

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR THE PROPOSED SPIRITUAL FORMATION MODEL

#### **Introduction to Spiritual Formation**

In *Pilgrim's Progress*, Paul Bunyan tells the story of two companions who arrive at the heavenly kingdom.<sup>1</sup> In order to enter, they must pass through the gate. In order to access the gate, they must traverse a river. They ask the angels on the bank if the water is the same depth throughout. “No,” the angels reply, “however, we can’t help you in knowing where to cross. You see, you will each find it deeper or shallower depending on your belief in the King of the kingdom.”

The rivers one faces in life may seem deeper or shallower depending on one’s belief in the King. How deeply has one been formed by the King? How intentionally has one surrendered and participated in this formative work? That is not to say believers will be spared from wading in the waters of sorrow, but their spiritual formation may deliver them from being taken under. A Christian’s relationship to the King matters.

Spiritual formation is about God’s grace and one’s participation in that grace. God’s grace acts in believers’ lives to create and enable what they cannot do on their own, but do they must.<sup>2</sup> Christians are called to intentionally and consistently yield to the image of Christ being formed within them. Thus, throughout history the followers of Christ have created various

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<sup>1</sup> John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: Random House, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Dallas Willard, “Spiritual Formation as a Natural Part of Salvation,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 54; 2 Timothy 2:1.

models of spiritual formation, which beckon and guide them in their yielding. Just as there are differing gifts, personalities, callings, and seasons of life, there are differing models of spiritual formation which are more tailored to some individuals.<sup>3</sup> While Christlikeness is always the goal, it is expressed differently in different individuals. Christlikeness does not seek to make every believer an introvert or an extrovert, for example. However, the kingdom virtues are the same.<sup>4</sup>

“In dealing with God, we are dealing in mystery, in what we do not know, what we cannot control or deal with on our terms.”<sup>5</sup> Mystery is at the heart of the life-long process called spiritual formation, the journey of believers surrendering parts of themselves as the Spirit transforms those parts. The Holy Spirit re-creates Christians, for creating “is what the Spirit does.”<sup>6</sup> This process brings forth within believers the “living water” promised by Christ, which is life itself.<sup>7</sup> If one is concerned with life itself, living that life fully and abundantly, living into and with the “breath of life,” receiving and sharing God’s grace of life, then one is concerned about spiritual formation.<sup>8</sup> One’s spiritual formation determines one’s usefulness as a servant in God’s kingdom. A Christian’s relationship with the King matters deeply.

If believers in general, and pastor’s wives specifically, are to pursue spiritual formation, then they are called to do so in alignment with Scripture and with sound doctrine. This chapter

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<sup>3</sup> Simon Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 21; Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Discover Your Soul’s Path to God* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 21.

<sup>5</sup>Eugene H. Peterson, *Christ Plays in Ten Thousand Places: A Conversation in Spiritual Theology* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2005), 46.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 15:25; Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 24; Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 22.

<sup>7</sup> John 7:37-38.

<sup>8</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 29; John 10:10, 17:3; Revelation 11:11; Acts 20:24.

will explore the theological foundations of Christian spirituality and the progressive nature of sanctification. These two components call us to address spiritual formation with intentionality and reflection, therefore, included here is an overview of the proposed spiritual formation model. Particularly, the example of Jesus is examined to discover his ways of both solitude and small group community.

Spiritual formation, here defined, is the mysterious process of both a believer's progressive surrender to and the action of God's grace transforming them into the image of Christ, through the creative work of the Holy Spirit, individually and in communities of faith, "for the glory of God and for the sake of others."<sup>9</sup> "Theologically, our spiritual formation is in the context of the Trinity – God's self-revelation and continuing presence with us as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, exhibiting unity and diversity."<sup>10</sup> The trinitarian theological foundation is that Father God works by the Spirit and through the Word to form Christ in believers, to equip them as kingdom servants.<sup>11</sup> Father God has established a new covenant with all believers, bringing them into the kingdom through the atonement of Christ and making them living temples through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. As such, the Holy Spirit continually forms them by faith through their union with Christ into Christlikeness, as believers exercise spiritual practices.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis, eds., *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010), 24; MaryKate Morse, "What Is Spiritual Formation?" (Lecture presented at the Portland Seminary DMIN LSF3 Spring Retreat, Cannon Beach, Oregon, Spring 2018). This definition is primarily a synthesis from Greenman and Morse and includes the plural form of *communities*, since both a worshiping community and a small formative community are required for spiritual formation. Romans 8:29; 2 Corinthians 3:18.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Lau Branson and Juan Martinez, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2011), chap. 2, sec 2, Kindle.

<sup>11</sup> Romans 8:4-6.

<sup>12</sup> Thomas Oden, *Systematic Theology Volume Three: Life in the Spirit*, 3 vols. (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishing, 2006), 150; John 15:5-6; Colossians 1:27; Galatians 2:20; Romans 10:17.

Spiritual formation is a “spirit-driven process of forming the inner worlds of the human self in such a way that it becomes like the inner being of Christ himself.”<sup>13</sup>

As Christians’ inward heart becomes more deeply fashioned into Christ himself, their outward actions follow suit, “as the Spirit reshapes moral character.”<sup>14</sup> As Christians live more fully according to the Spirit, as opposed to the flesh, they produce greater fruit of the Holy Spirit and a deeper moral character.<sup>15</sup> The “flesh is that principle of opposition to the will and ways of God.”<sup>16</sup> The flesh in believers is still acting in opposition to the Spirit.<sup>17</sup> As such, they need spiritual formation models, which provide a framework for spiritual practices, so that they may more deeply and authentically keep in step with the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> The tension of spiritual life in Christ is the paradox of having the Holy Spirit within as well as the flesh. This same tension is felt in all creation, as the kingdom of God has been inaugurated and is active but has not yet been consummated. William Pope explains how the church lives in tension of opposing qualities as we wait for Christ’s return.<sup>19</sup>

Unity	Diversity
Sanctity	Imperfection
Invisibility	Visibility
Catholicity	Localization

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<sup>13</sup> Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2002), 22.

<sup>14</sup> Graham A. Cole, *He Who Gives Life: The Doctrine of the Holy Spirit*, Foundations of Evangelical Theology Series (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2007), 225.

<sup>15</sup> Romans 8:4-13; Galatians 5:22-26.

<sup>16</sup> Cole, *Gives Life*, 227.

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 5:17.

<sup>18</sup> Galatians 5:16-25.

<sup>19</sup> William Burt Pope, *A Compendium of Christian Theology: Being Analytical Outlines of a Course of Theological Study, Biblical, Dogmatic, Historical Volume Three*, 2nd Revised., 3 vols. (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1880), 266.

Apostolicity	Confessionalism
Indefectibility	Mutability
Glory	Meekness

Eliminating the church's tension between "sanctity" and "imperfection" will not occur until the consummation of God's kingdom. However, followers of Jesus can be formed by the Holy Spirit to walk more consistently in the sanctity and to more freely confess and forgive in the imperfection.

### **Spirituality and Spiritual Theology**

*Spirituality*, strictly defined by Oxford, is "the quality of being concerned with the human spirit or soul as opposed to material or physical things."<sup>20</sup> It is the concern of what humans do with the heart within them, their inward energies, desires, hopes, pains, restlessness, the fire inside, or those things that keep them awake at night.<sup>21</sup> Spirituality informs people's outlook, choices, and responses, which are always more important than the situations to which they respond.<sup>22</sup> Regardless of whether actions are for good or for ill, it is spirituality that shapes them.<sup>23</sup> While limiting the bounds of Oxford's definition to Christianity, with the triune God at its center, a very large umbrella of concern still exists.<sup>24</sup> These boundaries simultaneously limit and expand the definition as well. *Christian spirituality* is additionally concerned about the

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<sup>20</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "spirituality" 1417, accessed November 14, 2019, <https://www-oed-com.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/view/Entry/186904?redirectedFrom=spirituality&>.

<sup>21</sup> Ronald Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing: The Search for a Christian Spirituality* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 6-11.

<sup>22</sup> Willard, *Renovation*, 14

<sup>23</sup> Rolheiser, *Holy Longing*, 7.

<sup>24</sup> "Spirituality...anything and everything that men and women designate as they speak or think about the significance of their lives, including God and personal meaning and concern for the world." Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 26.

material, inasmuch as one considers the body material: “the mind, the will, the feelings, the soul, and the body.”<sup>25</sup> Christian spirituality is epistemologically anchored in the Holy Scriptures, led and governed by them, as they reveal God. The concern in Christian spirituality is not about the self-improvement of the “spirit or soul” but about dwelling in communion with the living God deeply, fully, and intimately.<sup>26</sup> This communion brings the transformation that leads to the blessed life. Yet it requires commitment and discipline. A life of Christian spirituality “is not a quick sprint to a well-marked finish line, but a marathon, an arduous lifelong journey into an ever-widening horizon.”<sup>27</sup>

“Spirituality is the lived reality, whereas spiritual theology is the systematic reflection and formalization of that reality.”<sup>28</sup> Jordan Aumann explains:

Spiritual theology is that part of theology that, proceeding from the truths of divine revelation and the religious experience of individual persons, defines the nature of the supernatural life, formulates directives for its growth and development, and explains the process by which souls advance from the beginning of the spiritual life to its full perfection.<sup>29</sup>

Spiritual theology stands in the gap between systematic/biblical theology and practical theology.<sup>30</sup> For example, without biblical theology, believers do not know they are filled with God’s love. Without practical theology, believers do not know that they in turn are to love. Without spiritual theology, believers never enter into the experiential intimacy of God’s love and

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<sup>25</sup> Willard, *Renovation*, 31.

<sup>26</sup> Kelly Kopic, “Evangelical Holiness: Assumptions in John Owen’s Theology of Christian Spirituality,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 101; Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 27.

<sup>27</sup> Rolheiser, *The Holy Longing*, 214.

<sup>28</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 16.

<sup>29</sup> Jordan Aumann, *Spiritual Theology* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1984), 22.

<sup>30</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 19.

lack either the impetus or the power, or both, to share agape love toward others. “Spiritual theology is the attention we give to lived theology.”<sup>31</sup> Without a balanced emphasis on spiritual theology, one discovers what Richard Lovelace calls a *sanctification gap*:

There seemed to be a sanctification gap among Evangelicals, a peculiar conspiracy somehow to mislay the Protestant tradition of spiritual growth and to concentrate instead on frantic witnessing activity, sermons on John 3:16 and theological arguments over eschatological subtleties.<sup>32</sup> Evangelism-in-Depth and two-by-two house evangelism can expand the trade routes of the gospel outside our church walls, but unless what we export is more than a two-dimensional caricature of Christian spirituality, we will not overcome the credibility gap among consumers.<sup>33</sup>

As we Evangelicals seek to close what continues to be, by-and-large, a sanctification gap, we do well to consider what a “fully orbbed, evangelically oriented, contemporary spiritual theology might look like.”<sup>34</sup> A sound beginning is Diogenes Allen’s accumulated historical spiritual principles:

1. What is the goal of the spiritual life?
2. What is the path to the goal?
3. What motivates us to begin the spiritual life?
4. What helps us make progress in the spiritual life?
5. What hinders us?
6. How do we measure progress?
7. What are the fruits of the Spirit?<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 5.

<sup>32</sup> Greenman and Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit*, 33; Richard Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1979), 232. Lovelace does, of course, recognize that there were spiritual depths in some quarters of Evangelicalism, however, asserts that by-and-large contemporary Evangelicalism has lost its deep roots of spiritual depth. Spiritual theologies were developed by the likes of John Owen, John and Charles Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and Charles Simeon.

<sup>33</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 236.

<sup>34</sup> Jeffrey P. Greenman, “Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective: Classic Issues, Contemporary Challenges,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2010), 33.

<sup>35</sup> Diogenes Allen, *Spiritual Theology: The Theology of Yesterday for Spiritual Help Today* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Cowley, 1997), 15-20.

In systematically reflecting on these principles, Evangelicalism can recapture and re-create anew its history of deep Christian spirituality and work toward the goal of spiritual theology, to possess congruence of belief, action, and method.<sup>36</sup>

### *Works of the Holy Spirit*

Christian spirituality, as previously noted, is theologically a triune God event. “The Son is present by the power of the Spirit, making known the love of the Father.”<sup>37</sup> The triune God is love and spirit.<sup>38</sup> Nothing Christians can know or accomplish accounts to any good in God’s kingdom without love.<sup>39</sup> God pours love into hearts through the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> The Spirit births believers into God’s kingdom, gives them life, and teaches them all truth during their spiritual journey.<sup>41</sup> Believers are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to unite them with Christ; therefore, the degree to which one manifests Christlikeness, and all the benefits and results attached to Christlikeness, is dependent upon the Holy Spirit. Therefore, spiritual formation is integrally dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is a personal being, indeed one whom can be grieved.<sup>42</sup> The Spirit accomplishes many works in the economy of God’s kingdom; a few particularly apropos ministries will be discussed here. The Holy Spirit provides assurance, illumination and guidance, fellowship, and transformation. The Holy Spirit assures believers of salvation through a holy seal

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<sup>36</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 333.

<sup>37</sup> Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 207.

<sup>38</sup> John 4:24; 1 John 4:8.

<sup>39</sup> 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

<sup>40</sup> Romans 5:5.

<sup>41</sup> John 3:5, 6:63, 14:26, 16:13.

<sup>42</sup> Ephesians 4:30.

upon their souls.<sup>43</sup> This seal extends certainty of the love and redemption of Jesus, assuring Christians of their place as adopted children of God and joint heirs with Christ. Indeed the Spirit is the pledge, promise, and down payment (foretaste) of the inheritance to come: a fully consummated kingdom life where the Spirit abounds within and without perfectly.<sup>44</sup> The Spirit plants this assurance in believers' souls and nourishes it to blossom into "gratitude, delight, hope, and confidence."<sup>45</sup> This assurance gives believers the necessary security and encouragement to journey into spiritual formation.

The Holy Spirit provides illumination and guidance. First, with the Scriptures, as Kevin J. Vanhoozer explains:

The Scriptures are the Spirit's work from first to last. The Spirit is involved in the very messy historical process of producing Scripture – prompting, appropriating, and coordinating human discourse to present God's Word – as well as in the process of bringing about understanding of Scripture among present-day readers. The traditional names for these modes of participation are inspiration and illumination, respectively.<sup>46</sup>

The spiritual understanding of Scripture that brings about inward transformation is brought by the Spirit, as is affection for the Scriptures.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Holy Spirit is the epistemic bond of the triune God.<sup>48</sup> Out of and through the Scriptures the Spirit guides believers, individually and corporately, in all discernment and acts of service, including evangelism.<sup>49</sup> St. Augustine

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<sup>43</sup> Ephesians 4:30; Cole, *Gives Life*, 270.

<sup>44</sup> Romans 8:15-17; Ephesians 1:5 and 14; 2 Corinthians 1:22, 5:5; Colossians 1:13; James 2:5; 2 Peter 1:11; Revelation 11:15; Cole, *Gives Life*, 283.

<sup>45</sup> J.I. Packer, *Keep in Step with the Spirit: Finding Fullness in Our Walk with God*, 2nd, Revised and Enlarged ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Books, 2005), 43.

<sup>46</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox, 2005), 266.

<sup>47</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:12-13; Cole, *Gives Life*, 264.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

<sup>49</sup> Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand

explains, “The Spirit wishes to save each person, the whole person, to the uttermost, to show a way through every trial, and to bring the faithful to final blessedness.”<sup>50</sup>

The Spirit ministers fellowship and transformation. As the bond between believers and Christ, the Spirit provides us personal fellowship with Jesus. The Spirit draws one’s “entire being into renewed communion with God.”<sup>51</sup> The personal living connection Christians have with the Spirit brings the living Jesus into their present lives. In this fellowship, the Spirit corporately dissolves the barriers between believers, creating a unified body.<sup>52</sup> Within the body, the Spirit sanctifies Christians, progressively, searching the depths of believers’ souls, deepening affections for God, and freeing wills to both desire and serve God’s will and ways.<sup>53</sup> “It is characteristic of the Holy Spirit to work personally and uniquely in each recipient to do what is proportionally and contextually required and salutary to draw that person closer to God.”<sup>54</sup> The Holy Spirit thus works all things together to transform Christians’ character into that of Christ’s.<sup>55</sup> As one church patriarch explains, “Without the Holy Spirit, God is distant, Christ is in the past, the Gospel is a dead letter, the church is simple organization, authority is domination, mission is propaganda, worship is the summoning of spirits, and Christian action is the morality of slaves.”<sup>56</sup>

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Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2005), 702-711.

<sup>50</sup> Augustine, “Book VII,” in *Confessions*, vol. 1, 14 vols., A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church (New York: Christian, 1900), 102-115.

<sup>51</sup> Kopic, “Evangelical Holiness,” 106.

<sup>52</sup> Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 705.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 705-707; Cole, *Gives Life*, 283; Kopic, “Evangelical Holiness,” 106.

<sup>54</sup> Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 221.

<sup>55</sup> Packer, *Keep in Step*, 43.

<sup>56</sup> Cole, *Gives Life*, 283.

## *Indwelling of the Holy Spirit and Union with Christ*

Pentecost changed the nature of human existence. After Christ's complete redemption story, the Holy Spirit was sent to fill the void and continue the work of Jesus in his followers' hearts and lives.<sup>57</sup> The adopted children of God became the living temples of God: "Father, Son, and Spirit are all taking up abode in the faithful through the indwelling Spirit."<sup>58</sup> The indwelling of the Spirit affords the faithful union with Christ.<sup>59</sup> Yet, their identity remains. Union with Christ maintains the distinction between God and follower but unites them because the same Holy Spirit resides in both.<sup>60</sup> The indwelling of the Spirit brings glory to God by equipping and enabling followers of Jesus to live for him and bear witness of him: to serve the kingdom.<sup>61</sup> Pentecost also transformed the nature of human community. The indwelling of Christians binds them together into holy community: the *ἐκκλησία*, the church.<sup>62</sup> Indwelling, after all, is what humanity was made for: "to be temples of the Holy Spirit, with God's own Spirit dwelling within them in intimate and redemptive relationship."<sup>63</sup>

The indwelling of the Spirit, bringing union with Christ, supplies Christians with the necessary grace for spiritual formation and kingdom service.<sup>64</sup> This union provides the benefits

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<sup>57</sup> Luke 24:49; Acts 2:33; Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament*, 146.

<sup>58</sup> John 14:25; Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 60.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians 6:17.

<sup>60</sup> Kopic, "Evangelical Holiness," 109.

<sup>61</sup> William J. Larkin, *Acts*, vol. 12, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary (Carol Stream, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2006), 388.

<sup>62</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 24.

<sup>63</sup> Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Biblical Theology: The Common Grace Covenants*, vol. 1 (Wooster, Ohio: Weaver Book Company, 2014), 130.

<sup>64</sup> Kopic, "Evangelical Holiness," 106.

of the Son, through which the Spirit enables Christians to cry out to God, “Abba! Father!”<sup>65</sup> Just as the Spirit was integrally involved in Christ’s ministry from conception to resurrection, the Spirit is integrally involved in believers’ entire spiritual journey and service.<sup>66</sup> Union with Christ is the indispensable core of Christian identity, and without the Spirit, there is no union with Christ.<sup>67</sup> Progressive sanctification, spiritual formation, is wrought from union with Christ. Cyril of Alexandria explains, “The Holy Spirit works in us by himself, truly sanctifying us and joining us to himself; and by this coalescence and union of ourselves with him he makes us sharers in the divine nature...beautifying human nature with the splendor of the divinity.”<sup>68</sup> Ultimately, progressive sanctification “flows out of union with Christ, not merely imitation of Christ.”<sup>69</sup>

### *Progressive Sanctification and Holiness*

The Lord is patient with creation and does not wish that any perish but wishes that all would repent from the worldly kingdom and become citizens of God’s kingdom.<sup>70</sup> How does that happen? What happens after one becomes a citizen? Soteriology provides the foundation and has systematically been described in the reformed *Ordo Salutis*: calling, regeneration, conversion, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance, glorification. This order is more descriptive than prescriptive. Some events happen simultaneously, some instantaneously, and some are progressive. Justification and adoption are both the anchor and soil for sanctification.

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<sup>65</sup> 1 John 4:14-15; Romans 8:15.

<sup>66</sup> Cole, *Gives Life*, 283.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 241.

<sup>68</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *Thesaurus*, vol. 75, 162 vols., *Patrologia Graeca* (Paris: Migne, 1876), 958.

<sup>69</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 74.

<sup>70</sup> 2 Peter 3:9.

Justification affords believers a state of righteousness being reckoned to them through Christ; adoption welcomes believers into God's kingdom as children and heirs, whatever their condition at the moment of justification. In this state, it may be said that Christ's followers have positional sanctification, with Father God seeing them as a holy people set apart. God views believers through the son, seeing them as saints. A final, or complete, sanctification will occur for all believers upon the consummation of God's kingdom. However, Christians live in the in-between. This is where progressive sanctification is found: the progressive transformative work of the Holy Spirit to bring believers' true selves – soul, character, will – to mirror in reality what God sees in them through the son, the righteousness of Christ.<sup>71</sup> The Spirit deepens followers' affections for the Word and the Word Made Flesh, so that they long to be progressively formed by the Spirit into Christlikeness through union with Christ to the glory of God, as they seek to serve the kingdom and be used by God to advance the kingdom, both in depth and breadth.<sup>72</sup> Jesus himself prayed for this sanctification of his followers.<sup>73</sup>

Justification and sanctification bestow holiness; they are not identical but deeply conjoined.<sup>74</sup> The state of justification, if fully grasped, calls Christians to the journey of sanctification.<sup>75</sup> "Holiness by faith is our justification; whereas holiness of life is our sanctification."<sup>76</sup> Evangelical holiness is marked by both the sanctifying grace of the Holy Spirit

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<sup>71</sup> 2 Corinthians 3:18; Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 1983), 875; Cole, *Gives Life*, 228-229.

<sup>72</sup> Kopic, "Evangelical Holiness," 102.

<sup>73</sup> John 17:17; William David Spencer and Aida Besancon Spencer, *The Prayer Life of Jesus: Shout of Agony, Revelation of Love, a Commentary* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, Inc., 1990), 201.

<sup>74</sup> Lovelace, *Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, 98.

<sup>75</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology: A Compendium Designed for the Use of Theological Students*, Reprint 1993. (Valley Forge, Pennsylvania: Judson Press, 1907), 869.

<sup>76</sup> Kopic, "Evangelical Holiness," 113.

and the discipline of believers to engage in spiritual practices, from repentance to acts of service to solitude.<sup>77</sup> Holiness for believers is a matter of learning to be in action what they already are in heart: united with Christ.<sup>78</sup> Think of newborn children. They are fully human, but not fully mature or developed. Likewise, believers may have the holiness of a saint in their heart but lack the maturity and development to display that holiness in their character and actions.<sup>79</sup> Another historical example is that of a steamship.<sup>80</sup> The ship may arrive safe enough to port, but it may not be sound—requiring much repair and development. Justification may make believers safe, but progressive sanctification makes them sound. It is the sanctifying grace of the Spirit and our endeavor to walk in that grace toward intimacy and communion with the triune God that precipitates progressive sanctification, holiness. The importance of progressive sanctification can be seen in how various protestants have sought and named it: the Puritans have godliness, the Methodists have perfection, the Lutherans have pietism, etc.<sup>81</sup> In the end, it can be simply seen as the effort of “living in our own neighborhood, what we know about God.”<sup>82</sup>

For many Christians, the struggle is not with sincerity of heart, but with direction.<sup>83</sup> Progressive sanctification requires an intentional direction. Spiritual formation describes the direction and means for believers. It does not describe the spiritual method, for the mystery of God remains. Yet, Christians have consistently found spiritual growth and maturity through

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<sup>77</sup> 1 Peter 1:15-16; 1 Thessalonians 5:3 and 7, 5:23; Ephesians 1:4, 5:25-26, 2:10; Romans 12:1; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 222, 235; Kopic, “Evangelical Holiness,” 113.

<sup>78</sup> Packer, *Keep in Step*, 89.

<sup>79</sup> Oden, *Life in the Spirit*, 222.

<sup>80</sup> Strong, *Systematic Theology*, 869.

<sup>81</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 28.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 339.

<sup>83</sup> Rolheiser, *Holy Longing*, 40.

varying biblical and historical means of spiritual formation. As John Cassian, a Christian teacher from the 400s, explains, “There is no arrival unless there is a definite plan to go.”<sup>84</sup>

### **Overview of the Proposed Spiritual Formation Model**

“Once Christians are committed to holiness as their goal, then a second battle begins, this time concerning the way to achieve holiness in daily life.”<sup>85</sup> Table 3.2 below depicts an elemental overview of a model designed for women serving in the role of clergy wife. Due to the scope of this paper, not all the individual elements will be discussed. The overarching theme of this model is one of holy tension between surrender and intention: the tension between what God does and what we do.<sup>86</sup> In surrender believers release themselves to grace where the Spirit forms them. In intention believers exert their will to engage in practices and serve as Jesus did. A version of this model with detailed footnotes, quotations, and comments may be found in Appendix A.

**Table 3.2. Spiritual formation model overview of principles and processes**

	Orthodoxy	Orthopathy	Orthopraxy
Principles	The Gospel of the kingdom	Acceptance and longing in Christ	Solitude and community
	The tension between the already and not yet of God’s kingdom	The tension between full acceptance in the Beloved and a longing to be more Christlike	The tension of creating a rhythm of life between solitary prayer and work in a group

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<sup>84</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 18.

<sup>85</sup> Packer, *Keep in Step*, 102.

<sup>86</sup> Philippians 2:12-13.

Processes	Orthodoxy	Orthopathy	Orthopraxy
	Re-orient thinking through biblical study of kingdom values and behaviors	Learn to identify, name, experience and discuss the full range of emotions, secure in Christ's love to accept us amid all that we feel; learn to free others to do the same	Create guarded time alone with the triune God: regularly in a dedicated space, practice such disciplines as silent meditation, contemplative prayer and Lectio Divina, engage inner excavation as led by the Spirit, etc.
	Frame suffering as a shadow of this world that falls on everyone through deep sharing of ourselves and active listening of others' stories	Follow the Spirit's equipping and empowering to differentiate between what emotions come from God versus our brokenness	Humble oneself to others: seek individual, spiritual guidance and feedback from others such as colleagues, mentors, pastors, spiritual directors, counselors, etc.
	Define embodied role by continuously interacting with: God's calling, gifting, season of life, family, church, culture, etc.	Resist the temptation to bury or defend our brokenness, instead submit to Christ's transformative work to be more like him as a lifelong, ongoing process	Engage in Christian community, both worshiping and formative small group, where wives mature spiritually and emotionally: display their growing spiritual attributes, pray, manage themselves and learn to serve others well
		Cultivate gratitude toward God, as an attitude toward living, and as a response to others	Sacrifice for the sake of the community: pray for others, seek Shalom for all, love and forgive their neighbor, empower and care for the poor and disenfranchised

Sources: Gerald Lawson Sittser, *Water from a Deep Well: Christian Spirituality from Early Martyrs to Modern Missionaries* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Books, 2007); Chan, *Spiritual Theology*; Willard, "Spiritual Formation"; MaryKate Morse, "Transformation Principles and Processes"; John Jefferson Davis, *Meditation and Communion with God: Contemplating Scripture in an Age of Distraction* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2012); Kapic, "Evangelical Holiness"; Peterson, *Christ Plays*; Christine Pohl, *Living into Community: Cultivating Practices That Sustain Us* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012); Randy Woodley, *Shalom and the Community of Creation: An Indigenous Vision.*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012), Kindle; Fred Van Dyke, *Redeeming Creation: The Biblical Basis for Environmental Stewardship* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2007); Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina the Sacred Art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing,

2011), Kindle; Marva J. Dawn, *Keeping the Sabbath Wholly: Ceasing, Resting, Embracing, Feasting* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989).

Spiritual formation includes a tension between what we do and what God does, although it is God who grants the very desire to take action. There is a tension throughout all of Scripture between believers' fallenness and redemptive state, as Christians await their own resurrection in a suffering world whose redemption has begun, been secured, but has not yet been completed. With the assurance that God's kingdom will fully come, believers align their thoughts with it, to be a conduit of light breaking through in the present darkness.<sup>87</sup> In this state of tension, Christians long and strive to live more fully into the kingdom of their adoption. Through regeneration, Christians are new creations with a new disposition and God-given desire to pursue what is holy and to have fellowship with God and God's people.<sup>88</sup> God's loving justification and acceptance of believers in the Beloved allows them to humbly and courageously seek spiritual transformation with no risk of rejection.<sup>89</sup> They can freely confess and expose the depths of their true selves to Christ in order to be transformed.<sup>90</sup> However, transformation requires a rhythm of interaction between solitary spiritual practices and group spiritual practices.

### **Imitating Jesus, the Apostolic Example, and Tradition of the Church in Solitude**

God's Word calls believers to grow up spiritually into Christ himself; becoming more like Christ.<sup>91</sup> Paul goes on to explain how this is a joint work of God and followers of Jesus.

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<sup>87</sup> Acts 26:18.

<sup>88</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17.

<sup>89</sup> "...to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved." Ephesians 1:6 NKJ.

<sup>90</sup> Romans 8:1.

<sup>91</sup> Ephesians 4:15.

Followers lay aside their old selves and put on the new self.<sup>92</sup> God renews the spirit of their minds and creates their new self in God's own likeness, "in righteousness and holiness of the truth."<sup>93</sup> Paul goes on to paint a picture of what actions precipitate from this combined formative work: falsehood is forsaken and truth is spoken, anger fails to cause hateful actions, stealing stops and fruits of labor are shared, words are used for building up and not tearing down, kindness and tender-hearted forgiveness abound, etc.<sup>94</sup> In short, Paul sums up, "be imitators of God."<sup>95</sup>

Spiritual formation addresses the life-long work of the *laying aside* and the *putting on*; *the renewing* and the *new self*. It is in this space that spiritual transformation and character are formed so that the rest of Paul's Ephesians picture may come to fruition; Christians become deep imitators of God.

As imitators of God, believers look to God made flesh: Jesus. How did he model Christian spirituality? For one thing, he practiced solitude. He frequently prayed alone, often in a desolate place.<sup>96</sup> Sometimes he lingered there in solitude, perhaps in meditation, as was the Jewish teaching.<sup>97</sup> He went off in a boat by himself to mourn and reflect after the death of John the Baptist, perhaps seeking comfort from the Holy Spirit and his Father.<sup>98</sup> At times he rose

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 4:22, 24.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 4:23-24.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 4:25-32.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 5:1.

<sup>96</sup> Matthew 14:23; Luke 5:16.

<sup>97</sup> Matthew 14:23; John 6:15; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 77:12; Psalm 119.

<sup>98</sup> Matthew 14:13, Isaiah 51:12; Isaiah 66:13; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Acts 9:31.

early, before sunrise, to pray in the desolate place, occasionally spending the whole night in prayer.<sup>99</sup>

The routine of Jesus' solitary praying and the regularity with which he went to a desolate place to engage it was his practice; no disciple ever seemed surprised by it. In fact, Jesus taught his disciples to pray in individual solitude.<sup>100</sup> As one considers the biblical understanding of discipleship, however, this verbal instruction would not have been necessary. "In the first-century Jewish world of Jesus, being a disciple was all about one key word: *imitation*."<sup>101</sup> While biblical knowledge is important, a disciple of a rabbi was not to merely absorb knowledge.<sup>102</sup> A disciple was to mirror the practices and habits of the teacher, as a full apprenticeship in a way of life.

When Paul instructs all disciples of Jesus Christ to be "imitators of God," he uses the Greek noun *μιμητής*: an imitator, one who follows another's example for exemplary living.<sup>103</sup> Paul wants disciples to absorb the practices and habits of God; to continue, through the Holy Spirit, the mirroring of the practices and habits of Jesus. Paul uses the same noun to instruct readers of 1 Corinthians: "be imitators (*μιμητής*) of me" and "be imitators (*μιμητής*) of me, just as I also am of Christ."<sup>104</sup> Paul uses the same noun to note how the church at Thessalonica

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<sup>99</sup> Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12.

<sup>100</sup> Matthew 6:6.

<sup>101</sup> Edward Sri, "In the Dust of the Rabbi: Clarifying Discipleship for Faith Formation Today," *The Catechetical Review*, no. 4.2 (June 2018): 1, <https://review.catechetics.com/dust-rabbi-clarifying-discipleship-faith-formation-today>.

<sup>102</sup> Romans 10:2-3.

<sup>103</sup> Ephesians 5:1; F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick William Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, 2nd ed., s.v. "4289," (The University of Chicago Press, 1965); Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament*, s.v. "18554," (BibleWorks 2000).

<sup>104</sup> 1 Corinthians 4:16, 11:1.

became imitators (μιμητής) of Paul, his traveling ministry partners, the churches in Judea, and the Lord himself.<sup>105</sup> The author of Hebrews uses the noun to inspire disciples:

And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, that you may not be sluggish, but imitators (μιμητής) of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.<sup>106</sup>

In Philippians 3:17 Paul addresses readers as *συμμιμητής* (fellow-imitators), which is often translated as brethren or brothers and sisters. Yet, there is a different Greek word for that, *ἀδελφός*. In Philippians 3:17, Paul is stressing something different. He is encouraging these fellow-imitators to follow the example of himself and other believers who live according to a certain *τύπος* (model). By addressing readers as fellow-imitators, Paul stresses the fact that he too is an imitator of Jesus.

In Hebrews, the author uses the Greek verb form of the above noun, *μιμέομαι*: to imitate one's way of life, follow as an example.<sup>107</sup> The Hebrews author exhorts readers to remember those Christians who led them and to "imitate (μιμέομαι) their faith."<sup>108</sup> John also uses the same verb in 3 John when commending readers to imitate (μιμέομαι) Demetrius as a Christian model.<sup>109</sup> In 2 Thessalonians 3:7 Paul uses the same verb and fully expected readers to understand the discipleship concept of mirroring the practices and habits of the teacher when he writes, "For you yourselves know how necessary it is to imitate (μιμέομαι) us."<sup>110</sup> Paul continues in 3:9 explaining how he and his ministry partners offer themselves as a model (*τύπος*) for

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<sup>105</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:6, 2:14.

<sup>106</sup> Hebrews 6:11-12.

<sup>107</sup> Friberg, s.v. "18552."

<sup>108</sup> Hebrews 13:7.

<sup>109</sup> 3 John 1:11.

<sup>110</sup> Author's translation; NAS translates as "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example."

readers to imitate (μιμέομαι). Here Paul links μιμέομαι (*imitate*) with τύπος (*model*): τύπος: model, form designed to be copied, form of character, image.<sup>111</sup>

Paul provides other examples of τύπος. He notes how the church in Thessalonica became a model (τύπος) for “all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.”<sup>112</sup> Paul urges both Timothy and Titus to be a model (τύπος) for the followers around them, as Peter urges leaders to be a model (τύπος) to their flock.<sup>113</sup>

Paul emphasizes that this imitating form of discipleship is indeed a form of Christian teaching, as it was a form of rabbinic teaching. Paul addresses the Romans, “But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form (τύπος) of teaching to which you were committed.”<sup>114</sup> This form (τύπος) of teaching and making disciples through an imitation of life, including rhythms of solitude, is the expected and reproducible way of Gospel instruction, of Gospel discipleship and living. It was not just the knowledge of Christ but also the form of “life teaching life,” learner imitating teacher, to which the Romans obediently dedicated their hearts. Frances de Sales, a spiritual writer from the late 1500s, explains it with a familiar example:

We see that little children by hearing their mothers speak and prattling often with them, do come to learn their language, and so we continually conversing with our Savior by meditation, observing and pondering reverently his words, his works and his affections shall soon by the help of his grace, learn to speak, to work and to will and desire as he did.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Friberg, s.v. “27139”; *The Abridged Liddell-Scott Greek-English Lexicon*, s.v. “43508,” (Public Domain).

<sup>112</sup> 1 Thessalonians 1:7.

<sup>113</sup> 1 Timothy 4:12; Titus 2:7; 1 Peter 5:3.

<sup>114</sup> Romans 6:17.

<sup>115</sup> Francis de Sales, *Introductions to the Devout Life*, 1st ed., Vintage Spiritual Classics (New York: Vintage Books, 2002), 2.1.

Modern research demonstrates the effectiveness of what the biblical disciples knew and taught. In a study including various faith traditions, the researchers separated what they term as *intrinsic religiousness* versus *extrinsic religiousness*. Where the faith itself is the motivation, religion is an end in itself, it is categorized as *intrinsic religiousness*. Where desires such as social inclusion, comfort, or status are the primary motivations, religion is a means to other ends, it is categorized as *extrinsic religiousness*. The impacts on the individuals are very different. Intrinsic religiousness is “associated with well-being and good health”—positive outcomes such as lower risks of depression, cardiovascular disease, and early mortality.<sup>116</sup> Extrinsic religiousness was not associated with these positive impacts; in fact, in some cases there was an inverse relationship where depression was worsened through such behaviors as “avoiding life difficulties through religious activities.”<sup>117</sup> Perhaps legalism found its religious trickery in extrinsic religiousness, where “moral rule keeping without development of character” left adherents empty and wanting.<sup>118</sup> There are no shortcuts to the abundant life found in Christ.<sup>119</sup> “The holy God is interested in the moral agent, the moral action, and the moral aftermath.”<sup>120</sup> Eugene Peterson sums it up with pith and charm, “Only when we do the Jesus truth, in the Jesus way, do we get the Jesus life.”<sup>121</sup>

The premise of imitation is crucial for discipleship and spiritual formation. Christians cannot produce the actions Paul describes in Ephesians 4:25-32 without the work of Ephesians

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<sup>116</sup> Kevin D. Jordan et al., “An Interpersonal Approach to Religiousness and Spirituality: Implications for Health and Well-Being,” *Journal of Personality* 82, no. 5 (October 2014): 418-419, <https://doi-org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1111/jopy.12072>.

<sup>117</sup> Jordan et al., “Religious Spirituality,” 419.

<sup>118</sup> Cole, *Gives Life*, 246.

<sup>119</sup> John 10:10.

<sup>120</sup> Cole, *Gives Life*, 246.

<sup>121</sup> Peterson, *Christ Plays*, 334.

4:22-24, which is the same work of Philippians 2:12-13: “work out your salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.”<sup>122</sup> It is a work of both Savior and saved. Therefore, how are Christians instructed to do their part of this work? Through knowledge of the Word, yes, but also through example. They imitate. They imitate Jesus. They imitate Paul and Peter who imitated Jesus. They imitate Titus and Timothy and Priscilla and Aquila and Phoebe, who imitated the founding apostles. They imitate the ways and means of the early church fathers and mothers: Antony of Egypt in the late 200s and the desert saints of the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>123</sup> Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross from the 1500s. Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Woolman and the Puritans from the Reformation and following.<sup>124</sup> Marva Dawn, Richard Foster, Dallas Willard, and Sue Monk Kidd are just a tiny fraction from our contemporary times; and on, and on it goes. The Apostolic tradition continues through church history, urging believers to imitate their practices of spiritual formation.<sup>125</sup>

They all practiced solitude—the same practices that the original disciples watched and absorbed from Jesus—the ways he would withdraw in solitude regularly and predictably. He would read Scripture, pray, meditate, fast, grieve, etc. From church history, Christians could add to the solitude such practices as Lectio Divina, memorizing Scripture, self-examination, wordless prayer, centering prayer, etc.<sup>126</sup> One Puritan spiritual writer conveys it like this, “to read and not

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<sup>122</sup> Philippians 2:12-13.

<sup>123</sup> Sittser, *Deep Well*, 76, 87.

<sup>124</sup> “Calvin devoted a whole chapter in his Institutes to the theme of meditation on the heavenly life. Puritans in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries developed it into a full-fledged art.” Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 167-168; Phillips P. Moulton, ed., *The Journal and Major Essays of John Woolman*, 8th ed. (Richmond, Indiana: Friends United Press, 2007).

<sup>125</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1998), 384, Kindle.

<sup>126</sup> Greenman and Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit*, 16; James C. Wilhoit, “Centering Prayer,” in *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective*, ed. Jeffrey P. Greenman and George Kalantzis (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2010), 180-197; Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 149,

to meditate is unfruitful; to meditate and not to read is dangerous; to read and meditate without prayer is hurtful.”<sup>127</sup>

### **Imitating Jesus in Spiritual Small Group Community**

How else did Jesus model Christian spirituality? He frequently met with a small, intimate group of spiritual companions. In the case of Christ, these were additionally his disciples. While Jesus had the communion of God in his divine nature on earth, he also had a human nature which desired human companionship. As much as they could, Peter, John, and James offered spiritual friendship and small group community to Jesus.

Jesus, the second person of the Trinity, was, is, and always shall be in a loving harmonious relationship with the first and third persons of the Trinity. Jesus’ very nature is in a constant small group...of sorts. This community is complete, lacking nothing – needing nothing, of the same substance but performing differently in the economy of God. Out of this communal substance, humanity was created in the image of God, created to be in relationship with God and with each other.<sup>128</sup> Indeed, even in our solitude with the triune God, we might consider ourselves in a small group...of sorts.

In Jesus’ earthly ministry, it is possible to categorize his interactions into varying levels of outward contact and depth of relationship, as depicted in Table 3.3 below.

**Table 3.3. Community categories of Jesus earthly ministry**

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Category	Numbers	Interaction	Biblical Reference
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153-154, 171; Christine Valters Paintner, *Lectio Divina-The Sacred Art: Transforming Words & Images into Heart-Centered Prayer* (Woodstock, Vermont: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2011), Kindle.

<sup>127</sup> Richard Greenham, *Works* (1612): 41, quoted in Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 158.

<sup>128</sup> Genesis 1:26-27, 28, 31, 2:24-25, 3:8.

Multitudes	Large, varied	Teaching, healing, often these people stayed in this category without moving into discipleship.	Matthew 13:36, 14:14, 23:1; Mark 6:34, 8:34, 10:46; Luke 7:11, 12:1.
Worshipping Community	Varied	Those with whom Jesus worshipped, taught and healed in the synagogues.	Matthew 4:23, 9:35, 13:54; Luke 4:15, 6:6, 13:10
Seeker Groups	Small numbers	Sought out Jesus for healing or teaching, many were the unclean tax collectors and/or sinners.	Matthew 9:10; Mark 2:15; Luke 20:45.
Extended Disciple Group	Ranges in number from 12, with notations of 70, 120, and a multitude	These disciples believed in and served Jesus fulfilling various roles, yet many fell away.	Matthew 23:1; Mark 8:34, 10:46, 16:1; Luke 7:11, 8:2, 10:1, 12:1, 19:37, 20:45, 24:10; John 6:66.
Familiar Disciple Group	Small number	This group loved and served Jesus in a closer context (Examples: Mary the mother of Jesus, Lazarus, Martha, Mary, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Susanna, etc.) Several witnessed the resurrected Jesus.	Matthew 20:21, 27:56; Mark 15:40, 16:1 and 9; Luke 8:3, 24:10; John 11:1-45, 12:1-8, 19:25, 20:16-18.
Personal Disciple Group	12	The apostles who attached themselves to Jesus ministry and witnessed his resurrected self. Those Jesus spoke with privately and shared great lengths of time.	Matthew 9:10, 10:2-4, 13:9-7 and 36, 20:17, 24:3, 26:20-21 and 36-39, 28:16-17; Mark 2:15, 4:34, 6:31; Luke 6:12-16, 9:18, 22:39-45; John 2:12, 3:22, 18:1, 21:2-3
Intimate Disciple Group	3	Peter, John, James. These men offered close companionship and accompanied Jesus during emotional times. Jesus shared deep emotions with them.	Matthew 17:1-6, 20:20-24, 26:36; Mark 9:2-9, 10:35-41, 14:33-37; Luke 9:28-37, 22:8-11, 24:34; John 19:26-27, 21:15-17

Source: Created by the author, Elisa Ashley, for use in this dissertation.

The main category of concern for this paper is the intimate disciple group with whom Jesus spent time. As the chart above denotes, Jesus fellowshiped in concentric circles of groups with the twelve at the center and the three at the heart.

In exploring the few examples the Bible provides, the first is of the transfiguration of Jesus. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all convey the story.<sup>129</sup> Jesus takes Simon Peter, John the disciple he loved, and James the son of Zebedee (also the brother of John) up to a high mountain

<sup>129</sup> Matthew 17:1-6; Mark 9:2-9; Luke 9:28-37.

to pray with him.<sup>130</sup> One might suspect that this had already become a practice for Jesus and his companions, as there is no record of any indignation among the other disciples. However, ten members of the personal disciple group do become indignant shortly thereafter. Soon after the transfiguration, Matthew and Mark record an event where John and James ask to sit on Jesus' right and left in glory.<sup>131</sup> The other ten disciples are offended that John and James would ask to be placed above them in honor. Perhaps the transfiguration had gone to their heads a bit. Interestingly, the personal disciple group do not seem to be offended by the alone time Jesus spends with his three close companions, yet they were angered by the request of a more prestigious place in glory. It seems rather antithetical to long for a place of prestige more than intimate time with Jesus on a mountain.

Upon Jesus' request, the companions kept the transfiguration event confidential, but it was no secret that Jesus was away praying with these three men, as a large group of people met them upon their descent. It certainly stands to reason that Jesus had already begun to form a closer bond with these men, since he chose them to accompany him to his transfiguration. The preparation of the event required lengthy prayer on the mountain, so lengthy that the men fell asleep. After the event, the companions stayed on the mountain for the night, no doubt spending some time together in awe and celebration and thanksgiving. These disciples, after all, did just witness Moses and Elijah. These companions, while not present at Jesus' baptism in order to hear God speak, did hear God speak on that mountain. Jesus' intimate small group witnessed the triune event that mirrored his baptism: the Spirit was manifest, Father God spoke and bore

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<sup>130</sup> Matthew 4:18; John 13:23; Matthew 4:21.

<sup>131</sup> Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-41.

witness to the son, and children of God witnessed the event. This event was holy, personal, emotional, and one Jesus wanted to share with his spiritual companions.

Luke tells us of the preparations of another holy, personal, and emotional event in Jesus' life: the institution of the Lord's Supper.<sup>132</sup> For this task of preparation, Jesus chose two of his spiritual companions, Peter and John. While the two men had no idea that a new sacrament was about to be instituted, they did understand the importance of Passover. Jesus had asked them to handle the preparations, perhaps in part for sentimental reasons. This Passover would be deeply meaningful and perhaps he wanted two trusted companions from his intimate disciple group to handle the arrangements. There is indeed every reason to believe that the small group continued to pull away and pray together. (While Peter and John are not named specifically in Luke 19 as they are in Luke 22, in the preparation for Jesus' triumphal entry, the author believes a good argument could be made that these two companions served him in a similar fashion.<sup>133</sup>)

Matthew and Mark describe the time after Passover, when Jesus, as was his practice, took the personal disciple group to a garden to pray with him.<sup>134</sup> Then, he pulled Peter, John, and James aside. As Jesus knew the cross was at hand, he shared the depths of his soul with them. He shared his pain, distress, sweat, tears, emotions. He tells them, "My soul is deeply grieved, to the point of death; remain here and keep watch with Me."<sup>135</sup> While his companions fall asleep, as they did on the mountain, Jesus still wanted them close to him. Even in the midst of his struggling prayer with his Father, Jesus was still concerned for his intimate disciple group. He desired them to watch and pray so that they would resist temptation.

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<sup>132</sup> Luke 22:8-13.

<sup>133</sup> Luke 19:29-31.

<sup>134</sup> Matthew 26:36-46; Mark 14:32-42.

<sup>135</sup> Matthew 26:37.

On the cross, Jesus loves and trusts John enough to summon him to care for his mother as her own son.<sup>136</sup> In John's Gospel, he tells the story of the restoration of his dear friend and intimate disciple group member, Peter.<sup>137</sup> John takes care to convey Peter's love of Jesus and Jesus' desire for Peter to continue to both love and serve him. John and James witnessed the restoration, as they continued to spend time together in what we can only assume was a sustained deep spiritual companionship. After Jesus restores Peter and conveys the sacrificial death Peter will offer, Peter is concerned for the fate of his friend John. Peter questions Jesus about John's death in much the same caring but boundary-breaking way he asked of Jesus' fate.<sup>138</sup> He was rebuked for each—not for the caring, but for the meddling.

In Jesus' intimate disciple group, he models for us the importance of deep spiritual companions. While it may not be said that Jesus, in his divinity, needed these companions, it can certainly be argued that, in his social humanity, he wanted them. These men certainly needed and wanted Jesus' companionship. He created this intimate group where he could find safety, confidentiality, deep intimacy, loyalty, prayer, companionship, etc. As best they could, these men offered spiritual friendship through interpersonal relationships.<sup>139</sup> Of course, the relationships fail the strict definition of friendship where mutuality and spiritual qualities are shared, since no one can be an equal with the Christ.<sup>140</sup> Yet, it does appear that the intimate disciple group did exhibit some of the qualities of spiritual friendship as described by Aelred of Rievaulx:

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<sup>136</sup> John 19:26-27.

<sup>137</sup> John 21:15-17.

<sup>138</sup> John 21:21; Matthew 16:22-23; Mark 8:32-33.

<sup>139</sup> Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 172.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

Furthermore, a friend is called the guardian of love, or, as some prefer, the guardian of the soul itself. Why? Because it is proper for my friend to be the guardian of mutual love or of my very soul, that he may in loyal silence protect all the secrets of my spirit and may bear and endure according to his ability anything wicked he sees in my soul. For the friend will rejoice with my soul rejoicing, grieve with it grieving, and feel that everything that belongs to a friend belongs to himself.<sup>141</sup>

While the formative small groups of Christians today will have different economies than the intimate disciple group of Jesus, his example has been set. And we are called to imitate.

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<sup>141</sup> Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship*, ed. Marsha J. Dutton, trans. Lawrence C. Braceland, 5 vols., Cistercian Fathers Series (Colleeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2010), Book One, verse 20, Kindle.