative prayer and leads to Christian holiness.

In his sermon 79, "On Dissipation," John Wesley said that dissipation, which means to disperse or scatter, is the "uncentering the soul from God."[269] He compares it to Martha who in Luke 10 was encumbered by serving, in contrast to her sister Mary who was fully present at the feet of Jesus. According to Wesley, there are a thousand things that fracture our thoughts, and distract us from attending to God's voice which is continually speaking to our hearts. "We are encompassed on all sides with persons and things that tend to draw us from our centre...The whole visible world, all we see, hear, or touch, all the objects either of our senses or understanding, have a tendency to dissipate our thoughts from the invisible world; and to distract our minds from attending to Him who is both the Author and End of our being."[270] It is this very type of scattered, uncentered way of being in the world that we are seeking to counteract through the integration of contemplative prayer in corporate worship and subsequently the collective and private lives of the congregation.

In returning to our center, we are able, as Wesley says, to return to the Author of our being and attend to the voice of God who is continually speaking to our hearts, if we will only learn to listen.[271] When the loving eye of the soul is fixed on God, dissipation has no place within us.[272] The solution to the temptation of dissipation is faith that works itself out by love in

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[269] John Wesley, "On Dissipation," *Sermon 79*, accessed June 3, 2021, https://www.whdl.org/dissipation-sermon-79, 5.
[270] Wesley, "On Dissipation," *Sermon 79*, 5.
[271] Wesley, "On Dissipation," *Sermon 79*, 5.
[272] Wesley, "On Dissipation," *Sermon 79*, 7.

which one can testify, “The life which I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God; who loved me, and gave himself for me.”[273] This is in its essence *orthokardia* in which as Wesley says, the capacity of attending to God is restored and “the same power which made the world makes us a ‘clean heart, and renews a right spirit within us.’”[274] It is this right spirit which leads to right works. In a Wesleyan understanding of the Means of Grace, the instituted means of grace such as prayer and contemplation are held together with works of piety and with works of mercy. All of this combined is what leads Christian holiness.

The Wesleyan understanding of contemplative prayer is that which forms the heart and compels one to action. It is both holding space for quiet discernment and responding in faithful service in the world. Wesley was frustrated by the quietists of his day as their quiet posture did not move them to action. On the other hand, he was frustrated with elitist Christian practice of the Anglican tradition of which he was a part that was motivated by cultural norms and social benefits rather than a transformed heart. Wesley espoused that holiness of heart and works of mercy, or social action, must be held together. Contemplative prayer practices foster the renewal of the heart and the renewal of the heart rightly orients works of piety and works of mercy. The result is Christian holiness manifested in love of God and neighbor.

Wesley sought to nurture this type of balance both through corporate worship and the classes and bands he developed. He held tightly to the advice he once received from a serious man who said, “The Bible knows nothing of solitary religion.”[275] Genuine Christian community is essential for the journey. It breaks down social barriers, integrates people from all walks of

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[273] Wesley, “On Dissipation,” *Sermon 79*, 7.
[274] Wesley, “On Dissipation,” *Sermon 79*, 5.
[275]John Fletcher Hurst, “Chapter 9,” in *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work* (New York, NY: The Methodist Book Concern, 1903), https://www.whdl.org/john-wesley-methodist-plain-account-his-life-and-work-chapter-9.

life, and provides a place for accountability in asking tough questions of oneself and one's spiritual journey.[276]

Conclusion

Contemplative prayer practices span the breadth of human connection with God as found in scripture, in the life of Jesus, in the early church, and through to this present day. Within the particular stream of Christianity that is known as the Wesleyan Holiness Tradition, contemplative prayer practices foster the very renewal of the heart that Wesley espoused. The integration of contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship is within the bounds of the Wesleyan tradition and faithful to Wesley's persistent call to holiness of heart and life. Contemplative prayer practices foster spiritual formation that results in communion with the holy God and subsequent transformation of heart and life.

[276] Mark A. Maddix, "John Wesley's Small Groups: Models of Christian Community," *Holiness Today* (2009), https://www.holinesstoday.org/john-wesley-small-groups-christian-community.

CHAPTER 3

THE CORPORATE MEETS THE CONTEMPLATIVE

As the literature review demonstrates, contemplative prayer and the practices that support capacities for contemplative prayer have been a part of connecting and communicating with God since the very beginning of recorded human history. We see evidence of this in the lives of the prophets of the Old Testament, in the life of Jesus, in early apostles such as Paul, in the early church, and among Christians worldwide today. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, was influenced, particularly in his early years, by the writing of Christian mystics. A holistic understanding of the influences on John Wesley's own spiritual formation frames an understanding that there is a place in the Wesleyan-Holiness tradition, of which the Church of the Nazarene is a part, for contemplative prayer practices today. As a result, it is essential that the church engage these practices in corporate worship as the primary context in which the community is shaped across Christian traditions. In the early part of the fourth century, monastic communities emerged in numerous wilderness locations in Western Asian and Northern Africa. In these communities, believers moved to the wilderness as hermits or in cloistered groups in which they practiced various forms of contemplative prayer. Since then, contemplative practices have thrived in monastic settings and among mystics. As a result, the practice of contemplative prayer has been relegated largely to clergy and the select few congregants who want to explore and engage in such practices individually.

Andrew Root suggests that the divide between the sacred and the secular became even greater in the years leading up to and during the Catholic and Protestant reformations. Farmers

had the responsibility of milking cows and raising children, so they needed someone else to take on the constant tasks of prayer, confession, and fasting.[277] The cathedrals themselves became the place where the holy and the ordinary met, a place where the eternal plane breaks into the temporal.[278] Meanwhile, today, the physical places are simply viewed as buildings and no longer hold in our minds the power of the transcendent.

Even committed Christians who attend church most Sundays of the year have little personal experience with a sense of the sacred. In that vein, seldom have they heard of and even more rarely have they had the opportunity to explore contemplative prayer practices. Most peoples' exposure to prayer is limited to prayers of petition and thanksgiving. These are good, but they are not complete. In a faith tradition whose richness is reflected much like a carefully cut multifaceted diamond, we are sufficing with a two-dimensional model of prayer as a means for communication with God and spiritual formation, rather than honing each of the many facets in a desire to reveal the beauty and depth that is within. In order to equip people for the deepest types of Christian experience, we must equip them with all of the facets, including that of contemplative prayer.

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[277] Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular Age: Responding to the Church's Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 104.
[278] Root, *Faith Formation*, 105.

In our current time, philosophers such as Andrew Root[279], Kenda Creasy Dean[280], James K.A. Smith[281], and others are wrestling with an essential framework for spiritual formation in the secular age in which we now find ourselves. They discuss the importance of community, testimony, service, and relationships in their writing, with a heavy emphasis on the importance of being able to share one's own story. However, there continues to be a consistent absence of contemplative prayer practices.

Dean suggests four primary components that youth need for significant spiritual formation and engagement in the church: an easily stated creed to believe; a community to belong to; a call to live out; and a hope to hold onto[282]. She goes on to outline three historic Christian "arts" that parents and congregations can pursue that help foster missional imagination in their young people. These include translation, which is imitating the life of Christ and noting when other people do this well; testimony, which is having conversations about Jesus that help teens develop a robust vocabulary and Christology; and decentering practices that take the focus off the self, such as service projects and mission trips.

These things are not untrue. In fact, if held in their appropriate places, these can indeed foster spiritual flourishing to a degree. However, this framework is simply incomplete. In chapter

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[279]Andrew Root is a professor of youth and family ministry and the author of the Ministry in a Secular Age series, which is a three-volume series engaging with Charles Taylor's work *A Secular Age*. In this trilogy, Root explores the challenges of Christian life and ministry in Western world that has found divine action increasingly unbelievable.

[280] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2010). Kenda Creasy Dean is an ordained Methodist Minister and a professor of Youth, Church, and Culture at Princeton Theological Seminary. She writes extensively on the intersection of youth, faith formation, and the church. Her work includes *Almost Christian: What the Faith of our Teenagers is Telling the American Church*.

[281] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2016). James K. A. Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin University and the author of the Cultural Liturgies Trilogy, as well as *You are What you Love* in which Smith explores the liturgies that are shaping the Western culture and our hearts.

[282] Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian,* 71-77.

one I described the plight of a young woman who had been offered and participated in most of the things that Creasy describes by the church and its leaders, and yet was fraught with questions about the point of prayer and how to discern God's voice. Dean's outline, while thoughtful and theologically sound, does not seem to provide the full depth of spiritual formation that the church can and should provide.

In *Faith Formation in a Secular Age,* Root articulates that in order to help people in our churches experience faith, our role is to encourage people to pray, opening their lives to the transcendent. "It is to invite them to come in and, through prayer, to articulate their experience of negation so that they might be ministered to. And it is, in and through these acts of ministry in which their person is shared in, to continue to prayerfully seek the action of God."[283] However, as Root illustrates the church as the household of ministry and the very locale of Jesus Christ in the world, he does not expand on how or what kinds of prayer might open people's hearts to the transcendent. I would suggest that opening oneself to the transcendent and seeing the action of God are indeed primary actions of the church. One of the ways this has most readily taken place throughout history and to our present moment is through contemplative prayer practices.

Root adds to his thoughts on the role of prayer in *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, suggesting that the pastor's vocation, particularly in a secular age is to pray and to teach people to pray, not just individually, but together.[284]

> To say that the pastor is the one who prays and teaches others to pray is to say that the pastor leads her people into addressing and being addressed by a speaking God, sharing in the person of Jesus, who prays for the world and teaches his disciples to do the same through the Spirit (Luke 11:1–13). Jesus invites these disciples to pray using the intimate

[283] Root, *Faith Formation*, 150.
[284] Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God*, Kindle Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2019), Loc. 7108.

> name for God: Abba (Mark 14). In prayer, we come to see that this God is a minister who shares in our lives by caring for us.[285]

This is a beautiful exposition that articulates exactly why prayer is so fundamental to the life of the community, but it again primarily discusses praying for and with others in the form of petitionary prayers without any exploration of the many types of prayer that are instrumental in shaping a life with God and in community. Root's discussion is void of any mention of contemplative prayer or varied prayer types that might engage the imagination in engaging with the God who shares in our lives. This leaves our prayer lives and our spiritual formation unnecessarily lackluster.

As a whole, these Protestant philosophers, theologians, and pastoral practitioners completely fail to mention anything in the vein of contemplative prayer practices as significant to spiritual formation. In a world filled with constant noise and a barrage of messages, it is a grievous oversight that leaders in the Protestant church are not articulating and equipping children, youth, and adults of all ages with the tools to learn to listen for and discern the voice of God. Thus, the church is failing to foster one of the most theologically rooted and historically supported avenues for developing a robust relationship with God. The absence of contemplative prayer practices in these discussions and in corporate worship is a glaring one.

One might be inclined to think that such ancient practices are no longer relevant or desirable in this secular age. However, other statistics prove it is not so. Interest in mindfulness and mediation have been rapidly increasing for the past thirty years. Studies around the effectiveness of mindfulness on mental health increased by nearly 200% in the period between

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[285] Root, *Pastor in a Secular Age*, Loc. 7122.

1995 and 2015.[286] These practices are proving increasingly valuable to the well-being of humans who are bombarded with information and twenty-four-hour media.[287] However, these practices and the human need for them are not new. Ultimately, these practices have been a part of humanity's connection with God since Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden in the cool of the evening.[288] It is negligent of the church to fail to develop these practices for the people who find themselves within the realms of Protestant evangelical Christian practice. Yet, because we do not model, practice, and utilize contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship, which is the primary teaching space in Christian tradition, we are relegating these practices to the select few who choose to engage them on their own, or worse, surrendering the sacred practices of the church to an entirely secular context.

All is not lost. There are some theologians and sociologists giving voice to the role of contemplation in spiritual formation, particularly around that of children. Jerome Berryman is the developer of Godly Play, a Montessori based method of Christian education for children that invites children to sit in the midst, literally and figuratively, of parables, sacred stories, silent contemplation, and liturgical action in order to build the domain of Christian language and experience.[289]

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[286] Alvin Powell, "Harvard Researchers Study How Mindfulness May Change the Brain in Depressed Patients," *Harvard Gazette* (August 27, 2018), https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/04/harvard-researchers-study-how-mindfulness-may-change-the-brain-in-depressed-patients/.

[287] Amy G Lam, Sean Sterling, and Edward Margines, "Effects of Five-Minute Mindfulness Meditation on Mental Health Care Professionals," *Journal of Psychology & Clinical Psychiatry* 2, no. 3 (2015): 1-6, https://doi.org/10.15406/jpcpy.2015.02.00076.

[288] Genesis 3:8

[289] Sam Donoghue, "Q & A: Jerome Berryman," Premier YCW, January 19, 2017, https://www.youthandchildrens.work/Childrenswork-Past-issues/2015/June-July-2015/Q-A-Jerome-Berryman.

In his work *The Spiritual Guidance of Children*, Berryman writes, "Learning 'Christian' as a second language is more complex than often realized, because the language system is so odd. Its toolbox contains sacred stories, parables, liturgical action, and contemplative silence." In Godly Play, the art of using sacred stories, parables, liturgical action, and contemplative prayer is taught to make existential meaning. All four are important for developing a whole language of theological understanding. The goal, according to Berryman, is not to impose a language that could distort their experience of God, but to provide a language for expressing the experience of God that they already have.[290] "Godly Play feels like the creative process in action." Berryman writes, "To be more specific it feels like flow, play, love, and contemplation, which are the four dimensions of this process."[291]

As one of the four pillars of Berryman's process of Christian education, contemplation is not nurtured at the expense of the sacred stories of scripture or the liturgical action of the church. Rather, contemplative prayer is held in communion with the other components as one of the key facets of spiritual formation and fundamental components of Christian language.

Children's spirituality researcher Rebecca Nye suggests that things that adults work hard at in spiritual life may be quite natural and easy for children.[292] Children are naturally more open, curious, and imaginative, with a greater capacity for wonder and sensitivity to the Spirit. In fact, Finish theologian, educator, and professor Kalevi Tamminen found that 60% of eleven-year-olds and 80% of seven-year-olds mention times of being aware of Gods' presence, compared to only

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[290] Donoghue, "Q & A: Jerome Berryman."
[291] Jerome Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children: Montessori, Godly Play, and the Future* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2013), Loc. 89.
[292] Rebecca Nye, *Children's Spirituality and Why It Matters* (London, UK: Church House Publishing, 2011), Loc 339.

30% of adults.[293] Yet, a child's natural aptitude for the type of mystery and contemplation that foster a deep prayer life are often squelched by the type of petitionary prayer that children see modeled almost exclusively. Nye writes,

> Younger children can get rather tangled up by the notion of petitionary prayer. Too easily this lends itself to the idea that this type of prayer is like a wish list for getting what they want or want for others. In effect, this becomes asking God for certain 'products' or, at least, set outcomes: 'Please God, let me have a PlayStation for Christmas' and, 'Please make my Nana's leg better.' While everyone is prone to this type of prayer to some extent, if this mindset defines children's understanding of prayer, then they may be particularly disappointed when God fails to provide the PlayStation or literal healing. A misunderstanding about this kind of prayer could tempt children to dismiss prayer, and God.[294]

The problem is this phenomenon does not stop with children. Because this is exactly the type of prayer that is modeled in corporate worship or prayer meetings across the Protestant church each and every week, this is precisely the kind of one-dimensional prayer that most people learn as children and are limited to as adults. As a result, adults are asking questions about the legitimacy of prayer, and God, even if they have gone to church their entire lives.

There is a real temptation to relegate work such as what Berryman and Nye have done around children's spiritual formation, as well as the work of the mystics both ancient and modern, to the classrooms located at the end of long hallways or in the form of small groups offered as bonus content for the spiritual life. Even the most liturgical of prayer practices such as those found in the Book of Common Prayer are petitionary or confessional in nature, but do not provide guidance for contemplative prayer. Jesus, on the other hand, modeled posing questions, engaging the imagination, exploring the natural world, and times of solitude as a means of

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[293] Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, Loc 374.
[294] Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, Loc 1431.

learning about God and spiritual things in his public life as a teacher and his personal life.[295] Therefore, these qualities as exemplified in contemplative prayer practices should also hold a place in the primary teaching assemblies of the twenty-first century church.

Worship is the Main Thing

Corporate worship is the primary space for teaching, spiritual formation, and liturgical practice within the church. Each week, Christians gather in corporate worship to be shaped by the practices and work of the people, the singing and praying, the hearing of the word, and the breaking of the bread. With the benediction, the congregants are then sent out into the world so that they might be the body of Christ for the world. The liturgies of corporate worship are what counteract and reform believers in the face of the deformation of the liturgies of the world.

Smith writes, "Worship is the arena in which God recalibrates our hearts, reforms our desires, and rehabituates our loves. Worship isn't just something we do; it is where God does something to us. Worship is the heart of discipleship because it is the gymnasium in which God retrains our hearts."[296] Corporate worship, then, is essential to the believer. It is the locale where above all others, we are transformed as a body by the power of the Spirit. The issue is not whether our community is large or small, affluent or impoverished, traditional or contemporary.

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[295] Nye, *Children's Spirituality*, Loc 1205.
"When Jesus was asked for spiritual information, such as, 'What is the kingdom of heaven?' or, 'Who is my neighbour?' he chose an imaginative style to convey the breadth and depth of these matters (i.e. parables: '[Imagine] it's like . . .'). He almost never gave a factual type of answer or explanation but used his imagination and required his listeners to do the same. It's also interesting that though we try to declare our list of beliefs in the creed, for many, the highpoint in worship, when we come close to God, is Holy Communion. In that experience we imaginatively 'act out' or 'play through' our grasp of the mystery of Christ's body and blood being given and broken for us, like bread and wine to his disciples."

[296] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit*, 77.

It is the collective encounter with the Word and the water, the bread and the wine, and the modes of prayer week after week that shapes our hearts.

Gordon Lathrop suggests that the assembly of corporate worship is the cornerstone of spiritual formation. He writes, "Christian spirituality may then be understood as the continual questioning and redirection of human lives that occurs in the encounter with central symbols of the faith, symbols that live primarily in the assembly life of the community."[297]

Nazarene theologians and practitioners such as Dirk Ellis[298], Brannon Hancock[299], Brent Peterson[300], Timothy Brooks[301], Matt Rundio[302], affirm the centrality of worship in the Christian experience, placing a heavy significance on the role of liturgy in worship. In so doing, they have reclaimed Wesley's sometimes forgotten tenant that Eucharist should be received at least weekly, if not as often as the community is gathered, while also emphasizing the other sacraments and symbols of corporate worship as a means of spiritual formation.

This rationale is entirely merited. However, it is not quite complete. Like Lathrop, the extent to which each of these theologians explore the role of prayer in corporate worship begins with the Lord's Prayer and ends with the liturgical prayers surrounding the Lord's Table. As important as these prayers are, they are not the sum total of the prayer life. Neither does the addition of the extemporaneous pastoral prayer found in less liturgical worship settings suffice in creating a full and robust environment for spiritual formation.

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[297] Gordon W. Lathrop, *The Pastor: A Spirituality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 14.
[298] Dirk Ray Ellis. *Holy Fire Fell*.
[299] Brannon Hancock, *The Scandal of Sacramentality*.
[300] Brent D. Peterson, *Created to Worship: God's Invitation to Become Fully Human* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 2012).
[301] Brooks, *Power of Worship*.
[302] Rundio, Matthew A. "Education for Liturgy in Christian Formation at Scottsdale First Church of the Nazarene".

Christian spirituality cannot be fully understood without a robust and varied means for relating with God and communicating with God in prayer. Further, Lathrop's definition of Christian spirituality, while merited, leaves very little room for answering any of the questions about prayer raised by Nye's example above or by the people in my churches. However, by taking things one step further and integrating contemplative prayer practices in the life of the community, the symbols of the faith can take on new life as vibrant representations of a multi-dimensional encounter with God. If indeed Word, Bath, and Table are the orienting factors as Lathrop suggests, then contemplative prayer is the means by which those elements come alive in the minds and hearts of the holy assembly.

Prayer belongs in community. Prayer shapes community. Prayer is a response to that which is happening in the community. As Benedictine Sister Joan Chittister writes, Benedict did not write a treatise on private prayer. Instead, he wrote a *Rule* by which prayer is scriptural rather than personal, a practice that is to be borne out within the life of the community. "Prayer is, then, the natural response of people who know their place in the universe. It is not designed to be a psychological comfort zone though surely comfort it must. And lastly, it is an act of community and an act of awareness."[303] Barbara Holmes suggests that contemplative practices create intersections between the inner life and life in community.[304] She writes, "[Despite] signs of postmodern fragmentation and the rise of radical individualism, we cannot carve out shared destinies in isolation."[305] Holmes goes on to explain that while we are a part of a wondrous and mysterious existence in our inner lives and in the vast cosmos, we are also born into

[303] Joan Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, p. 101
[304] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 106.
[305] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 118.

"communities of interpersonal reliance."[306] Therefore, contemplative prayer should be integrated into the liturgy of corporate worship as a means of witnessing, practicing, and exploring communion with God.

This is How we Learn

This premise is supported by educational philosophers and experts. Across generations and cultures, it has become evident that students learn best in an "I do, we do, you do" model of instruction in which the educator models a skill, practices the skill with the learner, and then provides an opportunity for the learner to practice the skill with other learners and independently. This is called a gradual release of cognitive responsibility.[307] By following this pattern in a cyclical fashion, building on skills that have been previously developed, the learner is able to spiral into progressively more complex content with supported learning. This is a blend of learning theories introduced and explored in the twentieth century by psychologists Jean Piaget [308] and Lev Vygotsky[309] who each developed a constructivist theory of education which supports the understanding that students learn by doing, not simply hearing about something, or even simply watching something take place. This was followed by Jerome Brunner who coined the words scaffolding, to describe the ways learning is supported by the instructor[310], and spiraling

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[306] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable,* Loc 118.
[307] Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, "Gradual Release of Responsibility Instructional Framework," Keys to Literacy, 2013, https://keystoliteracy.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/frey_douglas_and_nancy_frey-_gradual_release_of_responsibility_intructional_framework.pdf.
[308] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*. (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2018).
[309] Lev S Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1978).
[310] David Wood, Jerome S. Bruner, and Gail Ross, "The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 17, no. 2 (1976): 89-100, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.1976.tb00381.x.

curriculum, in which content is returned to and built upon repeatedly over time to deepen understanding and foster growth.[311]

Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey first coined the term gradual release of cognitive responsibility in the 1980s. Since then, they have developed a framework that begins with focused instruction, followed by guided instruction and collaborative learning, and finally resulting in independent learning.[312] This allows the learner to gain independence and opportunity for further application as his or her proficiency and confidence is increased.

The same types of things are taking place as congregants participate in the liturgies of worship week after week and move through the church calendar year after year. As Smith suggests, the work of the people literally shapes us as a people. If there are holes in what our congregants are learning, such as those identified in contemplative prayer in this dissertation, then we must examine the instructional weaknesses in our primary place of instruction, Christian worship. And yet, as pastors and congregational leaders, we often fail to think critically about what is absent from our worship and the ways that may be creating a spiritual formation shortfall.

Berryman writes that we often think too small about Christian education. One way we do that is forgetting "Christian education is about 'showing how,' rather than talking about something [learners] are supposed to think, feel, or do. It takes the whole person to show how the whole person is involved in the Christian life. This is why showing how is more important than explaining how in Christian education."[313]

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[311] Jerome S. Bruner, *The Process of Education* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, a division of Random House, 1963), 33.
[312] Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, *From Better Learning Through Structured Teaching: A Framework for the Gradual Release of Responsibility*, 2nd ed. (Alexandria, VA: ASCD, 2013).
[313] Berryman, *The Spiritual Guidance of Children*, Loc 194.

Smith agrees that education is a holistic endeavor that involves the whole person, including our bodies. All of this is integrated "in a process of formation that shapes our desires, primes our imagination, and orients us to the world—all before we ever start *thinking* about it." [314] From the earliest ages, spiritual formation practices are learned as they are modeled, as they are engaged with a guide, and as they are explored collaboratively and independently.

The same should be true for the practices of prayer. In order to help the people in our churches develop robust and meaningful prayer lives, we must provide opportunity for them to see contemplative prayer practices modeled by someone more experienced, provide the opportunity to practice it in the life of the community, and equip individuals to engage them in their lives in the world. This framework for contemplative prayer practices is essential within the construct of corporate worship.

Conclusion

Because contemplative prayer practices are important to the spiritual formation of Christian believers and have been throughout history, they need to hold a place within the broader practice of corporate worship, which is the primary means of education and spiritual formation within the church. By integrating contemplative prayer practices into corporate worship, Christians will learn to listen to and discern the voice of God as a collective body and as individuals who bear out Christ's body in the world.

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[314] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 39.

However, as much scholarship has gone into the importance of worship and the significance of liturgy, the absence of contemplative prayer as a component of corporate worship is glaring. These practices should not be relegated to an add-on available to or engaged by a select few. To do so handicaps the spiritual life of the Christian and hamstrings the church. Its inclusion need not be complicated or included at the expense of other significant liturgical practices. Rather, it should be integrated thoughtfully and strategically into the liturgy of corporate worship, so that the entire Christian community can be equipped with a variety of practices for communicating with God and discerning the Spirit.

CHAPTER 4

CONTEMPLATIVE PRAYER PRACTICES FOR CORPORATE WORSHIP

This dissertation proposes that contemplative prayer practices should and can be easily integrated into the liturgy of corporate worship. In the first section of this chapter, I will introduce and narrate six contemplative prayer practices that lend themselves to corporate worship. In the second section, I will describe with broad strokes where and how these might be incorporated into the natural flow of a Protestant worship service. In the third section, I will provide some considerations for the pastor in the worship planning process, particularly around the idea of integrating prayer practices. Finally, in the fourth section, I will provide several specific worship service outlines that integrate a variety of contemplative prayer practices. These outlines will include different types of worship services as a means of illustrating how contemplative prayer practices can be integrated across the spectrum of Christian worship contexts.

No matter the size of the congregation, the liturgical practices utilized, the age range of the congregants, or intercultural nature of the assembly, these practices enrich the praxis of corporate worship. These practices are not meant to replace song, sermon, Eucharist, or benediction, but to find their place among them. In so doing, the spiritual formation that takes place in Christian worship is made deeper and more vibrant in its embodied reflection of the Kingdom of God. Further, the questions around prayer and discernment that have plagued many faithful church attenders for generations are met with important tools for exploration.

I will note here and reinforce later that not all of these practices need to be used all of the time. These practices lend themselves to different points in the service, seasons of the church year, and Scripture passages. This dissertation is about engaging a variety of contemplative prayer practices to help construct robust prayer lives that equip the gathered assembly with the tools to listen to and discern God's presence and voice. This can be done over a period of many weeks and developed over many years in the life of a community.

Each congregation will need to discern how these practices can best be introduced, modeled, and engaged in the life of their community. It may be most beneficial to incorporate these practices into familiar rhythms. Perhaps a community that has the practice of observing the seasons of the church year can incorporate a specific practice during Advent, another during Lent, and a third during Easter, Pentecost, or ordinary time, returning to them year after year. Another community may observe that they already participate in a pastoral prayer and integrating a weekly guided prayer of Examen during that time seems natural and fitting. This may become a part of their weekly rhythm. Alternatively, a community that has the regular practice of reading the Lectionary Psalm as a part of their corporate worship may extend that practice by utilizing the Psalm for a short practice of *Lectio Divina* during that point in the service. There is power in pattern and repetition in spiritual formation. This is what helps develop the spiritual muscles of one's prayer life and the life of the community. The weekly rhythms will become anticipated and familiar. They will become deeper and richer as a result.

This dissertation seeks to integrate six key contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship. Those practices include Lectio Divina; Audio and Visio Divina, which are held together for our purposes because they may occur simultaneously in corporate worship; Examen; Breath

Prayer; the Jesus Prayer, which is a specific type of breath prayer, but also deserves its own discussion; and Imaginative Prayer. This list of contemplative prayer practices is by no means exhaustive. However, I have identified these practices as ones that engage a diverse group of pray-ers and lend themselves to group gatherings. They are thus fitting for the corporate worship setting. Each of these builds the spiritual muscles for extended silence and solitude and can easily be implemented in a private or small group prayer practice as well. The goal is that the prayer practices introduced and enacted in the gathered assembly would act as formative contemplative encounters with God in worship and equip individuals and the church body to put them into practice in their daily lives.

The Practices

Outlined and described below are the six practices suggested for integration into corporate worship and potential applications within a twenty-first century Christian worship service.

1. Lectio *Divina*
2. *Audio Divina & Visio Divina*
3. *Examen*
4. *Breath Prayer*
5. *Jesus Prayer*
6. *Imaginative Prayer*

Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina, or divine reading, was birthed out of St. Benedict of Nursia's commitment to praying the Psalms daily. It has become a practice that has served the church across Christian tradition for more than 1500 years, allowing space for the living Word of God to speak into the lives of all who read in unique and Spirit-filled ways. This is not a pattern of reading scripture that involves exegeting or analyzing text. Rather, it is a practice of listening to what God might communicate through God's Word. In a traditional Lectio Divina practice, there are four key movements: *Lectio, Meditatio, Oratio, Contemplatio*. These movements translate to Read, Meditate, Pray, and Contemplate as follows:

Step 1 *Lectio*: Read or listen to the scripture passage prayerfully as though you are reading it for the first time.

Step 2 *Mediatio*: Read or listen to the same passage again, this time listening for a word or phrase from the text that stands out or seems to come into bold print. Do not seek to analyze the passage as whole. In addition, refrain from analyzing the word or phrase as they appear in the passage. Rather, sit with the word or phrase that stands out to you for a few moments.

Step 3 *Oratio*: Read or listen to the same passage a third time, listening again for a word or phrase that stands out to you. It may be the same word or phrase, or there may be a slight variation. Prayerfully talk to God about why those words might be coming to the surface for you today. Ask God to lead you into deeper understanding.

Step 4 *Contemplatio*: Listen to the passage a fourth time. Then, spend some quiet moments in loving contemplation with God. Rest in God's presence. Listen to what God might be saying to you.

In a corporate worship setting, Lectio *Divina* usually involves one reader who is reading a passage of scripture aloud for the gathered assembly. The passage length can vary from one to two verses to several verses, though it is generally helpful if it is not too long. Pauses between each movement can be lengthened over time. Additionally, it is sometimes helpful to start with three readings of scripture instead of four as the congregation learns the practice and becomes familiar with the repetition and the periods of silence.

While praying the Lectio Divina, I often encourage children to draw or create something with supplies I have already made available to them, such as pipe cleaners, foam blocks, Wikki Stix, a whiteboard and markers, or play-doh if the setting permits. This opportunity for tactile engagement helps kids pray with their hands as well as with their minds and hearts. Sometimes the images and symbols they create appear to have very little to do with the thoughts and prayers on their minds and hearts. However, this should not be a measure of the spiritual formation that is taking place. Later conversations may reveal a reflection, ways the scripture captured the child's attention, or the stirring of curiosity and wonder. The goal of contemplative prayer in an intergenerational setting is to hold space for the youngest and oldest worshipers alike to encounter God in prayer, and to invite participants to join as they are ready.

Audio Divina and Visio Divina

The practices of *Audio Divina* and *Visio Divina* are often held together in a corporate worship setting. Audio *Divina* refers to divine or sacred listening while Visio *Divina* refers to divine or sacred seeing. I have treated them in a complimentary fashion here. *Audio Divina*, or sacred listening, may include listening to instrumental music, lyrics, or sounds of nature. *Visio Divina*, the practice of allowing what is seen with the eyes to stir the heart in prayer, may include looking prayerfully at a piece of art displayed in person or projected for the assembly. It may also include prayerful attention to a visual display or a scene from nature. It entails contemplating an image beyond a first glance or surface impressions to see what God might be revealing to us and allowing ourselves to be seen by God.

Henri Nouwen wrote "For those who gaze on the beauty of the Lord, what is opaque becomes transparent; nature, time, and people are transformed; and we ourselves are transfigured."[315] The truth of this statement illustrates the value of the role of *Visio Divina* in the prayer life. We see similar types of practices illustrated with the use of visions in scripture, such as Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones[316] and the animals in Peter's trance on the rooftop.[317] *Visio* and *Audio Divina* provide an opportunity to gaze or to listen with the eyes and ears of our heart so that which is true might be revealed to us in new ways and we might experience transformation as a result.

In a corporate worship setting, art or visual display is often accompanied by music and vice versa. However, this is not essential for partaking in the value of these practices. This practice can be as unstructured as simply gazing and listening. However, in a more structured

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[315] Henri J.M. Nouwen, Michael J. Christensen, and Rebecca Laird, *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2015), 15.
[316] Ezekiel 37:1-14
[317] Acts 10:9-23

setting, it can follow guided rhythms similar to Lectio Divina. The process for Visio Divina is as follows:

Step 1: Begin by preparing your heart for prayer.

Step 2: Look carefully at the image. Pay attention to the light and the shadows, the shapes and the colors. What do you notice? What draws your attention? Take a moment to pause.

Step 3: Look again at the image with new eyes. Pay particular attention to the part of the picture that is drawing your attention. What thoughts, feelings, or memories does it evoke? What might God be communicating with you? Do you sense a call or an invitation today? How might God be revealing something of God's self through this image? Take a few moments to reflect on these questions.

Step 4: Respond to God with any thoughts, feelings, yearnings, or desires that arise. You may find it helpful to imagine yourself in the image. Where would you be? What would you be doing? How might that guide your response to God? Take some time to communicate with God and listen for God's response to you.

Step 5: Rest in God's loving presence. Enjoy the language of silence. Savor the stillness and peace that you experience in God's presence.

For a few suggested art pieces to begin exploring Visio *Divina*, see Appendix A.

Audio *Divina* in a corporate worship setting may involve a short piece listened to one or more times, a longer piece with a repeated chorus or phrasing, or one piece listened through in its entirety with no repetition. It may also simply involve listening prayerfully to the sounds of the

natural world. “Discernment is a life of listening to a deeper sound and marching to a different beat,” wrote Henri Nouwen, “a life in which we become ‘all ears’.”[318] Using our physical ears in the act of prayer helps build the spiritual muscles necessary for discernment. In the practice of Audio *Divina*, the key is listening to the sounds around you and allowing that to help open the ears of your heart in order to become aware of God’s presence and better listen to the Spirit. In a corporate worship setting, that includes sitting quietly rather than singing with the music if words are a part of sound. Perhaps, as in Lectio *Divina*, there is a word or a phrase that stands out to the listener. This practice invites participants to explore why that particular word or phrase seems to resonate and spend time in conversation with God about it.

Questions that can help guide Audio *Divina* include:

- What feelings are stirred as you listen?
- Where do you think those feelings are coming from?
- What thoughts and memories are coming to the surface? What about these sounds evoke those thoughts or memories?
- If there are words, which stand out to you? Why are those resonating with you today?
- What does this communicate to you about God?
- What is God inviting you to as you listen?
- How do you feel led to respond to God right now?

[318] Michael Christensen, *Nouwen through a Wesleyan Lens Booklet* (San Diego, CA: 2019), 14.

Examen

The practice of praying the Examen is based on the work of St. Ignatius of Loyola. One of the key tenets of Ignatian spirituality is the belief that God is always near, we only have to learn to discern God's presence with us. Ignatius believed that it was the role of the people to increasingly learn to become aware of God in all things and at all times. The Examen generally is a five-step process, though many variations have been developed in the five hundred years it has been practiced.

Ignatius' original process is as follows:

I. Give thanks to God our Lord for the favors received.

II. Ask for grace to know my sins and to rid myself of them.

III. Reflect on the day from rising to the present examination, going over one hour after another, one period after another. Examine the thoughts first, followed by the words, and finally the deeds.

IV. Ask pardon of God our Lord for my faults.

V. Resolve to amend with the grace of God. Close with an *Our Father*.[319]

Below are two variations on the prayer of Examen that may be useful in a corporate worship setting and with a variety of age groups. Father Mark Thibodeaux, SJ, has written a book titled *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen*[320] filled with many different forms of the Examen which can be used to evoke different types of reflection and awareness. Thibodeaux uses an

[319] St. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis J. Puhl (Mansfield Centre, CT: Martino, 2010), 24.
[320] Mark E. Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen: Fresh Ways to Pray from Your Day* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, a Jesuit ministry, 2015).

alliteration beginning with the letter R as one guide for the practice: "Relish the good, Request the Spirit, Review the day, Repent from any wrongdoing, and Resolve to live well tomorrow."[321] The language of the questions and the prompts between each step of the prayer may be varied to fit the context of the congregation and the given moment. The common threads through each of these variations are gratitude, reflection over a suggested period, such as a day or a week, asking for forgiveness, and looking ahead. In a corporate worship setting, this prayer time would most likely be guided by a leader who prompts the praying assembly with a few phrases or questions as they move through the steps. Alternatively, the prompts could be displayed on a screen for participants to read. It may be concluded by the Lord's Prayer or another prayer.

The following is one outline of a prayer of Examen.

I. Awareness: Open the time of prayer by asking God to help you become aware of God's nearness throughout the day and presence with you now. Pray for the grace of understanding and awareness.

II. Gratitude: Give thanks for the ways God has provided for you today, whether they seem small or big.

III. Reflection: Review the day thus far, reflecting on each part of the day from the time you woke up. Perhaps divide the day into sections: early morning, from nine until noon, afternoon, and evening. What happened? How did you feel physically? How did you feel emotionally? Who did you interact with? When did you experience joy? What were your

[321] Thibodeaux, *Reimagining the Ignatian Examen*, 3.

strongest feelings? When did you experience frustration? When did God seem near? When did God seem distant?

IV. Forgiveness: Ask for forgiveness for any ways you may have fallen short of who God is calling you to be. Perhaps it was a time you lost your temper, said an unkind word, or chose not to care for someone in the way you sensed the Spirit nudging you. Confess those things to God.

V. Anticipation: Look ahead to the day that is to come with hope. What are you anticipating? What are you dreading? Ask God to be with you in those things and in whatever the day brings.

When using this outline in a congregational setting, the leader may begin by saying something like, "Dear God, we know you are here with us. Help us to become aware of your nearness throughout the previous day and presence with us now. Together, we pray for the grace of understanding and awareness.

God, we think back over the past day, and we give thanks for the ways you have provided for us, whether they seem small or big. [Pause.]

As we review the past day and the day thus far, we prayerfully reflect on each part of the day from the time we woke up." (*Perhaps divide the day into sections: early morning, from nine until noon, afternoon, and evening*.)

Proceed by asking guiding questions such as: "What happened? How did you feel physically? How did you feel emotionally? Who did you interact with? When did you experience

joy? What were your strongest feelings? When did you experience frustration? When did God seem near? When did God seem distant?" [Pause.]

After a pause, guide the congregation to the next step by saying, "Continue in prayer by asking for forgiveness for any ways you may have fallen short of who God is calling you to be. Perhaps it was a time you lost your temper, said an unkind word, or chose not to care for someone in the way you sensed the Spirit nudging you. Confess those things to God." [Pause.]

Finally, lead the congregation in the final step by saying something like, "Look ahead to the day that is to come with hope. What are you anticipating? What are you dreading? Ask God to be with you in those things and in whatever the day brings."

Conclude by drawing the minds and hearts of the congregation back together by praying something like, "God, we are grateful that you are always with us. Help us to be increasingly aware of your presence now and in the day to come. Be with those whose needs weigh heavily and those whose cup is overflowing with joy. In all these things, we give you thanks. Amen."

Another option is to pray over the past week as is outlined below.

I. Awareness: Ask God to give you God's eyes to see God's presence as you reflect on the past week and an openness to God's presence with you now.
II. Gratitude: Spend a few moments in gratitude, thanking God for some of the ways God provided for you this past week. What are some blessings, big or small, that come to mind? Give thanks.

III. Reflection: Ask God to help you think back over some of the important moments of this past week. Review each day since last Monday. What were the highlights? What were the low points? What were the consequences of each? When did you feel the most energized? When did you feel the most drained?

IV. Petition: Choose one specific event or concern from the week to pray about more specifically. Ask God for forgiveness, wisdom, insight, grace, or healing, whichever is appropriate.

V. Anticipation: Look ahead at the week that is to come as if looking over your calendar. How does it make you feel? What feels life-draining? What feels life-giving? Talk with God about these things. Are there changes or preparations that you can make? Ask God for wisdom and discernment as you begin the new week.

In a congregational setting where the pastor is leading the community in this prayer of Examen, it might sound like the following:

God, we pray that you would make us aware of your presence with us now and of the ways you have been with us throughout the week. We reflect on this past week and give you thanks for the blessings you have given us and the ways you have provided for us. Take a moment to express your gratitude to God. [Pause.]

As you pray, think over the past week beginning with Monday. What happened each day? What were the highlights? What were the low points? What were the consequences of each? When did you feel the most energized? When did you feel the most drained? [Pause.]

Choose one specific event or concern from the week to pray about more specifically. Ask God for forgiveness, wisdom, insight, grace, or healing, whichever is appropriate. [Pause.]

Look ahead at the week that is to come as if looking over your calendar. How does it make you feel? What feels life-draining? What feels life-giving? Talk with God about these things. Are there changes or preparations that you can make? Ask God for wisdom and discernment as you begin the new week.

God, we thank you for your presence with us today and all throughout the week. Continue to make us aware of your nearness and your grace that we may become bearers of your grace to the world.

For more Examen resources, including an oral prayer of Examen and an Examen journal page for kids, see Appendix B.

Breath Prayer

Breath prayer is a type of prayer that is highly accessible to all people at all times. Based on the idea from Genesis 2:7 that God breathed the breath of life into humans, breath prayers remind pray-ers that God is with us simply by inhaling and exhaling deeply and slowly. This has a significant physiological impact as slow, deep breathing has been shown to have significant mental and physical health benefits.[322] However, it is not just about lowering blood pressure and reducing stress. It is a means of becoming aware of God's presence with us.

[322] Tim Jewell, "Diaphragmatic Breathing and Its Benefits," Healthline (Healthline Media, September 25, 2018), https://www.healthline.com/health/diaphragmatic-breathing#whats-happening.

Breath prayer can be as simple as becoming aware of our breath with heart, mind, and body tuned toward God. It can also be beneficial to synchronize a word or a phrase to the timing of the inhale and the exhale. Often these words or phrases are taken from Psalms. For example, Psalm 23 can be prayed, "(*Inhale*) You are my shepherd. (*Exhale*) I lack nothing." Or, "(*Inhale*) You lead me beside quiet waters. (*Exhale*) You restore my soul." Psalm 98:1 may be prayed, "(*Inhale*) Help me sing a new song. (*Exhale*) You are doing marvelous things." Author Kayla Craig has included an entire section of breath prayers for all different occasions in her book, *To Light Their Way*.[323] The key is to repeat the words or phrases several times while inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply, becoming aware of God's presence and care.

In a corporate worship setting, a pastor or leader may offer the suggested phrases and guide the gathered assembly to inhale and exhale deeply as they pray the words internally while the leader voices them aloud several times. The leader may then allow for a few moments of silent breath prayer in which congregants continue to pray on their own while the voice of the leader becomes quiet. This practice can be relatively short and can be integrated at any point in the worship service. It is a practice that is easily translated into the everyday lives of congregants as they are driving, working, parenting, walking, playing, and otherwise engaging in their lives in the world.

For more breath prayers, see Appendix C.

Jesus Prayer

[323] Kayla Craig, *To Light Their Way: A Collection of Prayers and Liturgies for Parents* (Santa Rosa, CA: Tyndale Momentum, 2021).

The Jesus Prayer is a specific breath prayer that deserves its own attention and explanation. The story is told in *The Way of the Pilgrim*[324], that upon attending church, a Russian peasant hears that he should pray without ceasing and should pray in the Spirit on every possible occasion. He seeks out spiritual guides of all kinds to help him. Finally, the pilgrim meets an elder who teaches him the Jesus Prayer. The elder said, "The ceaseless Jesus Prayer is a continuous, uninterrupted call on the holy name of Jesus Christ with the lips, mind, and heart; and in the awareness of His abiding presence, it is a plea for His blessing in all undertakings, in all places, at all times, even in sleep." The words of the Prayer are: 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.'[325]

This prayer has taken on other variations which include: "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me," and "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner." In a corporate worship setting, it may be appropriate to replace the word "me" with the word "us" to indicate a collective plea for God's mercy. This prayer can be repeated several times in a row. When synchronized with the breath, the prayer may flow something like one of the following:

(*Inhale*) Jesus Christ, Son of God,

(*Exhale*) Have mercy on us.

Or

(*Inhale*) Lord Jesus Christ,

[324] Anonymous 19th Century Russian Peasant, *The Way of a Pilgrim and The Pilgrim Continues His Way*.
[325] Anonymous, *The Way of a Pilgrim*, 9.

(*Exhale*) Have mercy on us.

Or

(*Inhale*) Lord Jesus

(Exhale) Have mercy.

Imaginative Prayer

Imaginative prayer is rooted in the sixteenth and seventeenth century practices of St. Ignatius of Loyola and St. Francis de Sales. This practice, which is particularly suited for the Gospels, uses scripture to engage the senses and the mind, revealing God's word and insights to the contemplative. Ignatius was convinced that God can speak to us as surely through our God-given imaginations as through our thoughts and memories. St. Francis de Sales wrote many imaginative and guided prayers to help those whom he offered spiritual direction experience God's presence and discern God's leading. His imaginative prayers created scenarios that involved imagining a conversation with Jesus.

Imaginative prayers can be particularly beneficial in a gathered assembly as one guide leads the prayer, and the other participants pray with their imaginations. Having an audio guide for this prayer is particularly helpful. America Media has created a podcast called *Imagine* that guides participants through imaginative prayers using Gospel passages.[326]

[326] Tucker Redding, S.J. "The Baptism of Jesus." *Imagine.* Podcast audio. May 31, 2020. https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/the-baptism-of-jesus/id1514478151?i=1000476309443.

Below are examples of different types of imaginative prayers. Each should be read with long pauses between the paragraphs and questions to allow the imagination time and space to do its work.

Based on Mark 11:1-11

Inhale and Exhale.

It's time for the Passover celebration, a special time of feasting and worship. You've arrived in Jerusalem with your family. The sky is blue. The air is warm. The city is busy and bursting at the seams with people and animals. What do you see? What do you smell?

You hear people clamoring about Jesus coming. A crowd seems to be gathering on the sides of the road. What are the people saying? What are they doing?

Some people who have traveled with Jesus are walking with him. Who are they? What do they look like? You catch a glimpse of Jesus riding on a small donkey. What does he look like?

Jesus turns and looks directly at you. Your eyes make contact. What do you do? How do you feel?

The crowd continues to move with Jesus as he makes his way toward the temple. You find yourself going too. When he arrives at the temple, Jesus gets off his donkey and looks around. You notice one of his friends is holding the rope tied around the donkey's neck. Jesus makes his way down the steps from the temple and walks through the crowd toward you.

Jesus stops right in front of you.

What does Jesus say? What does Jesus do?

What do you say in response to Jesus?

How do you feel?

You conclude your time with Jesus, and he disappears into the crowd. What do you want to remember?

Based on Mathew 16:13-20

I'd like to invite you into a prayer practice with me. We're going to use our imaginations. Kids, if you'd like to draw or color what you imagine, you're welcome to do that. What words or images come to your mind? What do you hear? What do you see? What do you feel? There's not a specific formula for what you should think or how you should feel during this practice. It is simply an invitation to take some time to interact with Jesus. Close your eyes if you'd like. Get comfortable in your seat. Take a few deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly and deeply.

As you breathe, imagine yourself outside on a sunny day. You're walking on a dirt road and the dust is covering your feet. The ground next to the road is rocky with shrubs and clumps of grass sticking up through the ground. Nearby, a small river bubbles on its way to join up with the mighty Jordan river downstream. What does the air feel like? What does the sky look like? What do your feet feel like? What do you hear?

You realize that you're with your friends, people you know well and have been traveling with for a while now. You see Jesus's back just a few feet ahead of you as he

leads the group down the road. What does he look like? What is he like as he walks with you?

As you've walked, you've come to the edge of a place called Caesarea Philippi. You haven't been here before, so you look around carefully. There are stone monuments and carved signs for all kinds of things like colorful billboards announcing what you should value, what you should worship, what should be most important to you, how you should spend your time and your money. You look closely at each one. What do you see? What are they saying? Which ones stand out to you?

You notice a temple to the god Pan and lots of symbols of fertility and power and wealth.

How do you feel? Where have you seen signs like this before?

Jesus invites you all to sit on a big flat rock with him and the others. What do you notice?

Jesus interrupts your thoughts with a question, "Who do people say that I am?" You take a minute to think about who people say Jesus is.

You think about who the politicians say that Jesus is, your parents, your friends, people on social media…

Then, Jesus says your name. You look up and make eye contact with him. It seems like the others have wandered away without you noticing. It's just the two of you on the rock. He looks right into your eyes. What are his eyes like? How does it feel to make eye contact with Jesus? What does Jesus see when he looks at you?

"Who do you say that I am?" he asks, his voice soft yet strong, gentle yet powerful.

You know this question is for you and you, alone. You sit with it a moment. How do you feel? What is the first thing that comes to your mind?

How do you answer?

When you speak, how does Jesus respond?

What do you do next?

Take a deep breath, and then another one. Take another look around and at Jesus. Then, when you are ready, open your eyes.

Based on Isaiah 40:31-31

Close your eyes, if you'd like, and take a few deep breaths…

Imagine that you're walking on a dirt path with green fields on either side. It's a warm sunny day. Notice the hard-packed dirt between your feet and the blue sky above you.

You aren't carrying anything with you, and as you walk, you become somewhat hot and thirsty. As you continue on, you notice that your feet are getting tired…

Just ahead, you notice a sweet little house. It's well-kept and inviting. The path you're walking on seems to lead right up to the door. As you approach, you notice there's a man at the door. He calls out your name. He clearly knows you, and he says, "Come on in!" As you get closer, you see that it's Jesus. What does he look like? What is his voice like?

"Sit down. Make yourself comfortable and rest a minute," Jesus says. And so, you do. It's cool inside and the place you're sitting is very comfortable indeed. You find yourself really resting. Jesus brings you a refreshing drink. Take a big drink. What is it? How do you feel? What do you notice?

"How are you feeling?" Jesus asks. What do you say to him?

How does Jesus respond?

What else do you want to say to Jesus today?

What does Jesus offer you? Rest? Hope? Strength? Courage? Insight?

You put your drink down. It's time to go.

You hear these words:

You will find your hope in the LORD
your strength will be renewed.
You will soar on wings like eagles;
you will run and not grow weary,
you will walk and not be faint.
Amen.

It is intended that the outlines and descriptions of the six practices above would provide introductory material on six prayer practices that lend themselves to corporate worship settings. The explanations provided are in no way exhaustive. Extensive resources are available for further exploration of each of these practices. The second portion of this chapter will turn to exploring where these practices can fit in a corporate worship setting.

Where can they Fit?

There are five places that I have identified as natural places to integrate contemplative prayer. I will broadly discuss how prayer practices can be integrated in each of these places. The bounds of creativity are not limited to these suggestions. Rather these serve as jumping off points for the thoughtful integration of contemplative prayer practices. These places in the liturgy include as part of the song service, as part of the pastoral prayer, after the sermon, after communion, and as part of a high church liturgy.

There is not a one size fits all model for every church or even for every service in a given congregation. A pastor may find that her church responds well to the weekly rhythm of Lectio *Divina* or breath prayers. Alternatively, the sermon may lend itself to a time of imaginative prayer one week and a response of Audio *Divina* another week. Each of these practices are tools in the contemplative prayer tool belt and can be employed as seems fitting, based on context and personality preferences, for a robust and meaningful prayer life. Integrating each of these practices regularly and intentionally in corporate worship results in meaningful spiritual formation and discipleship. However, they do not all need to be employed every week in order to become effective means of spiritual formation and communion with God.

1. *As Part of the Pastoral Prayer*

Contemplative prayer practices can be utilized as a part of the pastoral prayer in a camp meeting or frontier revivalist model of Protestant worship commonly found in Evangelical and other Protestant traditions in the West. Integrating contemplative prayer practices as part of the

pastoral prayer has been a natural movement for our congregation. I began a slow on-ramp to increasing times of silence and reflection leading up to pastoral prayer by reading the Lectionary Psalm for the week and providing an extended pause. This naturally led to opportunity for Lectio *Divina*. Additionally, a worship song is often chosen specifically for the transition into pastoral prayer. Following that song, or in lieu of that song, Audio and or Visio *Divina* can be employed. During the pastoral prayer is also an excellent time to practice the prayer of Examen together, in which congregants are guided to pray through the movements of the Examen. Jesus Prayer or Breath Prayer can be employed at the beginning or end of the pastoral prayer.

In one example of the potential flow of the pastoral prayer, the pastor begins by inviting the congregation to quiet their hearts for a time of prayer. She begins by praying for the known needs of the congregation, the community, and the world. Then, she invites the congregants to explore the ways God was with them over the course of the past week by leading them in the prayer of Examen as described in the previous section. She then concludes by inviting the congregation to pray the Jesus Prayer out loud three times, replacing the final word "me" with "us" to fit the corporate setting. "Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on us."

In another example of the flow of the pastoral prayer, the pastor invites the gathered assembly to quiet their hearts in preparation for prayer. She begins by explaining the steps of Lectio *Divina* and then follows the steps of the Lectio *Divina* as outlined above, expanding the time for silence between each step as her congregation's familiarity with the practice grows over time. She follows the final step of Lectio *Divina* by praying for the needs of the congregation and the community.

In a third example, the pastor instructs the congregation on the purpose and practice of breath prayers. Each week, as she begins pastoral prayer, the pastor invites the gathered assembly to join her in a breath prayer repeated six to eight times, followed by a few quiet moments. The pastor chooses a phrase from the lectionary Psalm, or a couple of phrases that seem particularly relevant to the spirit of the congregation that week to use as a guide. Following the silence, the pastor continues by praying for the known needs of the congregation and community.

2. *Following the Sermon*

The conclusion of the sermon is an opportune time for contemplative prayer practices in the corporate worship setting. It is a pastor's desire that the hearts of the gathered assembly would have been stirred by the Scriptures. Contemplative prayer following the sermon allows the Spirit time and space to continue to move and speak. It also allows the assembly time to respond, rather than falling into the temptation to move on too quickly. This provides opportunity for the truth of the Word to sink more deeply, evoke a faithful response, or stir a conversation with God for which there is space in such a setting.

At the end of a sermon, pastors frequently take a few moments to pray. This can be an opportunity to pause, to contemplate, to reflect, and to commune with God rather than to quickly move to the next element of the liturgy.

Following many sermons, particularly those around scripture with vivid interactions with Jesus or Old Testament scenes between God and creation, the gathered assembly may be primed

for a time of imaginative prayer. In imaginative prayer, as described previously, the participants are invited to see themselves in the story, exploring the multi-sensory experience in their minds, and opening themselves to have a conversation with Jesus, or to receive the words God might be speaking to them. The words, “Let’s pray” can be followed with a few instructions and then a guided Imaginative Prayer.

In another setting, an appropriate response to the sermon may be Audio *Divina*, in which listening to a song of reflection, with or without lyrics, may be a most fitting prayerful response.

On another occasion, a few words or phrases from the Scripture passage may lend themselves to a breath prayer. Guided by a leader, the gathered assembly can participate in the breath prayer together and then consciously or subconsciously carry that breath prayer out of the assembly and into their lives in the world.

3. *Following Eucharist*

In many worship services, Eucharist is near the end of the service as a response to the other elements of the liturgy. As participants partake of the elements, this can be an appropriate place to incorporate contemplative prayer. In fact, it is the one place many churches may have an “accidental" contemplative moment in which there is an extended period of silence or space for quiet reflection as people are served. Rather than filling the space with a song of response led by a worship team or quickly moving to the benediction, there may be other ways to use the time prayerfully, allowing space for the senses stirred by the Eucharistic elements to come fully alive in the mind and body.

Perhaps between the Eucharist and the benediction, the congregation may be invited to participate in several repetitions of the Jesus Prayer together. Alternatively, as the pastor prepares to send the congregation out into the world, there may be an appropriate time to pause to absorb and reflect on all that has transpired in corporate worship by engaging in silence or another contemplative prayer practice prior to the benediction. If music is utilized during this period, perhaps it can be chosen and framed with the intent of fostering Audio *Divina*, rather than a heightened emotions or energy.

4. *As a Part of the Song Service*

In many contemporary worship settings, the call to worship is followed by greetings and announcements, which is followed by more songs. It may be appropriate to create thoughtful space in this portion of the service for contemplative prayer, perhaps in the form of Visio *Divina*, an image to reflect on, even while singing or listening to music, inviting the congregation to participate in the Jesus Prayer or another breath prayer before moving onto another song, or inviting the gathered assembly to pause and pray through the movements of the Examen together as a means of reflecting on the week, seeking areas of confession, and looking ahead at what is to come, before moving on quickly to other songs.

In one example, the congregation may begin with a call to worship, followed by a welcome and passing of the peace. As the congregants return to their seat, the leader may invite them into several moments of breath prayer or guide the assembly through the Examen.

In another example, after a song or two, the congregation may be provided with art or an image to reflect on while listening to instrumental music.

A third option is to lead the gathered assembly through a time of imaginative prayer using the gospel text for the day or using a simple narrative as outlined above.

5. *As a part of a high church liturgy*

In a more liturgical setting, prayer time may include reciting creeds, praying a Psalm, a time of silence, participating in Prayers of the People, and praying the Confession, the Absolution, and the Peace. There are already many types of prayer represented in such a liturgy, providing a rich soil for spiritual formation. However, in this rhythm, it is logical to integrate a contemplative prayer practice by expanding one or more of the prayer practices already present. Silence, certainly, is a contemplative prayer practice. Praying the Psalm can be expanded into the practice of Lectio *Divina*. Prior to the Confession, it may be helpful to spend a few moments praying Examen. Alternatively, the Jesus Prayer can be integrated following the Confession. A breath prayer may be used to mark the beginning of the service.

Considerations in the Planning Process

The issue at hand is ensuring the full breadth of the prayer life is nurtured in order to develop the spiritual muscles for communion with God and discernment of the Spirit. In this light, it is also important to note that as some things expand, other elements of the liturgy may need to shrink. A twenty-five-minute sermon may need to be reduced to eighteen minutes. Five songs may need to become four. Exposition by a worship leader may need to shift to the thoughtful use of silence or breath prayer.

Different types of Christian worship services emphasize different elements of the liturgy as the highest priority. In an Anglican mass, Eucharist is the pinnacle of worship, while in a Presbyterian service the sermon is the most important element. In a Baptist revival service, the altar call is the most important part of the service. Alternatively, in a charismatic worship service, music is of the highest importance.[327] Fundamentally, as Constance Cherry, the author of *The Worship Architect* writes, "If all the ideas about worship today can't be translated into real plans for dialoguing with God, what good are they?"[328] Cherry identifies that as God's very nature is relational, so too is worship, which is initiated by God.

Worship is diological in nature, a three-way liturgical dialogue in relationship with God and with one another. In that sense, the role of the worship architect is to facilitate space for the back-and-forth relational dialogue between God and people, people and God, people and one another.[329] As exemplified in scripture and throughout history, Cherry explains that God employs a conversation built on revelation and response. This is happening on a grand scale in Scripture and in corporate worship, but it is also taking place on a micro scale of inner dialogue in which God is revealing Godself and inviting God's people to respond. The work of the pastor is to facilitate through the fundamental movements of gathering, Word, Table, and sending an internal dialogue of revelation and response between God and people. Each element of worship should be giving space for this movement.[330] Contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship feed right into this revelation and response movement.

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[327] Sandra Maria van Opstal, *The Next Worship: Glorifying God in a Diverse World* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2016), 133.
[328] Constance M. Cherry, *The Worship Architect: A Blueprint for Designing Culturally Relevant and Biblically Faithful Services* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2021), Loc 140.
[329] Constance Cherry and Steve Zank, "Book: The Worship Architect," Theology in Motion (YouTube, February 5, 2021), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eNklG7XYJbY.
[330] Constance Cherry and Steve Zank, "Book: The Worship Architect," Theology in Motion.

In considering how one might integrate contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship, it is helpful to begin with the places that seem most natural in the existing liturgy. When introducing something new, it is helpful to avoid changing everything at once. Where is prayer already taking place? Where are there natural opportunities for dialogue with God? When is the gathered assembly most naturally postured for such a practice?

A second consideration is to explore the small shifts that can be taken toward contemplative prayer practices. Before I introduced Lectio *Divina* to my congregation, I realized that we were not regularly reading the Psalms. I began reading the lectionary Psalm every week at the beginning of our pastoral prayer time. I framed it not as a transition to prayer, but rather, as the beginning of our prayer with language like, "As we begin our prayer time together, would you join me as we pray with the Psalmist in Psalm 41. When the text and the order of service allowed, I began leading my people through Lectio *Divina* using the lectionary Psalm at the beginning of the pastoral prayer. It was a subtle move into an ever-deepening understanding of this particular contemplative prayer practice.

Likewise, there is a significant revelation and response movement that takes place around the Eucharist. In my congregational setting, we typically respond with a song following receiving the Eucharist. However, it is a small shift to invite the gathered assembly instead into the practice of Audio *Divina* by inviting them to quietly listen to a song or musical piece, rather than a more common practice of singing along with a song that may tend toward heart-warming and familiar. I pose a few of the Audio *Divina* questions articulated above as I invite the congregation to listen. This allows for a different type of revelation and response movement in

which there is quiet space for communion with God, rather than the temptation to rush to the next item on the agenda.

A third consideration when integrating contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship is which of these practices resonates with the leader? I would encourage leaders to begin with practices that stir their own heart, that feel most natural to them and their congregational setting. Pastors and leaders should not be discouraged if it feels a bit bumpy as they introduce a new practice. The key is trying again when the time seems right, honing the way the practices are facilitated and facilitated to allow for a rich experience within a given context.

A fourth consideration is the instructions or background information people in the congregation need. Will it be helpful if they see the prayer practice printed as well as hear it? Will they want to have something to take home with them? Is it helpful for them to know a sentence or two about St. Ignatius prior to beginning, or is it enough to simply guide them through a prayer of Examen during the pastoral prayer? When introducing the Jesus Prayer, what information about breath prayers and the Russian Peasant will make the experience most meaningful?

In addition, do the youngest worshipers in the congregation need special instructions in order to set the stage? I often do this specifically for Imaginative Prayer, as well as when the silence in our practices lengthen. It is helpful for kids and adults alike to know what to expect and how they can participate. I might use words like, “We are going to participate in Imaginative Prayer together. We believe that God created our imaginations and can use them to speak to us. Kids, your imaginations are great. I would like to invite you to listen as I speak and let your imaginations do their best work. You might imagine pictures or a conversation. There will be

times of silence. That is me giving space for God and your imagination to do their work. You might want to draw or write or hold the squishy stress ball as you listen and imagine. If you want to tell or show me what you imagined at the end of the service, I would love to hear and see it."

The final consideration for pastors when exploring how to integrate contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship is naming the primary goals. Questions for consideration include: How will you know these practices are taking root in the life of your community and shaping their lives with God? Prayer lives often do not have tangible measures. Perhaps it is at first enough to know that a congregation's vocabulary and understanding around prayer are expanding, even if they do not seem to be exuberant participants. The first thing a pastor should consider is how these practices are shaping their own life as a leader, as a pastor, and as a member of their local community. The continued formation of their own life with God will have an impact on their congregation.

There are some other anecdotal things I look for in my context. Are my people talking about these practices? Statements like, "I've begun praying the Jesus Prayer several times over my baby as I shush her to sleep," and "I sense God's presence during Audio *Divina*, what music might you suggest for me while I sit with my sister in her hospital room?" tell me that these practices are not just things that we do when we are together at church, but have real, practical applications in our daily lives. When my people are asking for resources they can share with others, telling me how they revisited an Imaginative Prayer on their own time, or turning to their own breath prayers in times of stress, I feel confident that their lives with God are becoming more multi-dimensional and deeper. Finally, I pay close attention to how the kids in our congregation are engaging. They are sometimes a more transparent study on how things are

sinking in and what is resonating. When parents are sharing pictures of their kids' Imaginative Prayer drawings or anecdotes about their responses to the prayer of Examen, I consider that to be an indication that we are laying solid groundwork.

Sample Worship Service Outlines

There are many different worship liturgies among Protestant churches. This section outlines some examples of different worship services and where contemplative prayer might fit within the natural flow of the service. These are intended as examples that provide a starting point and are in no way intended to be prescriptive, nor are they all-inclusive for every service or church within a given tradition. In these outlines, the contemplative prayer practice is written in bold font for ease of reading.

Presbyterian Church[331]

Gathering around the Word

Prelude

Introit :: "Know That God Loves You"

Doxology (congregation is invited to hum)

Call to Worship

> Leader: This is the day the Lord has made.
> All: Let us rejoice and be glad in it.
> Leader: May we bring our minds, hearts, and souls to this service.
> All: We seek the Spirit's transformation.
> Leader: God's steadfast love endures forever.
> All: Thanks be to God!

[331] "Fourth Church Bulletins 2021," Fourth Church, September 5, 2021, https://www.fourthchurch.org/bulletins/2021/090521b.pdf.

Hymn “This is My Father’s World”

Welcome and Announcements

Anthem :: “The Lord Is My Shepherd”

Listening for the Word

Prayer for Illumination

Psalter Psalm 138

> **Lectio *Divina* Psalm 138:1-3** ***(Note: The entirety of Psalm 138 may be a little too long for Lectio Divina. The pastor can read the entire Psalm as the first reading or simply choose to focus on verses one through three for this service.)***

Gloria Patri

Scripture Lesson Genesis 3:1–13 Sermon :: “Normal Never Was, God Always Is”

Responding to the Word

Anthem :: “Teach Me, O Lord”

*Affirmation of Faith (unison) . . . . . from A Brief Statement of Faith

(pcusa)

Prayers of the People

The Lord’s Prayer (unison)

Call to Offering

Prayer of Dedication (unison)

Bearing the Word into the World

Hymn “Come, Labor On”

Charge and Benediction

Postlude

Anglican Church

Beforehand/Prelude

The Gathering

- Hymn / Introit
- Greeting Prayer of Preparation
- Prayer of Penance
- Gloria in Excelsis
- Collect

Liturgy of the Word

- First reading
- Psalm / canticle
- Second reading
- Response
- Gospel acclamation
- Gospel
- Sermon
- Creed
- Prayers of Intercession

Liturgy of the Sacrament

- The Peace
- Preparation of the table

Gifts

Eucharistic Prayer

Holy Holy

Acclamation

Doxology

The Lord's Prayer

Breaking bread

Giving communion

Audio *Divina* (Note: In this worship sequence, many prayers have been said and a significant amount of scripture has been read. Any one of these could be shifted to a more contemplative prayer practice. However, it may be helpful in a service such as this one to spend a few moments in quiet listening reflection. A piece of instrumental music and a word of instruction from the priest could create space for a contemplative prayer practice that fits naturally in the flow of this service.

Prayer after communion

Dismissal

Afterwards / Postlude

Baptist Church[332]

Call to Worship – *Psalm 95:1-6 (ESV)*

Sing: Lion and the Lamb

Welcome, Scripture, and Prayer

Breath Prayer (Note: This service format typically caters to just a few minutes of extemporaneous prayer. A simple integration of contemplative prayer would be to use a couple of lines from the scripture that has just been read to shape a breath prayer that is repeated six to eight times at the beginning of the prayer or the end. Assuming read here is the sermon text listed below, the breath prayer could be as follows:

[332] "Worship Bulletin," First Baptist Church of Tallahassee, August 29, 2021, https://fbctlh.org/resources/bulletin/.

(Inhale) **Love comes from God**
(Exhale) **God loves us**

or

(Inhale) **God loves us**
(Exhale) **Let us love one another**

Sing: Our God Saves

Sing: The Lord Is My Salvation

Sing: Living Hope

Sermon — "In This Is Love" 1 John 4:7-11

Sing: *How Deep the Father's Love For Us*

Special Recognition

Benediction

Nazarene Church ~ Advent Lectionary Year C, Four Week Series

First Sunday in Advent -- Hope

Call to Worship

Worship through Passing the Peace

Worship through Song

Worship though Lighting the Advent Candle, Reading 1

Leader: This morning, we light a candle. The light of the single flame is a reminder to us of the in-breaking hope that flickers in the darkness of our world.

Congregation: We have hope in the midst of the darkness.

Leader: We remember the hope that is all around us, and in us through Immanuel, God with us.

Congregation: We have hope that God is with us.

Leader: We light this candle in remembrance of the Christ who came, but also with a hopeful expectation of the return of Christ when all things will be made right.

Congregation: We look ahead in hope for Christ's return.

Leader: We light this candle in the sanctuary, yet we know that the light is not meant to be kept here in this place, but that the hope of Christ is for the world around us as well.

Congregation: May we bring hope to the world around us through our works of justice, peace, and love.

All: May the light of hope that we light here, be ignited in our hearts and carried throughout the world around us. Amen

Breath Prayer

***(Inhale)* May the light of hope**
***(Exhale)* Be ignited in our hearts**

Worship through Prayer

Psalm 25:1-10

Visio *Divina* option[333]

Worship through Giving

Worship through Hearing God's Word

Luke 21:25-36

[333] *Visio Divina* "Starry Night" by Vincent Van Gogh: In response to lighting the first Advent Candle, the candle of peace, let us take a few moments for *Visio Divina*, or sacred gazing. As you look at this image, what captures your attention? What emotions are stirred in you? What might God be saying to you today? We would then continue in prayer by reading the passage from Psalm 25 and praying for the needs of the community.

As we close our sermon today, I would like to invite us into a practice of Examen. This is a practice attributed to St. Ignatius of Loyola who believed that God is always with us, we need only become increasingly aware of God's presence. This practice has been helping Christians do that for 500 years. When we are presented with a difficult text such as this one, it is important to allow space for it to confront us personally and for the Spirit to help us become aware of God's nearness even now.

1. Awareness: God help us to become aware of your presence with us now and aware of the ways you have been with us this week.
2. Gratitude: Give thanks for the blessings God has given you, whether seemingly big or small.
3. Reflection: Reflect over the past week. When were you tempted to despair or become overwhelmed with anxiety over the events in your life and the world? What was your response? When did you experience hope of the resurrection? How did that impact your thoughts and actions?
4. Forgiveness: Ask God for forgiveness for the times you chose despair over hope, putting your trust, identity, and hope in the empires and powers of this world.
5. Anticipation: As you look ahead to the day and the week that is to come, how might you be a bearer of God's hope in the world right now? Ask God to help you and equip you for what is to come.

Worship through Receiving Eucharist

Worship through Sending & Benediction

Second Sunday in Advent -- Peace

Call to Worship

Worship through Passing the Peace

Worship through Song

Worship though Lighting the Advent Candle, Reading 2

> **Leader: Today we light the candle of peace, not as a denial of the places in our world and lives that lack peace, but as a reminder of our call to peace even in the midst of it.**
>
> Congregation: May the light of peace be a reminder to seek peace in our hearts, lives, and the world.
>
> **Leader: We know that the path toward peace isn't easy. The path toward peace isn't smooth. The path toward peace is risky, takes courage, and challenges the broken realities of the world.**
>
> Congregation: May we learn to be courageous peacemakers in our world.
>
> **Leader: For peace to come, we must get to the hard work of aligning a world made crooked by sin with the straight paths of the kingdom of God. For peace to come, there is creative work that makes valleys of despair into mountaintops of hope. For peace to come, there is repetitive work that sands away injustice to bring about the smoothness of equity. Without the work, without the challenge, and without upsetting the status quo, peace will not come.**
>
> Congregation: We join the Holy Spirit in actively seeking peace in the world around us.
>
> **Leader: We remember that Christ came as the Prince of Peace, but we also long for the day that Christ will return, and we will see the fulfillment of true peace in the world around us.**
>
> **All: May the promise of peace ignite us to action, that the world around us may truly know the peace of Christ. Amen**

Breath Prayer

(Inhale) **May the promise of peace**
(Exhale) **Ignite us to action**

Worship through Prayer

Luke 1:68-79

Worship through Giving

Worship through Hearing God's Word

Luke 3:1-6

As we close our sermon today, we're going to participate in the prayer practice of Audio *Divina, or sacred listening. As you listen, I invite you to pay attention to what is stirred within you. What words or phrases stand out to you? What might the Spirit be inviting you to hold onto?*

- Zechariah's Song by Ordinary Time[334]
- Hope by The Brilliance[335]

Worship through Receiving Eucharist

Worship through Sending & Benediction

Third Sunday in Advent -- Joy

[334] Ben Keyes, Peter La Grand, and Jill McFadden, "Zechariah's Song, by Ordinary Time," Ordinary Time (Ordinary Time, December 31, 2016), https://music.ordinarytimemusic.com/track/zechariahs-song.
[335] David Gungor and John Arndt, "Hope," YouTube (The Brilliance, January 28, 2015), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ULyroZQPJuk.

Call to Worship

Worship through Passing the Peace

Worship through Song

Worship though Lighting the Advent Candle, Reading 3

Leader: This morning we light the candle of joy. Joy is deep and abiding, rich and rewarding. Joy is a well that does not run dry when trouble comes.

Congregation: We seek joy in our lives, and to share joy with those around us.

Leader: The siren song of our culture is consumption. Consume more, and you will be fulfilled. Consume more, and you will be happy. Consume more, and you will have worth. When we allow ourselves to be entranced by this song, we will never find true joy.

Congregation: May we find contentment in what we have, and view others as God's beloved that we might know true joy.

Leader: Joy is found not in consuming more, but rather in a transformed life. This new life is a life of generosity, compassion, and care for those around us.

Congregation: May we feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and have compassion on all that we might know true joy.

Leader: We are invited into this new way of doing so we can become people of joy. This doing involves sharing, giving, respecting, honoring, and caring for people around us. Joy comes when we hold what we have lightly—our possessions, our positions, our finances—so we can give freely. Joy comes in truly showing love to the other.

All: May the light of joy consume our hearts as we allow Christ to transform us into generous people of joy. Amen

Breath Prayer

***(Inhale)* May the light of joy**

***(Exhale)* Compel us to generosity**

Worship through Prayer

Isaiah 12:2-6

Worship through Giving

Worship through Hearing God's Word

Luke 3:7-18

We are going to close today by participating in an imaginative prayer. We believe that God created our imaginations and can use them to communicate with us. This is a practice that Christians have engaged in since the days of St. Ignatius 500 years ago. Kids, you might want to write or draw as you imagine. If you capture something that you'd like to share with me, I would love to see it at the end of the service. Today, we are going to imagine that we have been invited into this particular scene in Scripture. What might God have to say to us today? What might God be inviting us into?

Sit up and take a few deep breaths, inhaling and exhaling slowly.

Imagine yourself on a dusty path, in the middle of a large crowd. You're headed out of town on your way to the wilderness. There's a trail of people ahead of you and a trail of people behind you. You've heard there's a man preaching in the wilderness who has some wild and life-changing things to say. You are curious, so you follow too.

Notice how you feel as you walk. What are you wondering?

You hear the preaching before you can even see the preacher.

"Brood of snakes! What do you think you're doing slithering down here to the river? Do you think a little water on your snakeskins is going to deflect God's judgment? It's your life that must change, not your skin... What counts is your life. Is it green and flourishing? Because if it's deadwood, it goes on the fire."[336]

How do those words make you feel?

You move closer to get a look at the preacher. What do you notice about him?

Someone from the crowd asks him and others seem to wonder the same, *"Then what are we supposed to do?"*

"If you have two coats, give one away," he said. "Do the same with your food."

Tax men also came to be baptized and said, "Teacher, what should we do?"

He told them, "No more extortion—collect only what is required by law."

Soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He told them, "No harassment, no blackmail—and be content with your rations."

What do these questions and answers stir in you?

"I'm baptizing you here in the river. The main character in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will ignite the kingdom life, a fire, the Holy Spirit within you, changing you from the inside out. He's going to clean house—make a clean sweep of your lives. He'll place everything true in its proper place before God; everything false he'll put out with the trash to be burned."

[336] Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2004). The italicized text from this imaginative prayer is found in Luke 3:7-18 from *The Message*.

Suddenly you notice someone standing near you. You realize it is Jesus. He has obviously been watching the whole scene play out.

"And what question do you want to ask?" Jesus asks you ever so gently. How do you respond?

When you ask your own question, how does Jesus respond to you?

What are you still wondering? What does Jesus say to you in response?

Go, and be at peace, child of God." Jesus says as he slips into the crowd.

Amen.

Worship through Receiving Eucharist

Worship through Sending & Benediction

Fourth Sunday in Advent -- Love

Call to Worship

Worship through Passing the Peace

Worship through Song

Worship though Lighting the Advent Candle, Reading 4

Leader: We light the candle of love as we reflect on the words "for God so loved the world, that He sent his one and only son."

Congregation: We remember the faithful love of God.

Leader: We remember Mary's song this morning, and how through song, she reflects on and responds to her love for God and God's work in the world, and what her present experience will do through history. It

Congregation: With Mary we reflect on the faithfulness of God throughout history to care for the people of God.

Leader: We reflect on the truth that Zechariah was silenced while a humble virgin teenager is allowed to sing. It upsets the normal systems and elevates the voice of a peasant girl. This is a reminder to us, that the kingdom of God looks different than the systems of the world.

Congregation: May we live lives that reflect the kingdom of God, where the voices of the oppressed are elevated, while those in power are humbled.

Leader: We are guided on a journey of searching out the places where God is at work in unusual ways. We open our ears to listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit in unexpected places.

Congregation: May we faithfully set aside our preconceived ideas and judgments to truly hear the voice of God in the world.

Leader: With the love of God in our hearts, may we work to see the love of God at work in the world. A love that embraces all people regardless of background, race, ethnicity, gender, or any other category that we place upon others.

All: May we remember the love that God is extending to all, and live out that love to the world around us, especially to those so often overlooked by the world. Amen

Breath Prayer

***(Inhale)* May the love we freely receive**
***(Exhale)* Flow freely to the world around us**

Worship through Prayer

Visio *Divina*: As you listen to Mary's Song from Luke 1:46b-55, reflect the image on the screen. What captures your attention? What emotions are stirred within you? What questions arise? Where might you find yourself in this image? How might God be inviting you to respond today? (NOTE: This Visio *Divina* Practice could also be used following the sermon)

One of the following pieces of art would be appropriate for this reflection:

- Mary Visits Elizabeth by Steve Gamba
- Jump for Joy - Mary and Elizabeth by Corby Eisbacher
- Jesus Hears Mary's Song by Mike Moyers (2018)

Worship through Giving

Worship through Hearing God's Word

Luke 1:29-45, (46-55)

Worship through Receiving Eucharist

Worship through Sending & Benediction

Nazarene Church ~ Good Friday Tenebrae Service

A Good Friday Tenebrae service is an example of a corporate worship service that combines aspects of Audio, Visio, and Lectio *Divina* for a multi-sensory sacred worship experience. In the case of a Tenebrae service, the Audio *Divina* is contemplative music played or sung while candles are slowly being extinguished. The Visio *Divina* element is the extinguishing of the candles and the ever-darkening sanctuary. The Lectio *Divina* is the reading of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' arrest, trial, and crucifixion. Following each scripture reading, one or two candles are extinguished while music plays. Then, the next portion of scripture is read, followed

by the extinguishing of more candles until following the final scripture reading, the Christ candle is extinguished and the congregation leaves in the dark.

Good Friday Tenebrae Service
Order of Service

The service of Tenebrae or "shadows" grew out of a combination of night prayer and early-morning prayer with focus upon the commemoration of Christ's death. The most striking feature of this service is the gradual extinguishing of the lights and candles in the room and on the altar. The black candles represent the apostles and all the followers of Christ, and the white candle represents Christ. The dramatic high point occurs with complete darkness in the sanctuary after the Christ candle is extinguished.

Order of Worship

Welcome

Hymn: *At Calvary #236*

Leader: And this is the judgment, that the light has come into the world, and men and women loved darkness rather than light.

People: **God is light, in whom there is no darkness at all.**

Leader: For God sent the Son into the world, not to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.

People: **Everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light.**

Leader: Come, let us worship in spirit and in truth.

Hymn: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross #239*

In the Garden[337]
1. Peter's Affirmation Matthew 26:30-35
2. Praying with the Disciples Matthew 26:36-46
3. Judas' Betrayal Matthew 26:47-50
4. Speaking to the Multitudes Matthew 26:55-56

The Trial
5. Before the High Priest Matthew 26:59-68
6. Peter's Denial Matthew 26:69-70
7. Before Pilate John 18:28-38

Rejection and Mockery
8. Crowds Choose Barabbas Matthew 27:15-23
9. Mockery of Jesus Mark 15:16-20

The Crucifixion
10. Events at Calvary Luke 23:32-34
11. The Malefactor Luke 23:39-43
12. Cruelty of Crown Matthew 27:39-44

13. Jesus' Death Matthew 27:45-50
14. Aftermath Luke 23:44-48
The Christ candle is extinguished

After the last word from the cross is spoken, the lighted Christ candle will be extinguished, symbolizing the burial of the Light of the World. With Christ dead, there is nothing more to be said until Easter morning, when He becomes alive forevermore. After the Christ Candle is extinguished, the congregation is encouraged to sit in silence as long as they

[337] Between each scripture reading, one or more candles are extinguished, depending on how many candles have been lit. While the candles are extinguished, music can be played or sung. We typically play *Membra Jesu Nostri* performed by the Netherlands Bach Society (*Membra Jesu Nostri*, n.d.). As the person extinguishing the candles moves from view, the music slowly fades away and the reading begins again. Alternatively, someone may sing movements of Felix Mendelssohn's Kyrie Eleison.

would like, then leave the sanctuary silently and as quietly as possible, without any announcement or benediction.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined six prayer practices that can be integrated into corporate worship in order to deepen the worship experience and equip the gathered assembly with contemplative prayer practices that can shape their daily lives and communion with God. Further, this chapter has identified where and how these practices can be integrated into worship services across Protestant traditions. While this chapter is not exhaustive in its description of the discussed practices or the ways they can be applied in corporate worship, it provides a springboard for application in a variety of corporate worship settings.

These are the practices I have introduced in my local congregation in response to the problem I outlined in chapter one, which is that most people sitting in church pews today have little idea how to pray or experience communication with God beyond the petitionary prayers they see modeled by pastors and church leaders. I have found these to be practical and well-received by my multicultural and intergenerational congregation. Additionally, the anecdotal evidence provided by my local church community has indicated that these practices are playing a significant role in the spiritual formation of individuals and families from my congregation, both within the gathered assembly and in their own lives. I trust that these practices which have endured through hundreds of years and in many different settings will

flourish and contribute to the flourishing of God's people in any number of contexts today and in the generations to come.

CHAPTER 5

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

This dissertation has made a case for contemplative prayer in corporate worship, particularly among Protestant Evangelical churches that were shaped by the Frontier-Revivalist style. It has outlined six contemplative prayer practices that are rooted in the historical Christian tradition and easily lend themselves to corporate worship. It has further outlined how these might be integrated into a corporate worship service. By integrating these six practices into corporate worship, pastors and leaders expand the breadth and depth of the Christian worship experience, while also equipping the gathered assembly with the tools to listen for and discern the voice of God in their daily lives. Each of these practices is significant in their own right, as well as serving as on ramps to other contemplative prayer practices within the Christian tradition.

However, there are several aspects of the integration of contemplative prayer practices that this dissertation does not explore. The limitations of this dissertation include the role of contemplative prayer practices among African Americans and the African Diaspora, in multicultural settings that are primarily non-Western in nature, or in age-specific settings for children and youth. Each of these categories could be a dissertation in their own right.

Barbara Holmes points to the role of dance, drumbeats, the mourners' bench, baptism, ecstatic singing, and praying in the closet or as groups in pews or homes as she articulates the contemplative religious experience of the African American tradition. Holmes writes, "African American contemplative practices are hidden in plain sight. They are enfolded in familiar worship practices from the mourner's bench to the baptismal font, from the church shut-ins to

public sit-ins; each of the practices."[338] According to Holmes, "Amid the hums and foot cadences there would be an entry into joy unspeakable. Sometimes it would come in the holy dance or the rhythm of the proclaimed word. Always there was a shared sense of transformation. There was also a sense of awe and expectation."[339] For example, in a song that repeats the phrase "Oh, oh, oh, Jesus," the "ohs" are repeated until every participant remembers a time when they cried out for God's intervention. Holmes writes, "A deep listening abides between every note and stanza. Those who listen know that the Holy Spirit is in control."[340]

The contemplative practices that Holmes describes, as well as the cultural context in which they are embedded, has significant value to the church and deserves thoughtful attention from academic circles and practitioners, me included. As a pastor to immigrants from Cameroon to New Zealand and as a district leader to immigrants from Zambia, Tanzania, and Sudan, it will be helpful for me to explore how these contemplative practices resonate within these cultures and correlate with the contemplative prayer practices discussed at length in this dissertation. However, these concepts are not explored further here.

The limitations of this dissertation also mean it does not explore the integration of contemplative prayer practices within age-specific ministries such as ministries with children and youth. However, as mentioned in chapter three, there are strong voices around the contemplative nature of spiritual formation in children. In addition to Jerome Berryman and Rebecca Nye who are discussed in chapter three, there are many others who are exploring the role of contemplative practices, particularly contemplative prayer practices, in the spiritual formation of children. A

[338] Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 75.
[339] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 74.
[340] Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*, 84.

2021 release from The Foundry Publishing is a devotional for kids called *My Life with Jesus*, which includes a guide for Lectio *Divina*[341]. In addition, resources such as *Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry: A Guide to Transforming Your Students' Spiritual Lives into Journey, Adventure, and Encounter*[342] and *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation*[343]. However, there are few resources that provide a prayer of Examen or other practices for kids or youth. See Appendix B for the versions I have created for use in my family and local church community. Contemplative prayer practices can be fostered in the youngest members of the Christian community and nurtured through adulthood. There is no need to wait until someone has arrived at a certain age or stage of faith development to begin offering a variety of ways of listening for and communicating with God. Further study and exploration around the regular use of contemplative prayer practices with children and youth would be beneficial to the broader church community.

The other limitations around this dissertation are related to the types of practices included. The six practices explored in this project naturally lend themselves to group settings, are simple to introduce, and require few supplies or constraints. However, they are in no way exhaustive. Rather, they are more like dipping one's toes in the flowing stream of contemplative prayer. There are many other practices that are deeply meaningful to the spiritual life and should not be neglected when exploring the breadth and depth of contemplative prayer. These practices

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[341] James Abbott et al., *My Life with Jesus: 365 Devotions for Kids* (Kansas City, MO: The Foundry Kids, 2021).
[342] Jeannie Oestreicher and Larry Warner, *Imaginative Prayer for Youth Ministry* (El Cajon, CA: Youth Specialties, 2006).
[343] Jared Patrick Boyd, *Imaginative Prayer: A Yearlong Guide for Your Child's Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, an imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2017).

include but are not limited to silence and solitude, centering prayer, journaling prayer, praying in nature, and creating art as prayer.

Silence and Solitude

Silence and solitude are often viewed as the foundational building blocks of contemplative prayer. Yet, in twenty-first century culture, most peoples' aptitude for silence and solitude is greatly diminished. The capacity for these practices must be developed over time, much like the development of muscles that have experienced significant atrophy. The prayer practices outlined in chapter four lend themselves to the development of expanded capacity for silence and solitude. However, these practices should be nurtured in their own right.

Richard Foster writes, "Inward solitude has outward manifestations. There is the freedom to be alone, not in order to be away from people but in order to hear the divine Whisper better."[344] Likewise, Thomas Merton observes that the practice of silence and solitude have a direct impact on our relationships with others. Merton writes, "It is in deep solitude that I find the gentleness with which I can truly love my brothers. The more solitary I am, the more affection I have for them. It is pure affection, and filled with reverence for the solitude of others. Solitude and silence teach me to love my brothers for what they are, not for what they say."[345] This aligns closely with the Wesleyan perspective which maintains that contemplative prayer practices foster communion with God which in turn shapes our lives in the world. We hold to the tenet that

[344] Foster, *Celebration of Discipline,* 97.
[345] Thomas Merton, *The Sign of Jonas* (San Diego, CA: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002), 280.

holiness of heart and life is a genuine love of God and neighbor. As such, solitude that teaches us to love our brothers and sisters is a practice that orients us toward holiness.

Centering Prayer

Centering prayer is a contemplative prayer practice that can foster significant depth and spiritual awareness, increasing one's capacity for silence and solitude. Thomas Keating and Cynthia Bourgeault are two of the leading voices on the practice of centering prayer. Thomas Keating developed centering prayer as a Christian practice for strengthening one's interior silence and developing increased sensitivity to the movement of the Spirit. Keating writes, "It is a preparation for contemplation by reducing the obstacles caused by the hyperactivity of our minds and of our lives."[346] The actual work of Centering Prayer is consenting to God's presence and action within us.[347]

This is often practiced by choosing a simple word that consents to God's presence and action within us and returning to that word whenever our intention begins to grow fuzzy.[348] It is a way of saying, "Here I am" to God. The chosen word such as "Abba," "peace," "Jesus" can be repeated in the mind as often as necessary throughout the centering prayer practice.

According to Bourgeault, centering prayer allows for "interior rearrangement" to take place. This interior rearrangement allows for one's deeper, more authentic self to be revealed, and one can begin to interact in the world with the same generous vulnerability that we see manifested in Jesus.[349]

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[346] Keating, *Intimacy with God*, Loc 98.
[347] Keating, *Intimacy with God,* Loc 501, 503.
[348] Keating, *Intimacy with God,* 17.
[349] Bourgeault, *Centering Prayer,* 10, 17, 39.

This is a practice that could lend itself to a few moments at the beginning of a corporate worship service. It has significant value as an individual and corporate practice. However, I decided not to include the practice of centering prayer in this project because in my context, practices which may be perceived as having cultural overtones from Hinduism and Buddhism are strongly resisted among some members of my faith community. This is due to the fact that many have either converted from Hinduism or Buddhism or have significant cultural ties to them. While centering prayer is firmly rooted in the Christian tradition, I do not want to build resistance to the other practices by introducing centering prayer in a way that could cause people to put up walls. That is not to suggest that I would not include it in other opportunities for individual or small group contemplative prayer. It is to say that cultural sensitivity is important, and this practice is best received in one-on-one settings in my context.

Journaling Prayer

Journaling prayer has been one of my preferred prayer practices for many years. Some of my most profound conversations with God have taken place with pen and paper. However, this practice is not ideal for corporate worship. I have, however, successfully facilitated small groups of journaling prayer.

There are countless formats for journaling prayer. One of my preferred methods is to divide my paper into two columns. On the left, I write whatever I want to say to God. On the right column, I record whatever I sense God saying to me. This may come in the form of a scripture, lines of a song, a question, or any number of other thoughts that come to my head. As with any contemplative prayer practice, I test the words that flow through my pen against what I

know about God. Does this fit with who I know God to be and with the character of God? Is this in line with the narrative arc of scripture? I have found that even when I am writing hard words to God, the responses that come to my head and out through my pen in God's column are true to the character of God and God's loving, correcting guidance. I often say, I "hear" God through writing.

Praying in Nature

Praying in nature is one of the most fundamental means of prayer for the Christian. Henri Nouwen suggests that nature is one of the most prevalent means by which God reveals Godself to us. Nouwen acknowledges that God is a hidden presence, but he offers the encouragement that we have only to let nature speak to us about the God who is everywhere.[350] Nouwen also submits, "It can be said that God's first language is nature, even if God is revealed through our ancient and enduring spiritual texts. You can read God's ways and will in the seasonal patterns and cycles of creation: life and death, planting and harvest, waiting for and basking in new life and resurrection."[351]

While this practice is not always ideal for corporate worship, it is a practice that the church can nurture in our posture toward nature in Christian worship. Additionally, it should be fostered among small groups and individuals. The location, whether urban, rural, desert, or wilderness need not be a deterrent. In New Zealand, I am blessed to live in an exceptionally beautiful place with an abundance of nature of every kind just beyond my doorstep. However,

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[350] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Genesee Diary: Report from a Trappist Monastery* (London, England: Darton Longman & Todd, 2014), 53.
[351] Nouwen, *Discernment*, 58.

prior to moving to New Zealand, I lived in the high plains of New Mexico where water is scarce, little grows, mountains are hundreds of miles away, and natural beauty can be more elusive. There, one of the best times to pray in nature was at night under the vast canopy of stars. Because there are no trees or mountains, the sky is expansive, and the milky way is a constant companion.

In an urban setting, praying in nature may look like praying *with* nature. While not immersed in nature, noticing something growing through the sidewalk cracks, attending to house plants, or turning one's attention to the nature found in a communal place can all be acts of prayer when one's heart is turned toward God in the process. In the fictional work *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* by Betty Smith, the primary metaphor is a tree, commonly called A Tree of Heaven, that persistently grows in the inhospitably inner-city environment of early twentieth century Brooklyn, New York.[352] Despite the adverse conditions, the tree grows as does the protagonist, Francie Nolan. We can see that God is revealing something of Godself through whatever natural elements are available in a given place.

Sometimes praying in nature involves paying attention to the very small things, such as what is happening in the patch of grass, or the very big things, such as what the clouds are doing. That said, seeking opportunities to be immersed in nature is a good practice for one's spiritual life and physical and emotional well-being.

Creating as Prayer

[352] Betty Smith, *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn: A Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951).

One more practice that is worth exploring and fostering in a Christian community is creating art, or simply the act of creating, as a prayer practice. Because humankind is made in the image of the Creator God, creating is naturally an act of worship and prayer. Often, people are led to believe they must be "creative" or able to produce something others will find valuable in order to pursue the act of creating as prayer. However, in the image of God, any sort of creative act can become a means of prayer. In the practice of creating art as prayer, the end product is not the goal, but rather the emphasis is on what is revealed in the process.

Prayerful questions for the exercise of creating art as a prayer practice may include the following: How do these colors, these textures, these materials, or this pattern make me feel? What is stirred in me as I create? What is this revealing to me about myself? What is it revealing to me about God? What might God be inviting me into as I participate in this practice and during the rest of my day?

When nurtured with an eye toward prayer, this practice fosters an increased awareness of God in all things and helps us live fully into our identity as co-creators with God. St. Benedict submitted that a balanced practice of work and prayer is what ultimately makes co-creators of us all. He believed both were essential to a life that is both holy and useful. When immersed in God, the commonplace is transfigured, and the ordinary is transformed.[353]

I once participated in the practice of creating art using only water on a paintbrush and a blank chalkboard. The water revealed the image or pattern I was creating, but it very quickly dried leaving a blank slate again. This can be a helpful practice for people who are concerned

[353] Chittister, *The Rule of Benedict*, 211.

about the quality of the end result. In this practice, there is no end result. However, sometimes things are revealed as we focus on the fading lines in prayer.

This is also a practice that kids tend toward naturally. Whether it is in the sand pit or with crayons, children can often be found creating for the sake of creating. In a worship space that is conducive to play-doh, allowing kids (or adults) to pray by creating with play-doh can be a tangible, multi-sensory way of engaging with the Spirit and becoming aware of God's presence.

Conclusion

The intent of this dissertation is to confront the questions posed by members of my congregation and other congregations around what prayer is, how to learn to listen for and discern the voice of God in prayer, and how to communicate with God. In exploring the reasons for and potential answers to these questions, it became obvious that while Christian tradition is rich with different means of communicating with God, very few of these are talked about and modeled in corporate worship settings. As a result, the majority of people who participate in the gathered assembly that is corporate worship are unaware of the wide variety of ways people have communed with God throughout history. They often believe that the more spiritual you are, the bigger and more plentiful the words you have to say to God. For many Christians across the Protestant tradition, prayer is solely petitionary or confessional in nature.

This dissertation has sought to address that deficiency by providing a solution that is practical, effective, and accessible to a wide variety of churches in a wide variety of contexts. The solution suggested is the integration of contemplative prayer practices in corporate worship. These practices are modeled, practiced, and nurtured over time in a way that enriches the

corporate worship experience and equips individuals to apply those practices in their own lives. This dissertation specifically explored six contemplative prayer practices that are deeply rooted in Christian tradition and naturally lend themselves to corporate worship settings.

As demonstrated in chapter two, this project considers a survey of Christian history from scripture through to the twenty-first century. However, the limitations of this dissertation are significant. It does not consider a broad expanse of multicultural voices and influences. Nor does it provide extensive exploration of age-specific resources for engaging contemplative prayer practices. It does, however, assume that the corporate worship setting is intergenerational, and the six practices outlined in depth can be engaged by worshipers of all ages. That said, this dissertation does not explore the entire breadth of contemplative prayer practices. Several of the practices not included in the proposal in chapter four are mentioned in this concluding chapter as worthy of further exploration. Fr. Thomas Keating reminds us that prayer is a large umbrella. There are many kinds of prayer and many ways of expressing it. However, at its core, prayer is a response to God's invitation to turn our minds and hearts to God.[354]

The ultimate goal of the author of this project is not that the six practices discussed at length in this dissertation be seen as all-encompassing, but rather that they would provide a foundation for contemplative prayer. This would become an entry point to a deeper life of prayer for individuals and congregations. These are to be seen as tools in the prayer tool belt that can easily be drawn on by any member of the body at any time and by which the presence of God is made known to the people. It is through a deep and varied life of prayer with God that the body

[354] Keating, *The Heart of the World*, Loc 608.

of Christ will experience an increased sense of flourishing in their communion with God, in their awareness of self, and in their community with one another.

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APPENDIX A

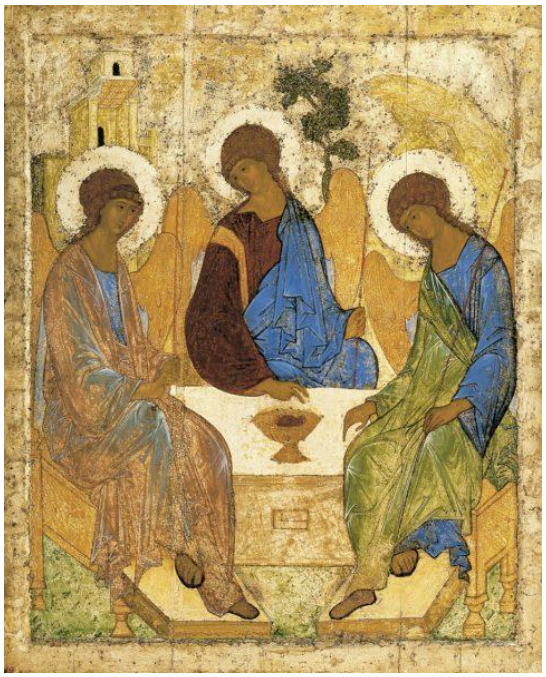
RESOURCES FOR VISIO *DIVINA*

Below are suggested art pieces for Visio *Divina*. This is in no way an exhaustive list, merely a few suggested pieces from various styles that tend to work well in a variety of settings. These may serve as a jumping off point for further exploring art as a means of prayer through the practice of holy gazing.

The Return of the Prodigal Son, Rembrandt (1668)

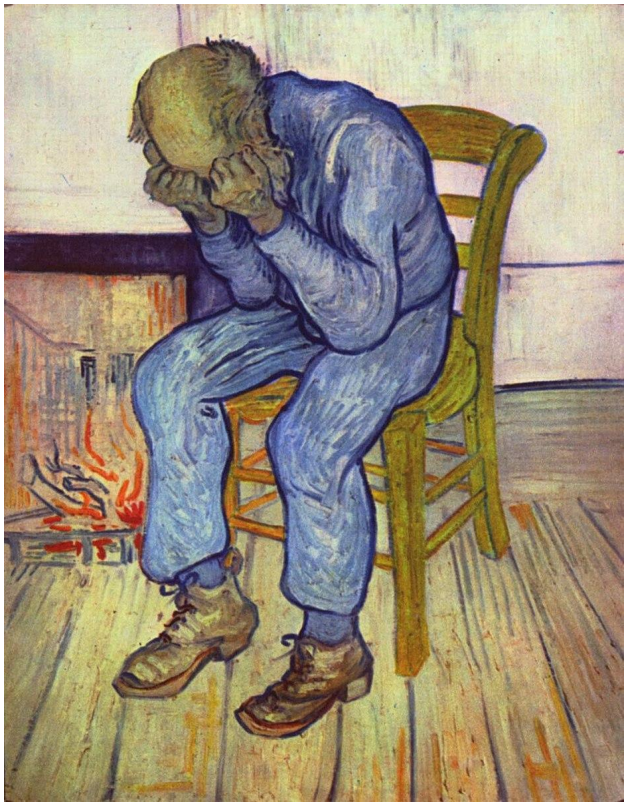
The Sun (1910-1913) by Edvard Munch, from the Collection of the Munch Museum

Rublev's Icon of The Trinity by Andrei Rublev (1425)



The Starry Night by Vincent Van Gogh (1889)

Sorrowing Old Man by Vincent van Gogh (1890)



The Stone Bench in the Garden of St Paul Hospital by Vincent van Gogh (1889)

Dust You Are by Ally Markotich (2017) [355]

Christ of the Breadlines by Fritz Eichenberg (1952)

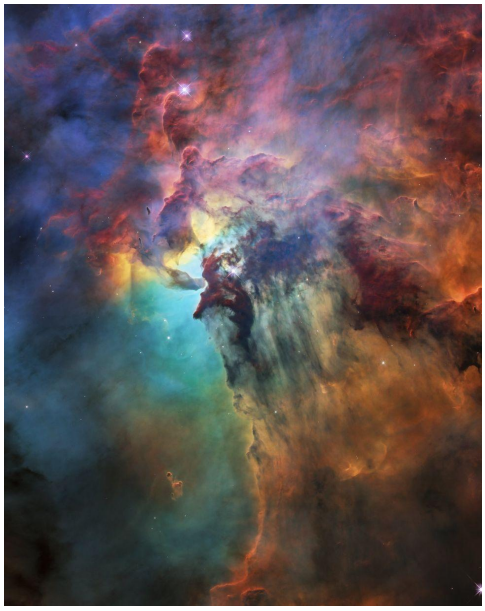
Christ of the Breadlines, woodcut by Fritz Eichenberg

[355] Ally Markotich, "Dust You Are. (Ash Wednesday)," Soul Kindling, March 1, 2017, https://soulkindling.com/2017/03/01/dust-you-are-ash-wednesday/.

The Annunciation by John Collier (2000)

Lagoon Nebula Hubble Space Telescope (2018)[356]

[356] https://www.space.com/40356-hubble-space-telescope-anniversary-lagoon-nebula-photos.html
"To celebrate its 28th anniversary in space, the Hubble Space Telescope took this image of the Lagoon Nebula. The nebula, about 4,000 light-years away, is 55 light-years wide and 20 light-years tall. This image shows only a small part of this turbulent star-formation region, about 4 light-years across. The observations were taken by Hubble's Wide Field Camera 3 between Feb. 12 and Feb 18, 2018. (Image credit: NASA/ESA/STScl)"



APPENDIX B

RESOURCES FOR PRAYING THE EXAMEN

Oral instructions for Examen for Kids

Today, we're going to use our memories to pray. It's a way of noticing or paying attention that helps us come aware that our life is already filled with the presence of God. Once you begin to look around and allow yourself to believe that God is with you, you can more easily see the ways that God is with you and at work in your life. Begin by taking some deep breaths in and exhaling slowly to quiet our minds and our hearts. Close your eyes and get comfortable.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Remind yourself that God is here with you. Perhaps you'd like to imagine that God is sitting next to you looking back over your day with you.

[Pause.]

What's something big or small you can be thankful for today?

[Pause.]

Think back over your day. What did you do? Where did you go? What did you do in the morning? In the afternoon? In the evening?

[Pause.]

What made you feel happy, excited, or loved today? In your mind, talk to God about those times and how you felt. Thank God for those things now.

[Pause.]

Did anything make you sad, worried, angry, or scared today? In your mind, talk to God about those times and how you felt. Remember that God loves you. You are God's precious child, and nothing can ever change that. Maybe there is something you want to say sorry for to God or to a person when you see them next. Talk to God about how you will do that.

[Pause.]

Was there a particular time during your day that you were aware of God's presence or love? Where were you? What were you doing? Thank God for those moments and for being with you always.

[Pause.]

Now think about your day tomorrow. What are you looking forward to? What are you worried about? Is there anything that you need? Talk to God about those things now. Ask God to help you be aware of God's presence throughout the day.

Amen.

Examen Journal for Kids

The Examen Journal for Kids can be utilized as an accompaniment to praying the Examen as a congregation. I often find it is helpful to provide parallel resources that allow kids to engage in the liturgy of the congregation while providing visual elements, offering a way for them to use their hands, and framing it in language they understand. Alternatively, if kids happen to be worshiping in a different space during the time that the congregation is participating in the Examen, this is a great resource for them to utilize in their worship space. Finally, this simple journal page can be printed and bound to provide a weeklong or monthlong opportunity for

becoming increasingly aware of God's presence. This particular page is geared toward kids who are between five and eleven years old. In other words, they're old enough to read, but being asked to write too many words can be a deterrent to participation.

Kids begin by encouraging kids to circle the day of the week. They remember that God is with them. As they think back over their day, they circle the image that seems to fit best for each part of the day. Additional words or pictures may not be necessary in those sections. Words or pictures are, however, encouraged when they choose one thing, good or bad, they want to talk with God about. Even if there is very little on the page when it is complete, the thought process alone makes this as valuable a practice for kids as it is for adults.

Examen Journal for Kids

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

Remind yourself that God is here with you. Perhaps you'd like to imagine that God is sitting next to you looking back over your day with you.

How did you feel in the morning? Circle the image that fits best. Draw or write anything you want to remember.

How did you feel in the afternoon? Circle the image that fits best. Draw or write anything you want to remember.

How did you feel in the evening? Circle the image that fits best. Draw or write anything you want to remember.

Choose one part of your day to talk to God more about. Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for? Is there anything you want to share with someone who cares about you? Is there anything you want to celebrate? Draw or write what you want to communicate with God.

Look ahead to tomorrow. What are you looking forward to? What are you worried about? Talk to God about those things. Ask God to help you be aware of God's love all day.

Alternative Prayer of Examen

1. *Ask*: God give me eyes to see my day as you see it, and help me see what I need to see, so I can become more aware of your presence and a better reflection of you in the world.
2. *Thank*: I give thanks for your provisions and blessings today.
3. *Look*: As I look back over my day, I think about my joys and accomplishments. I see you there. I look back over my sorrows and shortcomings. I see you there.
4. *Confess*: God, I confess that I have fallen short of who you have called me to be. I name my failures to you. I acknowledge my need of you. Forgive me.
5. *Hope*: I place my hope in you as I look ahead to a new day. Give me what I need and help me to be aware of your loving presence and to be a bearer of your loving presence.

APPENDIX C

BREATH PRAYERS

(Inhale) You are

(Exhale) my peace

(Inhale) You are

(Exhale) my hope

Based on Isaiah 41:10

(Inhale) You are with me.

(Exhale) I do not need to be afraid.

Based on Proverbs 3:5-6

(Inhale) I trust in you.

(Exhale) Guide my paths.

Based on Psalm 121:2

(Inhale) My help comes from the Lord

(Exhale) The Maker of heaven and earth.

Based on Isaiah 55:12

(Inhale) I will go out in joy

(Exhale) And be led forth in peace

(Inhale) God of love

(Exhale) fill me with hope and peace

(Inhale) You are making

(Exhale) All things new