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Matthew P. Flynn

Lipscomb University, flynn.matt08@gmail.com

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LIPSCOMB UNIVERSITY

THE EFFICACY OF SHARED, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES
TOWARD THE FORMATION OF FAMILIES
AT MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE HAZELIP SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY
MATTHEW PATRICK FLYNN

HUNTSVILLE, AL

MAY 2023

The Doctorate of Ministry project, directed and approved by the candidate's committee, has been accepted by the Hazelip School of Theology of Lipscomb University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree.

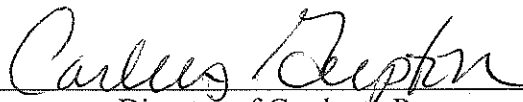
THE EFFICACY OF SHARED, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES
TOWARD THE FORMATION OF FAMILIES
AT MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

By

Matthew Patrick Flynn

for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry



Director of Graduate Program

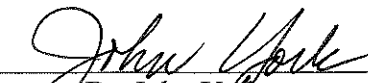
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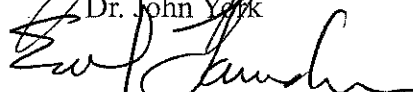
Doctorate of Ministry Committee



Dr. Walter Surdacki, Chair



Dr. John Yeak



Dr. Earl Lavender

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ABSTRACT

This doctor of ministry project presents the results of a qualitative research study of the efficacy of shared spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. Once a week for six weeks, I met with six Mayfair families with adolescents, where they were able to learn about and practice spiritual disciplines consistently together over the course of six weeks. The selected disciplines engaged different God-given human faculties intended to unite us with God and with each other. After each session, families were then invited to practice the discipline as a family throughout the week. I also facilitated space for families to share about their experiences. The goal was to explore the effect of these shared practices in the spiritual formation of the participating families.

Several beneficial findings emerged as a result of this project model. First, the families' shared experiences led to a shared language. The movement from experience to dialogue to formation proved to be a powerful tool for families as they seek to be formed by the Holy Spirit. The project model also created space for families to practice the *Shema* together. The spiritual practices shared by families throughout the series helped them envision a pathway to living in their calling as the people of God. In addition, the shared, spiritual practices played a crucial role in creating community among all the participating families. Finally, while time proved to be the biggest threat in the spiritual formation among the families who participated in the project, the culture of accountability created through this project can assist in generating new spiritual rhythms and pathways that can combat this threat to formation. Overall, this project proved to be effective in impacting the spiritual formation of participating families.

DEDICATION

To Emily Anne,

You are such a beautiful source of God's love, joy, peace, and comfort for me.

Thank you for the innumerable ways you have loved me through this project.

Gx4.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my family: I have always felt incredibly loved and supported by you. Thank you for consistently checking in with my progress, providing much-needed brain breaks, and expressing interest in my research. You are at the heart of my research and center of my experiences with and understanding of God. I love you.

To Papa: Thank you for being my first, unofficial reader. You have loved me well by sharing your thorough, honest feedback. You were an invaluable resource for me as I navigated through this project.

To the Mayfair Shepherds: I will always be grateful for you giving me the opportunity to pursue this Doctor of Ministry. Your trust and support mean so much to me. It is such a blessing to serve this church.

To the Mayfair Ministry Staff: Thank you for your willingness to serve as sounding boards and conversation partners as I have walked through this project. It is an honor to partner with you in ministry.

To the families who participated in the project: I know your time is so valuable. Thank you for sacrificing those 6 weeks for this project. It was a gift to be able to walk through this experience with you.

To Kim and Liz: Thank you for serving as my field observers. Your feedback and observations were so helpful. I'm grateful to have had trusted, talented friends like you that I could count on in that role.

To the MYM students and families: I have the best job in the world! I am so blessed to get to walk with each of you. You add so much liveliness, joy, and love to Emily Anne's and my life. I'm always so proud of you.

To my DMin cohort and professors: This program has truly been life-changing for me. I have learned so much from each of you. I have experienced the Lord's presence through your thoughtfulness, authenticity, insight, accountability, and love. We did this!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This project addresses an opportunity that exists for Mayfair Church of Christ¹ to partner with families with teenagers and create space for them to share in several spiritual practices that engage a variety of human faculties. The purpose of this project is to explore the effectiveness of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair. In chapter 1, I will explore my context at Mayfair, identifying two locational threads that have proven to be critical in my research project: Mayfair’s connection with the tradition of the Stone-Campbell movement and Mayfair’s location in Huntsville, Alabama—a hotbed for science, mathematics, and engineering. These two locational threads have led to a widely cognitive approach to spiritual formation. Chapter 1 will also identify the opportunity, definitions, and significance associated with the research project. Chapter 2 outlines the theological, philosophical, and sociological framework of the project. This chapter begins by focusing on a survey of the theological and epistemological significance of human experience of God. The second part of the chapter outlines a theology of family spirituality rooted in the *Shema* and concludes by delineating identifying characteristics of the unique generation of teenagers I pastor today: Generation Z.² Chapter 3 lays out the methodological approach to the project and includes the intervention strategy, scope, participation plan, and evaluation procedure. Chapter 4 seeks to delineate an interpretation and evaluation of the data collected from the ministry project sessions and participants surveys. In the final chapter, I offer a

¹ Hereinafter labeled “Mayfair.”

² Hereinafter labeled “Gen Z.”

a number of conclusions and implications observed in response to the analysis of the data. I also reflect on both the personal and theological significance of the project and the project's potential significance at Mayfair and for churches outside of Mayfair's context.

Title of Project

The Efficacy of Shared, Spiritual Practices toward the Formation of Families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama

Description of Ministry Context

Mayfair was planted on the outskirts of Huntsville, Alabama, in 1949 by a team of approximately fifty members from Central Church of Christ, located in downtown Huntsville. Mayfair's seventy-three-year history is marked by her heart for the mission of God, resiliency through obstacles, desire for unity, and love for families.

Demographically, Mayfair is multi-generational and consists of many multiple-generation families. Although there are only a few of the original church planters who are still living and a part of our church, their stories have carried on through their family members. As Mayfair continues to navigate the pandemic, they currently average approximately 1000 in attendance on Sunday mornings. Mayfair also supports two additional local congregations: a Spanish-speaking congregation and a congregation located in the north part of Huntsville. Huntsville is an incredibly educated, success-driven city. It is the home of NASA, the Redstone Arsenal, and hundreds of defense-contracting companies. Because of this, our congregation is well-educated and is comprised of engineers, rocket scientists, lawyers, educators, and medical professionals. In the same way, I am a part of a highly educated ministry staff. Seventy-three percent of

our eleven-person ministry team has one or more graduate degrees in theology, ministry, or professional counseling. Currently, our mission is simple. It was developed six years ago: we seek to follow Jesus by loving God and loving others.

I have been a part of Mayfair’s family since 2008—four summers as a children’s ministry intern, five years as a children’s minister, and more than five years as a youth minister. Ministry to families has always been the heartbeat of Mayfair’s congregational life, so it is an honor to serve as our Youth and Family Minister. As the Youth and Family Minister, I lead a ministry team of four who seek to partner with families in the spiritual formation of their teenagers. I am also tasked to manage a group of more than one hundred deacons, ministry leaders, small group leaders, and volunteers of all ages who have each committed to walking with students as we all seek to be formed more fully into the image of Jesus. Based on my experience with Mayfair, as a whole, I have noticed Mayfair has often utilized a highly cerebral approach toward spiritual formation. I believe Mayfair’s location within the Stone-Campbell tradition in Huntsville, Alabama, has led to this approach.

Spiritual Formation and the Stone-Campbell Tradition

In their book, *Participating in God’s Life*, Allen and Swick identify a crossroads in which the leaders of the Stone-Campbell movement found themselves.³ One path was characterized by a cognitive, rational approach to spiritual formation tied to Lockean philosophy, the Enlightenment, and the age of reason, while the other led to an approach to spiritual formation open to the Spirit and rooted in the theology of movement leaders like Stone and Harding. Swick and Allen identify that this “spiritual crossroads” can be

³ Leonard C. Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God’s Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, CA: New Leaf, 2001), 10.

recognized most clearly in a disagreement between two central figures of the movement: Robert Richardson and Tolbert Fanning. Doctor by trade, Richardson was an admirer and close friend of Alexander Campbell himself and served as an editor of Campbell's periodical, *The Millennial Harbinger*. Fanning founded Franklin College and *The Gospel Advocate*. The argument between the two men was sparked by Richardson's series of articles entitled, "The Misinterpretation of Scripture." In it, he argues "that one does not properly interpret the Bible by a merely 'formal' or rational reading of it."⁴ He writes that true understanding goes beyond rationality and occurs in the Spirit. In response, Fanning wrote that Richardson's articles were "purely metaphysical" and later shared that he opposed that line of thought in order to "preserve true Christian faith against the dangerous threats of mysticism."⁵ The reality is this debate was not merely between two men but between two theological mindsets: one that sought to deny and suppress the work of the Holy Spirit and one that sought to understand it more fully. As Campbell, Fanning, and other leaders of the movement preached and argued that the Holy Spirit was only received through the Holy Scriptures, Richardson was fearful that that teaching was a "practical denial of the Holy Spirit's real presence and power."⁶ He was afraid that by embracing a word-only theology, church leaders were suppressing the vitality and energy of the church.

Word-only theology became a reality throughout many of the Churches of Christ within the Stone-Campbell movement. A good example of this approach to theology that

⁴ Leonard C. Allen and Danny Gray Swick, *Participating in God's Life: Two Crossroads for Churches of Christ* (Orange, CA: New Leaf, 2001), 38.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

has characterized the Stone-Campbell tradition can be found in Foy Wallace's 1968 book, *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit*:

All the knowledge of God, Christ, salvation, and spiritual influence comes only from the Word of God. Apart from the inspiration of the apostles and prophets it is impossible for spirit to communicate with spirit except through *words*. God and Christ never personally occupied anyone; and for the same reason the Holy Spirit does not personally occupy anyone.⁷

Another example of this understanding of the Holy Spirit is in 1950 with movement leader and minister, A.O. Colley who writes, "We believe today that our Lord's only communication with the souls of his disciples is through his word; that he is able to communicate his ideas to us in that way; and that the only way we can have access to him and have his assurance of 'divine presence' is the promises he has made us."⁸ The teachings of Colley and Wallace became the norm among many Churches of Christ whose ecclesial practices reflected an understanding that God's intimate work among creation is a thing of the past. For many churches within the movement, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit was only a reality among the apostles. That indwelling ended with the cessation of the gifting of the Holy Spirit referenced in 1 Cor 13:8–10. As I grew up in a conservative Church of Christ, this was my experience. There was no mention of the Holy Spirit outside of the inspiration of Scripture, and as I began college, I had no teaching or experience that informed an understanding of the character and nature of the Holy Spirit. I was taught that we come to know God through Scripture and Scripture alone. However, this is not the theology of the entire movement. John Mark Hicks notes

⁷ Foy E. Wallace, Jr., *The Mission and Medium of the Holy Spirit* (Charleston, AR: Cobb Publishing, 2018), 14.

⁸ A. O. Colley, "The Work of the Holy Spirit (1950), *Stone-Campbell Books*, 510, https://digitalcommons.acu.edu/crs_books/510.

that both Campbell and Stone recognized the transformative work of God and identified that work as the work of the Holy Spirit.⁹ While the majority of the Stone-Campbell Movement aligned with the teachings of Fanning with regards to understanding the work of the Holy Spirit, an embodied understanding of the Holy Spirit is also found through the beginnings of the Restoration Movement.

However, the most basic problem with the movement, as Richardson saw it, was the absence of the Divine life. While Fanning argued that Richardson was utilizing philosophy outside of Scripture, Richardson reluctantly turned the tables. Undeterred by his love and admiration of Campbell, Richardson sparked back, writing that at the heart of this suppression of the Holy Spirit was ironically an embrace by movement leaders of Lockean philosophy. Richardson argued that leaders were unaware of the influence of John Locke and his philosophy, sensual dogmatism. This “dirt philosophy” was the understanding that all we can know is what we can physically sense.¹⁰ Because of this, for movement leaders, faith became exclusively connected to reason. Faith had turned into an academic exercise of logic. According to this philosophy, “The factual testimony, rationally presented and argued, produced faith.”¹¹ Our faith is merely a result of factual discernment.

This moved the movement toward a scientific approach of hermeneutics. Allen writes, “The natural scientist inductively gathers his or her facts from nature; the biblical ‘scientist’ inductively gathers his or her facts from the Bible. The natural scientist,

⁹ John Mark Hicks, “The Holy Spirit and Unity,” accessed February 28, 2022, <https://johnmarkhicks.com/2011/12/05/the-holy-spirit-and-unity-in-stone-campbell-perspective/>.

¹⁰ Leonard and Swick, *Participating in God’s Life*, 60–81.

¹¹ C. Allen Leonard, *Things Unseen: Churches of Christ in (and After) the Modern Age* (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2004), 48.

reasoning from the facts,' reaches precise and certain knowledge; the biblical 'scientist,' likewise reading from the facts, also attains precise and certain knowledge."¹² Because of this scientific, rational approach to spiritual formation, Churches of Christ became more known for their debates rather than their formation into the image of Christ. Holloway writes, "We were a debating people. Our ministers debated Baptists over the order of baptism and salvation, Christian Churches over instrumental music, premillennialists over the millennium, and numerous other religious groups over a variety of issues. As a result, much of our theology in Churches of Christ was formed in controversy."¹³ Faith for many in the Stone-Campbell Movement was a matter of rational thinking and reason. As he comments on the teaching of movement leader, Walter Scott, Tom Millay writes, "The hearer of the gospel need not *wait* upon the mysterious activity of the Holy Spirit in order to believe. Belief can happen *now*, based on the evidence presented. All that is needed is rational assent."¹⁴ In response to our roots in Lockean philosophy, it has become difficult for many churches to see and experience the work of God in the present.

In response to this emphasis on Lockean philosophy, several recent leaders within the Stone-Campbell movement have sought to move churches toward a more holistic, embodied approach to spiritual formation. For example, in 1967, at a lectureship at Abilene Christian, Bible faculty member, J.D. Thomas denounced this form of biblical Deism that "assumes that God started the Christian system and left the Bible down here

¹² Ibid., 58.

¹³ Gary Holloway and Douglas A. Foster, *Renewing God's People: A Concise History of Churches of Christ* (Abilene: Abilene Christian University Press, 2006), 110.

¹⁴ Tom Millay, "An American Pneumatology: Walter Scott in Context," *Stone Campbell Journal Conference*, April 1, 2016, accessed February 26, 2022, https://www.academia.edu/23936406/An_American_Pneumatology_Walter_Scotts_Discourse_on_the_Holy_Spirit_in_Context.

to do what it could, but meanwhile, He, Christ, and the Spirit have all retired to heaven and have nothing to do with the world until the end, when they will come back and check up to see how it all worked out.”¹⁵ Between the movement’s emphasis on a word-only understanding of the Holy Spirit and a Lockean approach toward spirituality, there was little room for God’s activity in the world and in the lives of individuals and communities in the present. Abilene Christian professor Richard Beck reflects on this movement in our tradition that has led to a rational, scientific approach to spirituality that has often become the experience for much of the American church:

The world was once alive and enchanted, quivering with the love of God. The mere existence of the world was a miracle, the gift of each new morning inspiring awe, reverence, and gratitude. We’ve lost track of that miracle. We don’t behold the world as crackling with God’s power and love. We study the Machine in our science classes. Sure, perhaps at the start, with the big bang, God kicked the whole thing off. But once it got ticking, the cosmos no longer needed God. The laws of physics took over. We sidelined the Love that moves the stars, and God began to die his slow death.¹⁶

As a result, many Churches of Christ today continue to follow behind the footsteps of Fanning, suppressing the tangible, present work of the Holy Spirit to Scripture alone and unwittingly supporting Lockean philosophic understanding of world and faith. While others do not directly fall in line with these two theological and philosophical approaches, many churches, including Mayfair, have been affected by these philosophies.

Spiritual Formation at Mayfair

To gain a fuller understanding of Mayfair’s context, I sat down with six leaders to ask the following questions:

¹⁵ Allen, *Things Unseen*, 92.

¹⁶ Richard Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels: Recovering an Enchanted Faith in a Skeptical Age* (Minneapolis Broadleaf Books, 2021), 25.

1. In your experience with Mayfair, what are the primary ways our church has sought to be spiritually formed? Which spiritual practices have been central to the life of the church, and how have you seen them shift over time?
2. How would you describe Mayfair's theological understanding of the Holy Spirit? How is that understanding reflected in the practice and worship of the church?
3. What significant events in Mayfair's history have been central in our understanding of God? How have those significant events shaped the way the church seeks to connect with and experience God?
4. How has Mayfair's location in Huntsville, Alabama, shaped the way the church seeks to connect with and experience God? What would you identify as some of the gifts associated with our location in Huntsville, and what would you identify as some of the challenges associated with our location in Huntsville?

The only exclusion criteria in identifying the leaders was that each served at Mayfair in some capacity for at least fifteen years. The goal of these interviews was to identify spiritual practices that have been central to the formation of Mayfair, to explore the way Mayfair's understanding of the Holy Spirit has shaped those practices, and to survey the way Mayfair's spiritual formation has been shaped by her history and social location in Huntsville, Alabama.

Spiritual Practices at Mayfair

After interviewing the six leaders at Mayfair, four sets of spiritual practices came to the surface as central to Mayfair's spiritual formation. The first of these spiritual practices was quickly identified by every leader: devotion to Scripture. One of the leaders interviewed immediately shared, "The primary means [toward spiritual formation] is simply exposure to the Word of God. I think there's been a fundamental appreciation, fortunately, at this church, for the Word of God as being pivotal in our spiritual formation." This participant continued that they hoped that all churches might approach spiritual formation with the understanding that "Scripture, with all its various kinds of

literature, is ultimately the voice of God trying to speak to us about his design, his dreams for us, and what he wants to see in us as the outcome of our lives.” From the beginning, as a church plant on Bob Wallace Avenue, Mayfair’s spiritual formation has centered around the Word of God. This focus on Scripture is often practiced through study. Another participant shared Mayfair’s approach to formation has often been “information-centric” through Bible classes and preaching. They described Mayfair as having “a long history of embodying the best of our tradition in Churches of Christ, as people who love ‘The Book.’” While her approach to formation can be described as information-centric, her approach to reading is theologically rich. The congregation is hungry to dive into the historical context of Scripture and allow that context to inform her understanding. Mayfair’s desire to understand Scripture is grounded in application. A different participant noted that study of scripture must move beyond an intellectual pursuit to be put into practice throughout the week. They shared that Mayfair’s leadership desires to be “close to the Word [and] yet true to the Word;” however, they also seek to ask the question, “How do we live it?” This pursuit of the truth found in God’s Word and our invitation to practice that truth has been embodied in a deep lineage of ministers that include Jack Duncan (Mayfair’s first preacher), Bob Anderson, Gary Bradley (who has served the church at Mayfair for more than forty years), and currently Jason Bybee (who has served at Mayfair for nearly twenty years). Overall, while at times Mayfair may be driven by a desire to acquire knowledge of God, at the heart of her devotion to scripture is a desire to know God more deeply and understand God more fully.

The second spiritual practice that was also identified by every leader interviewed was service. Participation in the mission of God has always been a central part of

Mayfair's body life. The motivation behind Mayfair's heart for the mission of God has shifted throughout the years. At first, Mayfair seemed to have been driven by a desire to obey God and a desire to share the Gospel in locations that have never heard the Gospel before. This is of no surprise considering Huntsville's connection with the space race. Our church has often been motivated by the seemingly impossible. However, over time, Mayfair's approach to mission has become more theologically rich. One interview participant noted that Mayfair's understanding of mission could be summarized in this way: "foreign mission, local service." According to a document that was produced by one of Mayfair's leaders in 2009, a mission in Thailand led by Ola Traw began in 1961.¹⁷ This was the first of many mission efforts that have taken place all over the world including ministries in Baja, Belize, South Africa, Cuba, Scotland, Russia, and Honduras. In the late 60s and early 70s, Mayfair also began to lead several stateside mission efforts that included church plants in Montana and in the northeast. These efforts were often spearheaded by one of Mayfair's shepherds, Ernest Petty. Youth Missions also became an innovative way for Mayfair to participate in the mission of God locally and abroad. These efforts were often led by Lee Milam who has served on staff at Mayfair for more than forty years as a youth minister and now, a worship minister. Lee led trips to the City of Children in Ensenada, Mexico, Augusta, GA, Orlando, FL and Sarnia, Ontario, Canada at a time when trips like that were not normative. Lee's approach to youth ministry and youth missions was creative, visionary, and formative. On the youth group's trip to the 1997 City of Children in Ensenada, Mexico, Lee with a group of other Mayfair leaders felt called to take a group of high school juniors and seniors down the Baja

¹⁷ This writeup on Mayfair's story can be found in Appendix M.

peninsula to a small agrarian city, San Quintin, Mexico, to visit a new church that had recently been planted. This trip led to the beginning of Baja Missions—a mission organization that has now led to nineteen church plants that are led by local ministers in Baja. Experiences like this one were formative for all participants involved.

While historically Mayfair has often understood local mission work as service, there has been a shift over the past decade to envision our work in Huntsville through a missional lens. Many of Mayfair’s leaders have been intentional to seek out ways our church may be called to participate in the mission of God right here in our city. One example of this movement was Mayfair’s ministry 2820 (named after the address of the missional space). The leaders of 2820 have sought to keep their eyes open to the needs of their neighborhood, and over the past three years, the space has become a haven for Huntsville’s displaced and homeless community. It has connected them with local ministry organizations including ShowerUp (a local nonprofit that provides mobile showers, hygiene resources, and personal care for those who need it) and His Way (a local rehabilitation organization that helps men and women overcome addiction to drugs and alcohol). In 2021, the shepherds were moved by Acts 19’s account of Paul’s ministry in Ephesus where Luke writes that his ministry “went on for two years, so that all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord.”¹⁸ Over this past year, they have sought to inspire and empower the congregation to imagine what it might look like for the whole city of Huntsville to encounter the Gospel. This has led to a variety of new local ministries like 2820 that have been planted this year.

¹⁸ Acts 19:10.

The third spiritual practice that has been central to Mayfair's history was fellowship. One of the most pivotal and painful events in Mayfair's history was a split that took place in 1979. This event continues to be difficult for leaders to share about who was a part of that moment; however, the event has been deeply formative. One interview participant noted that it was as if a bomb went off. Mayfair went from an 800-member church to a 400-member church overnight. While this season was incredibly challenging, one of Mayfair's leaders shared, "God can take a broken, painful milestone and change it," and that is the paradigm Mayfair's leadership has sought to understand that event and other challenging moments in Mayfair's history. They have been able to discern the ways God has been at work in response to difficult moments throughout the life of the church. Fellowship became a central practice in Mayfair's healing. Gary Bradley was hired after the split and helped to move the church toward healing. While the event is seen as an incredibly painful part of Mayfair's history, it is also recognized as unifying. One participant shared that one of Gary's strengths was that he loved the church. They shared that they remembered Gary proclaiming, "Jesus loved the church, and so we love the church! We're gonna be about love in this community," and that became the heart of Mayfair's community—a church who loved one another and loved their neighbors. This movement toward loving the church was embodied by a fellowship that took place annually at the Tate Farm. The Tate's would invite the entire church over to their farm for games, worship, and a meal. They would cook for hundreds, and according to sources, the food was absolutely delicious. One interview participant noted, "The Tate's would feed 900 people in their front yard, and from then on, the bonding and the community that was brought upon by that was so beneficial. You can't go to something like that, and

see the giving, generosity, fellowship, and laughter, and not love the church.” Events like this picnic helped to create a spirit of fellowship and love in the 80s and 90s. However, another participant noted that the more Mayfair grew, the more challenging it was to create space for this type of fellowship on a larger scale. Today, fellowship often takes place on a smaller scale in small groups or in age-based activities. I am hopeful that fellowship will continue to be a practice and an area of growth our leadership can prioritize as a congregation.

Finally, over the past year, the practices of prayer and fasting have been emphasized among our shepherds. Many of the leaders I met with shared that our shepherds participated in a retreat in September 2021 that was pivotal in their practice as a leadership team. During that retreat, the shepherds spent time studying and practicing intentional prayer and fasting together. Furthermore, after that retreat, the shepherds have continued to practice prayer and fasting as they walk through seasons of discernment. Leaders have shared that Mayfair has always been a praying church; however, it has been pivotal to pair that prayer with the practice of fasting. One interview participant shared that the periods of prayer and fasting as an eldership “have made our hearts more sensitive to the unseen world.” While Mayfair’s leadership hopes that this can become a central practice of the church-at-large, it is still emerging and has yet to become a shared practice of the entire congregation.

Mayfair’s Understanding of the Holy Spirit

While interviewing the six Mayfair leaders, each participant admitted that teaching about and practice related to the person of the Holy Spirit have not been

prominent in Mayfair's history. Historically, I see this absence of teaching connected to a desire for unity and a skepticism toward the role of experience in faith formation and experience-centered faith communities. At the same time, each leader also identified that most of Mayfair's congregation believes that the Holy Spirit indwells in individual believers. One leader summarized, "Certainly, among the leadership...there's an understanding that the Holy Spirit is an indwelling presence that we receive at the point of our conversion or baptism, as a special blessing in my mind, as God forgives us." This same leader wondered, "Does the Holy Spirit empower us to go beyond our limits as individuals and as a church and launch out in new areas? I'm not sure that we have that picture to the extent that we should." Another participant noted that they have seen a shift in casual conversation regarding the presence and work of the Holy Spirit over the past ten years. They mentioned that Mayfair members are more likely to acknowledge the ways they have seen the Spirit moving in their lives day-to-day.

Although Mayfair's comfort level with the Holy Spirit has increased through the years, there still seems to be a sense of caution today when discussing the church's understanding of the Holy Spirit. One of the participants noted that they attribute some of that caution to the leadership's desire for unity. Pursuit of unity has always been a core value of Mayfair's leadership, especially in relation to the events that transpired in 1979. Consequently, because Mayfair's demographic is made up of one group who perceives the Holy Spirit as only indwelling the Word and one group who perceives the Holy Spirit indwelling individual believers, the topic has often been pushed out to the periphery to maintain unity. Leadership may touch on the topic from time-to-time but has not consistently included Holy Spirit language in teaching and in worship. However, many of

the leaders who participated in the interviews recognize this as an area of growth for Mayfair. As the population who prescribes to a Word-only understanding of the Holy Spirit becomes smaller, there is greater comfort and desire for the Holy Spirit to become a more central figure in our worship and teaching.

There also appears to be a slight apprehension to the role of experience in faith formation. This skepticism is often attributed to other Christian groups' heavy emphasis on the physical manifestation of the Spirit. As one of the participants reflected on the action of the Spirit, they shared the following:

I think, for a lot of people, that struggle is just how do we know that the Spirit is there, if we're not experientially aware of the Spirit...And I finally came to the conclusion that if there was a tangible experience of the Holy Spirit, we would seek that experience, maybe more than we should. We would want that spiritual high, and I think God doesn't want us to only seek that experience. He wants us to be more involved in ministry."

Another participant noted, "I think for those of us in Churches of Christ, we have long been formed this way that we'd rather be right than experience something because your feelings can betray you. You shouldn't always trust those feelings. You just trust truth." However, this skepticism toward experience has sometimes led to an imbalanced approach to spiritual formation that concentrates only on what we can see, touch, and read about in Scripture. That same participant shared that in their experience serving at Mayfair, they have found it helpful to envision Bible study as a pathway to give language to what we are experiencing in our day-to-day lives—helping to move Mayfair members "from the classroom to the laboratory." Perhaps Bible study understood through this paradigm can serve as a bridge at Mayfair toward a more balanced approach to spiritual formation that connects the movement of the Holy Spirit to the mind, heart, body, and experiences among God's people in Huntsville.

Huntsville's Role in Mayfair's Spiritual Formation

Mayfair's social location in Huntsville has played a central role in her formation as a church and in her understanding and pursuit of the Lord. In her origin, Mayfair was a church plant on the southern edge of town in 1949, and in Mayfair's early years, Huntsville itself was a small, rural town. Huntsville is at the heart of the Bible belt and in between two of the most influential areas in the Stone-Campbell movement: Middle Tennessee and Florence, Alabama. One interview participant noted that in their experience with Mayfair, they see the ways our church has been influenced by leaders like David Lipscomb, James Harding, and Barton Stone. They noted that much of our understanding of God aligns with what they have read from Stone, Harding, and Lipscomb. At the same time, another of the participants noted the influence of T.B. Larimore, a minister located in Florence. Larimore was more fundamental in his approach to theology and believed that there should be a Church of Christ congregation in walking distance from every neighborhood. In fact, at one time, Lauderdale County had more Churches of Christ than any county in the country. Consequently, Churches of Christ in Huntsville were influenced by the Stone-Campbell tradition's pragmatic approach to spiritual formation. However, in 1961, everything changed for Huntsville. NASA and the Redstone Arsenal made their home in the area, and in the words of one of Mayfair's leaders, "Huntsville goes from extremely rural to boomtown." An influx of military personnel and engineers from all over the country made their way to Huntsville. Huntsville shifted from being a rural, farm town to today being one of the top three cities with the highest concentration of STEM jobs (jobs in the fields of science, technology,

engineering, and math) in the country at 15.7 percent.¹⁹ While speaking to a NASA employee, I was surprised when he shared that NASA's placement in Huntsville did not dramatically change the religious make up of Huntsville. He shared that because Huntsville is the engineer wing of NASA, many of the engineers who moved into town came from educational institutions like Georgia Tech, Auburn University, and Texas A&M University who had similar religious and cultural backgrounds to Huntsville. The employee noted that if Huntsville was the home of the science wing of NASA, this change would have been more dramatic. Huntsville's most dramatic shift was socio-economic. Because of the growth in population, Mayfair was no longer on the outskirts of town but was at the center of one of the most affluent areas of town. The change in population led to a highly educated congregation, and most of the congregation held white-collar jobs. One of the contributors observed, "The whole atmosphere of Huntsville in the 60s and 70s was all about intelligence and cerebral knowledge...I remember a lot of my childhood, most guest speakers were all about dispelling atheism, Christian evidence, and the case for the truth." Huntsville's population often connected with the hermeneutics associated with Mayfair's Stone-Campbell tradition. Our tradition's pragmatic approach to spiritual formation aligned well with the pragmatism inherent in the fields of science, mathematics, and engineering.

Many of the participants indicated a connection between Mayfair's location in Huntsville and a very linear way of thinking and learning. A couple of participants remarked that Guy N. Woods became an influential voice to the Mayfair community.

¹⁹ Niall McCarthy, "The U.S. Cities with the Highest Concentration of STEM Jobs [Infographic]," *Forbes Magazine*, April 17, 2019, accessed May 10, 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/niallmccarthy/2019/04/17/the-u-s-cities-with-the-most-stem-jobs-infographic/?sh=adf89204d19e>.

Woods was a lawyer-turned-preacher. His approach was linear, scholarly, and intellectual and connected with many of our members. One of the leaders interviewed shared that when Woods preached it was like he was standing in front of a courtroom. Woods returned to Mayfair on an annual basis to preach for more than a decade and cared so deeply for the church that he left a scholarship fund for Mayfair members who intended to go into ministry. Still, no single person has been as influential in the spiritual formation of Mayfair as Gary Bradley. Many participants noted that Gary was the ideal preacher to come on board in 1979. Almost every interview participant referenced Mordecai's exhortation toward Esther in Esther 4:14, where Mordechai encouraged Esther that she was uniquely positioned to lead Israel "in such a time as this." Gary is viewed in the same light, as he helped lead the church toward healing amid arguably the most tumultuous season in Mayfair's history.²⁰ He also helped to lead Mayfair to a fuller understanding of God's love and grace. One of Mayfair's leaders recognized Gary's graciousness, sharing that he was gracious in the way he preached, pastored, and led. Another participant called him "a Bible scholar from South Alabama." He embodied Mayfair's rural past and intellectual present. Gary's words were rooted in Scripture and garnered the credibility from the congregation; however, they also connected to the heart. Gary's practical, heartfelt approach to preaching assisted in connecting the congregation's learning to their hearts and experiences. Furthermore, in my own experience over the past ten years, I have witnessed our current lead minister, Jason Bybee, facilitate deeper growth and

²⁰ Because I have found that the contents of the split in 1979 do not have any direct bearing on the scope of this project, I have chosen to not go into detail of that prompter. As I have shared, the biggest impact of the split on Mayfair's understanding of the Spirit is her desire to find "middle ground" in order to maintain peace. Because of her desire for peace, there have been times where Mayfair leaders avoided certain topics and subject matter, including the work of the Spirit. In my experience, avoidance of this central theological truth has shifted in recent years.

openness with spiritual practices that I believe will continue to develop a more embodied approach to spiritual formation. While Mayfair's location in Huntsville brings about several challenges, it is full of possibility beyond our greatest imagination. Because of Mayfair's thoughtful, intelligent, innovative, generous congregation (qualities rooted in our location in Huntsville), our church is positioned to continue to grow in understanding of and connection to the triune God of love. Just as many in our congregation have committed a portion of their lives to the exploration of the mysteries of space, there is a deep desire among God's people at Mayfair to explore the mysteries of our God and to embody love of God with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Opportunity

As noted above, because Mayfair's location is in a hotbed for research in science, math, and technology, Mayfair's population is highly cerebral and linear thinking. Furthermore, Mayfair is a part of the Stone-Campbell tradition whose spirituality is rooted in rationalism. Our tradition is marked by a pragmatic approach to spirituality and a practice of pneumatology that is often confined to the inspiration of Scripture. In my experience, these two locational threads have led to a disconnect in the spiritual formation of both students and adults at Mayfair. For many in our congregation, the most natural way to pursue God is through the mind. However, I have spoken with several people at Mayfair who have struggled with their faith because their intellectual pursuit of God leaves them desiring more. This in part could be due to the larger shifts in American culture that have become more experiential, regardless of the STEM setting. They desire an embodied faith that integrates their mind, heart, and experiences.

Throughout the biblical narrative, the home is the center for the spiritual formation of children and adolescents. Parents have received a calling from God to love him with their hearts, souls, and strength. Their goal is to pass that love along to the next generation. However, because of the challenges stated above, parents in our context often lack the confidence and tools to express their faith and to invite their children to participate alongside them.

Historically, spiritual practices have become a vessel for people to experience God that moves them toward deeper intimacy with Jesus. These practices tap into several human faculties: mind, body, emotions, imagination, and memory. These are tools that lead us beyond intellectual pursuit toward an integrated love for God that engages our heart, soul, mind, and strength. Consequently, the opportunity exists for the church to partner with families and create space for them to share in these spiritually formative practices together.

Definitions

Family/Families – When I use this term in this project, I have in mind specifically the diverse family units that make up our families with adolescents at Mayfair. These family units can include traditional family units, blended family units, family units led by single parents, and families with non-traditional caretakers.

Gen Z – This is the generation of those who were born from approximately 1995 through 2010.²¹

High Schooler – This is a student currently in the 9th through 12th grade.

²¹ James Emery White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2017), 38.

Middle Schooler – This is a student currently in the 6th through 8th grade.

Students – These are children and adolescents that are a part of Mayfair’s Youth Ministry whose ages range from 12-18 years old.

Spiritual Disciplines and/or Practices – Intentional practices and experiences that create space for us to "place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."²²

Significance to Ministry

In my congregation, I have noticed a deep desire from students and adults alike for an embodied experience with God that moves beyond intellectual pursuit. Spiritual practices can lead to a fuller, more embodied faith that integrates experience with the mind, heart, spirit, and body. While we consistently create space for our students to practice these spiritual disciplines, I can imagine the impact of these shared practices on the formation of the family as a whole. I am confident these shared experiences will be a doorway for these families to connect with God together in ways they may have never connected before.

This project should prove helpful on several levels. First, the research and class will assist in our church’s partnership with families by providing tools for parents as they seek to pass on their faith and love for God to their children. I hope they will walk away from the class with an understanding of ways they can practice these disciplines consistently within the context of the home. Second, the project will serve as an opportunity for families to begin to integrate their experiences of God that engage mind, body, and spirit. Finally, the project will serve as a model for churches that are a part of the Stone-Campbell tradition and many other denominations and traditions to create

²² Richard J. Foster, *Spiritual Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (New York: HarperOne, 1998), 7.

space for parents and students to participate in mutually beneficial spiritual practices that engage the whole self. The research project itself was created for and occurred within the unique social and emotional system of Mayfair. While the project itself may not be completely transferable to other church systems, I am hopeful that the models, learnings, and conclusions gained from the project will serve useful to other churches who are seeking to walk beside families in the formation of their faith.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As demonstrated in chapter one, Mayfair's contextual location within the Stone-Campbell tradition and in Huntsville, Alabama, has led to a mostly cognitive approach to spiritual formation. At Mayfair, teaching has become the primary means of formation and discipleship. I am arguing that a more holistic, integrated approach is needed in the spiritual formation of families at Mayfair. The first part of the literature review surveys the theological and epistemological significance of human experience of God. This survey begins theologically with a focus on the foundation of the identity and character of the triune God—love—and God's invitation to participate in that love we read through the *Shema* (Deut. 6:4–9). The survey will then address the way God has created humanity with certain epistemic faculties that create space for humans to experience the very presence of God and will then survey a history of understanding of epistemological experience of God among theologians. Central to that discussion will be William P. Alston's seminal work on Epistemology, *Perceiving God*. Finally, the first part of the literature review will discuss the role of the Holy Spirit and human attentiveness in epistemology and will consider spiritual disciplines as epistemic experience.

Because of the research project's focus on families with adolescents, the second part of the literature review will survey the theology and praxis of family spirituality. It will begin with a study of the *Shema*, utilizing the passage as a model for the spiritual formation of families. The review will also outline several foundational passages located in the New Testament that inform an understanding of spiritual formation of adolescents and families. The review will then survey a history of adolescent spiritual formation and

catechesis throughout church history and a brief history of youth ministry. To gain a better understanding of today's adolescents, I will delineate a number of identifying characteristics of Gen Z. The review will conclude by focusing on two ecclesiological practices that I believe can assist in the spiritual formation of families: church and family partnership and communal experiences of God.

Theological and Epistemological Significance of Experience of God and Participation in Spiritual Practices

Trinitarian Foundations of Human Experience of God's Love

Theologically, love is at the very core of the identity and character of God.

Stanley Grenz writes that love is *the* foundational attribute of God. Regarding the apostle John's description of God as love, Grenz writes that John's statement "refers...to the intratrinitarian relationship within the eternal God. God is love within himself."²³ Love is the essence of God and is most clearly reflected in the life of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In fact, because God is triune, he is fundamentally "loving relationality and sheer liveliness."²⁴ At their very core, the Trinity is a community of love. God *is* a living relationship of love. As he describes the nature of the Trinity's "loving relationality," Paul Fiddes points to the teaching of Gregory of Nazianzus who writes that the divine life of God can be best understood through the concept of *perichorisis*—a circle dance. He emphasizes that this image of the circle dance "implies a God in movement...rather than

²³ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 72.

²⁴ Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 23.

a God whose intellectual love simply moves other things and people.”²⁵ He paints a picture of the Trinity dancing among themselves and living in perfect mutuality, reciprocity, and peace.²⁶ We see this love demonstrated throughout the biblical narrative but most clearly embodied in the life and ministry of Jesus. Consequently, considering this living relationship of love, creation’s understanding of loving God arises out of God’s own love within the Triune community. It is within this trinitarian framework that we are invited to experience God.

The Trinity’s circle of love and mutuality was never intended to be closed off to creation. Instead, creation is the direct result of the expansive love of God. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen writes that the creation act is an act of “divine hospitality,”²⁷ for out of the overflow of his character, God created with the intent to expand his love. In the act of creation, God creates that which is not God for the purpose of that creation being drawn into intimate participation *with* God. The apostle Peter confirms this, as he invites his readers to become “participants in the divine nature.”²⁸ Because humankind is created in the image of God, we are invited to participate in this trinitarian circle of love. The instinct and desire for connection and love are embedded in our very identity. Humankind has been created for the purposes of connection with the Divine and connection with the Divine’s creation. According to Paul K. Moser, we “come to know God by knowing God’s character of love, and human participation in God’s love is the main avenue to

²⁵ Paul S. Fiddes, *Participating in God* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 74.

²⁶ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 31.

²⁷ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Spirit and Salvation*, vol. 4 of *A Constructive Christian Theology for a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 44.

²⁸ 2 Pet 1:4.

knowing God's character."²⁹ God invites us to respond to his love by reciprocating that love.³⁰ This is the heart of the message of 1 John 4:7–21. As we experience the transformative love of God, we participate in that love by loving one another and by abiding in the presence of the triune God of love. While it might contradict some of the central tenets of the Stone-Campbell tradition's theology of the Holy Spirit described in chapter one, this depiction of the triune God of love would help lead the people at Mayfair to a fuller understanding of our God and the invitation He extends to us to participate in His love.

***Shema* as Biblical Foundation of the Human Invitation to Experience God**

The cornerstone teaching in all of Scripture, the *Shema*, points to the divine invitation to participate in the trinitarian circle of love.³¹ Moltmann writes, "All the commandments are explications of the one commandment, to love God and to cleave to him (Deut 6:5), and this one commandment is but the reverse side of the promise. It commands what the promise offers."³² This is why the *Shema* is at the heart of teaching in the Torah and the entire biblical narrative. The commandment moves us toward

²⁹ Paul K. Moser, "The Inner Witness of the Spirit," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 114.

³⁰ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 178.

³¹ The *Shema* is the name for the Hebrew passage Deuteronomy 6:4–9, "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates."

³² Jürgen Moltmann, *The Theology of Hope: On the Ground and the Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 121.

communion with the triune God.³³ All the law and all of scripture point toward this central commandment to love God. I was moved by the way Daniel Berrigan described this command:

For the great command follows on a prior impulse named grace. We are commanded to love the One who has first loved us—more who has lighted in us the flame of divine life. Thus, the command signals a kind of recognition scene. Like knows Like, and is known; Like embraces Like, and is embraced. It is the holy in us who knows the Holy. It is the love of God in us that enables love. Like heliotropes, we turn to the light, toward the God who first named us: “Mine.”³⁴

The *Shema* moves us toward our created purpose—participation in the divine life. This is a life characterized by mutuality, reciprocity, and love. Furthermore, the structure of the *Shema* itself moves us toward a deeper, more intimate love. Brueggemann writes that the movement of our love from heart to soul to strength speaks to “the superlative degree of total commitment to YHWH.”³⁵ The love described in the *Shema* is a holistic, fully embodied love. Daniel I. Block summarizes that the *Shema* is a commandment “to commit themselves exclusively to this incomparable YHWH by fearing him alone, walking in his ways, loving him alone, serving only him, and proving it with *full-bodied and whole-hearted* obedience to his will.”³⁶

³³ It should be noted that while this would be a majority view of most Christian scholars and thinkers, the author of Deuteronomy is not working out of a Trinitarian understanding of Yahweh.

³⁴ Daniel Berrigan, *Deuteronomy: No Gods but One* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 45.

³⁵ Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, Abingdon Old Testament Commentaries (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 83.

³⁶ Daniel I. Block, *The Gospel according to Moses: Theological and Ethical Reflections on the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2012), 267.

Epistemology of Experience of God

Epistemological Faculties Created for Connection with God

The triune God has created humankind intentionally for the sake of fully embodied connection. This connection begins with the mind. In their book *How God Changes Your Brain*, neuroscientist Dr. Andrew Newburg and therapist Mark Robert Waldman outline the parts of the human brain that shape connection with God. For example, Newburg and Waldman note that the occipital-parietal circuit is engaged in early childhood stages as perceptions of God are mostly concrete, while the parietal-frontal circuit forms the relationship between an individual and God. It creates space for an individual to experience the presence of God. The frontal lobe helps to counterbalance the fight or flight center of the brain, the amygdala. The frontal lobe is the part of the brain that also helps people to think rationally about their relationship with God. Moreover, Newburg and Waldman write that the “thalamus gives emotional meaning to your concepts of God...[and] appears to be the key organ that makes God feel objectively real,” while “the anterior cingulate allows you to experience God as loving and compassionate.”³⁷ Dr. George Vaillant writes that our brains are a “coordinated whole.”³⁸ The diverse parts of the brain cooperate to lead humans toward deeper, embodied connection with the Divine and with creation.

However, while the mind is wired for connection with God, this connection is not isolated to the human brain. As noted above, God seeks to engage all of us—mind, body,

³⁷ Andrew Newburg, M.D. and Mark Robert Waldman, *How God Changes Your Brain: Breakthrough Findings from a Leading Neuroscientist* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2009), 43–44.

³⁸ George E. Vaillant, M.D., *Spiritual Evolution: How We are Wired for Faith, Hope, and Love* (New York: Broadway Books, 2008), 165.

and spirit. Evan Howard emphasizes the fully embodied human connection with God as he identifies the nature of human experience of God: “Human experience arises as embodied soul/mind/self/spirit, constituted by the somewhat integrated arising of various mental-biological operations or systems of operations, which ordinarily proceed in generally definable stages and develop in time and space, within the context of a web of relationships and at various levels of depth, while maintaining its own unique being.”³⁹ In other words, human experience occurs as our fully embodied self is integrated through various systems of operation, over time within the context of a “web of relationships.” In his book, *Affirming the Touch of God*, Howard delineates the three operating systems that are at the hub of human experience with God: cognitive operations, affective operations, and volitional operations. According to Howard, the cognitive operations system is the source of all “inquiry, judgment, insight, deduction, comparison, synthesis and other similar operations.”⁴⁰ For Howard the cognitive system is the system of rational and organized *thinking*.

The affective operation system is the source of “feeling, attraction, action tendency, excitement, mood, reactions, and the host of labels for individual emotions.”⁴¹ Curt Thompson emphasizes the ways the affective operations system aligns with the nature and character of God. He writes, “The point, of course, is that God attunes to us and feels and acts contingently. We influence him through our emotional states. Certainly, through Scripture we see that God feels joy, hurt, surprise, delight, grief, anger, distance,

³⁹ Evan B. Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2008), 81.

⁴⁰ Evan B. Howard, *Affirming the Touch of God: A Psychological and Philosophical Exploration of Christian Discernment* (Lanham: University Press of America, Inc., 2000), 293.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 293.

and a multitude of other things in response to him.”⁴² Our affective operation systems interact with the affections of the triune God. They reflect God’s creative intention. God has created humanity for the sake of connection, and the heart of this connection takes place at the affective operational level.

Finally, according to Howard, our volitional operation system is the location of the human will. This is where the activity in the affective and cognitive operation systems is transformed into a lived, bodily reality. True connection with God engages the whole self and leads to lived experience. According to philosopher Howard Wettstein, this is the case in Jewish teaching as well, “Belief itself is never mentioned in the Hebrew Bible...[there is] no talk of believing doctrines, believing that something is the case...The Hebrew Bible’s interest is rather in one’s overall stance, the essential components of which are affective and behavioral, most importantly awe/fear and love of God as realized in lived experience.”⁴³ As we *experience* the Lord through these three operation systems, each system is then transformed. According to Dallas Willard, this is at the heart of spiritual formation. He writes that spiritual formation is “the transformation of the inner reality of the self in such a way that the deeds and words of Jesus become a natural expression of who we are. But it is the nature of the human being that the ‘inner reality of the self’ settles into our bodies, from which that inner reality then operates in *practice*.”⁴⁴ Curt Thompson points out that in Psalm 86:10, David asks

⁴² Curt Thompson, M.D., *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale Momentum, 2010), 101.

⁴³ Howard Wettstein, *The Significance of Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 131.

⁴⁴ Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ*, 20th anniversary edition (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2020), 172.

the Lord to give him an “undivided heart.” This is a heart that is “united, knit together, or...in the language of neuroscience, *integrated*.”⁴⁵ Because of our unique design, the triune God pursues humanity’s fully embodied self. God’s transforming love moves us beyond the mind to engage our cognitive, affective, *and* volitional operation systems.

Historical Theological Survey of Epistemological Experience of God

For centuries, theologians have sought to understand the nature of God’s multi-sensory pursuit of humanity. In their book, *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley have compiled a collection of monographs that survey the understanding of the perception of God throughout the history of Christian spirituality. To begin, Mark McInroy notes that when Origen speaks of experiencing God, he utilizes language that engages all five senses. He writes that Origen

speaks of seeing God with ‘eyes of the mind’, hearing with ‘spiritual ears’, speaking to God with a ‘bodiless voice’, and ‘breathing Christ in everything’...He describes a ‘sense of touch’ for handling the ‘Word of life’, ‘smelling...with no sensible organs of perception’ and ‘taste that feeds on living bread that has come down from heaven’.⁴⁶

The concept of *theosis* was central to the teaching of early Eastern spirituality. As Eastern theologians reflect on the *telos* of the Christian life, the goal was union with the Trinity. Sarah Coakley makes this connection as she walks through the teachings of Gregory of Nyssa regarding his understanding of human experience of God. She writes that he

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 168–169.

⁴⁶ Mark J. McInroy, “Origen of Alexandria, in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21.

thought it was necessary that all the senses of the soul be unified.⁴⁷ According to Matthew Lootens, Augustine also emphasized the unity of the senses that takes place as humanity experiences God. He writes, “Unlike the fragmented experience of corporeal sensation, the experience of God is characterized by the unity of the senses as God becomes a polymorphous sensory object that fulfills everything that the soul needs and desires.”⁴⁸ Furthermore, he notes that Augustine also draws on sensory language as he recounts his own conversion story.⁴⁹ Throughout the beginnings of Christianity, we find several theologians reflecting on the Divine’s multi-sensory pursuit of humanity.

Many of the theologians highlighted in this survey address the ways experience of God engages in all three of the operation systems delineated by Howard. For example, Thomas Gallus is quoted: “in so far as we thus taste, touch and embrace, and smell God, so, to that extent do we cognize him, by ineffably participating in his sweetness and suavity.”⁵⁰ Gallus identifies both a bodily experience of God as well as the cognitive experience, and he notes that each inform our understanding of the triune God. So then, our bodily and cognitive experiences shape our understanding, perception, and volition. Similarly, Gregory LaNave notes that Bonaventure distinguishes between the interior and exterior senses of humankind’s experience of God. He defines the exterior senses as “acts

⁴⁷ Sarah Coakley, “Gregory of Nyssa,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 51.

⁴⁸ Matthew R. Lootens, “Augustine,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 68.

⁵⁰ Boyd Taylor Coolman, “Thomas Gallus,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 149.

of the sense organs”⁵¹ and defines the interior senses as “acts of soul—memory, intellect, and will.”⁵² His writing illustrates the integration of Howard’s three operation systems. The goal for humanity is the development of habits that create space for “spiritual perception.” According to Bonaventure, as humanity habitually opens themselves up to interior and exterior sense experiences, they can perceive God.⁵³ So then, these interior and exterior sense experiences of God lead to a change in the will—the volitional system.

Epistemology in Alston’s *Perceiving God*

William P. Alston’s *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* is the seminal epistemological work that seeks to understand the role of experience of God in justification and formation of belief. He defines the aim of his text as a defense of “the view that putative direct awareness of God can provide justification for certain kinds of beliefs about God.”⁵⁴ He makes the argument that mystical experiences and sensory experiences ought to carry the same weight in faith formation because both rely on previous mystical or sensory experience. Thomas D. Senior illustrates Alston’s hypothesis in this way: “In the same way that my belief that the car is in the driveway is justified by my visual experience of the car in the driveway, my belief that God is strengthening me is justified by my experience of God strengthening me.”⁵⁵ Doxastic practices are central to

⁵¹ Gregory F. LaNave, “Bonaventure,” in *The Spiritual Senses: Perceiving God in Western Christianity*, edited by Paul L. Gavrilyuk and Sarah Coakley (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 161.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 161.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 162–3.

⁵⁴ William P. Alston, *Perceiving God: The Epistemology of Religious Experience* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 9.

⁵⁵ Thomas D. Senior, “The Experiential Grounding of Religious Belief,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 66.

Alston's argument. He identifies Christian Mystical Practices as the doxastic practices of the Christian faith. These are "belief-forming practices, beliefs, and habits that Christian religious experience gives rise to."⁵⁶ According to Alston, these doxastic practices are a result of Christian mystical experience. The practices also lead to further Christian mystical experience.

Alston emphasizes that perception of God is not a result of detached observation but a lived experience. Perception of God is formed as "one learns to pray to God, worship God, hear and respond to His voice, ask God for forgiveness, and see one's life and the environing world in the light of its creation, sustenance, and providential ordering by God."⁵⁷ However, these mystical experiences move beyond belief formation. Richard Beck describes religious experiences as "perceptions of More,"⁵⁸ and Alston indicates that while the purpose of his writing was to argue for the justification of mystical experience of God in belief formation, he also notes, "The experience of God greatly enlivens one's religious life, it makes an enormous difference to the quality and intensity of one's devotional life, it greatly stimulates one's aspirations to virtue and holiness, and most important, *it makes possible the loving communion with God for which we were created.*"⁵⁹ Therefore, according to Alston, mystical experiences that result from doxastic practices lead humanity toward their created purpose—participation in the divine life.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁵⁷ Alston, *Perceiving God*, 187.

⁵⁸ Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels*, 68.

⁵⁹ Alston, *Perceiving God*, 303. [Emphasis added].

Pneumatology and Epistemology

The formative experiences Alston addresses are made possible because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. In 2 Cor 1:12, Paul describes the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as a “deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.” Moser identifies this guarantee as “epistemic, courtesy of God’s Spirit.”⁶⁰ According to Moser, as one experiences the Spirit “abiding in the hearts, the volitional and affective centers,”⁶¹ they are transformed more fully into the image of Christ, and that transformation “has definite epistemic significance.”⁶² Transformation and experience occurs within one’s regular rhythms, as they open themselves up to the Divine. Therefore, through the indwelling of the Spirit, the extraordinary God enters the ordinary life of creation. According to Pinnock, the Spirit is always active, orienting “people, *wherever they are*, toward the mystery of the divine.”⁶³ He continues, “The Spirit meets people not only in religious spheres but everywhere—in the natural world, in the give-and-take of relationships, in the systems that structure human life. No nook or cranny is untouched by the finger of God.”⁶⁴ According to Wettstein, this is also a value of the Jewish faith. He writes, “It has been said that close to the core of the Jewish religious attitude...is the idea of the sanctification of the ordinary.”⁶⁵ We live in a universe within both the ordinary and

⁶⁰ Moser, “Inner Witness of the Spirit,” 114.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 116.

⁶³ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁶⁵ Wettstein, *Significance of Religious Experience*, 206–7.

extraordinary, and through his indwelling presence, God is pulling humanity toward the Divine.

Therefore, as humanity encounters God through the power of the Spirit amid their ordinary patterns and rhythms of life, they are further transformed into the image of Jesus. Moltmann also emphasizes the role of the Spirit's activities amid everyday experiences. Because of the Spirit's work "as the power of creation and the wellspring of life," humanity encounters God "*in, with, and beneath* each everyday experience of the world."⁶⁶ This divine activity among the everyday experience of creation is at the heart of the biblical narrative, as well. In many ways, the biblical narrative is a collection of unique experiences with the Divine. These belief-forming encounters we find throughout the story of Scripture occur in all three of Howard's human operational systems and create a communal narrative. Moltmann confirms the necessary centrality of narrative in understanding divine experience: "In the historical experience of God, God is perceived in unique and contingent events, and is hoped for with the expectation of eternal and necessary present... Only narrative is able to preserve the historical character of such experiences."⁶⁷ As the people of God reflect on the past and present experiences with the Divine and share these experiences with one another, they can be assured of the promise of God's transformative presence that is to come.

⁶⁶ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 34–35.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

Human Attentiveness and Epistemic Experience

Transformative, epistemic experience begins with human attentiveness and a willing spirit. As he addresses the teaching of Jonathan Edwards and the hiddenness of God, William Wainwright attributes our inability to experience God to “human blindness—a blindness that is ultimately our fault.”⁶⁸ According to Wainwright and Edwards, it is human inattentiveness that impedes human experience of God. Moser notes that in Ps 51, there is a connection “between receiving God’s Spirit and having a ‘willing spirit’ towards God.”⁶⁹ Moser emphasizes that both are required for connection to God. God willfully gifts us with his Spirit; however, we must have an openness to receive and seek transformation and connection with trinitarian God of love. Pinnock also confirms the need for human receptivity and experience with the Divine, as he writes, “As spirit, we are made for encountering God and responding to his love. The greatest issue is whether when the Spirit approaches human spirits, he receives a welcome or not.”⁷⁰ As has been demonstrated, humanity has been created to experience the Lord and participate in life with the triune God; however, experience requires attention and discernment. In fact, it requires a fully embodied receptivity. Howard writes that the process of discernment and attentiveness to God “develops from living the life of the Spirit, a process of growth involving an ever-greater integration of desires, feelings, reactions, and choices with a continuing commitment to abide in Christ.”⁷¹ Spiritual formation occurs

⁶⁸ William J. Wainwright, “Jonathan Edwards and the Hiddenness of God,” in *Divine Hiddenness: New Essays*, edited by Daniel Howard-Snyder and Paul K. Moser (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 108.

⁶⁹ Moser, “Inner Witness of the Spirit,” 112.

⁷⁰ Pinnock, *Flame of Love*, 73.

⁷¹ Howard, *Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 380–1.

when humanity opens up their whole self—the cognitive, affective, and volitional operation systems—and becomes attentive to the ways the triune God seeks to shape those systems. This is the act of attentively abiding in the presence of God. Moser summarizes that the act of abiding “requires the centering of one’s whole life in God’s sustaining Spirit: including one’s affections, volitions, thoughts, and actions.”⁷² Barbara Holmes builds on this fully embodied receptivity to the experience of God while reflecting on her experiences with the Black Church: “Receptivity is not a cognitive exercise but rather the involvement of intellect and sense in a spiritual reunion and oneness with God...Rather, this contemplative moment is a spiritual event that kisses the cognitive but will not be enslaved to its rigidities.”⁷³ Holmes’s description of the Black Church illustrates well the goal that abiding in the trinitarian love of God moves beyond intellectual pursuit of God toward a pursuit of God that engages the whole self. Fully embodied receptivity and attentiveness opens humanity up to fully embodied union with the triune God.

Spiritual Disciplines as Epistemic Experience

Historically, spiritual disciplines have served as vessels that open humanity up to experience the Divine. While the work of spiritual formation belongs to God, spiritual disciplines are initiated by the people of God. Beck writes that awareness of God is “effortful and practiced.”⁷⁴ Disciplines are not the source of the transformation; they open

⁷² Paul K. Moser, *The God Relationship: The Ethics for Inquiry about the Divine* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 302.

⁷³ Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church*, Second Edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 3.

⁷⁴ Beck, *Hunting Magic Eels*, 132.

the door that leads to transformation. Frederick Aquino writes that spiritual practices “cultivate a kind of receptivity and facilitate a long-term process of growth in wisdom and a deeper love of the good.”⁷⁵ Willard writes that spiritual disciplines are “activities that *are* in our power and that enable us to do what we cannot do by direct effort. We cannot transform our ideas and images, or even the information we have or our thought process, into Christlikeness by direct effort. But we can do things—adopt certain practices—that, indirectly, will increasingly have that effect.”⁷⁶ Spiritual disciplines engage a variety of human faculties that lead to connection and assist in developing habits that place humanity in proximity with the triune God. James K.A. Smith writes that habit-forming is at the heart of spiritual formation: “Discipleship, we might say, is a way to curate your heart, to be attentive to and intentional about what you love.”⁷⁷ As we habitually and intentionally open ourselves up to the triune God of love through spiritual disciplines, we are then transformed into the image of the Divine.

However, to reflect the nature of the trinitarian community of love most expressly, the people of God ought to exercise these spiritual practices communally. Adele Ahlberg Calhoun asserts that she believes that spiritual practices are best learned within the context of relationships.⁷⁸ While God is experienced at an individual level, often meaning of trinitarian experience is discovered within the context of community. As we share in

⁷⁵ Frederick D. Aquino, “Spiritual Formation, Authority, and Discernment,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, edited by William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 159.

⁷⁶ Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 114.

⁷⁷ James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2016), 2.

⁷⁸ Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*, Revised and expanded edition (Downer’s Grove: IVP Books, 2015), 23.

spiritual practices within the context of a community that reflects the shared life of the Trinity, our individual meaning and perceptions of God begin to be formed by the shared narratives and experiences of the community at large. Moltmann calls communities of God “narrative communities” and notes that they are shaped by “the shared voyage of discovery into memories.”⁷⁹ Moltmann identifies that the voyage itself is where the formation takes place. We are formed by the voyage and formed by the practices and shared experiences, and the community of faith begins to live out that narrative. Grenz affirms that a person’s formation is rooted in their participation in the narrative of their community:

Finding ourselves means, among other things, finding the story in terms of which our lives make sense. The narrative of a person’s life is always embedded in the story of the communities in which the person participates. The community is crucial in the process of identity formation, because it mediates to us the transcending story, bound up with which are traditions of virtue, common good, and ultimate meaning, by means of which we contract our own narrative.⁸⁰

As communities of faith participate in these spiritual practices together and share about their individual experiences, they grow in greater awareness and attentiveness to the presence and work of God—individually and communally—and can understand their individual experiences within the context of the transcendent narrative. Howard asserts that formation is incomplete without the “active, prayerful participation in the shared activity” of the church.⁸¹ Moreover, Donald L. Gelpi, SJ writes, “Communities grow in consciousness through a complex process of shared interpretation and shared, practical realization of their historical origin, present identity, and future destiny. Small

⁷⁹ Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life*, 25.

⁸⁰ Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God*, 51.

⁸¹ Howard, *Affirming the Touch of God*, 275.

communities, like one's immediate family, grow in shared consciousness in part through directly shared experiences."⁸² This is central to the premise of my project. Shared familial experiences within the context of faith communities can deepen attentiveness to and consciousness of God. Mayfair has an opportunity to create space for families with adolescents to explore spiritual practices that engage a variety of human epistemic faculties. Because humanity has been created to participate in the trinitarian community of love, families ought to pursue a fully embodied experience of the Divine within the context of their faith community, and churches ought to make these shared experiences a priority as they seek to lead and encourage families.

Theological and Practical Foundations for the Spiritual Formation of Families

Old Testament Model of Spiritual Formation: Rooted in the *Shema*

Throughout the history of Christianity, church leaders have sought to understand the best ways to pass on their faith from one generation to the next. This is also a major theological thread throughout the biblical narrative. In the Old Testament, as Moses initiates the very first Passover feast in Exodus 13:14, future generations are at the heart of his teaching: "In the future, when your son asks you, 'What does this mean?' you are to tell him, 'With a mighty hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.'" Furthermore, as a generation passed toward the end of Moses' life, he invites the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 32:7 to "remember the days of old; consider the years of many generations; ask your father, and he will show you, your elders, and they will tell you." Judges 2:10 serves as a reminder of what happens when one generation

⁸² Donald L. Gelpi, SJ, *The Gracing of Human Experience: Rethinking the Relationship between Nature and Grace* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2007), 303.

fails to pass on their faith to another: “And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord or the work that he had done for Israel.” Throughout the Psalms, we find psalmists praying for opportunities to share the story of God with future generations like in Psalm 71:18. “So even to old age and gray hairs, O God, do not forsake me, until I proclaim your might to another generation, your power to all those to come.” The entire Old Testament consistently commands the leaders of Israel to tell and retell the story of God in such a way that each passing generation can come to know YHWH.

The cornerstone passage used for catechetical teaching in both Christian and Jewish traditions is the *Shema*. Patrick D. Miller writes, “The *Shema* was the touchstone for Israel’s faith and life, the plumb line by which their relationship to the Lord of history was constantly being measured.”⁸³ All of life and all of faith flowed from this central passage. Robert Alter writes, “This entire passage...has been aptly described as a catechism, and it entirely fits its character as an exhortation to hew to God’s teachings that it later was incorporated in the daily liturgy, recited twice each day in Jewish worship.”⁸⁴ According to Jewish tradition, this passage was to shape every part of their life, and that tradition continues in the life and teaching of Jesus. Deanna A. Thompson writes that both Jews and Christians “build on this call of Moses [in Deuteronomy 6] for passing down the knowledge of the faith.”⁸⁵ In Matthew 22:36-40, Mark 12:28-34, and

⁸³ Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1990), 97-8.

⁸⁴ Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, vol. 1: The Five Books of Moses (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2019), 641.

⁸⁵ Deanna A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, Belief: A Theological Commentary of the Bible (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014), 78.

Luke 10:25-28, Jesus continues this tradition. When pushed by Jewish leaders to reveal the most important commandment in the Torah, Jesus does not hesitate; he quotes the *Shema* (with a slight amendment) and Leviticus 19:18. As Thomas á Kempis puts it, in Jesus' response to the Jewish leaders, "he put a whole dictionary into just one dictum."⁸⁶ Jesus identifies the *Shema* as the centerpiece of our spiritual formation. It is the heartbeat of discipleship, and today, we have the same calling as that of our spiritual fathers and mothers. We, too, are called to proclaim the story of God's redemptive history to the next generation and to invite them to participate in that history of God's incomparable love. As we seek to build upon the faith of those who have led before us, Deuteronomy 6 ought to continue to serve as a model for us to imagine how we might approach this calling for Gen Z today. The content of Deuteronomy 6 should inform our approach as we seek to love God as families and faith communities and disciple the students God has placed along our path.

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD Our God, the LORD Is One”: Deuteronomy 6:4

The *Shema* begins with the first of a series of imperative verbs, “hear.” This imperative would have immediately grabbed the attention of Jewish listeners but also would set the tone for the posture the nation of Israel ought to pursue—a posture of listening. Israel was to become a nation defined by its faith and trust in YHWH's transforming love. From its conception, it had been led by listening leaders like Abraham and Moses. They were leaders who were open to the voice and calling of God and who consistently responded in reciprocal love to God's voice with faith. The imperative, “hear,” sets the tone of the covenantal nature of the relationship between God and Israel.

⁸⁶ Thomas á Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. W. Griffin (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 2000), 160.

Walter Brueggemann writes that the imperative, *shema*, establishes “an assembly that, in this address, is always being formed, re-identified, and reconstituted as the Israel of God, for Israel becomes Israel through hearing.”⁸⁷ The formation of Israel was of central importance to YHWH. As they listened to the LORD and responded to His presence among them, they would live into their own vocation as the image of God to the world. Israel’s identity was rooted in their submission to the Creator God. We see this at work in their worship: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us—*so* that your ways may be known on the earth, your salvation among all nations.”⁸⁸ Michael Goheen calls Israel a “so-that people”—chosen, blessed, and commissioned *so that* the world might see the face of God.⁸⁹ Israel would not simply listen to YHWH for their own sake but for the sake of the redemption of all creation. The imperative, *shema*, would also set the tone for Israel’s call to loving obedience to YHWH. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks describes “the recital of the Shema [as] a supreme act of faith-as-listening: to the voice that brought the universe into being, created us in love and guides us through our lives.”⁹⁰ According to Jewish tradition, as we *listen* to the voice of God and his teaching (specifically the teaching of the Torah), we become an obedient people of faith.

The imperative, *shema*, also leads us into one of the most central declarations of faith in the Torah: “The LORD our God; the LORD is one.” The exact translation of this phrase is debated—especially “*yhwh ‘ehad*.” The word, *‘ehad*, can be translated as either

⁸⁷ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 83.

⁸⁸ Psalm 67:1.

⁸⁹ Michael W. Goheen, *Introducing Christian Mission Today: Scripture, History, and Issues* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2014), 45.

⁹⁰ Jonathan Sacks, *The Koren Sacks Siddur: A Hebrew/English Prayerbook* (Jerusalem: Koren, 2009), 96, as cited in Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 76.

alone or one. Thompson writes, “Many emphasize God’s undivided nature; at the same time, others argue that this claim stands as a confession of monotheism.”⁹¹ Miller writes that while the intended meaning is likely irresolvable, the goal for interpreters is to seek understanding of both meanings and how it might inform our understanding of God.⁹² The first translation, “our God alone,” seems to emphasize YHWH’s uniqueness among the gods of the nations. This text points to the very first commandment in which God declares, “I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. You shall have no other gods before me.”⁹³ Brueggemann writes that the statement, “God alone,” is a demand for “exclusive, uncompromising loyalty from Israel.”⁹⁴ This is a call away from the gods of the nations toward commitment to the one God who has created, commissioned, and rescued them. Israel is commanded to give their unwavering worship to YHWH *alone*. On the other hand, if the phrase, “*yhwh ‘ehad*,” is translated, “our God is one,” the Shema seems to be communicating something of the substance of God. J. G. McConville writes, “The effect of this is to suggest that ‘oneness’ is in some sense part of Yahweh’s nature. The nuance shifts therefore from ‘uniqueness’ to ‘unity’ or integrity. Yahweh is one and indivisible.”⁹⁵ The traditional consensus among Jewish scholarship tends to lean toward this translation. This statement serves as a statement of identity. Alter writes, “This statement stands, then, as it has been

⁹¹ Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 75.

⁹² Miller, *Deuteronomy*, 99.

⁹³ Deuteronomy 5:6–7.

⁹⁴ Brueggemann, 83.

⁹⁵ J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 141.

traditionally construed, as a ringing declaration of monotheism.”⁹⁶ Whether the statement in Deuteronomy 6:4 is a description of Israel’s monotheistic God or a calling to worship YHWH alone, the statement seems to place YHWH at the center of all of life. God is to be the umbrella under which all of life is to fall. This is at the heart of the command to come in Deuteronomy 6:5.

“Love the LORD Your God with All Your Heart, Soul, and Strength”: Deut 6:5

As emphasized earlier in this chapter, the *Shema* points the people of God toward the divine invitation to participate in the trinitarian circle of love. The triune God is inviting us to participate in a fully embodied love that engages the entire self. Theologians like Brueggemann emphasize that the writer of Deuteronomy does not intend to delineate three exhaustive categories of love in the *Shema*. However, the three movements in Deuteronomy 6:5 can help us evaluate the spiritual formation of adolescent students in our churches today. A deeper understanding of these three movements can also help leaders discern what spiritual formation can look like both as the church and home seek to walk in the trinitarian love together with Gen Z.

The first movement of the *Shema* is the call to love God with all our heart. The translation of this text in most of our English Bibles is a result of the interpretation of the LXX rooted in Greek anthropology. However, according to Block, the Hebrew word *lēb* has two functions: “metaphorically...[it serves as] the seat of the emotions and will, but equally often it refers to the ‘mind’ or the seat of thought.”⁹⁷ In Hebrew culture, this is

⁹⁶ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 641.

⁹⁷ Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 183.

essentially the location of our inner life. Throughout the biblical narrative, we find that the heart—the inner life—is considered the foundation for all of life. We see this theme in Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” Paul teaches us to “set our mind on things above” and to think about that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, or praiseworthy.⁹⁸ Finally in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches that those who are pure in heart will see God. As has been discussed, life with God begins with the shaping of the heart. As we love God with all our inner life, our heart and our desires shift. We begin to love what God loves and desire what God desires. James K.A Smith writes, “Jesus’ command to follow him is a command to align our loves and longings with his—to want what God wants, to desire what God desires, to hunger and thirst after God and crave a world where he is all in all—a vision encapsulated by the shorthand ‘the kingdom of God.’”⁹⁹ The love of God becomes a paradigm through which humanity can see all of life. Discipleship of children and adolescents ought to begin with the shaping of their spirits. As leaders, how can we create space for our students to participate in disciplines, practices, and habits that lead to the transformation of their spirit and mind? How can we engage all three of Howard’s categories of experience—cognitive, affective, and volitional systems—in such a way that leads to the students’ transformation into the image of Christ and their union with the triune God? The church and the home ought to facilitate opportunities for encounters with the triune God of love who is at work around us and within us. We want to invite students to love God with their mind by exploring the mysteries of God. Johnson-Miller

⁹⁸ Col 3:2 and Phil 4:8.

⁹⁹ Smith, *You Are What You Love*, 2.

and Espinoza write that “mystagogy, the journey into the mystery of Christ is central to the whole process of Christian initiation and spiritual growth.”¹⁰⁰ The trajectory we seek is a pursuit of knowing God. We want to love God with our whole hearts by knowing God, and we experience this love rooted in our inner life as we encounter God himself.

The second movement of the *Shema* is the call to love God with all our soul. The Hebrew word here is *nepes̄*. Block writes, “Concretely *nepes̄* means ‘throat, gullet,’ but the word is used in a variety of derived metaphorical senses: ‘appetite/desire’ (Prof. 23:2; Eccl. 6:7); ‘life’ (Gen. 9:5; 2 Sam. 23:17; Jonah 2:5); a person as a living being without life/breath (Lev. 21:11). Here, the word refers to one’s entire person.”¹⁰¹ Alter rightly writes that the Hebrew word “means ‘life-breath’ or ‘essential self.’”¹⁰² He further clarifies that the translation as soul is misleading because it implies the body-soul dualism that was absent from Jewish culture. The movement in Deuteronomy 6 is a movement from the inner life toward an ethic and way of life. We are called here to love God with all our being, and Jesus becomes the embodiment of the life we are called to pursue. As the triune God sought to reconcile humankind back toward the *imago Dei*, Jesus—through his life and ministry—became that *telos* for us: “He is the *image of the invisible God*, the firstborn of all creation.”¹⁰³ The apostle Paul confirms that this is the goal of our spiritual formation when he writes, “my little children, for whom I am again

¹⁰⁰ Beverly Johnson-Miller and Benjamin D. Espinoza, “Catechesis, Mystagogy, and Pedagogy: Continuing the Conversation,” *Christian Education Journal* 15, no. 2 (August 2018): 163. doi:10.1177/0739891318761673.

¹⁰¹ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 183–4.

¹⁰² Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 641.

¹⁰³ Col 1:15.

in the anguish of childbirth, *until Christ is formed in you!*”¹⁰⁴ Therefore, through the power of the Holy Spirit that lives within humanity, we are reconciled into the image of Christ—the image of the invisible God—and restored back into the image through which we have been created to live. We can pursue this *telos* as we become “partakers of the divine nature”¹⁰⁵: participating in the very nature of God within and around us, loving God with all our heart, just as Jesus did, and living out the words of Jesus: “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.”¹⁰⁶ Therefore, as we seek to disciple children and teenagers at our churches in the way of Deut 6, we hope to move them from the transformation of their inner life toward the transformation of their way of life—from the cognitive to the affective to the volitional systems. As they love God with all their souls and encounter the living God, they begin to produce good fruit aligned with the abundant life found in Jesus.

The third movement of the *Shema* is the call to love God with all our strength. This is also a translation that does not quite hit the intention of the original text. According to Block, the word *me’ōd* means “greatly” or “exceedingly.” He says this word is “best captured by a word like ‘resources,’ which includes physical strength, but also economic or social strength, and it may extend to the physical things an Israelite owned: tools, livestock, a house, and the like.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike the movements before it, according to Alter, the word *me’ōd* is not a noun but instead is an adverb meaning

¹⁰⁴ Gal 4:19.

¹⁰⁵ 2 Pet 1:4.

¹⁰⁶ Luke 6:40.

¹⁰⁷ Block, *Deuteronomy*, 184.

“very.”¹⁰⁸ The movement in the *Shema* begins with love for God rooted within our inner life, to a love that is transforming our very being and way of life, toward a love utilizing every possible resource available to us. This may represent our physical resources, but as I reflect on our calling to disciple teenagers, I see this movement rooted in their mission and vocation. Like Israel, our vocation ought to be rooted in our love for God. This is a move from love of God toward love for our neighbor. It is a movement directed toward the eschatological hope that all of creation might be reconciled toward YHWH. So then, for our students, how can we create space for them to participate in this love for God with all their *me'ōd* and creatively pursue and discern their God-given vocation as the image of God to the world? This is the *telos* for all of us: to love God with our hearts and minds, to love God with our whole being, and to love God with every possible resource available to us.

“You Shall Teach Them Diligently to Your Children”: Deut 6:6–9

Beginning with verse 6, the writer of Deuteronomy moves into actual pedagogy. How do the church and home pass this commandment on to future generations given that our culture’s concept of family, as a pared down nuclear family system, today is completely different from that of the Old Testament and New Testament world? Brueggemann notes that the writer moves from the utterance to the implementation of God’s command.¹⁰⁹ The responsibility of this implementation is given primarily to parents. Unlike our Greco-influenced culture that siphons off life with God from the rest of life, the invitation to love and teach children about loving God is to affect all of life.

¹⁰⁸ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 641.

¹⁰⁹ Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, 82–3.

Alter points out that the two pairs of terms, “house...way and lie down...rise,” utilize a literary device called a merism. They are “two opposing terms that also imply everything between them; [this] obviously has the sense of wherever you are, whatever you do.”¹¹⁰ As the church seeks to disciple our children and teenagers in the way of the trinitarian God of love, every moment is a teaching opportunity. Michael McGarry emphasizes this role of the home, as he writes, “Likewise, parents are to carefully, skillfully, and diligently impress God’s commandments into their children’s hearts. Because the commandments are not constrained to Temple-worship but involve every aspect of Israel’s life, the manner of this instruction is to take place continually, regardless of location or time.”¹¹¹ He continues that the command of the *Shema* invites parents to engage in both “intentional, structured time” and “casual teaching that arises throughout the day.”¹¹² YHWH invites his people to engage with the next generation in all aspects of life—both in the temple courts and in the confines of one’s home. This is the way Jesus taught his apostles; he spoke about the Kingdom of God when he sat at the house, when he walked by the way, when he lied down at night, and when he arose in the morning. Formation that takes place along the way assists in opening students’ eyes to the work of God everywhere. The triune God then begins to shape their eyes to see things as they are. Furthermore, the church is not always available to teach children “along the way,” so we must do everything we can to partner with families who are. One question then becomes, “How can we help to encourage and prepare families for these conversations?” A second

¹¹⁰ Alter, *The Hebrew Bible*, 641.

¹¹¹ Michael McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry: Teenagers in the Life of the Church* (Nashville: Randall House Publishers: 2019), 24.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 25.

question continues from the theme in the first part of the literature review: “How can we create space for families to experience YHWH together?” These conversations and shared experiences become pivotal as families and churches seek to pass on the teaching and embodiment of the *Shema* to the upcoming generation.

The writer of Deuteronomy also continues a trend we see throughout Scripture. We are encouraged to utilize tokens to help remind us of God’s law and story. As the people of Israel were wandering through the wilderness, a pillar of cloud during the day and pillar of fire at night reminded them of God’s presence. After crossing the Jordan River into the Promised Land, the LORD asks Joshua to create a memorial of twelve stones to remind future generations of God’s covenantal faithfulness. One of the ways that we can point future generations to the story and love of God is by being intentional as we practice the sacraments. Every time someone participates in baptism and every time we gather around the table for communion, we have an opportunity to encounter the living God. These shared experiences are opportunities for families to connect with one another and experience the triune God together. The church and the home must intentionally lead families toward God’s love through every one of those opportunities.

New Testament Foundations in the Spiritual Formation of Families

In the New Testament, this theological thread of passing on the story of God’s love to the next generation continues. This is at the heart of what John defines as his purpose of writing his Gospel a generation after the resurrection of Jesus. He shares that his Gospel is written “so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God,

and that by believing you may have life in his name.”¹¹³ John does not simply wish to share the stories of Jesus; instead, he intends to invite his future readers into the life Jesus embodied. As Paul reflects on the faith of Timothy, his young protégé, he writes that he sees the faith of Timothy’s grandmother Lois and mother Eunice in the life Timothy himself lives.¹¹⁴ Paul sees Timothy’s life as a direct result of two incredible women passing on their faith to the next generation. In his book *Adoptive Church*, Chap Clark utilizes the New Testament image of the household of God to illustrate the goal of adolescent spiritual formation. He emphasizes that throughout the New Testament, we find that as the people of God, we are given the privilege of being adopted sons and daughters belonging to the household of God. In a world where adolescents feel more isolated than ever, the apostles Paul and John remind us that when we are in Christ, we belong to a new family.¹¹⁵ Clark writes, “Adoptive youth ministry is an intentional and strategic process for creating the kind of environment where young people can feel valued and included and where adults can receive and empower the young. It is based on the theological truth that whoever is ‘in Christ’ is an adopted sibling of everyone else ‘in Christ,’ regardless of gender, ethnicity, location in the world, denomination, or even, yes, age.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, adolescent participation in spiritual practices both with their individual families and with the greater household of God creates space for the young to pull up a seat to the table as a valued member of the family. One goal of this project is

¹¹³ John 20:31.

¹¹⁴ 2 Tim 1:5.

¹¹⁵ John 1:12; Eph 2:19; 1Tim 3:15.

¹¹⁶ Chap Clark, *Adoptive Church: Creating an Environment Where Emerging Generations Belong* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), 8.

that shared experiences lead to shared conversations and a shared faith with the next generation.

Historical Foundations and Trends in the Spiritual Formation of Adolescents

Historically, the practice of catechesis emerged out of this theological and biblical thread where God calls his people to pass on His story to future generations. This began as early as the first and second centuries. *The Didache* is seen by many as a central piece of catechetical literature utilized by the early church. Jonathan A. Powers outlines two aspects of the teachings of *The Didache* that led to this categorization: “first, the manner by which the instruction of the Didache promotes love for God and neighbor as the primary rule of Christian life; and second, the way the eschatological vision of Christ’s church outlined in the document synthesizes ecclesial life and the pursuit of personal holiness.”¹¹⁷ For the writer of *The Didache*, catechesis was rooted in the teachings of Jesus. It was centered around our love for God and love for neighbor. Saint Augustine of Hippo continues this tradition of catechetical teaching in his work *De Catechizandis Rudibus (Catechizing the Uninstructed)*. In this work, Augustine uses “faith, hope and love” as the overarching structure in his teaching. He encourages his readers to “give all your instructions that he to whom you speak by hearing may believe, and by believing may hope, and by hoping may love.”¹¹⁸ This tradition continued during the Reformation through leaders like Martin Luther. For Luther, catechesis was about more than

¹¹⁷ Jonathan A. Powers, “Ecclesia Semper Sanctificanda: Historic Models of Catechesis and the Cultivation of Social Holiness,” *The Asbury Journal* 74, no. 1 (2019): 90. doi: 10.7252/Journal.01.2019S.05.

¹¹⁸ Quote from Augustine cited by Gordon A. Jensen, “Shaping Piety through Catechetical Structures: The Importance of Order,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 10, no. 2 (August 2008): 225. doi:10.1558/rrr.v10i2.223.

knowledge of doctrine and beliefs; instead, it was about “holy living.”¹¹⁹ Throughout the history of the Christian Church, leaders have sought to teach the biblical narrative in a way that future generations will continue and build upon the tradition and faith of those who have come before them.

Additionally, the history of the American church has continued this tradition of seeking to discern the best ways to pass along faith in God to the next generation. Today, in the life of the church, youth ministry plays a central role in the spiritual formation of adolescents. In his book, *When God Shows Up*, Mark H. Senter III delineates four cycles of youth ministry that he identifies by their form and intent. The first cycle (1824–75) led to the formation of youth organizations like Sunday School associations and the YMCA. The focus of these organizations was not necessarily connection to God. Instead, they focused on moral living. The second cycle (1881–1925) placed a high emphasis on an educational experience of God. According to Senter, this cycle led to the formation of youth societies like Christian Endeavor that focused on handing over biblical truths and doctrines to adolescents in an educational manner. The third cycle (1933–1989) became highly relational. The focus was on creating spaces for adolescents to connect relationally with other adolescents and adult mentors. This led to the formation of parachurch organizations like *Young Life* and *Youth for Christ*. While Senter emphasizes that this current cycle (beginning in 1990) is continuing to be formed, the movement seems to be shifting toward a more intimate experience of God’s presence.¹²⁰ Michael McGarry identifies that after World War II, adolescent culture began to play a more centralized role

¹¹⁹ Johnson-Miller and Espinoza, “Catechesis, Mystagogy, and Pedagogy,” 161.

¹²⁰ Mark H. Senter III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), xii–xiii.

with the culture-at-large. That generation of parents also began to become less involved in their teenagers' lives. According to McGarry, with the rise of adolescent culture and the fall of parental involvement in spiritual formation, the church sought to discover how to respond. This led to the formation of modern youth ministry.¹²¹ Today, the shape of youth ministry continues to shift, as churches and families navigate the rapidly changing culture of Gen Z in an attempt to discern the best ways to pass faith in God to the next generation.

Characteristics of Gen Z

A Secular Culture

Churches and families are seeking ways to connect with a new generation of adolescents who are leaving the church. There is a critical need to create space for this new generation to experience the love of the triune God. These two institutions must be willing to understand the culture of this new generation: Gen Z. One identifying characteristic of this generation is that they are part of a secular culture. According to research that was conducted in 2016 by Barna research groups, when asked about their religious identity 35 percent of Gen Z responded that they did not affiliate with any religious faith (i.e. agnostic, atheist, or none).¹²² Similarly, in a study conducted in 2020 by the Springtide Research Institute, they noted, “Nearly 40 percent of young people ages 13–25 indicate they are unaffiliated, whether agnostic, atheist, or ‘nothing in

¹²¹ McGarry, *A Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 68.

¹²² *Gen Z: The Culture, Beliefs and Motivations Shaping the Next Generation* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group and Impact 360 Institute, 2018), 25.

particular.”¹²³ According to Springtide, this is a twenty point shift from a poll taken in 2004 by the General Social Survey and a thirty point shift from 1990. Additionally, in the research for their book *Sticky Faith*, Kara Powell and Chap Clark conclude that “40 to 50 percent of kids who graduate from a church or youth group will fail to stick with their faith in college...only 20 percent of college students who leave the faith planned to do so during high school. The remaining 80 percent intended to stick with their faith but didn’t.”¹²⁴ This exodus from religious affiliation and institutions is alarming. In recent years, churches are seeking new ways to address the alarming decline in ecclesial participation of Gen Z and younger generations.

In many ways, this research reflects an overarching cultural shift toward secularism. American society today is post-Christian. James Emery White defines this secularization as the removal of “sectors of society and culture...from the domination of religious institutions and symbols.”¹²⁵ Today, religion plays a less centralized role in the formation of our society. Andrew Root observes that modernity led to a clear divide between religious and a-religious spaces. He writes, “The secular and sacred...are distant locations *bound within institutions and ideologies*, located almost exclusively in our cultural and social realms.”¹²⁶ Through modernity, sacred and secular cultures became compartmentalized in their own silos. In many ways this compartmentalization was

¹²³ *The State of Religion & Young People: Relational Authority* (Winona, MN: Springtide Research Institute, 2020), 23.

¹²⁴ Dr. Kara E. Powell and Dr. Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 15–16.

¹²⁵ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 28.

¹²⁶ Andrew Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular World: Responding to the Church’s Obsession with Youthfulness* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 107.

reflective in the practice of the church—especially youth ministry. Root notes that youth ministry leaders often approach ministry to adolescents from a posture of competition, as they seek to compete with each of the other silos. In our secular world, faith is seen as “just another thing,” instead of a lens that affects all of life. Root invites church leaders:

The church as a whole must pass on narratives through their own personhood, which young people can live within. And this attention to narrative reveals an important way forward for youth ministry. In my mind, it’s a losing proposition to assume that youth ministry can win the status of other *things*, moving itself up the scale of rankings.¹²⁷

Leaders like Andrew Root are encouraging churches to shift their approach. Rather than trying to compete with secular culture, churches have an opportunity to provide what secularism cannot. White writes that in Gen Z culture,

there is a profound spiritual emptiness. They’ve never encountered God, experienced God. They are left feeling the sickness of the world’s disease without a narrative, without a story, without a transcendent meaning or purpose. They have a crisis in values; they find themselves needing them but not having them and divorced from any means of finding them.¹²⁸

As this generation becomes more steeped in today’s secular culture, the church and home must recognize the need to shift the approach toward spiritual formation reflective of the secular, post-Christian world.

A Digital Culture

Another identifying characteristic of Gen Z is that they are a part of a digital culture. White calls this generation the “‘Internet-in-its-pocket’ generation.”¹²⁹ This

¹²⁷ Andrew Root, *The End of Youth Ministry: Why Parents Don’t Really Care about Youth Groups and What Youth Workers Should Do about It* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2020), 164.

¹²⁸ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 131.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 41.

generation of adolescents has grown up with access to the whole world in a small device in their pocket. Many grew up with the tablet in their hands from a very early age. David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock note that Gen Z is growing up as exiles in digital Babylon. They write that Digital Babylon is marked by three trends: “phenomenal access, profound alienation... (from institutions and traditions that give structure and meaning to our lives)... and a crisis of authority.”¹³⁰ Today’s digital age has led to a number of social imbalances. First, while this generation has access to vast amounts of information, they lack wisdom. Time in front of their screens has affected their ability to pay attention. White notes that “according to the research of the National Center for Biotechnology Information, the average attention span has dropped from 12 seconds in 2000 to just 8.25 seconds in 2015.”¹³¹ Barna Research Group shares a study that was conducted in 2015 that found that more than 55 percent of Gen Z averages at least four hours of screen time per day.¹³² While screen time is up, reading is down. Jean Twenge notes that according to the American Freshman Survey, nearly 60 percent of twelfth graders in 1976 read from a book or magazine every day; however, in 2015, that number was down below 18 percent in 2015.¹³³ Because of the amount of information adolescents are sorting through—true, false, positive, negative, appropriate, and inappropriate—today’s adolescents need the gift of discernment. Ron Bruner writes, “Discernment with others, though, helps defuse

¹³⁰ David Kinnaman and Mark Matlock, *Faith for Exiles: 5 Ways for a New Generation to Follow Jesus in Digital Babylon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2019), 19.

¹³¹ White, *Meet Generation Z*, 115.

¹³² *Gen Z*, 16.

¹³³ Jean M. Twenge, PhD, *iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood and What That Means for the Rest of Us* (New York: Atria, 2017), 61.

negative cultural forces by providing: (1) identity, (2) a world view, (3) a mission that requires us to better understand our surroundings, (4) stronger relationships, and (5) a call into the work of God in this world.”¹³⁴ Gen Z needs to develop the skill of judgment, as they discern which information is helpful or unhelpful and true or false. Furthermore, this generation needs good mentors at church and at home, who can help them navigate beyond the digital access they have to vast amounts of information right at their fingertips.

While this generation has wide circles of digital friends, Gen Z has been noted as the “loneliest generation.” According to Springtide Research Institute, when asked to respond to the statement, “I feel completely alone,” more than 30 percent of Gen Z (ages 13–25) responded with either always or sometimes.¹³⁵ Twenge notes that while smartphones allow adolescents to remain in constant contact with one another, loneliness has still increased from 21 percent in 2007 to 32 percent in 2015, and among females, depressive symptoms have increased from approximately 22 percent in 2012 to nearly 34 percent in 2015. Additionally, the suicide rate among 12 to 14-year-olds has doubled in both males and females since 2007.¹³⁶ This does not even take into consideration the toll that COVID-19 has had on this generation since 2020. Twenge directly ties this increase in loneliness, depression, and suicide to our digital culture as she writes,

A plausible theory includes three possible causes: (1) more screen time has led directly to more unhappiness and depression, (2) more screen time has led to less in-person social interaction, and (3) more screen time has led to less print media

¹³⁴ Ron Bruner, “Discernment: Core Spiritual Practice of the Disciple,” in *Owning Faith: Reimagining the Role of Church and Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers*, edited by Dudley Chancey and Ron Bruner (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2017), 101.

¹³⁵ *The State of Religion and Young People*, 27.

¹³⁶ Twenge, *iGen*, 97; 103; 111.

use, leading to unhappiness and depression. In the end, all of the mechanisms come back to new-media screen time in one way or another.¹³⁷

As digital consumption continues to increase so do the harmful returns, and adolescents continue to lack the tools to cope with those challenges in healthy ways. Twenge highlights that the access this generation has to mature and explicit content and their worldwide, virtual communities have forced Gen Z to grow up more quickly than they should have. However, at the same time, as face-to-face community and responsibility decrease, Gen Z is also growing up more slowly.¹³⁸ While adolescents are growing up more slowly in person, they are growing up at warp speed digitally. Isolated teenagers need the church and home to come beside them and help model the discernment they need to navigate these challenges as well as become the community they need to form them into the image of Christ.

An Individualized Culture

A third identifying characteristic of Gen Z is that they are a part of an individualized culture. Individuation, as the development of the individual from a secular culture, is a critical developmental task of adolescence. In their book, *The Reciprocating Self*, Balswick, King, and Reimer write, “A major developmental task that takes place during adolescence is differentiation. Through differentiation young people wrestle with their identity; personal beliefs, values and goals, and boundaries with families, peers, and romantic partners.”¹³⁹ During adolescence, teenagers are pursuing three major questions

¹³⁷ Ibid., 112.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹³⁹ Jack O. Balswick, Pamela Ebstyn King, and Kevin S. Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, Second Edition (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2016), 201.

of differentiation: questions of identity, belonging and purpose.¹⁴⁰ However, this pursuit of differentiation must never take place in isolation. Amy Jacober emphasizes that this process of differentiation cannot take place alone: “Individuation—becoming one’s own person—is the developmental task of the adolescent stage within a lifelong process of differentiation. This is not an isolated journey of growth toward rugged individualism; adolescents grow within their environment, its influences, structures, pathology and salubrity.”¹⁴¹ The church must pursue the balance of giving space for adolescents to walk through this season of differentiation, while also providing the support they deeply need. Even though Gen Z has grown up in a highly individualized culture, differentiation should continue to take place within the context of a community, culture, and family.

Research indicates Gen Z being highly independent and differentiated. White ties this to the generation of parents that are raising adolescents today. He writes, “One of the marks of Generation Z is that they are being raised, by and large, by Generation X—a generation that was warned repeatedly not to become ‘helicopter’ parents...As a result, Generation Z has been given more space and more independence than any other generation. This means that Generation Z is very self-directed.”¹⁴² As Gen Z has been given space to gain independence, feelings of abandonment and isolation abound. Chap Clark writes that adolescents “want and need adults, but because many (or even some) of the adults they have known over the years have participated in abandoning them, they

¹⁴⁰ Kara Powell, Jake Mulder, and Brad Griffin, *Growing Young, 6 Essential Strategies to Help Young People Discover and Love Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2016), 95.

¹⁴¹ Amy E. Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Practical Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 72.

¹⁴² White, *Meet Generation Z*, 51.

have little trust in any adult.”¹⁴³ Based on a 2020 survey, Springtide Research Institute shares that more than 25 percent of teenagers said “they have one or fewer adults they can turn to if in trouble and needing to talk.”¹⁴⁴ The lack of healthy, trusted relationships with adults reinforce the migration of Gen Z toward a more individualized, independent approach to life. This has led to a highly individualized faith. The church and home have an opportunity to come beside Gen Z and help them navigate their questions of independence and differentiation, as we participate in the triune circle of love together.

Ecclesiological Praxis for the Spiritual Formation of Gen Z

Church Partnership with Family

With these identifying characteristics of Gen Z in mind regarding today’s generation of adolescents, there are a couple of opportunities for the church as we seek to participate in the spiritual formation of teenagers. As the church seeks to align our practices with the calling of Scripture, we have a responsibility to partner with and support parents and families as the primary guides and leaders in the lives of their children. Curt Thompson notes that God seeks to partner with parents in spiritual formation. This is a central part of the vocation of a parent: “Yes, he knits each infant together in the uterus, but he then gives parents particular freedom and responsibility to shape the neurological wiring of their children.”¹⁴⁵ It is both the calling and gift of a parent to have the opportunity to partner with God, as he seeks to form children into his

¹⁴³ Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today’s Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 39.

¹⁴⁴ *The State of Religion and Young People*, 68.

¹⁴⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 111.

image. In his book, *Think Orange*, Reggie Joiner emphasizes the God-given influence parents hold in their children's lives and encourages churches to do everything they can to provide support, encouragement, and training for parents. He writes, "Maybe the greatest gift a church can give parents is the confidence and courage to do what God has wired them for."¹⁴⁶ In my own context at Mayfair, unless we have a spiritual retreat and trip, our ministry team will spend only one to two hours per week with students at most. While it is important that church leaders are intentional with the time we spend with students, it is critical that we take advantage of our opportunities to help parents in their role.

The church should do everything we can to partner with parents as they continue to have the greatest impact on their child's faith formation. Len Kaegler points to a survey done by Christian Smith and Melissa Denton that indicates that when faith is important to parents, it is considerably more likely that their adolescent's faith will be important to them. For example, for the parents surveyed who indicated that faith is very important to them, 82 percent of their teenagers said that their faith was either extremely, very, or somewhat important to them, and only 17 percent indicated that faith was not very or not at all important to them. On the other hand, when parents indicated that faith was only somewhat important to them, only 64 percent of their teenagers shared that their faith was either extremely, very, or somewhat important to them, while 36 percent of teenagers shared their faith was either not very or not at all important to them.¹⁴⁷ This

¹⁴⁶ Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 89–90.

¹⁴⁷ Len Kaegler, *Youth Ministry in a Multifaith Society: Forming Christian Identity among Skeptics, Syncretists, and Sincere Believers of Other Faiths* (Downers Grove: IVP Books, 2014), 54.

research shows that one of the best ways that the church can participate in the spiritual formation of the whole family is by supporting the faith of the students' primary caregivers.

Even though family plays such a pivotal role in the spiritual formation of adolescents, many family members do not engage in conversations about God with their children. Powell and Clark note, "According to the Search Institute's nationwide study of 11,000 teenagers from 561 congregations across six denominations, 12 percent of youth have a regular dialogue with their mom on faith or life issues... One out of twenty, kids, or 5 percent, has regular faith or life conversations with their dad."¹⁴⁸ In my experience, one of the main reasons families fail to engage in these important faith conversations and experiences is because they lack either the tools or the confidence to engage. According to Ron Hunter, this was the work of Randall House publisher's resource to churches called D6, based on the calling of the *Shema*. He writes that D6 began a journey they have called "*generational discipleship*, where the church and home work toward a deliberate and strategic plan to change our culture by strengthening the family."¹⁴⁹ The idea behind this strategy is that as the church joins with the home to strengthen the faith of parents and caregivers, as a result, the faith of teenagers and children are strengthened. Johnny Markham supports this claim writing, "The church maintains a critically important place in developing and nurturing faith in people of all ages. The church is there to inform, encourage, support, and supplement what is taught and practiced at

¹⁴⁸ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 71.

¹⁴⁹ Ron Hunter, "The D6 View of Youth Ministry," in *Youth Ministry in the 21st Century*, edited by Chap Clark (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2015), 149.

home. A healthy church will provide encouragement, teaching, and support.”¹⁵⁰ The church can partner with families by providing education where caregivers are able to acquire tools and practices that can be utilized within the context of the family. They can also provide supplemental relational support for adolescents. In *Sticky Faith*, Powell and Clark recommend that every student needs an additional five nonparent adults who can come alongside teenagers in their spiritual formation.¹⁵¹ The church can partner with families to help provide layers of supportive adults who will help families connect with each other and become like Jesus.

Communal Experience of God

Experience plays a pivotal role in communal epistemology. We come to faith in Jesus through our experience of and communion with the triune God. Participation in the life of the Trinity ought to be our goal in spiritual formation. Root emphasizes that the spiritual formation of teenagers must always be tethered to experience. He writes, “just as faith cannot be disconnected from experience, so too must faith be bound in relational personhood. To have faith is to have an experience with the *person* of Jesus Christ coming to your *own person*.”¹⁵² As adolescents continue the developmental process of differentiation, they begin to discern their identity, community, and purposes by encountering the person, community, and mission of the triune God. They come to know who they are called to be as they come to experience who God is. Theresa O’Keefe

¹⁵⁰ Johnny Markham, “Building Faith at Home,” in *Owning Faith: Reimagining the Role of Church and Family in the Faith Journey of Teenagers*, edited by Dudley Chancey and Run Bruner (Abilene: Leafwood Publishers, 2017), 94.

¹⁵¹ Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 101.

¹⁵² Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular World*, 142.’

highlights the adolescent invitation to pursue communion with the triune God, as she writes, “As God is Communion, so the adolescent is called into communion—into relationship—with others and with God, so as to discover his personhood. The community, through its many practices, trains the adolescent how to be in communion, how to love God and love neighbor as himself.”¹⁵³ Consequently, if the goal of spiritual formation is union with God, as adolescents are experiencing such a pivotal season of differentiation, we should do everything we can to create space for them to understand and experience that union. Balswick, King, and Reimer illustrate this point well:

Our teleology, being in relationship with God and others emphasizes that reciprocating spirituality involves a deepening relationship with God... Faith is not rational but relational... From a teleological perspective the purpose of human life is to deepen intimacy with God, which occurs directly through encounters with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and also through the family of God... spiritual development does not occur through increased understanding of religious beliefs or universal truths; rather it transpires through the deepening of our intimacy with God. It is through this intimacy that the Spirit is released more fully in our lives. Through this experience of Christ we are given meaning, guidance, hope and motivation to act.¹⁵⁴

So then, rather than solely implementing a cerebral approach toward spiritual formation through the dictation of doctrinal belief statements and a cognitive assent toward faith in God, we can model a way of life where we are formed by our experiences with the communal presence of the triune God through several different human faculties including the mind.

The church seeks to participate with families in the spiritual formation of new habits and rhythms in teenagers. The church must encourage parents to create space for

¹⁵³ Theresa A. O’Keefe, *Navigating toward Adulthood: A Theology of Ministry with Adolescents* (New York: Paulist Press, 2018), 16.

¹⁵⁴ Balswick, King, and Reimer, *The Reciprocating Self*, 323.

teenagers and families to slow down and encounter the presence of the triune God together. One way the church can do this is by assisting families in creating healthy rhythms and rituals that will help form the volitional system of adolescents and their family members. Powell, Mulder, and Griffin encourage churches to lean into helping establish rhythms in the home, writing, “Rituals have served throughout the Christian tradition as channels through which to answer deep questions of identity, belonging, and purpose with God’s response of grace, love, and mission. Rituals embody meaning through actions that are often deeper than words alone can convey.”¹⁵⁵ These rituals and practices can help propel students from mind to heart to will and can lead to a commitment to discipleship of Jesus. So then, as students encounter the Lord with their families through these rituals, the hope is that they have the confidence and volition to follow him. Root emphasizes that “rituals, practices, and forms of action aren’t important. They are essential because they take both our minds and our bodies deeply into the narrative (165).”¹⁵⁶ Root emphasizes that as we participate in these life-giving practices that create space to experience the goodness, grace, and love of the triune God, we begin to embody those experiences, and the local church can facilitate families participating in those experiences together:

Because the local church is a living expression of the Church as the family of God, creating opportunities for families to grow in their faith *together* should be a regular priority for the church leadership (not only for the youth workers). Creating space for families to bond, to laugh, and to experience meaningful times together is a practical outworking of viewing youth ministry as a bridge between the church and the home.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁵ Powell, Mulder, and Griffin, *Growing Young*, 155.

¹⁵⁶ Root, *End of Youth Ministry*, 165.

¹⁵⁷ McGarry, *Biblical Theology of Youth Ministry*, 153

The following project will teach families a way to incorporate these new spiritual exercises into their respective families. The project will show families how to create space that will enable and embolden family members to practice the new spiritual exercises together. This new dimension of shared communication will allow the family to experience the very presence of the triune God together. The goal is that this method will lead to new family and individual habits and rhythms that will lead to an intimate union with the Father, Son, and Spirit as they transform into the very image of Jesus.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this project was to explore the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of our families at Mayfair Church of Christ. In my experience, due to Mayfair's connection to the Stone-Campbell Movement and our location in Huntsville, Alabama, members at Mayfair have often felt most comfortable practicing a cerebral approach of spiritual formation. This study aimed to create space for families to learn about and practice spiritual disciplines consistently together over the course of six weeks. The selected disciplines engage a number of God-given faculties intended to unite us with God and with God's creation. The project aimed to describe themes that surface in responses to these communal experiences based on participants' feedback and field observations. This chapter intends to describe the intervention strategy, project format, and methods of evaluation.

Intervention Strategy

In my experience serving as a children's minister and then youth minister for more than ten years, I have noticed that a cognitive approach to spiritual formation is most comfortable for many of our students and parents at Mayfair Church of Christ. This approach includes teaching, Bible study, research, and reading as the primary means of connection to the triune God of love. For many, this cognitive approach to spiritual formation is quite shallow and fails to satisfy the deep inner cravings for God. It has left students and parents desiring a more embodied, genuine spiritual connection to God. In many cases, students are often more comfortable engaging in exercises that connect

beyond their cognitive operation system. On the other hand, parents find it difficult to express their faith and teach their children in a way that connects their cognitive, affective, and volitional systems to the heart of God. I do believe our church has an opportunity to create space for families to communally experience God in a fully embodied way. These shared experiences that engage several different human faculties of connection can lead to a rounder, more grounded, truly intimate faith.

This project intended to accomplish this goal by selecting a sampling of five to six family units who are a part of Mayfair's youth ministry to participate in a six-week series together. These participants were selected based upon two criteria. First, in order to describe a fuller baseline for the spiritual formation of families at Mayfair, the family units must have been a part of our church family for at least five years. These families have become an integral part of Mayfair's body life and have partnered with Mayfair's leadership in the spiritual formation of their family. Second, each family must have adolescents between the ages of twelve and eighteen. Each family had students who participated in our youth ministry in at least a semi-regular capacity. I sought to recruit both traditional and non-traditional families, including but not limited to nuclear families, blended families, families with a single parent, families with non-parent figures as primary caregivers, etc.

The description of the participating families are as follows. The project was made up of six family units with eighteen participants. The first family was made up of a 47-year-old father and 46-year-old mother with their 15-year-old daughter. The second family was made up of a 51-year-old mother and her 17-year-old son. The third family was made up of a 43-year-old father and 48-year-old mother with their two daughters

(ages 11 and 14). The fourth family was made up of a 49-year-old mother and her two sons (ages 13 and 15). The fifth family was made up of a 59-year-old father and 55-year-old mother with their 16-year-old son. The final family was made up of a 52-year-old father and 45-year-old mother with their 16-year-old son.

Because I am working with minors as a part of their family unit, I have retrieved letters of consent from the adults, as well as letters of parental consent and assent for each participant under the age of eighteen. All activities and intervention strategies that have been utilized in this project have been fully reviewed by Lipscomb University's Institutional Review Board.¹⁵⁸ All participants remained confidential as I delineated findings that have resulted from the intervention strategy.

Each participant agreed to be a part of the six-week class series described below. The group met on Monday nights from October 10 until November 14 for approximately one hour each week.¹⁵⁹ In response to the research and literature review, I have determined six spiritual practices that engage specific human faculties that have been gifted to humanity for the sake of connection with God and with one another. Each week, I (1) introduced the new spiritual practice by sharing its historical background and its theological and biblical foundation, (2) led the group in the new spiritual practice communally, (3) facilitated space for families to share about their experiences with the new spiritual practice, and (4) invited families to participate in the new spiritual practice together throughout the week. These practices could take between fifteen minutes and one hour per day, and the prompts invited families to participate in the practices both

¹⁵⁸ See Appendix A.

¹⁵⁹ Due to one of the Monday nights falling on Halloween, I chose to reschedule that session for the following Tuesday night, November 1.

individually and communally as a family unit. At the beginning of the following week's session, I created space for families to discuss their experiences with the spiritual practices as a family and then with the other families participating in the project. The class took place in our youth area at Mayfair Church of Christ. I chose this space because of its familiarity to our student population. I sought to create an environment that removed as many distractions and barriers as possible and was intentional with lighting, music, and spacing to help set the tone for a night of worship, prayer, and true spiritual connection to God.

The six-week family series overflowed from two major hypotheses I concluded following my experiences in the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb University and the literature review for this project. First, shared, embodied experiences of God within the context of faith communities lead to deeper attentiveness and consciousness of God. These experiences stack on top of one another and strengthen one's faith especially when they engage every part of us—heart, soul, and strength. Second, because the family is the primary instrument God has empowered to pass along faith to the next generation, faith communities have an opportunity to partner with families to create space for these formative experiences that will lead their family to create new habits and will lead to greater union with the Father, Son, and Spirit. I intend for this six-week series to model what this formation can look like for the church and home—both at Mayfair and other church communities.

I chose questionnaires as my primary data collection instrument for this project. Participants agreed to answer a questionnaire before the series to assess levels of knowledge, comfort, experience, and understanding of key issues central to the project.

Following the series, each participant took a post-session questionnaire to evaluate and reflect on their experience of the class as an individual and as a family. Each participant—both adults and minors—filled out the same questionnaire.

As facilitator, I played a key role in opening lines of dialogue among each family in response to their experiences. Because I led the class sessions, I invited two people to serve as field observers for each session. They were my eyes and ears during each of the sessions. The field observers completed ethics training required by Lipscomb's Institutional Review Board and agreed to practice confidentiality of their experiences throughout the series. The participants were made aware of the field observers' presence and role.

Project Format

Each of the week's class sessions were organized into four different movements: Let's Check in (Weeks 2-6), Let's Explore It, Let's Practice It, and Let's Share About It. I also included an invitation to practice the spiritual exercises and disciplines throughout the week together. The first movement of the class, "Let's Check in," created space for family units to share about their experiences with the "homework" throughout the week. I asked the same questions during this movement each week to create continuity: First, how was your experience walking through the practice this week? As you practiced the spiritual discipline throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging? Share about that with your family. Second, I invited each family member to share one takeaway with their family based on their experiences throughout the week. I then invited families to share their collective experience with the group-at-large.

In the second movement of the class, “Let’s Explore It,” I shared about a specific human faculty that leads humanity to a deeper spiritual connection with God and with one another. This movement included a mix of lecture, storytelling, anecdotes, and biblical and theological background and teaching. At times, it also included dialogue as a group and activities that reinforced the teaching. The goal was that this teaching would be understood by both the students and parents in the room.

The third movement of the class, “Let’s Practice It,” created space for the room to share in a spiritual exercise experience communally. Each of the practices overflowed from the specific human faculty we walked through during the teaching portion of the class. In the letters of consent and assent, the participants were made aware that the exercises we were walking through communally might be new to them and might be out of their comfort zones. They were also made aware that the exercises we walked through could lead them to reflect about impactful memories and events from their lives. The exercises could potentially tap into challenging or difficult emotions and experiences, and they were invited to share about those experiences with their family members. The participants were consistently reminded that all activities are voluntary, and they were able to choose to take a break or not participate at any time. We also made resource lists available with several local counselors and therapists in case someone became distressed. As the facilitator, I led the participants in the spiritual practices as a group.

In the fourth movement, the family units had an opportunity to share about their experiences with the shared, spiritual practices as a family. Family members were invited to share one positive takeaway or experience from the communal practice and one way

each person found the practice challenging. I then created space for each family to share about their collective experience with the group-at-large.

Finally, families were invited to participate in an exercise collectively and individually throughout the week. Participants were aware of this part of the commitment before they chose to be a part of the project. I took family's busyness and potential unfamiliarity into consideration as I put together the curriculum. I sought to make this invitation as manageable as possible. To alleviate any added inconvenience, the practices were designed to be exercised individually throughout the week. I also intentionally chose exercises that could be flexible in practice for each family. For many of the practices, I offered multiple options. Families were provided prompts both physically and digitally.

The first week's session focused on loving God with our attentiveness. After walking through an overview of the project-at-large, I introduced the concept of mindfulness, the practice of *Examen*, and the theologian Ignatius of Loyola. I walked through a communal exercise of *Examen* as a group and then invited each family to practice *Examen* individually at least five times throughout the week. I also encouraged the family to check in with one another twice throughout the week to share about their experience with the spiritual discipline.

The second week's session focused on loving God with our minds. After checking in with the families about their experiences with *Examen*, I shared about how the mind is a tool gifted to us by God so that we might connect with Him and with one another. I also shared about how God's Word is one avenue for us to use to love God with our minds. The practice I focused on this week is *Lectio Divina*. I introduced the spiritual disciplines

and then walked through that discipline communally. After facilitating space for dialogue about the collective experience with *Lectio Divina*, participants were given a prompt that invited each family to practice the discipline at least five times throughout the week.

They were encouraged to practice *Lectio Divina* at least once together.

The third week's session focused on loving God with our bodies. After the families shared about their experiences with *Lectio Divina*, I surveyed the way we see people in Scripture connect with God kinesthetically. This week's exercises focused in on the five senses. To connect with multiple senses, the group walked through two spiritual practices together. The first was an art practice and the second was a guided prayer walk. The homework for this week focused on unplugging and implementing a media fast. Families were provided multiple options that they were able to walk through this spiritual discipline together.

The fourth week's session focused on loving God through contemplation. This week's session was probably the most foreign and challenging for our families. The teaching time focused on the invitation we find in Scripture to practice silence, and the group walked through a communal exercise of breath prayer. This session required extra instruction. Throughout the week, families were invited to engage their imagination as they read Scripture utilizing the spiritual discipline of imaginative prayer. Because imaginative prayer is new to many of our families, we walked through this practice as a group before we left.

The fifth week's session focused on loving God with our memories. After reflecting on the group's experiences with imaginative prayer, we surveyed the ways God calls us to remember his presence, power, and work in our lives throughout the biblical

narrative. Memory is a tool that helps us remember God's Word and helps us remember and see the ways God's presence has been active in our lives. Memory also connects us to each other. For the communal practice, the group took time to reflect on their spiritual autobiography, focusing on people, experiences, and circumstances that have impacted their lives. After creating that autobiography, I invited the group to focus on one event or circumstance that seemed especially significant. The group created a communal prayer of thanksgiving formatted like Psalm 136. Responding to that significant event or circumstance, on a slip of paper, participants were asked to fill in these blanks: "When I was _____, God, you _____." I read these experiences aloud, creating a communal Psalm. After dialoguing about that experience, families were invited to practice exercises that engage their memory in two ways. First, each family chose a passage they would work to memorize together over the course of the week. Second, five times throughout the week, families were invited to have an intentional conversation that engaged the memory. Each family unit was given a prompt with ideas for these intentional questions.

The final week's session focused on loving God with our community. After checking in about the collective experience with the memory disciplines, the group reviewed each of the week's sessions and faculties that have been gifted to us for the sake of connection. For the practice, the families were invited to work together to create a rule of life for their family. They were encouraged to engage the faculties practiced throughout the class series: attentiveness, mind, body, contemplation, imagination, memory, and community. The goal was that because of their participation in this series,

families might create habits and rhythms that could lead to deeper connection and union with the triune God.¹⁶⁰

Methods of Evaluation

For this project, I am engaging in qualitative research. John W. and J. David Creswell define qualitative research as “an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”¹⁶¹ As I have reported, at Mayfair, because of our location in a hub for STEM research and because of our connection to the Stone-Campbell tradition, the approach to spiritual formation has often been rooted in pragmatism and rationalism. This has led to many students and adults struggling with their faith because their intellectual pursuit has left them desiring a more embodied faith that integrates their mind, heart, and experiences. The opportunity existed for Mayfair to partner with families and create space for them to share in spiritual practices together that engage the whole self as a whole family. I hoped to explore how these shared experiences affected the family—both individually and communally. Could these shared experiences lead to new habits and rhythms that moves families to deeper union with the triune God of love?

My research utilized the thematic analysis method, a subtype of qualitative research. Through the thematic analysis method, a researcher seeks to utilize several data analysis methods to help identify connecting themes and threads related to the research. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clark write that thematic analysis “allows the researcher to

¹⁶⁰ See Appendix K for the project curriculum. The handouts and homework utilized for the project series can be found in Appendix L.

¹⁶¹ John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, Fifth Edition (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, Inc., 2018), 4.

see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences.”¹⁶² The goal is that the collective and shared experiences of the differentiated, unique family participants might lead to learnings and conclusions connected to the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama.

The primary instrument utilized in this method was questionnaires that each participant filled out. The questionnaire answered before the series assisted in creating a baseline for participant experience with the subject matter. The first questionnaire consisted of the following questions:

1. What has your experience with spiritual disciplines looked like before this family series?
2. What habits, routines, and/or traditions does your family practice in your walk with God together?
3. Describe a time when you felt closest to God.
4. Describe a time when you felt far from God.
5. What are the greatest obstacles you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?
6. What are the greatest joys you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?

The goal is that this questionnaire establishes a baseline in the ways that both the students and parents understand their relationship with God. The questionnaire also aimed to delineate the language the participants use to describe their relationship with God and highlight the habits and practices that were already a part of the life of each family participant.

The second questionnaire helped to measure the efficacy of the shared, spiritual practices in the formation of the participants and their families. It created space for each

¹⁶² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Thematic Analysis,” in *APA Handbook of Research Methods in Psychology, Vol. 2: Research Designs: Quantitative, Qualitative, Neuropsychological, and Biological*, edited by H. Cooper (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2012), 57.

participant to evaluate their experience and reflect on their learnings and takeaways. The second questionnaire consisted of the following questions:

1. Describe your overall experience walking through these spiritual practices as a family.
2. In what ways did your understanding of and relationship with God change as a result of walking through these practices together?
3. In what ways did your relationship with your family change as a result of walking through these practices together?
4. Which of the spiritual disciplines we practiced was most beneficial to you? Why?
5. Which of these spiritual disciplines we practiced was most challenging to you? Why?
6. Do you hope to utilize these spiritual practices moving forward? If so, how? If not, why not?
7. If we were to offer this class again with families at Mayfair, what changes might you make?

The goal of this questionnaire was that as each participant described their experiences in the class series, their findings and conclusions might connect with other participants to create thematic threads.

I also enlisted the help of two non-participating field observers who described any observations noticed during the implementation of the class series. The field observers walked through ethics training, agreed to practice confidentiality, and were given the following protocol for their general field notes:

1. Begin by noting the time, date, location, and your name on the Field Notes form.
2. Utilize shorthand in your notetaking. The goal is for you to serve as my “eyes and ears” as I am facilitating the class sessions.
3. As you write specific notes about an individual, use their first and last name initials.
4. Record details. Be descriptive.
5. Avoid language that makes judgment regarding behavior. Simply note the behavior.
6. Document both verbal and nonverbal communication. Note body language moods, or attitude, as well as interactions among family members and other participants.

Field observers were also asked to pay special attention to the following matters:

1. Comments, attitudes, or mood regarding participation in the communal spiritual practices. Listen and watch for excitement, anxiety, resistance, etc. as families walk through the practices together.
2. Level of interactivity among family members. How are families engaging with one another? How do these interactions shift as we move further into the series?
3. Emotional engagement and responses during spiritual practices.
4. Family and individual responses during the larger group dialogue.
5. Emotional engagement and responses during the larger group dialogue.

With the collection of the participant questionnaires, general field observations with the project participants, and the interviews of leaders at Mayfair that assisted in detailing Mayfair's history of spiritual formation found in chapter one, I have sought to collect a variety of data points that helped discern the project's collective thematic conclusions.

The goal of data coding is to move the dissertation project from chaos to order. After collecting the data from the field observation and questionnaires, I have coded the data utilizing the protocol found in Creswell and Creswell's *Research Design*. They delineate codes into three categories: expected codes, surprising codes, and codes of unusual or of conceptual nature. Expected codes align with the hypotheses that have been formed as a result of the researcher's hypotheses. Surprising codes represent themes that were unanticipated based on prior research and expectations. According to Creswell and Creswell, codes of unusual or conceptual nature could not have been predicted and would introduce the reader to new, unusual, and conceptual ideas and findings.¹⁶³ By coding data using these categories, I hope to be able to discern helpful thematic threads and patterns that provide clarity with regards to the effectiveness of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair in Huntsville. It is also critical that I be aware of silence

¹⁶³ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 195.

present in the data collected. Tim Sensing writes that the question silence asks is, “What is left unsaid that needs to be examined?”¹⁶⁴ Whether these silences are themes that were expected but never mentioned or themes assumed by the participants that are never stated, the researcher must be aware of these silences that exist in between the lines. Field observation might be a helpful tool in drawing out these silences.

Conclusion

The purpose of this project was to examine the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. The project was a result of my own experience having served the families at Mayfair for more than ten years, drawing on our church’s contextual location in Huntsville, Alabama, and connection to the Stone-Campbell movement tradition. Overflowing from my literature review exploring the theological and epistemological significance of experience of God and participation in spiritual practices and theological as well as practical foundations for the spiritual formation of families, I developed an intervention that created space for families to learn about and practice spiritual disciplines within both the community of their home and their larger faith community. These sessions also created space for families to share about their experiences with each other. The methodology presented here served as a means of measuring the efficacy of this project.

¹⁶⁴ Tim Sensing, *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2011), 200.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to explore the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of our families at Mayfair Church of Christ. Through my project, I sought to explore the impact of family units walking through spiritual practices together over the course of six weeks. The curriculum utilized in this series was designed to connect with several human faculties connecting mind, soul, and body. Each participating family met together once per week for six weeks. I educated the group about the particular human faculty of the week and then led the group through a spiritual practice that engaged that particular human faculty. Families were then invited to practice the spiritual disciplines throughout the week both individually and as a family unit. Each family was given space to share about their experiences with the spiritual practice at the beginning of each session. They were prompted by leading questions from the facilitator. The goal is that the collective and shared experiences of the differentiated, unique family participants might lead to learnings and conclusions connected to the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. To maintain confidentiality in this report, all participants will be referenced by the pronouns they and them. Overall, participation was very good for each of the six sessions. Four of the six families attended every week. One of the participating families had a family emergency and was unable to attend the first session, while another family was unable to all attend the final three weeks. I have taken the inconsistencies with these two families into consideration as I have gathered the results. I observed the experience

through three different phases. Phase one was the pre-series questionnaire. Each participant filled out this questionnaire before the series began so that I might gain an understanding of each participant's experience with the spiritual disciplines practiced in this series. The questionnaire also created space for each participant to reflect on his or her relationship with the triune God of love and with his or her family. Phase two consisted of the field notes of the series itself. Field notes were gathered by two non-participating, outside observers during each session and my own personal notes that were taken after each session. Finally, phase three was the post-series questionnaire. This questionnaire helped to describe the growth and setbacks that took place among each of the families participating in the series. These three phases were then triangulated to establish rich, thoughtful themes and conclusions.

Evaluation of Findings

Phase One: Pre-series Questionnaire

Families Struggle to Incorporate Daily Time with God

As participants answered the first question,¹⁶⁵ I noticed that many expressed personal struggle as they reflected on their experience with spiritual disciplines. I was surprised by the negative tone found in nearly half of the participants' answers to this first question.¹⁶⁶ That tone was also present in every category of participant: mother, father, middle schoolers, and high schooler. One of the parents shared, "I have always felt like we needed to have more family style spiritual work at home, but it always ends up

¹⁶⁵ In the pre-series questionnaire, the first question was "What has your experience with spiritual disciplines looked like before this family series?"

¹⁶⁶ Expression of struggle in connection with spiritual disciplines was shared in mothers, fathers, middle schoolers, and high schoolers.

feeling a little forced and unnatural except for prayer.” Another parent shared that their experience with spiritual disciplines was “sporadic.” They also shared that they sometimes do not feel or see the practice of spiritual disciplines impactful. One of the parents shared that if they are focused on applying spiritual disciplines in their life, the spiritual disciplines are effective; however, they describe the impact of spiritual disciplines as “disjointed otherwise.” This trend continued with student participants. One middle schooler shared that they pray but not every day, and another shared, “I pray when I need something, but not on a regular basis.” One of the high school students was honest and shared that they had very little experience with spiritual disciplines whatsoever. While I expected that several participants lacked extensive experience with spiritual disciplines, I did not anticipate that so many of the participants would speak about their experience with spiritual disciplines in a negative light. Overall, while some participants had experience with spiritual disciplines, it was not always a positive one.

This theme continued as participants reflected on habits practiced among their families. I asked participants, “What habits, routines, and/or traditions does your family practice in your walk with God together?” At least one person from three different families used a negative qualifier when describing habits their family practices in their regular routine. One high schooler was blunt and shared that their family does not have any habits, routines, or traditions in their walk with God together. Another high school student emphasized a lack of intention in their family’s walk with God, writing, “We pretty much just say a prayer before each meal with each other and show up on Sunday morning.” That student’s parent confirmed the same routines: “Prayers at meals, Sunday worship together.” Another shared, “The only habit we have is dinner prayers.” However,

one of the middle school participants wrote about what their family used to practice: “We used to read a chapter of the Bible each night.” While most participants shared about positive practices engaged among their families, it was notable that half of the participating families had a member who used a negative qualifier to describe their family’s practices.

To gain greater insight into the challenges families are facing as they seek to connect spiritually with each other, I asked participants, “What are the greatest obstacles you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?” Two themes rose to the surface of the responses. First, time often keeps families from forming habits that facilitate connection with one another and with God. This obstacle was especially central to the parents’ responses. In fact, all but two parents mentioned time in their response to this question. One parent shared that the greatest obstacle to connection is “making it a habit and setting time aside,” another listed, “time and priority.” Another parent shared, “Time, distractions, lack of planning to create positive family habits regarding our spiritual growth.” According to these parents, before the series, their busy schedules have become one of the biggest barriers between their families and connection to God.

Second, according to the series participants, insecurity and “awkwardness” was overwhelmingly the greatest obstacle they experience as they seek to connect spiritually with their families. In fact, two-thirds of the participants shared that this was a challenge for them. One of the high schooler’s comments summarized the sentiments of the group: “I feel awkward sometimes, and I’m not great at opening up.” When exploring faith as a family, for many of the students, their own insecurity prevents authenticity and increases awkwardness in family conversations about faith. Another high schooler shared, “I am

inexperienced, so I don't have much to contribute. I also am not super comfortable talking about my personal spiritual journey, so I feel awkward when asked deep questions." Similarly, insecurity was also experienced by parents. One parent shared, "My own struggles affect my conversations with my family." One of the moms shared about her struggles praying with her family, writing, "I've never been comfortable praying out loud in front of other people including my husband and family." For most of the participating families, insecurity has become an obstacle to connection and authenticity which has created a tense, awkward formation environment. To one of the parents, this tension is embodied through disrespect from their kids. They find themselves frustrated by the disrespect that manifests when it is time to connect spiritually as a family. Some parents experience this tension or "awkwardness" and do what they can to not force the issue. One participant shared that she hopes her child will "want to learn and grow without forcing it on [them]." Another parent shared, "[My child] is at an age where they seem to not be interested in family style practices. We have respected it because we didn't want to be pushy and because they study on [their] own." Another added that they want "to do something that is value-added and not forced. Natural, organic conversations about topics or situations work well. Forced conversations do not." Overall, according to the pre-series questionnaire, it seemed that the participants desire connection; however, insecurity, awkwardness, and a desire to not push teenagers too hard has become an obstacle for many as they pursue connection with one another and with God.

Pre-Series Understanding of Spiritual Disciplines

Regarding experience with spiritual disciplines, the scope of experience with this specific group at Mayfair was limited. For most, prayer was the primary experience with

spiritual disciplines before walking through this series. Two-thirds of the participants cited prayer when answering the question about previous experience with spiritual disciplines (six students and six parents). In fact, ten of the participants *only* mentioned prayer when sharing about their experience with spiritual disciplines in the past. Furthermore, when answering the question regarding their family's habits and routines, fifteen out of eighteen cited prayer as the primary discipline their families habitually practice together. There was never a specific type of prayer or practice mentioned. Only the general term prayer was cited. While prayer was overwhelmingly tied to participants' experience with spiritual disciplines, some cited a few other practices. While answering the first question, two cited that they practice service, two cited worship, and one cited gratitude. While answering the second question about family routines, four cited service, six cited intentional conversations, seven cited Sunday morning worship attendance, and two cited fellowship. Based on my research of our context at Mayfair, I was surprised that only three adults and one student mentioned Bible study while sharing about their experience with spiritual disciplines, and while sharing about family routines, only one mentioned Bible reading. Because of Mayfair's connection to the Stone-Campbell tradition and social location in Huntsville, Alabama, I expected more participants to mention Bible study as a part of their regular routine. Overall, before participating in the project series, families' understanding of and experience with spiritual disciplines were limited.

Closeness to God Connected to an Event or Experience

To gain a greater understanding of the participant's experience and perception of God, I asked them two questions: "Describe a time when you felt closest to God," and

“Describe a time when you felt far from God.” As participants answered the first question fourteen out of eighteen participants’ shared about an event or experience that occurred in their lives. Five participants cited baptism—either their baptism or the baptism of their child. One parent participant shared, “Right before I was baptized, I was studying on a daily basis and seeking God more.” Another parent shared, “When baptizing my kids, I felt peace, joy, and relief.” Five participants shared about their experience of God amid a difficult time or season. One of those participants shared that they felt close to the Lord “following the death of a loved one when [they] had to rely on Him.” Another shared something similar, “Right after my dad passed away, I turned to God for comfort.” Five participants mentioned that they experience God in moments of solitude or slowness. One of the high school students shared, “Whenever the summer hits and I get a break from school, it really gives me an opportunity to slow down my lifestyle and be more inviting to the presence of God.” One parent shared that they enjoy walking alone in a local cemetery near their home. As participants pointed to these specific events or experiences, many used modifiers to describe the intimacy of their experience of God. As one of the parent participants shared about their experience, they shared that they “felt full confidence, trust, and hope.” One of the high schoolers recounted that they experienced God’s comfort when they were struggling through a difficult time. One of the parents described an intimate picture of their experiences with God:

My closest times with God have been when I am in ‘the quiet’ or in deep pain. I have felt very close to God both times on Trek when I have been able to get away from the noise of the world and listen closely to God. I also felt the Spirit minister to me in a powerful way in my grief from suddenly losing my mother.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁷ Trek is an event that is offered to our high school students and parents. Participants spend six days backpacking on a mountain in Colorado. This event is coordinated by the organization Wilderness Expeditions.

For each of the participants, their experiences have formed their perception of the triune God of love and continue to shape the way they share about God with their families.

On the other hand, while participants overwhelmingly utilized the past tense to describe a time when they felt close to God, half of the participants surprisingly used present language to describe a time when they felt far from God. One of the adult participants shared, “I feel far from God when I am so busy that I am just exhausted. I have not felt particularly close to God recently because I have been so busy with work and family, and the last couple of years of the pandemic have been mentally challenging.” Another parent shared, “I probably struggle now more than ever.” One of the middle school participants shared, “I feel far from God when everything is coming hard on me.” A high school participant shared that they feel far from God, “when I am lonely, self-critical, or not experiencing nature and human connection like we’re created to.” Finally, one high schooler shared, “To be honest, I’d probably say right now, I’m having a really hard time seeing what God’s plan for me might look like, and it’s felt like there’s a disconnect.” In contrast, while answering the question about a time when they felt close to God, only three of the eighteen participants utilized present language. Despite the two questions being worded in the exact same manner, it seems that most participants were more likely to perceive distance from God in the present and closeness with God in the past.

Time with God Leads to Closeness as a Family

For the final question of the pre-series questionnaire, I asked participants, “What are the greatest joys you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?” As participants responded to this question, it was clear that each family desired closeness

with each other and saw time with God as the pathway to that closeness. One parent shared, “Watching the ones you love grow spiritually and seeing God through them. I learn so much from my family.” Similarly, another parent noted, “My greatest joy is watching them connect with God. Not only for their sake because of the benefits they’ll reap, but selfishly, what it does to encourage me spiritually.” For so many of the parents who participated in this project, they long to connect with their family through connection with God. Additionally, the students who participated in the project also longed for that same connection. A middle school student shared that their greatest joy is when their family is all together. One of the high schoolers shared that they experience joy by spending time with their family, while another shared that they experience that joy through openness with one another. One depicted their reliance on family, saying, “I experienced joys like feeling one’s love around me for my stress or discomfort, and how they are there to help pull me through challenging times.” Entering into this series, there was a tangible desire to cut through the tension and awkwardness some have experienced in order to connect to God together as a family unit.

Phase Two: Field Observation

Comfort Level with New Spiritual Practices

As I was preparing for this series, I was unsure of the comfort level the participants would experience while walking through these new spiritual practices. While many of the students had previously experienced several of the disciplines practiced in the series in our youth ministry, I wondered if the parents had any such experiences. I also wondered about the comfort level of the students as they walked through the new spiritual practices with their parents by their side. I was pleasantly

surprised by how open participants were to try new disciplines, especially for the participants thirteen years and older.

The participants' experience of breath prayer is exemplary of this positive outcome. During the fourth week of our series, I walked through how we can love God through silence and contemplation, utilizing the discipline of breath prayer as an example of this type of practice. As I was preparing for that session, I thought that this practice would be the most foreign spiritual discipline our families would experience. Breath prayer is not a discipline we practice on a regular basis in our context at Mayfair. Before leading the participants through the practice, I shared about the history of breath prayer and walked through several examples of possible breath prayer statements. The room was quiet, and I did not play any music. I also did not disclose the time allotted for the practice (ten minutes). As we walked through the practice together, every student and parent fully participated. In fact, one of the field observers noted that the entire group was as still as a rock. One of the adult participants shared that they had experience with the practice in the past and that it had helped her anxiety. One of the high school participants shared with the group that the ten-minute practice helped them to get to a "chill state." After practicing breath prayer for the following week in response to the session, one of the adults shared that they felt most connected to the Spirit compared to the other practices we had experienced. Overall, breath prayer was representative of the group's openness to the new spiritual disciplines practiced throughout the series, especially for the participants thirteen years and older.

Additionally, the new spiritual practices seemed to be a little more difficult for participants who were eleven and twelve years old. During our first week, I led the group

in a communal practice of *Examen*, where the participants were invited to reflect on the desolation and consolation they experienced throughout the day. They were also invited to look toward tomorrow and how God may be leading them. This was the group's first experience with a communal spiritual practice. As I began the exercise, I invited the group to slowly notice their breath. One of the field observers noted that this struck an eleven-year-old participant as funny, and they immediately started to breath dramatically and giggle. After a few moments, they were able regain their composure and participate in the practice. This particular participant did grow in comfort, however, as the series moved on. During week four, we walked through an Ignatian contemplative reading, where participants were invited to use their imagination to envision the story of the hemorrhaging woman found in Luke 8:43–48. They were prompted to engage all five of their senses to gain a fuller picture of the story. One of the field observers noted that as I invited the group to imagine what the scene smelled like, the same eleven-year-old participant made an “ick face” while trying to imagine the smell. The participant seemed to be fully immersing themselves in the Bible story. It was encouraging to see the way this young participant grew in comfort and composure over the course of the six weeks.

Similarly, during the third week, as the spiritual practices engaged the body, the group walked through an exercise where they were invited to blindly draw a picture of a windy tree on the screen while reflecting on Isaiah 61:1–3.¹⁶⁸ During the exercise, one of the field observers noted that a twelve-year-old participant was looking at their paper, looking around the room, and giggling. The field observer also noticed that the student's behavior frustrated their parent. This added layer of responsibility kept the parent from

¹⁶⁸ This practice was introduced to our cohort by one of our peers, Emily Bruff, whose Doctor of Ministry project focuses on the role of art in spiritual formation.

fully participating in the practice and led to irritation that seemed to be rooted in the student's potential disruption of other participants. This disconnection continued at times for the young participants as they tried to navigate many of the new practices; however, interactive and kinesthetic practices came more naturally for the younger participants like this one.

The younger students seemed to experience greater comfort during kinesthetic prayer exercises that engaged the body. That same week, the group participated in a prayer walk, where they were given a prompt and invited to take some space to walk around the auditorium, praying to God. Individuals were encouraged to spread throughout our large auditorium. I also played contemplative, instrumental music to help create a warm, positive environment. Both students and adults enjoyed this exercise and commented that it was something they could envisage incorporating in their day-to-day life. After the prayer walk experience, one of the younger participants shared with the entire group, "It was easier to pray while walking. It helped that there was music playing, too. It calmed me down, and I could think."

Finally, the younger participants also demonstrated understanding of several of the spiritual practices. One of the most challenging concepts the group learned about was the discernment that occurs during the practice of *Examen*. At times, it was confusing for the students under thirteen to figure out the difference between consolation and desolation. In fact, while the group was practicing *Examen* together, one of the younger students turned to their sibling and asked, "Is consolation the bad one?" However, that student later shared with the entire group about an instance of consolation they had experienced when they had a positive encounter with a peer at school. Another young

participant came up to me after the session was complete to walk through their journal entry. While they did not feel comfortable sharing their *Examen* aloud with the entire group, they demonstrated to me that they understood the practice and the differences between consolation and desolation. Altogether, all the participants were comfortable engaging in the new spiritual practices and grew more comfortable as the series went along.

Culture of Safe Accountability

One of the positive outcomes created throughout the course of the series was the culture of safe accountability established among the individual family units and the group-at-large. Both field observers indicated that there were moments where both parents and students held one another accountable to fully participate—both in class and during the week. After walking through each of the spiritual practices, I always invited families to take a few moments to share about their experiences with one another, and after sharing with their individual family unit, they were prompted to share with the group-at-large. Participants were encouraged to be honest about their experiences, even if it was challenging. Throughout the series, this time was always a good opportunity for accountability. Parents might encourage their child to be more engaged in the exercises, and occasionally, students actually held their parents accountable. For example, after practicing the blind contour exercise described above, one of the high school students looked at their parents' artwork and jokingly remarked, "Clearly, y'all haven't drawn in a long time." The culture of accountability and the format that created that accountability helped encourage thoughtful, intentional participation.

Likewise, at the end of each session, participants were invited to practice the exercises individually and collectively as a family throughout the week, and at the beginning of each of the sessions, families were given space to share about their individual and collective experiences. Families then shared with the entire group. Again, this format helped establish accountability among family units. For example, during week five, participants walked through spiritual practices that engaged their memory. One of the disciplines families were invited to practice was scripture memorization. Each family chose a scripture they would commit to memorizing during the week. This discipline proved to be especially difficult to some of the parents in the room. As families huddled together to share about their experiences, a field observer noticed that one of the parents shared with their family, “I’m sorry guys! I failed to memorize the passage.” After this parent shared this news with their family, the other parent revealed that they had not memorized the passage either. The high schooler in the family joked that they were shocked and said, “Well, I guess I was the only one who did the homework this week.” Another parent jokingly shared with the group that while their son memorized the passage as it was actually written, they chose to memorize their own version of the passage. The light-hearted environment seemed to contribute to participants’ ability to safely hold one another accountable. One of the more challenging disciplines families practiced together was unplugging. Families were invited to unplug in one of three ways:

- As a family, declare a time of the day that is technology-free. Dinnertime, evening, or nighttime are all great options. You might consider keeping each family member’s phone in a central location to help hold each other accountable.
- Another option is a media fast—social media, television, streaming, video games, etc. Allow each family member to choose what they would like to give up for the week.
- You might also consider giving up your phones/technology for an extended period one day (perhaps even for an entire day), like a phone Sabbath or fast.

Families were encouraged to utilize the time that was typically used engaging in technology connecting with God and with each other. As families shared about their experiences with the entire group, most of them found it difficult to follow through with this discipline. One participant shared, “Using my phone is such an automatic thing for me. When I’m waiting for something, my first impulse is to pick that up.” One of the families shared that this practice was difficult to execute because of work responsibilities and expectations to always have their phone nearby. They admitted,

Our family failed miserably with this week’s assignment. We did it one night for an extended amount of time, but we don’t typically have a habit of using phones at the table. It feels like phones are such a tool of Satan...we check everything on there—bank accounts, messages. It is hard to cut it back and tell your kids to cut it back when we have such a hard time doing it.

I imagine this moment of transparency was trust-building among their family, as both parents admitted that they find it difficult to encourage their kids to do something they struggle to practice themselves. This parent later shared, “We’re going to try it again this week and give it another chance.” Overall, the accountability that was created among families helped lead to a more committed experience.

As the researcher, I was also grateful that the culture of safe accountability overflowed into my role as facilitator and leader. Participants were unafraid to push back or ask questions if they did not understand the purpose of the practice or struggled to see its inherent value. I intended to create a safe space where students and parents alike would feel comfortable to ask clarifying or challenging questions. This accountability first occurred following the blind contour drawing. One participant kindly commented:

Maybe this is the devil, but I don’t see the merit in this. Maybe the point is to make me aware that different things can connect with different people, but I am

trying to understand what the end game is here. It felt like scribbling while listening, and I had trouble doing both of those things at once.

This participant's line of questioning created space for me to clarify the purpose and objective of the exercise that sought to engage multiple aspects of the body, kinesthetically and visually, as participants connect with the triune God of love.

Similarly, during the last week, I invited families to put together a "Rule of Life." The goal was for families to begin to envision a path forward as they seek to incorporate some of the disciplines practiced in their regular routines. As I taught the group about Rules of Life, I shared that legalism is one of the biggest challenges in this practice. The rule was to be a trellis or structure that can consistently shift based on current circumstances or needs. I encouraged families to keep the end goal in mind—formation into the image of Jesus—to help eliminate legalism. Our goal ought to always be connection with the triune God of love and with God's creation. However, after walking through the practice, one participant respectfully pushed back against the exercise, sharing that they had a difficult time wrapping their mind around all the categories and practices of a Rule of Life without making it legalistic. This parent's comment created space for me to further emphasize the heart of spiritual disciplines—placing ourselves before God in order for the Spirit to transform us. Questions and comments like this one were the feedback I need to discern how this project can be realistically practiced in a way that can be life-giving for future participants.

Culture of Authenticity

Another positive outcome I noticed throughout the course of the series was the environment of authenticity created. The field observers noted that every participant

expressed authentic emotion at some point throughout the series like joy and sorrow. They noted the joy and happiness that often filled the room when families gathered back together after walking through a spiritual practice. They described giggles and laughter that was shared among both parents and students. It seemed that families felt safe laughing with one another, and the common experiences gave them space to share the ways they were seeing the Spirit at work throughout the series. For example, one parent shared how tickled their family was that they had inadvertently chosen the same passage to walk through *Lectio Divina* that week. They shared, “We’ve just got to give the Spirit credit when moments like this occur.” The joy expressed throughout the series seemed to overflow from connection participants were experiencing with their family members and with God.

The series also created space for participants to express what they were feeling amid challenging circumstances. After walking through the communal *Examen* practice, one parent felt comfortable expressing to the group about their mother who is battling cancer and the grief they were experiencing during this season. They shared that the practice allowed them to invite God into the grief and stress they were walking through. Both field observers also noted that the same participant was weeping as she was participating in the prayer walk during week three. It was encouraging to see that the spiritual practices created space for those participants to connect emotionally with the Lord. The series also served as a launching point for conversation between one of the high school students and me at our fall retreat. The *Examen* practice gave the student language to describe some of the difficult challenges they were facing right now with their family. They shared about how they were in a season of desolation right now.

Throughout the conversation, the participant was able to express complex emotions, and the touchpoint was a direct result of the high schooler participating in the project series.

Similarly, the practice participants walked through during week five, Spiritual Autobiography, was illustrative of the culture of authenticity developed during the project. During this practice, participants were prompted to write down the people, events, and circumstances that were central to their spiritual formation. After they finished writing their brief spiritual autobiography, I read Psalm 136 and invited participants to fill in the blanks of this statement: “When I was (blank), God, you (blank).” After turning their cards in, the group created a communal psalm. I read the participants’ individual statements, and then the group recited, “Your steadfast love endures forever.”¹⁶⁹ Each of the statements was crafted with authenticity and transparency. One parent even shared with the group about their son seriously struggling while away at college. Another participant opened up about isolation they were currently experiencing. Families were then invited to share their autobiographies together. While reflecting about the practice with the group-at-large, one parent shared, “I like sharing and speaking collectively. It is a blessing to hear others’ struggles and know that we’re not alone.” Another parent did share that they struggle with practices like this one: “I get really emotional, and I do not like that!” However, one of the field observers noticed that that family had an engaging, emotionally connected conversation regarding their autobiographies. I did find it interesting that in most cases the parents led their kids in embracing authenticity. There were times when the student participants were hesitant to share. During this practice, both field observers noticed one of the high schoolers had

¹⁶⁹ Psalm 136:1.

placed their journal on their lap as they were writing their spiritual autobiography. Early on, one of the students was struggling to share with their family. A field observer noted that one of the parents “was leaning across the table as if to engage their child.” This student grew in comfort sharing throughout the series. For example, during week five, one of the field observers noted that as this family was sharing their autobiographies, all family members were fully engaged and were pointing at each of their handouts and talking. At times, they were even laughing with one another. This trend of increased openness throughout the course of the series was another positive outcome of this project.

Increased Fellowship

The final outcome noticed during the project itself was the increased level of fellowship that occurred by the end of the series. With a couple exceptions, the families participating in the series were not well-acquainted with one another before we began meeting. I noticed during the first couple weeks that before and after the session, families kept to themselves and did not mingle with the other families; however, that shifted as the series continued. For example, after the third session, I noticed two families exchanging numbers with one another. The father of one of the families introduced himself to the students of the other family. Other families began staying after the session and talking with one another. In fact, one night three of the families stayed at the church longer than I did. I had to ask them to shut off the lights. One of the high school students came to me one night after the session and asked if we could make a small group out of the families participating in the project. They said, “This would be an awesome small group! How can we make this happen?” The experiences shared during the project created a bond with one another among individual family units and among the group as a whole.

Phase 3: Post-Series Questionnaire

Deeper Connections Among Families

After mining through the questionnaires from individual participants following the conclusion of the series, the first positive outcome that came to the surface was an increase in depth of connection and appreciation among the individual family units. As participants responded to the first questions about the benefits they received from participating in this series, many cited that their experiences led to greater appreciation of one another. One of the high schoolers shared, “The best thing to come out of this was talking with my mom about the practices in general and the different ways to see God.” This same student’s mother replied to this question similarly, sharing, “My greatest benefits were the time spent [together] and the insight I gained into [their] spiritual development.” This mom was encouraged by the depth of her child’s understanding of and relationship with God. One of the middle schoolers shared, “For me, I thought that the greatest benefits of doing these practices was seeing how big my parents are in spirit about doing these things.” This student participant was inspired by the energy and passion their parents poured into the different spiritual disciplines. Moreover, for the fourth question, I asked participants, “In what ways did your relationship with your family change walking through these practices?” This theme of greater appreciation continued in these responses. One of the middle school participants shared, “I learned that they have really good stories about their churches, and they are really good with these sorts of things.” This middle schooler enjoyed listening to their parents’ old stories growing up in church and saw ways they hoped to become like their parents. One of the parent participants shared, “I loved hearing my husband and daughter’s takes on these

practices and which practices connected to each of us.” One student participant shared that they have had a struggling relationship with their sibling at times. However, this student revealed, “As these practices went on it’s been much easier to talk to [them] and have better interactions...this series definitely broke some ice between us.” Overall, many of the participants grew in appreciation of their family members, as they shared in these mutual spiritual experiences together.

The series also created space for families to have more intentional conversations. Overall, the regularity of the conversations that occurred in response to the shared experiences alleviated the tension many had experienced in their families’ conversations about faith in the past. In fact, every student who shared that they felt that the awkwardness of conversations about faith is the biggest obstacle they experience as they seek to connect spiritually with their family commented about how beneficial it was to engage in conversation with their parents in that setting. For those students, faith conversations moved from awkwardness to connection. One of those students shared, “I have a better understanding of my parents now. The intentional discussion questions of the last week let me hear things about their youth that let me better understand where they’re coming from in their mindset.” During the fifth week, families were given a list of intentional prompts to share with one another.¹⁷⁰ The intention behind these questions was to create space for both parents and students to share about their own experiences with God and church and for each family member to gain greater insight into the experiences, people, and circumstances that have formed them spiritually. This student shifted from awkwardness in conversations about faith to deeper understanding of their

¹⁷⁰ See Appendix L.

parents because of this series. Another student who initially acknowledged awkwardness as one of the biggest obstacles to spiritual connection with their family shared, “I realized I became more attentive to family interactions throughout the study and became more intentional with conversation. I think that will carry out, too, just the awareness of how our family loves and communicates with each other.” These shared experiences created a bridge to deeper connection that assisted in removing tension, awkwardness, and barriers.

Similarly, in the post-series questionnaire, many of the parents who shared that they seek to not force conversations with their children acknowledged that while the dialogue was somewhat forced in moments, it was still beneficial to their family’s connection with one another. One of the parents shared, “We benefited from some of the intentional conversations—even if they were sometimes forced. It’s a good stretch to push us to be more open in our interactions with one another.” Another parent shared something similar:

Sharing is hard when you do it rarely as a family. Taking these forced steps made each of these encounters easier. I feel like our family will strengthen each other with more intentional conversation. Even if it won’t be [my child’s] favorite thing, I think [they’ll] benefit in the future learning from my struggles and weaknesses.

These parents felt that while the conversations did not occur organically, they were still beneficial. They were able to begin to see a path forward, as they seek to incorporate conversations and experiences like these in their daily lives.

Furthermore, when asked if they would utilize these new practices in the future, more than half of the parents shared that they hoped to continue practicing the spiritual disciplines because of the connection and dialogue that occurred with their family. That connection was a direct result of their shared experiences. One parent shared that they hoped to continue walking through some of the practices because they “allowed us to

have so many meaningful family conversations...Learning these new spiritual practices as a family unit was beneficial because we were learning new things together and could discuss it together.” This parent intimated that they hoped to continue learning different practices together with the hope that the shared experiences might continue the growth in connection their family enjoyed. Another parent shared, “Identifying practices that bring me closer to God and closer to my family is important and powerful.” This parent found that one of the benefits to participating in the series was to discern the practices that connected individually and collectively with their family.

There was however, one outlier among the participants. Unfortunately, one parent shared that while the learned practices were helpful for their personal walk with God, the series led to greater frustration and less connection with their family. When asked how their relationship with their family changed, this parent replied, “Honestly, my frustration increased. I have been wanting and yearning for my children to desire a personal walk with God, and the more they chose not to implement the practices the more frustrated I became with them.” They also shared, “I enjoyed this series immensely! However, while I felt purposeful and intentional, my greatest challenge was not having the same energy from my children.” While it was disappointing to read this feedback and important to take it into consideration as I examine the results of the project, it is also important to acknowledge that this family was unable to fully participate after the third week of the series because of outside conflicts and sickness. I wonder how their full participation might have shifted this participant’s experience with the series for the better. Ultimately, it was encouraging to see the growth in connection that occurred among most of the families who participated in the project.

New Ways to Facilitate Connection with God

Another overarching theme discovered from the questionnaires was that the series created space for participants to experience new ways to connect with God. As expected, the spiritual disciplines practiced in the series were new to many of the participants, and they were encouraged by the ways the practices facilitated connection with the triune God of love. Participants were asked if they would utilize the learned spiritual practices moving forward in their lives. All but one answered unequivocally, “Yes!” The only participant who answered yes with reservation was one of the parents who shared,

I want to be more open to trying things out of the ordinary for me to connect with God. But at the same time, if those techniques do not work for me and my personality, I’m going to accept that and focus on the disciplines that come most naturally for me.

I did find it interesting that while students’ answers focused on how these practices led to deeper, *personal* connection with God, as parents answered this question, many focused on how they hoped to walk through these practices moving forward because it facilitated space for *their family* to connect with God.¹⁷¹ One parent shared that they absolutely hope to continue these practices, responding, “For myself and for my family. We need time together sharing our faith, and this is a great opportunity to keep some momentum going.” Another parent was especially focused on their calling to disciple their children, “Yes! I want to keep doing most of the practices as well as continue to keep our conversations and activities going as a family unit. I want to be a good example to [my children], and this is a great way to lead by example.” This parent saw the practices shared in the series as an opportunity to disciple their children and live out the command

¹⁷¹ The response to this question aligns with the research shared on Gen Z that describes this generation as an extremely individualized culture.

of the *Shema* with their family. Another parent talked about the desire to help their family remain oriented toward God. They shared, “I most definitely want to utilize much of what we’ve studied and discussed, as a means to help orient me and my family closer to God and the path to Him...to more actively *PURSUE* Him, and our deeper relationships with Him.” Many of the parents were encouraged by the ways the practices facilitated connection with God for their children.

At the same time, there were three additional themes I noticed in participants’ responses regarding their individual connection with God. First, the series provided new ways for participants to connect with God. I asked each participant, “In what ways did your understanding of and relationship with God change walking through these practices?” 10 out of 17 participants cited that they were able to identify new ways to connect with God. One parent participant shared:

I had an understanding that I am not alone. That everyone is struggling with finding intentional ways to connect with God. I am glad to know that there are so many different paths and practices I can take to connect with God. It's okay if I'm not connecting every time I do one of these practices. God may be telling or showing me something for later.

This participant acknowledged the camaraderie and fellowship that occurred among the group-at-large because of the newness of many of the practices, and they appreciated that the practices engaged several different human faculties. I was encouraged to hear that this participant was able to envision paths forward in their own spiritual formation that connects with the whole, embodied self. This is the work of the Holy Spirit connecting Spirit-filled families with one another out of the overflow of the spiritual practices they experienced. Another participant shared:

I discovered new ways of walking with God and connecting with God using these practices. Even giving “names” to some of the practices that I already participate

in, such as prayer walk, was very valuable. Also having options for different ways of connecting with God is powerful as I walk through different weeks and phases of life.

This participant saw one of the benefits of the series as giving language to some of the practices and disciplines that they were already exercising. The common experiences and practices led to a common language as a group. Another participant shared that the series provided pathways to new practices for connection with God and new understandings of God. Finally, one of the high school students shared that the series helped them to understand the practices that came most naturally for them and the practices that were most challenging for them. Overall, because of their experiences with the project series, many of the participants were able to identify new pathways toward connection with the triune God of love.

Participants also identified that they became more aware of God as they walked through the practices during the six-week series. The theme of attentiveness to God was especially important for the student participants. All but one student who participated in the study identified attentiveness, awareness, or mindfulness of God as a central takeaway in their post-series questionnaire responses. One of the high school students shared that the project series was most beneficial for them because, “it has helped me to see God throughout the day and has led me to see that there aren’t really any coincidences, and that God has his fingerprints on everything.” Another high schooler shared a similar response, explaining, “God does his side of the work, but I have to be attentive in order to see what he’s doing.” Another student shared that the practices helped them “notice God more.” I was encouraged that the series seemed to facilitate space for participants to experience the way the Spirit is consistently at work all around

them. The students demonstrated understanding that the spiritual practices serve as vessels to open their eyes to the ways God loves them daily and invites them to participate in that love.

Finally, many of the participants cited increased discernment as one of the greatest benefits in their connection with God throughout the project series. For this reason, 9 of the 17 participants recognized the practice of *Examen* as the most beneficial discipline shared in the series. One high schooler noted regarding their experience of the practice of *Examen*, “I really respect when people can differentiate between what is of God and what isn’t, and since this practice does exactly that, it helped me to do more of that in my daily life.” This high schooler recognized what I believe to be one of the most important tools adolescents need today. Because of the excess of content and media being flooded toward students today, more than ever, they need the tools to help them discern the work of God from the work of the enemy. I was encouraged to see this student recognize that need. One of the parents identified an observation, indicating, “By identifying episodes throughout the day, I’m able to dwell less on the small negatives and more on the positives—especially in discerning what’s enemy-related vs. God-inspired.” One of the parents identified this practice as foundational for the entire series, sharing, “*Examen* was most important and, to me, the foundation for the rest of the practices. I need to notice the true and false voices each day and be intentional in my reaction to those voices.” This participant noted that the practice of *Examen* set the tone to help families begin to discern the voice of God and activity of the Spirit amid the other disciplines we walked through together. Listening is at the heart of connection with God, and *Examen* assists in creating a listening posture. Overall, I was grateful to read of the

ways each participant experienced connection with the triune God of love because of their participation in the project series.

Obstacles to Connection

Participants were asked to name the greatest challenges they experienced while participating in the project series. There were two themes that were repeated by multiple participants. The first obstacle was time. More than half of the participants named time as the greatest obstacle they faced as they walked through the six-week series. Each week, participants were invited to practice the spiritual exercises experienced in the session daily. Based on my experience with the families at Mayfair and the feedback from the pre-series questionnaire, I anticipated that time would be one of the biggest challenges for families participating in this series. The “homework assignments” were designed to be adjustable based on individual circumstances. The practices would take between fifteen and thirty minutes per day to complete. Participants were invited to practice the disciplines approximately three times per week as an individual and two additional times per week as a family.¹⁷² The families who participated already struggle to navigate a busy schedule, so adding an activity another night of their week as well as daily practices was proven to be difficult. One of the parent participants shared, “Some weeks were better than others mainly based on the connection with the specific practice and/or time available that week. The greatest challenge was simply lack of time or being overwhelmed with other commitments in a given week.” Another parent emphasized that their family’s time management is a choice. They reiterated that while their schedules are busy, the way they choose to spend time is up to them. This participant shared, “The most

¹⁷² Weekly “homework prompts” can be found in Appendix L.

challenging part was finding the time and making the time.” One of the parent participants indicated that participation in the spiritual practices shared in the series kept them from walking through the spiritual disciplines that are central to their personal spiritual formation. They pointed out, “The greatest challenge was making time during the week to try something new as a spiritual discipline when it’s more comfortable to just pursue my spiritual time through the same process I’ve always been most comfortable with.” This participant pushed back against the disciplines that were out of their comfort zone, citing that these practices interfered with their regular “spiritual” routine. Many students also identified time as the greatest challenge they experienced participating in the project series. One of the high schoolers shared, “It’s hard to work anything consistently into my already scattered schedule.” Several of the students cited that they struggled to keep up with the weekly goals. One high schooler highlighted, “It was difficult to keep up with our goals each week because things were so busy,” and another agreed, “I have faced challenges of staying on top with doing the things assigned to us weekly.” One of the students noticed that their entire family struggled to keep up with the weekly practices, writing, “Doing these spiritual practices were definitely challenging for our family. Especially in the sense of staying in a routine and sticking to the required minimum. Our busy schedules did not help the process.” When referring to the obstacles families encountered while participating in the project series, it is of no surprise that time was overwhelmingly the most named challenge.

Participants also identified comparison as an obstacle to connection with the series and with their families. As has been identified, one parent shared that while the practices and content of the series connected with them, they grew more frustrated with

their children's participation level. This parent desired for their children to bring the same energy level as they did, so throughout the experience, comparison became an obstacle of connection. Instead of meeting their children where they were, the participant instead longed for their kids to be more engaged and more interested in the series than they are right now. Another parent cited something similar, disclosing, "It was also challenging to get us to the 'same place' mentally and spiritually. Everybody comes from a different place and brings different life experiences and levels of understanding and commitment." One of the middle schoolers shared that they struggled to compare themselves to the rest of their family, revealing, "I found it hard to do these things because I don't have much patience, and I am not as close to God as my sister and my parents are." Because this student was the youngest member of their family, there were times they dealt with insecurity because of their lack of experience with the practices navigated in this series. Like the pre-series questionnaire, insecurity becomes a challenge to families because it becomes a barrier to connection. Rather than connecting with family members that have different levels of experience or learning from their personal experience, comparison rooted in insecurity leads to greater isolation. Overall, time and comparison became the most widely identified themes regarding obstacles experienced during the family series.

Conclusion

The purpose of my project was to explore the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. Based on the data collected, I conclude that the spiritual practices shared by full project participants led to deeper connections with family members and among other participating families. The shared practices also facilitated new ways for participants to

connect with the triune God of love. Participants identified that the new practices led to greater attentiveness to the presence of God all around them and new ways to discern the work of the Spirit in their lives. These experiences helped participants envision new pathways for these families to be formed together into the image of Jesus by the work of the Spirit. Further conclusions and implications will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this project was to explore the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of our families at Mayfair Church of Christ. The project's premise was rooted in Mayfair's connection to the Stone-Campbell Movement and our location in Huntsville, Alabama. At times, Mayfair's social location has contributed to members' largely cerebral approach to spiritual formation. This study aimed to create space for families to learn about and practice spiritual disciplines consistently together for six weeks that engaged a number of God-given faculties intended to unite us with God and with God's creation. The final chapter focuses on conclusions related to the project including final interpretations and trustworthiness of the project. It will also include reflections regarding questions that remain unanswered and the personal and ecclesial significance of the Doctor of Ministry project.

Interpretation

After further reflection on the families' experiences with the series project, four concluding themes became central to my overall interpretation. The first theme is that families' shared experiences lead to a shared language. My conversation with the high schooler at retreat became a microcosm for me as I reflected on the experiences of the individual family units as they navigated the spiritual practices together. For this high school student, our shared experience through the practice of *Examen* became a launching point to deeper understanding of the work of the Spirit in this student's life. The practice itself gave us a touchpoint where we could further understand the student's

experiences. The shared language we received through our shared experiences facilitated deeper dialogue. That dialogue is essential to the formation of students. The flow from experience to dialogue to formation is a powerful tool for parents as they seek to lead their children. Not only do the practices themselves create space for the Spirit to form us, the language and dialogue that overflows from those practices assist us as we make meaning of our shared experiences. This is what helped the conversations of the families participating in the project move from “awkward” to meaningful and intentional.

Epistemologically, this move from practice to experience to dialogue forms our faith and understanding and engages our cognitive, affective, and volitional operation systems. The dialogue that results from shared, spiritual experiences and practices is what makes formation stick. In my estimation, the project was successful in facilitating both the shared practices and the dialogue that resulted from families’ shared experiences.

The second theme is that spiritual practices create space for families to practice the *Shema* together. In Deuteronomy 6, the people of God are commanded to participate in God’s love for them with their entire being and are asked to pass that love onto their children: “Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”¹⁷³ I talk to parents in my ministry often who struggle to navigate conversations about faith with their children. They sense distance and tension from their teenagers and have a difficult time cutting through that tension. The project participants confirmed this struggle, as the students identified the awkwardness they feel trying to connect spiritually with their family and as the parents identified their intent to not force that connection. However,

¹⁷³ Deuteronomy 6:7.

one parent made a helpful distinction as they envision a path forward in response to their experiences with the project series. They shared, “Naming these practices, actually practicing them, and giving them thought changed my walk from something of randomness to something of intentionality.” Practicing spiritual practices like this does not force spiritual connection among families. Instead, it creates space for families to live intentionally with one another as they pursue the triune God of love. This is the invitation of the *Shema*. The Lord calls us to live intentionally with our families, as we seek to participate in that love day-by-day. The spiritual practices families participated in throughout the series helped them envision a pathway to living in their calling of the *Shema* together.

The third theme is that the shared, spiritual practices played a role in creating bonds with non-family member participants. The shared experiences and the dialogue that resulted from those experiences assisted in building community among the participating families. I was deeply encouraged when one of the high schoolers came up to me after the third session and asked about making this group a life group. I was also encouraged when several of the families began hanging out with one another after the session was over. I wondered if this was the support families needed as they seek to raise their children to follow Jesus. Could family life groups formed like this one that are experience and practice-driven be a potential path forward for families as they seek to surround their teenagers with layers of support? Small groups like this one could provide the accountability and community families need as they all seek to follow Jesus in our world today.

The final theme is that time is the biggest threat in the spiritual formation of our families at Mayfair today. While there are infinite challenges our teenagers and families are facing in our world today, I believe time is at the top of the list. I am reminded of the words of Dallas Willard when John Ortberg asks him about the biggest threat facing Christians today. Willard shares, “You must ruthlessly eliminate all hurry from your life.”¹⁷⁴ Walking into this project, I anticipated time being one of the major obstacles families would name in the questionnaire before the series. Time also was the one of the major factors I considered while designing the curriculum. I know our families are busy, and I recognize that they have very little margin for additional activities. Between work, school, and extracurricular activities, there is very little time for anything else. I designed the weekly assignments with this in mind. I was intentional about making each of the assignments flexible based on families’ and individuals’ schedules. I also included several individual options in case different family members had different schedules and availability. This study confirmed my instinct. Families have a difficult time seeing a pathway toward connection with God and connection with each other because of the schedules they are managing. Time is a necessary ingredient to human spiritual formation. I do believe the culture of accountability created through this project can assist in generating new spiritual rhythms and pathways for students and parents alike that can help combat this spiritual threat.

¹⁷⁴ John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry* (Colorado Springs: Waterbrook, 2019), 19.

Trustworthiness

Applicability

Although the curriculum and model were created for a specific niche—families with teenagers at Mayfair—I can foresee how it could be applicable for many different contexts. The model utilized (education, practice, dialogue) could be adapted for many populations and groups. I met with our preaching minister at Mayfair, Jason Bybee, following the conclusion of the project, and we discussed several, potential future applications at Mayfair. Within the context of our youth ministry, we dreamed about the potential of leading a series like this one with families of freshmen in high school, as those families enter that new season together. With the transition into high school comes new challenges and obstacles for parents and students alike. That time is critical in building and deepening communication and emotional connection between parents and students. It is also critical for students to establish rhythms that will lead to their further spiritual formation into the image of Jesus. I can imagine this new rhythm for our church and youth ministry would be life-giving to our families navigating this transition.

Although the model was designed specifically for families of teenagers, I can also envision the model being adapted for different age groups and populations within our church and family ministries. I spent five years serving as a children's minister at Mayfair. I believe the model would be beneficial for families with younger kids with adjustments to the content level. In fact, it could be especially valuable for families to create rhythms like the ones utilized in the series at an early age. I can only imagine how that might help to generate formation in the Spirit for both the children and adults in the home. The content and practices could be adjusted to be more suitable for a younger age

level, while also maintaining the integrity and spirit of the spiritual disciplines and practices.

While I was unable to include these adjustments in the scope of this specific project, in the future, it would be beneficial to add an intergenerational element to the model utilized. This adaptation could lead to an even richer experience for the families involved. I also wondered what it might look like for older couples or individuals to be partnered with each of the families as mentors throughout the series. I am interested in the dialogue that would occur as all three generations experience new practices with one another. With the bonds created throughout the course of the project by the individual families and the group-at-large, I can imagine how the new relationships, forged in intergenerational groups, would be life-giving to all the participants. This would lead to greater dialogue and understanding among the different generations involved. Jason and I also discussed the potential of adapting the model for the church through a preaching series. While I believe the model is best-suited on a small-group level, with creativity, I can imagine that this adaptation of the model could be a blessing to the church. How can we create the space for the movement from teaching to practice to dialogue in a large-group context? I do believe the model could be adapted to meet this need.

While the study was designed for my specific context at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, I also believe the model could be adjusted for other church contexts. As I talk to my peers in ministry, many find themselves in similar circumstances as mine. They talk to families who are struggling to facilitate conversation about faith and are witnessing droves of Gen Z leave their faith communities. As Andrew Root emphasized, teenagers (and adults alike) need their spiritual formation to be tethered to experience. He

writes, “just as faith cannot be disconnected from experience, so too must faith be bound in relational personhood. To have faith is to have an experience with the *person* of Jesus Christ coming to your *own person*.”¹⁷⁵ This connection between faith formation and relational personhood occurs through experience in community. This need is not isolated to teenagers at Mayfair. Churches have a responsibility and an opportunity to partner with families to help facilitate these communal experiences, as churches seek to place themselves in the presence of the triune God of love to be formed by His Spirit. I believe this model can be adapted to any church context who is looking for similar opportunities.

Dependability and Credibility

Throughout this thesis, I have provided a detailed description of the project. I sought to compose a thorough report of my findings based on the triangulation of these three phases described in Chapter 4: pre-series questionnaire, field observation, and post-series questionnaire. To ensure that the results shared were not misrepresented or contrary to participants’ experiences, I utilized the tool “member checking.”¹⁷⁶ I shared my description of the project findings and results with several of the participants (both parents and students) and gave space for them to offer comments and feedback. I was also intentional about including divergent statements and results that differed from the rest of the findings to add to the credibility of this report.

Reflexivity

As I reflect on my role as the researcher, the biggest limitation I faced was the challenge to act in the role of researcher while also acting in the role of class facilitator. I

¹⁷⁵ Root, *Faith Formation in a Secular World*, 142.

¹⁷⁶ Sensing, *Qualitative Research*, 221–222.

felt that because of the newness of several of the spiritual practices utilized in the series, I was the best option to execute the series curriculum. There were times where it would have been helpful to have been relieved from my role as facilitator and teacher to participate and observe. However, I had to rely on two excellent non-participant field observers to serve as my eyes and ears. They were essential in providing detailed notes of each session. I was grateful to have two experienced field observers I could trust to make thoughtful, thorough observations, so I could be freed from this challenge and was able to lead the group through the curriculum and practices.

My role as researcher in this dissertation project was limited by an underlying bias that existed among the study participants and me. These participants were known to me. I have known many of the students their entire lives. I knew that I had all of the participants' support. Because they wanted me to succeed, they also wanted my project to succeed. I also understood that because of our shared history, my presence was influential among the participants. Recognizing this inherent bias, I was intentional in not leading the group toward my own preferred results. I reminded the participants throughout the course of the series that above all, I sought their authentic, honest feedback and experiences. At times, this limitation was also a strength of the model. Because of my shared history with the participants, I believe we were able to establish a trusted, authentic learning and worship environment. This environment led to a richer, more robust experience for all participants involved. Overall, the participants felt safe to share and were open to new experiences. I believe this was bolstered by the relational currency I held with the participants before the project began.

Because of our shared history, personally, it was such a joy to witness the way the Spirit was at work among the families involved in the study. There were moments where I had to smile as I witnessed the dialogue occurring among each of the family units. I was honored to have an inside peek into these family dynamics. The room was full of wonderful parents and students who longed to connect with one another and with God. There were nights when I would be moved to tears as I reflected on the way God was working among the participants or as I reflected on encounters I had with the participants. These experiences filled me with joy and reenergized me as a researcher and pastor.

Significance and Implications

Sustainability

Regarding the sustainability of this dissertation project, I am confident the findings and benefits of the study can continue beyond the scope of the current project. Throughout the course of the series, I was encouraged by the openness of the group of participants. There was a tangible desire on the part of both the parents and students to learn and participate in each of the practices. I am hopeful the enthusiasm of this sample of families is indicative of the spirit and interest of Mayfair-at-large. An important first step to maintain sustainability is to share my results and findings with our group of shepherds and ministry leaders. I plan to both educate them on my research, while also facilitating space for those leaders to participate in many of the same spiritual practices the project participants experienced. I hope that these experiences and the dialogue that occurs as a result might generate greater comfortability regarding conversation about the Spirit and the role of experience in faith formation among our leaders.

As I have shared about my dissertation project with fellow ministers, many have shared ideas of ways we can continue the fruit of the model in the future. As I mentioned, our preaching minister, Jason Bybee, served as a conversation partner as I reflected on the sustainability of the project model. We dreamt about ways to incorporate the practices and research in both corporate worship and in smaller ministry settings. Our worship minister, Lee Milam, also inquired about the potential of adapting the material into a video series that could facilitate the spiritual practices for family time or for small groups. I have also spoken to our children's ministry team about ways that we might adapt this curriculum for families with younger children. One way to ensure the continuation of the research that has occurred is by incorporating this series into the established rhythms and calendar of our student ministry families.

Recently, our shepherds have sought to discover ways to equip parents to disciple their children. In our dialogue together, I have shared that I believe my project thesis is a tool our families can utilize to facilitate that discipleship. My research has proven that creating space for families to practice spiritual disciplines together can help families envision pathways toward deeper discipleship and spiritual formation. This desire from our shepherds can help sustain energy behind my project model.

I believe the enthusiasm and experience of the participating families can also help generate energy to sustain the work of this project. In the post-series questionnaire, when asked about how they might change the series project in the future, one parent shared,

I do hope this is offered to others. It was good to recap each week, the introductions each week were good and relevant. Conversation and interaction were good in class. It was nice that we were all in the same place, each family, so we could share our struggles in light, such as busyness and teens.

This sentiment was repeated to me by several other participants after the series was completed. Another participant who leads one of our adult classes has reached out inquiring about one of the practices he would like to utilize for his class. A month after the series finished, one of our shepherd's wives shared that she had heard from a few different participants what a blessing the series was to their family and how they hoped we could offer it again. I believe the excitement from participating families can help drive the sustainability of the model at Mayfair in the future.

Unanswered Questions

As I reflect on this study, the biggest question that remains unanswered is the long-term efficacy of this series for the families involved. As I reflect on this study, I realize that the long-term efficacy of this series for the families involved cannot be measured. I wish time would have allowed to provide a follow-up questionnaire three months or one year after the series ended. While the observations noted during the series and the responses to the post-series questionnaire point to a shift in each family's dynamic and their attentiveness to the triune God of love, the question remains, "How do the shared experiences from the series affect the family's spiritual formation long term?" I am hopeful that the project series helped parents and students alike envision pathways toward incorporating the shared practices into their daily lives. However, spiritual formation does not occur in an instant. Our being formed into the image of Jesus does not simply take place overnight. Our spiritual formation is a work of God over time through our discipline, our experiences, and His presence. The question remains as to whether the

positive findings expressed by the participants continued over the coming weeks and months.

Another question I would be interested in exploring is how dynamics of the project series might shift with an added intergenerational layer. While this was not in the scope of my original project, the opportunity remains to take this model and incorporate non-family member mentors and participants. This additional caveat could help build a bridge between students and the church-at-large and assist students in envisioning their place in the family of God. This could also provide additional support for our parents who are seeking to live out their calling in the *Shema*.

Finally, I would be curious to explore other ways to enhance living out the *Shema*. We might adjust the project model for families with younger children. I do believe the earlier families are able to establish healthy habits and routines that lead to the spiritual formation of their family the better. How might walking through a series like this with younger children normalize and integrate healthy dialogue and spiritual disciplines into families' regular rhythms, especially in a season of life where children's schedules are not *quite* as hectic as the schedules of teenagers? I can imagine how we might see the benefits of this intentionality as students enter high school. I look forward to exploring this with our kids' ministry team.

Personal and Ecclesial Significance

This project and degree program hold deep, personal significance for me. Entering the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb, I was walking through a season of deep desolation. I was experiencing a great deal of isolation, as I was juggling ministry

and life as a single pastor. At times, I felt like God was far from me, and I longed to experience His presence. I needed the Lord but was not giving the Spirit any space to move within me. I was not placing myself before the Lord. I was trying to live life and pastor completely out of my own strength. I began walking through a season of discernment in the fall of 2019. While I was praying about the potential of beginning a Doctor of Ministry program, a global pandemic hit. It felt like a sign to give it a try. During my first semester, I took a class entitled, “Introduction to Spiritual Companionship” with Dr. Kris Miller. This class was truly life-changing for me. The class was essentially an introductory class on Spiritual Direction. In it, Dr. Miller was intentional about partnering education and reading about the work of the Holy Spirit with practices that facilitated the work of the Holy Spirit. One of the practices that was especially important was Ignatius’ practice of *Examen*. As I walked through three months of daily *Examen*, my awareness of the work of the Spirit was amplified. I began to see God in ways I had never experienced before. This experience culminated on March 24, 2021, while I was riding my bike on the greenway near my home. I experienced what I am confident was an encounter with Jesus Himself. Enveloped in an indescribable peace, I experienced the intimate presence of God in a way I had never experienced before. The liminal space between the triune God of love and me felt paper thin, and any doubt, fear, or disbelief melted away. The following semester, in Dr. Gary Holloway’s class entitled, “History of Christian Spirituality,” I began to read accounts of theologians and Christians whose experiences mirrored my own—indescribable, paradigm-shifting experiences of the Spirit. Joyful tears overflowed as I began to share about the way I had seen the Lord with my trusted friends and family members. I longed for more God, more Jesus, and

more Holy Spirit. I began to make meaning of these experiences with friends, mentors, and my now-wife, Emily Anne, and I found myself desiring these experiences for the people that God has placed around me. Students and adults alike began to come to the surface of my mind. I felt a pull to discover ways for them to experience the closeness of God the way I was able to experience closeness with God. My project at Mayfair was born out of an overflow of these experiences.

For Mayfair, I believe it is critical that we creatively discern ways for our church to experience the triune God of love cognitively, affectively, and volitionally. We must move beyond what is most comfortable to us to create space for the Spirit to form our entire selves—mind, body, and spirit. As I continued to reflect on the ways I saw the Spirit at work through Dr. Miller’s class, I began to dream about ways to incorporate those learnings and experiences into my ministry context. While I have incorporated several of the spiritual practices exercised in this project’s series for years with our students, at times there was a gulf between the experiences of our parents and students. As our students encountered the Lord through these spiritual disciplines, their primary “disciplers”, mom and dad, could not relate. I wondered, “What would happen if our families at Mayfair shared in these spiritual practices together? How might that affect their conversations and the ways they perceive and experience God?” I felt that a tool, like the one developed for this project, would provide families the means of incorporating healthy spiritual habits and disciplines into their daily routine. I hoped that it would also open the door to deeper connection with each other and greater attentiveness to the work of the Spirit within and around them.

Conclusion

This thesis outlines the contents of my Doctor of Ministry Project where I explored the efficacy of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama. It was a blessing to see the ways this project created space for each family to participate in God's love by loving each other and by enjoying the presence of the triune God of love. This study helped parent participants envision a path forward that enables them to live in their parental vocation delineated in the *Shema*. I am confident that experiences like the ones shared in this series can serve as epistemic evidence that leads to faith, as their families continue to be formed by the power of God through the indwelling of the Spirit into the image of Jesus. Experiences like this stack one on top of the other. As a minister at Mayfair, I hope to do what I can to help facilitate opportunities like this series where our families can enjoy intimacy with God together. Overall, the purposes of this project were achieved. Shared, spiritual practices experienced through this project's series did lead to deeper spiritual formation among our families at Mayfair.

APPENDIX A

IRB APPROVAL LETTER



Institutional Review Board

Status of Research Review

Date: June 11, 2022

Title of Project: The Efficacy of Shared, Spiritual Practices in the Formation of Families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, Alabama

Principal Investigator(s) and Co-Investigator(s): Matthew Flynn

- Research approved.
 Conditional approval. (See *comments*.)
 Committee requests further information before a decision can be made.
 This proposal has been denied.

The IRB has met and reviewed your project proposal, and its decision is marked above. Please review the appropriate text below for further information on the decision that was rendered regarding your proposal:

Research approved: If your protocol has been approved, please note that your project has IRB approval from the date of approval for a period of one year and you are free to proceed with data collection.

Conditional approval: If conditional approval is granted, you are allowed to proceed with data collection provided that the required modifications (see comments) are in place. Within 30 days of your receipt of conditional approval, you will need to submit a revised **Research Proposal Form** (i.e., one that documents the required modifications) with the **Request for Amendment to Approved Research** box checked on the first page.

Committee requests further information: Please see the comments and use them to guide required modifications, then re-submit your request.

This proposal has been denied: See the comments for an explanation of why your proposal has been denied.

If an approved study continues unchanged for longer than one year, you will need to submit another **Research Proposal Form** with the **Project Continuation** box checked on the first page. If an approved study continues for more than one year and there are changes to the research design or data that is collected, you will need to submit another **Research Proposal Form** with the **Request for Amendment to Approved Research** box checked on the first page. The IRB reserves the right to observe, review and evaluate this study and its procedures at any time.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Briggs".

Justin Gregory Briggs, Ph.D., LMFT
Chair, Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board

Comments: Only those with letters of cooperation can participate in recruiting subjects.

One University Park Drive | Nashville, TN 37204-3951 | 615.966.1000 | 800.333.4358

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT – MAYFAIR CONTEXT INTERVIEWS

THE EFFICACY OF SHARED, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR FORMATION IN FAMILIES AT MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HUNTSVILLE, AL *LEADERSHIP INTERVIEW - INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM*

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study looking into the effectiveness of shared spiritual practices in the formation of families at Mayfair in Huntsville. This study is being conducted by Matt Flynn, a graduate student in the Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Walter Surdacki, a faculty member in the College of Bible and Ministry. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are in a leadership role at Mayfair Church of Christ. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to see what happens when families walk through spiritual disciplines consistently for six weeks. Approximately 25 people will be a part of this study.

Your interview will be a part of preliminary research that will assist in outlining Mayfair's history with regards to spiritual formation.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview that explores your history and experience at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, AL. The interview will be held in person. It will last approximately one hour. I will be recording the audio from the interview.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has minimal risk. You will be asked to share about your history and experience with Mayfair Church of Christ. The interview questions could lead to engagement with challenging or difficult emotions or experiences.

There will be no direct benefits to you as you participate in this research project.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be shared only with your permission. All results will be kept confidential. Names of the interviewees will be removed. Only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in my encrypted computer located at Mayfair Church of Christ, and only my advisor and I will have access to the records and audio recordings

while I work on this project. I will finish the project by March 15, 2023. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. You are free to stop participating at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Mayfair Church of Christ or Lipscomb University in any way.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Matt Flynn, at 256-990-4580 or flynnmp@lipscomb.edu or matt@mayfair.org. You may ask questions now or later and my faculty advisor, Dr. Walter Surdacki (615-966-5787 & walter.surdacki@lipscomb.edu), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board at jgbriggs@lipscomb.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are deciding whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study, and I agree to be recorded (audio only).

Signature of Participant	Date
Signature of Researcher	Date

APPENDIX C

MAYFAIR CONTEXT INTERVIEW – MULTIMEDIA RELEASE FORM



IRB RESEARCH STUDY MULTIMEDIA RELEASE

To be completed by the researcher			
Principal Investigator:	Matthew Flynn		
Research Study:	The Efficacy of Shared, Spiritual Practices in the Formation of Families at Mayfair Church of Christ in Huntsville, AL		
Type of Release (check all that apply):	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Audio	<input type="checkbox"/> Video	<input type="checkbox"/> Photo

To be completed by the research participant

Name of Participant: _____

In consideration for participating in the research study referenced above, I hereby grant to Lipscomb University (“Lipscomb”), and those acting pursuant to its authority, a non-exclusive, perpetual, worldwide, irrevocable license to record, use, reproduce, exhibit and distribute my presentation, likeness, voice, name and/or identity on a video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic, Internet or other medium without restrictions or limitations (the “Recordings”) for the following purposes and uses (*please initial and check all of the following that apply*):

Initials	<input type="checkbox"/>	Recording Purpose
1. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for scientific publications.
2. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for scientific conferences or meetings.
3. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for educational purposes.
4. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for public presentations to non-scientific groups.
5. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used on television or the audio portion can be used on radio.
6. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be posted on a Lipscomb website.
7. _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	The Recordings can be used for reports/presentations to any research funding agencies.

I hereby agree to defend, hold harmless, indemnify, release and forever discharge Lipscomb and its trustees, officers, agents, representatives and employees from and against any and all liability, claims, actions, causes of actions and damages (including reasonable attorneys’ fees) of any kind whatsoever in law and in equity, both past and present and whether known or unknown, arising out of or related to (a) the use of my name, likeness, identity, voice, photographic image, video graphic image and voice, and the Recordings, and (b) any personal, intellectual property (including copyright), proprietary or other rights that I may have in connection with any use of the Recordings. To the extent required, I hereby grant and assign to Lipscomb all copyright in the Recordings and any video, audio, photographic, digital, electronic or other medium utilized in connection therewith. I hereby acknowledge and agree that Lipscomb shall have exclusive ownership of the copyright and other proprietary and property rights in the Recordings. **I acknowledge and understand that my name will not be used in any publication.**

I have read and understood this Multimedia Release, am at least eighteen (18) years of age and fully competent, and execute the same as my own free will.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

If the participant is under the age of eighteen (18), the undersigned parent/guardian of the participant agrees to the terms of this Multimedia Release on behalf of the above-named participant:

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX D

FAMILY SERIES – INFORMED CONSENT AND CHILD ASSENT FORM

THE EFFICACY OF SHARED, SPIRITUAL PRACTICES FOR FORMATION IN FAMILIES AT MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST IN HUNTSVILLE, AL ***INFORMATION AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM***

Introduction:

Your family is invited to be a part of a study that is looking into families' connection with God at Mayfair. This study is being conducted by Matt Flynn, a graduate student in the Hazelip School of Theology at Lipscomb University under the supervision of Dr. Walter Surdacki, a faculty member in the College of Bible and Ministry. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a part of a family with teenagers at Mayfair. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to see what happens when families walk through spiritual disciplines consistently for six weeks. I hope to describe your connection God, as an individual and as a family, and your family's relationships based before and after the six week class. Approximately 25 people will be a part of this study.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you and your family will be asked to fill out a questionnaire before the course to see what your experience with spiritual practices is like before the series. We will then walk through a six-week series that will meet for one hour, one night per week. During the class, Matt Flynn will teach the group about specific spiritual disciplines. We will practice the spiritual disciplines together. He will then lead the families in conversation about their experiences with the spiritual discipline. Your family will then be invited to try the spiritual discipline together throughout the week.

While we are participating in the class, there will be two people who will be watching the class and taking notes. They will agree to the same confidentiality I am agreeing to and have completed the ethics training as well. Following the class, you and your child will be asked to participate in a questionnaire to reflect on your experience with the series. The study will take approximately six weeks. We will meet one night per week for one hour, and you will be asked to practice the spiritual exercises throughout the week. Each spiritual exercise could take between fifteen minutes to one hour. The questionnaires before and after will take no more than thirty minutes each.

Risks and Benefits:

The study has minimal risks. First, some of the spiritual exercises we are walking through could lead you to reflect about impactful memories and events from your life. These exercises could tap into challenging or difficult emotions and experiences. Following each of these exercises, you will be invited to talk with your family. Second, the practices we will be walking through may be new to you. They may be out of your comfort zone.

Some of these practices that could be new to you will engage your imagination, silence, emotion, memory, and art. If you or a family member becomes distressed, we will have our resource list available with several local counselors and therapists that our congregation has formed a relationship with. Also, all activities are voluntary. You can choose to take a break or not participate at any time.

There will be no direct benefits to you as you participate in this research project.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you or your child will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in an encrypted computer, and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by March 15, 2023 and will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you.

Voluntary Participation:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Each of you is free to stop participating at any time. Your and your child's decision whether or not to participate will not affect his/her current or future relations with Mayfair Church of Christ or Lipscomb University in any way.

New Information:

If during course of this research study I learn about new findings that might influence you or your child's willingness to continue participating in the study, I will inform you of these findings.

Contacts and Questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Matt Flynn, at 256-990-4580 or flynnmp@lipscomb.edu or matt@mayfair.org. You may ask questions now or later and my faculty advisor, Dr. Walter Surdacki (615-966-5787 & walter.surdacki@lipscomb.edu), will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you may also contact Dr. Justin Briggs, Chair of the Lipscomb University Institutional Review Board at jgbriggs@lipscomb.edu.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are deciding whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study.

 Signature of Adult Participant 1

 Date

 Signature of Researcher

 Date

You are deciding whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study.

 Signature of Adult Participant 2

 Date

 Signature of Researcher

 Date

You are deciding whether or not your child can participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to allow my child participate in the study.

 Signature of Parent, Legal Guardian, or Witness

 Date

 Signature of Researcher

 Date

CHILD ASSENT FORM

I am Matt Flynn, a graduate student from Lipscomb University. I am doing a study to see what happens when families walk through spiritual disciplines consistently for six weeks. I am asking you to take part in the research study because you are a teenager at Mayfair.

For this research, first, you will be asked to answer questions on Google Forms before the class to see what your experience with spiritual disciplines has been before the class. We will then walk through a six-week class that will meet for one hour, one night per week. During the class, Matt Flynn will teach the group about specific spiritual disciplines. We will practice the spiritual disciplines together. He will then lead the families in conversation about their experiences with the spiritual discipline. Your family will then be invited to try the spiritual discipline together throughout the week.

While we go through the class, there will be two people who will be watching the class and taking notes. They will agree to keep anything they see confidential and have

completed ethics training before participating. Following the class, you will be asked to answer questions through Google forms. You will be asked to share about your experience with the class. The study will take six weeks. We will meet one night per week for one hour. You will be asked to practice the spiritual disciplines during the week. Each spiritual discipline could take between fifteen minutes to one hour. Each questionnaire will take around thirty minutes each.

Only Matt and his teacher will see your answers to your questionnaires. We will not show your answers to anyone else. In the reports that discuss the project, your name will not be used.

I don't think that any big problems will happen to you as part of this study, but some of the activities we are walking through could lead you to think about memories and events in your life that have made a big impact on you. Following these practices, you will be invited to talk with your family. Second, some of the activities may be new to you. They may be out of your comfort zone. You may be invited to use your imagination, listen in silence, or create art. We will be sharing lots of new ways to pray. All activities are voluntary. You can choose to take a break or not participate at any time.

There will be no direct benefits to you as you participate in this research project.

You should know that:

- You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to. You won't get into any trouble with Lipscomb University, Matt Flynn, or Mayfair Church of Christ if you say no.
- You may stop being in the study at any time. If there is a question you don't want to answer, just leave it blank.
- Your parent(s)/guardian(s) were asked if it is OK for you to be in this study. Even if they say it's OK, it is still your choice whether or not to take part.
- You can ask any questions you have, now or later. If you think of a question later, you or your parents can contact me at 256-990-4580 or flynnmp@lipscomb.edu or matt@mayfair.org or my teacher at Lipscomb, Dr. Walter Surdacki (615-966-5787 & walter.surdacki@lipscomb.edu).

Please sign this form only if you:

- have understood what you will be doing for this study,
- have had all your questions answered,
- have talked to your parent(s)/legal guardian about this project, and
- agree to take part in this research

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Researcher

Date

APPENDIX E

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL FOR MAYFAIR CONTEXT INTERVIEW

Dear _____,

I am currently working toward my Doctor of Ministry degree at Lipscomb. As a part of my dissertation project, I am hoping to interview several church leaders to gain a greater grasp of Mayfair's history with regards to spiritual formation. Because of your history with Mayfair, I would love to interview you. Is this something you would be able to participate in?

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you would be welcome to stop participating at any time. Furthermore, the interview would remain confidential and would last no more than one hour.

Finally, your participation will require a signed letter of consent and a multimedia release form. I have attached both of those forms in the e-mail below.

Please let me know if you have any questions.
Blessings,
Matt Flynn

APPENDIX F

RECRUITMENT E-MAIL FOR FAMILY SPIRITUAL PRACTICES SERIES

Dear _____,

I am currently working toward my Doctor of Ministry degree at Lipscomb University. For my project, I am studying the effectiveness of shared, spiritual practices for the formation of families at Mayfair. I will be walking approximately five families through a study of spiritual practices and their role in the formation of families.

Each week, I will share the historical and biblical foundation for each practice, walk through a communal practice we will participate in together, facilitate conversation within your family in response to the shared practice, and invite your family to participate in the practice individually and together throughout the week. I am hopeful this series will be a positive, formative experience for your whole family.

The class will meet one night per week for approximately six weeks. As a part of the research project, I will also administer a questionnaire to each family member before and after the six-week series.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you would be welcome to stop participating at any time.

Finally, your participation will require a signed letter of consent for each adult. For your children to participate, I will need a signed letter of consent from a parent as well as a letter of assent from each child. I have attached each of those forms in the e-mail below.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Blessings,
Matt Flynn

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: HISTORY OF SPIRITUAL FORMATION AT MAYFAIR CHURCH OF CHRIST

To gain a greater grasp of my current context at Mayfair Church of Christ, I plan to interview approximately five current and former church leaders at Mayfair utilizing these questions:

- I. In your experience with Mayfair, what are the primary ways our church has sought to be spiritually formed? Which spiritual practices have been central to the life of the church? How have you seen it shift over time?
- II. How would you describe Mayfair's theological understanding of the Holy Spirit? How is that understanding reflected in the practice and worship of the church?
- III. What significant events in Mayfair's history have been central in our understanding of God? How have those significant events shaped the way the church seeks to connect with and experience God?
- IV. How has Mayfair's location in Huntsville, Alabama, shaped the way the church seeks to connect with and experience God? What would you identify as some of the gifts associated with our location in Huntsville? What would you identify as some of the challenges associated with our location in Huntsville?

APPENDIX H

PRE-SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

To measure a baseline for participants' experience with the subject matter, I plan to ask the following questions:¹⁷⁷

- I. What has your experience with spiritual disciplines looked like before this family series?
- II. What habits, routines, and/or traditions does your family practice in your walk with God?
- III. Describe a time when you felt closest to God.
- IV. Describe a time when you felt far from God.
- V. What are the greatest obstacles you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?
- VI. What are the greatest joys you experience as you seek to connect spiritually with your family?

¹⁷⁷ Questionnaire was completed via Google Forms.

APPENDIX I

POST-SERIES QUESTIONNAIRE

To assist in measure the efficacy of the shared, spiritual practices for the formation of the participants and their families, I plan to ask the following questions:

- I. Describe your overall experience walking through these spiritual practices as a family. What were the greatest benefits you experienced walking through this series as a family? What were the greatest challenges you experienced walking through this series as a family?
- II. In what ways did your understanding of and relationship with God change walking through these practices?
- III. In what ways did your relationship with your family change walking through these practices?
- IV. Which of the spiritual disciplines we practiced was most beneficial to you? Why?
- V. Which of the spiritual disciplines we practiced was most challenging to you? Why?
- VI. Do you hope to utilize these spiritual practices moving forward? If so, how? If not, why not?
- VII. If we were to offer this class again with families at Mayfair, what changes might you make?

APPENDIX J

PROTOCOL FOR FIELD NOTES

The following was given to field observers in order to guide their data collection:

- I. General Notes for Field Observer
 - a. Begin by noting the time, date, location, and your name on the Field Notes form.
 - b. Utilize shorthand in your notetaking. The goal is for you to serve as my “eyes and ears” as I am facilitating the class sessions.
 - c. As you write specific notes about individual, use their first and last name initials.
 - d. Record details. Be descriptive.
 - e. Avoid language that makes judgment regarding behavior. Simply note the behavior.
 - f. Document both verbal and nonverbal communicate. Note body language, moods, or attitude, as well as interactions among family members and other participants.
- II. Pay special attention to the following matters:
 - a. Comments, attitudes, or mood regarding participation in the communal spiritual practices. Listen and watch for excitement, anxiety, resistance, etc. as families walk through the practices together.
 - b. Level of interactivity among family members. How are families engaging with one another? How does the interaction shift as the series moves forward?
 - c. Emotional engagement and responses during spiritual practices.
 - d. Family and individual responses during whole group dialogue.
 - e. Emotional engagement and responses during whole group dialogue.

APPENDIX K

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY PROJECT CURRICULUM: SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR FAMILIES

Session 1 – Loving God through our Attentiveness

Spiritual Practices: Examen, Journaling

Session 2 – Loving God with our Mind

Spiritual Practice: Lectio Divina

Session 3 – Loving God with our Body

Spiritual Practices: Prayer Walk, Visio Divina, & Unplugging

Session 4 – Loving God through Contemplation

Spiritual Practices: Contemplative/Imaginative Readings, (148) Breath Prayer, Silence

Session 5 – Loving God with our Memory

Spiritual Practices: Autobiography, Understanding your Narrative, Sharing Memories

Session 6 – Loving God with our Community

Spiritual Practice: Rule of Life

Session 1 – Loving God through Our Attentiveness

I. Introduction

- a. Consent Agreement
- b. Participation Covenant
- c. Field Observation
 - i. Our two field observers will serve as “my eyes and ears” as I facilitate the class.
 - ii. In the publication of any data, anonymity will be ensured.
- d. Project
 - i. Purpose: To explore the effectiveness of shared, spiritual practices in the formation of family at Mayfair
 - ii. Primary means of spiritual formation – the mind. Because of our social location, we often equated spiritual formation with knowledge acquisition.
 - iii. We were created for connection. We have been intentionally created with a number of different means through which we can connect with the triune God.
 - iv. *Spiritual Disciplines* - intentional practices and experiences that give us space to "place ourselves before God so that he can transform us."¹⁷⁸ (Also see *Anatomy of the Soul* 174-181)
 - v. According to Curt Thompson writes, “[Spiritual practices] create space within us for God to work.”¹⁷⁹
 - vi. As we engage with the triune God, through these practices, we are being transformed more fully into the image of God.
 - vii. This is the goal of our spiritual formation: Christlikeness.
 - viii. As we are being transformed by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit seeks to engage our whole self: mind, body, will.
 - ix. Throughout this series, we will explore several of those faculties of connection and will walk through several spiritual practices and disciplines that engage each means of connection.
 - x. We will engage in that practice communally, and then I will invite you to practice it together throughout the week.
 - xi. Each week, we will also create space for you to share about your experiences as a family.

II. Let’s Explore it!

- a. Key Scripture: “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ—to the glory and praise of God.” (Philippians 1:9–10)
- b. Paying Attention Metaphor.
- c. Autobiographical Connection with Spiritual Practice of Examen

¹⁷⁸ Foster, *Celebration of Discipline*, 7.

¹⁷⁹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 178.

- d. Historical Background: Ignatius of Loyola
- i. 16th Century Theologian.
 - ii. Examen is all about noticing. It's the daily practice of noticing the work and presence of God in your life and noticing the spaces in your life that desperately need the presence of the Lord.
 - iii. Ignatius taught that there were these two forces at work in our lives all the time: the true Spirit and the false spirit. He invites us to become attentive to those two competing forces so that we can "discern what is best and that we may be filled with the fruit of righteous that comes through Jesus."
 - iv. Play "Legend of the Two Wolves" video:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x95_BTeanI8
 - v. Ignatius writes that when we are living in the false spirit, the spirit of the enemy, we experience desolation.
 1. Mark Thibodeaux summarizes the characteristics of desolation:
 2. "I am in desolation when I am empty of faith, hope, and love and the sense of God's closeness and full of some combination of disquietude and agitation, boredom and tepidity, fear and worry, and secrecy."¹⁸⁰ (*Expand on this*)
 - vi. Furthermore, Ignatius writes that when we are living in the true Spirit, the Spirit of God, we experience consolation.
 1. Thibodeaux summarizes characteristics of consolation:
 2. "I am consolation when I have faith, hope, and love, the sense of God's closeness, peace and tranquility, great desires, and transparency."¹⁸¹ (*Expand on this*)
- e. The practice of Examen has given me space to discern what is from God and what is not. It is a practice of attentiveness, allowing me to slow down and discern the movement and presence of the Spirit at work within me and around me.
- i. So through the practice of Examen, at either the beginning or end of the day, we take time to notice the moments where we experienced desolation. When did we feel far from God? When were we agitated or bored, fearful or anxious. We simply notice each of those moments. We name them, and invite God into those moments.
 - ii. Then we move on to Consolation. When did we experience faith, hope, and love? When did we feel close to God? When did we experience peace or tranquility? We notice each of those moments. We name them, and thank God for them.
 - iii. This practice of Examen has been really good for me. It's been really helpful in identifying both the ordinary and extraordinary

¹⁸⁰ Mark E. Thibodeaux, SJ, *God's Voice Within: The Ignatian Way to Discover God's Will* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2010), 57.

¹⁸¹ Thibodeaux, *God's Voice Within*, 57.

ways that God works in my life everyday, and it's been helpful in identifying that hyper-focus on frustration, or my annoyances, or my fears and anxieties, or my sin, or that "curmudgeony," grumpy attitude I sometimes have.

- iv. What I've noticed is that the more aware I am of the good work of God in my life, the more grateful I am, and the more those feelings of frustration, anxiety, fear, and annoyance sort of melt away. I become less critical of myself and less critical of others. That cloudy feeling of being overwhelmed, isn't there as much because through this practice, I'm not keeping all my thoughts and feelings and experiences inside (good or bad). Instead, I'm noticing them, naming them. And as I notice and name them, they don't feel quite as overwhelming anymore!

III. Let's Practice it!

- a. Let's begin with our breathe and posture. Sit in a comfortable spot with feet firmly planted on the ground. Notice your breathing. As you breath, imagine you are breathing in the very breath of God. As you breath out, imagine you are releasing any stress, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and insecurity.
- b. Begin by thinking through your day today. Where did you see God at work in your life? Write those down. They could be small, quiet moments or big moments. Nothing is too insignificant. Were you encouraged by someone? Did you see God at work in you as you served or loved a friend or family member? Did you learn something new? Was there a moment when you experienced peace or love or joy? Did you do something fun? You don't have to write a ton, simply list them, walking through your day from the beginning, giving thanks.
- c. Now, think back through your day, noticing any moments where you experienced the false spirit. Do not dwell on any one, simply list them, one by one. Did you have a conversation or conflict with someone that was strained? Did you experience unkindness, or were you unkind to someone? Did you have a thought or thoughts that were rooted in impurity or insecurity or fear or anxiety or shame? Did you do something that you now regret? No thought or word or action is too insignificant to list. Simply list them, walking through your day, inviting God to help you.
- d. Finally, look toward tomorrow. What are you excited about? Anxious about? Fearful of? Do you have a test or a conversation or a ballgame that you're worried about? Is God inviting you to love a friend or neighbor or family member? List those items, asking God to join you in them.

IV. Let's Share about It!

- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with Examen.
 - i. What was one positive take away from the practice?
 - ii. In what ways was this practice challenging?
 - iii. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.

V. Invitation for the Week

- a. Individually, I want to invite you to practice Examen at least five times throughout the week. You might consider practicing first thing in the morning or right before bedtime. During Examen, journal using these three questions:
 - i. When today did you live in or experience faith, hope and love?
 - ii. When today did you live in or experience fear, worry, agitation or secrecy?
 - iii. As you look toward your day (tomorrow), list any invitations you hear from God.
- b. Provide a handout with the practice prompt. I will also e-mail them a copy as well.
- c. As a family, at least two times per week, check in with each other.
 - i. Share one life-giving moment as a family and one life-draining moment.
 - ii. You can do this around the table, in the car together, or before bed.
 - iii. Be intentional to pursue this time together.
 - iv. Notice where your experiences throughout the week align and where they differ. In what ways is God calling you together as a family?

Session 2 – Loving God with Your Mind

- I. Let's Check in!
 - a. How was your experience practicing Examen this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful or encouraging?
 - b. Share one takeaway with your family.
 - c. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- II. Let's Explore It!
 - a. Autobiographical Info – Confusion about the difference between pursuing knowledge and knowing God.
 - i. Quote from Richard Rohr: “Our desire to know more, read more, and study more can be another expression of our culture and its acquisitive nature. Knowing God, not knowing more, is the goal.”¹⁸²
 - b. Some of us are more wired to love God through our mind. We enjoy loving God by thinking.
 - i. Gary Thomas questions: Are you an intellectual? Scale of 0 to 5, with 0 being not true at all and 5 being very true.¹⁸³
 1. “I feel closest to God when I learn something new about him that I didn’t understand before. My mind needs to be stimulated. It’s very important to me that I know exactly what I believe.”
 2. “I get frustrated when the church focuses too much on feelings and spiritual experience. Of far more importance is the need to understand the Christian faith and to have proper doctrine.”
 3. “The words *concepts* and *truth* are very appealing to me.”
 4. “I feel close to God when I participate in a time of uninterrupted study—reading God’s Word or good Christian books and then perhaps having an opportunity to teach or participate in a discussion with a small group.”
 5. “On a scale of 0 to 5, how much does the statement describing the heart’s cry of the intellectual resonate with you: let me think.”
 6. “I spend more money on books than music.”
 7. “Any score of 15 or higher indicates a preference for this spiritual disposition.”

¹⁸² Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 187.

¹⁸³ Gary Thomas, *Sacred Pathways: Nine Ways to Connect with God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 206-207.

- c. While this is one way to connect with God, our pursuit of God has to be more than a “cognitive assent.”¹⁸⁴ The goal is that we encounter the living God.
 - i. The mind is a tool for us to connect with and be transformed by God. Regarding the mind, Curt Thompson wrote, “To love God we have to use our brains, and for our minds to be transformed, our brains must be equally changed.”¹⁸⁵
- d. At the heart of that transformation is our relationship with Scripture.
 - i. Psalm 119 excerpts: “Turn my heart toward your statutes (vv.36)...Oh, how I love your law! I meditate on it all day long (vv. 97)...How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth (vv. 103)...Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart (vv. 111).”
 - ii. Hebrews 4:12-13, “For the word of God is *living* and *active*. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight.”
 - iii. Deuteronomy 30:14, “The word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it.”
- e. We’ve got to learn there is a difference between God and the Bible. The Bible is not our God...The Bible is from God and helps us to see and experience God.
 - i. Window metaphor
 - ii. “Missing the difference there would be like someone who reads the story and spends hours and hours figuring out if a human can live inside a whale—and what kind of whale it was—but never encounters God. The book is about Jonah’s God, not Jonah’s whale. Or it is like the athlete who becomes enamored with her soccer uniform and forgets that she’s got a game to play regardless of what the uniform looks like. Or it is like a college student who, like, forgets that the point of college is, like, studying and learning and not (only) finding a wonderful social life. Or it is like the person who is obsessed with the appearance of the church building and misses that the point of the building is facilitation of worship and fellowship, of loving God and loving others.”¹⁸⁶
 - iii. The Bible is created to be relational...as a way to communicate with his creation.

¹⁸⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 15.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁸⁶ Scot McKnight, *The Blue Parakeet: Rethinking How You Read the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 88.

- iv. I like the equation McKnight uses, “God communicates → Bible → with God’s *listening* people → in conversation → relationship with the God of the Bible

III. Let’s Practice It!

- a. There are some great practices that help us to connect our mind and our heart to our God.
- b. *Lectio Divina* is a spiritual practice that has been around for a long time. Because the beginnings of the Christian faith were primarily oral, this reading practice was incredibly common. The goal of the practice is to read and listen. What is this text saying? Is there an invitation in this text? Is there a connection to your life circumstances?
- c. We’ll walk through this practice communally.¹⁸⁷
 - i. Step 1 – *Silencio* – This is the space for quiet preparation and breath. It is similar to our experience with the practice of Examen. Let’s begin with our breathe and posture. Sit in a comfortable spot with feet firmly planted on the ground. Notice your breathing. As you breath, imagine you are breathing in the very breath of God. As you breath out, imagine you are releasing any stress, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and insecurity.
 - ii. Step 2 – *Lectio* - The first step is called “Lectio,” or “Reading.” This is where you sit down, and slowly and reflectively read a passage of scripture. This can be any passage of Scripture you’d like. Listen to one word or phrase that the Spirit has given you. Don’t be critical or judgmental of the word. Be open to what
 - iii. Step 3 – *Meditatio* - Begin by rereading the passage of Scripture and then “reflect” on it. Allow it to sink deep into the depths of your being. Allow the Spirit to bring to your mind and heart an experience or issue that you are facing right now that seems to connect with your word or phrase. Don’t force it. Allow it to emerge.
 - iv. Step 4 – *Oratio* - Step 3 is our “response” to the first two steps. As you reread once again as the question, “Is God inviting you to do or be something in the next few days?” Listen for an invitation.
 - v. Step 5 – *Contemplatio* - This final step is an opportunity to enjoy the presence of God, and allow the words you have read and meditated on transform you from the inside out. How can this passage affect the way you see the world and affect how you live everyday?

IV. Let’s Share about It!

- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with *Lectio Divina*.
- b. If you feel comfortable, share about the invitation and word you heard from God.
- c. In what ways was this practice challenging for you?

¹⁸⁷ This practice is adapted from Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 188-189.

- d. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- V. Invitation for the Week
- a. I want to invite you to practice *Lectio Divina* at least five days this week. It doesn't matter when or where. Take your time and walk through the practice slowly and intentionally. This practice shouldn't be rushed. Use your journal to write down what you heard.
 - b. Provide a handout with the practice prompt. I will also e-mail them a copy as well.
 - c. At least one time this week, practice *Lectio Divina* together as a family.
 - i. Share your findings and invitations with each other, if you feel comfortable.
 - d. Here are some options for *Lectio Divina* readings:
 - i. Exodus 3:1-6
 - ii. Psalm 16
 - iii. Psalm 27
 - iv. Psalm 42
 - v. Psalm 130
 - vi. Jeremiah 1:4-10
 - vii. Matthew 6:25-34
 - viii. Mark 10:46-52
 - ix. Romans 5:1-5
 - x. Philippians 2:1-11

Session 3 – Loving God with Our Body

- I. Let's Check in!
 - a. How was your experience practicing *Lectio Divina* this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging?
 - b. Share one takeaway with your family.
 - c. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- II. Let's Explore It!
 - a. We're going to walk through multiple layers of this tonight. We're going to talk through a few different ways that we can connect to God with our body: with different senses, kinesthetically, and through fasting/unplugging.
 - b. We have been created to connect with God with all our senses. Whether we are listening to beautiful music or a babbling brook, observing a beautiful artwork or an incredible landscape, smelling freshly baked bread or freshly cut grass, holding the communion emblems or experiencing the waters of baptism, or eating a delicious meal around the table (which can definitely be a religious experience)! Each of those are doorways through which we can experience God.
 - c. Throughout Scripture, we find the biblical writers engaging language that connects with all our senses. Gary Thomas highlights this "colorful" language using texts from Ezekiel:¹⁸⁸
 - i. "[Ezekiel] *feels* a wind. He *sees* flashing lightning surrounded by brilliant light, fantastic creatures, and a magnificent and stunning throne of sapphire (Ezekiel 1:4, 5–14, 26–27). He *hears* the sound of wings like the roar of rushing waters, and a loud rumbling (1:24; 3:12–13). Ezekiel is then asked to *eat* a scroll that tastes sweet (3:1–3)...[he] then experiences burning coals, great radiance, a loud sound, clouds filling the temple, and fantastic sights and movements—wheels that sparkled like topaz and cherubim with four faces." There are multiple moments where after Ezekiel experiences this beauty, he falls down, like dead.
 - d. We were made to taste, see, hear, smell, and touch the Lord!
 - i. Psalm 34:8 says, "Taste and see that the Lord is good," and in 2 Corinthians 2:5, Paul calls us "the aroma of Christ."
- III. Let's Practice It!
 - a. Our first practice for tonight taps into our touch and sight.¹⁸⁹
 - i. I will have a picture of a windy tree on the screen.

¹⁸⁸ Thomas, *Sacred Pathways*, 54–55.

¹⁸⁹ I have adapted this practice from one of my cohort members in the Doctor of Ministry program at Lipscomb, Emily Bruff. She walked us through this practice during one of our classes. Emily's focus in her Doctor of Ministry project is the connection between art and spiritual formation

- ii. Movement 1 (Slide 1 – only the verse) – Pause and hear the word of the Lord (Read Isaiah 61:1-3)
 - iii. Movement 2 (Slide 2 with simply the picture of the tree) – Look at the image. Follow the lines of the branches with your eyes. When you're ready, put your pen on the paper and without looking at your paper, follow the lines of the tree with your pen. Continue to follow the lines of the tree with your pen.
 - iv. Movement 3 (Slide 3, tree with a portion of the verse again). Continue to follow the lines, don't worry about what your image looks like. Maybe a word jumps out to you in the verse. In a continuing line, without picking up your pen, write the word that jumps out to you.
 - v. Movement 4 (Slide 4, tree with the next part of the passage) – Continue to follow the lines, don't worry about what your image looks like. Continue to keep your eyes on the tree ahead. Maybe a word jumps out to you in the verse. In a continuing line, without picking up your pen, write the word that jumps out to you.
 - vi. Movement 5 (Slide 5, tree with the next part of the passage) – Continue to follow the lines, don't worry about what your image looks like. Continue to keep your eyes on the tree ahead. Maybe a word jumps out to you in the verse. In a continuing line, without picking up your pen, write the word that jumps out to you.
 - vii. Movement 6 (Slide 6, tree with the next part of the passage) - Continue to follow the lines, don't worry about what your image looks like. Continue to keep your eyes on the tree ahead. Maybe a word jumps out to you in the verse. In a continuing line, without picking up your pen, write the word that jumps out to you.
 - viii. Movement 7 – Pause a moment and feel the word of the Lord fill you. What is the Spirit bring to mind in this moment?
 - ix. Now look at the image you created. Hear the word of the Lord once more time.
- IV. Let's Share about It!
- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with the tree practice.
 - b. If you feel comfortable, share about the invitation and word you heard or saw from God.
 - c. In what ways was this practice challenging for you?
 - d. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- V. Let's Explore It!
- a. The balance of kinesthetics, nature, and prayer have always been important. Some of my most important moments with God have taken place in nature on a hike, a walk, or a bike ride.
 - b. Autobiographical Information
 - c. Biblical Experience in Nature with Moses and with Jesus
 - i. Moses at the Burning Bush and on Mt. Sinai
 - ii. Jesus with his early mornings

- VI. Prayer Walk
- a. Take approximately 15 minutes to walk around our church campus. Take in the beauty of Jones Valley.
 - i. Share some tips like music or audible speech
 - b. As you walk, listen to the voice of God within you and around you. Respond to that voice. Here are some ideas for potential prayer engagement. This prayer time can be conversational.
 - i. Perhaps you spend some time practicing gratitude—grateful for the creation all around you or grateful for the character and work of God. You might also reflect on some of the relationships
 - ii. Perhaps you spend some time in intercession for some of the people for whom you care.
 - iii. Perhaps you spend some time in confession.
 - iv. Perhaps you spend some time releasing any anxieties, fears, or insecurities.
 - v. This time is for you to connect with God as you walk.
- VII. Let's Share about It!
- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with the prayer walk.
 - b. If you feel comfortable, share about the invitation and word you heard or saw from God.
 - c. In what ways was this practice challenging for you?
 - d. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- VIII. Invitation for the Week
- a. Unplugging
 - b. So often, one of the biggest reasons we are unable to experience the Lord is because of the way our mind and our body is distracted. Unplugging is a physical way that we can intentionally release one of those attachments. Here are a couple ways you can practice this discipline.
 - i. As a family, declare a time of the day that is technology-free. Dinnertime or evening and nighttime is a great option. You might consider keeping the family's phone in a central location to help hold each other accountable.
 - ii. Another option is a media fast—social media, television, streaming, or video games. Allow each family member to choose what they would like to give up for the week.
 - iii. As you unplug, be intentional with your extra time as an opportunity to connect with God together and individually.

Session 4 – Loving God through Contemplation

I. Let's Check in!

- a. How was your experience practicing unplugging this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging?
- b. Share one takeaway with your family.
- c. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.

II. Let's Explore It!

- a. Our experiences throughout last week are a great segue into our focus this week: contemplation.
 - i. Our world is filled with noise.
 - ii. In 1981, Henri Nouwen said this, “Over the last few decades, we have been inundated by a torrent of words: words softly whispered, loudly proclaimed, or angrily screamed; words spoke, recited, or sung; words on records, in books, on walls, or in the sky; words in many sounds, many colors, or many forms; words to be heard, read, seen, or glanced at; words which flicker off and on, move slowly, dance, jump or wiggle. Words, words, words!”
 - iii. He continues, “There was a time not too long ago without radios and televisions, stop signs, yield signs, merge signs, bumper stickers, and ever-present announcements indicating price-increases or special sales.”¹⁹⁰
 - iv. Discuss: How do you experience the noise all around you? How does that keep you from experiencing God? What are some of the messages these voices are communicating?
- b. But silence is difficult for us; why is that?
- c. Calhoun notes several passages that point to the practice of silence:¹⁹¹
 - i. Habakkuk 2:20
 - ii. 1 Kings 19:12
 - iii. Revelation 8:1
 - iv. Luke 5:16
- d. When we slow down and be silent, we are creating space for God to speak.

III. Let's Practice It!

- a. Breath Prayer
 - i. Breath prayer “reminds us that just as we can't live on one breath of air, we can't live on one breath of God. God is the oxygen of our soul, and we need to breath him in all day long.”¹⁹²

¹⁹⁰ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart: Connecting with God through Prayer, Wisdom, and Silence* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1981), 37.

¹⁹¹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 121.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 233.

- ii. You'll notice that many of our practices we have walked through begin with a focus on our breathing. That focus helps us to slow our minds and create an open disposition.
 - iii. Breath prayer can help us to practice silence. It's simple. As you breath in focus on a name of God, and as you breath out express a desire of your heart.
 - iv. Here are some examples of these breath prayers:¹⁹³
 1. "Breathe in "Abba." Breathe out "I belong to you."
 2. Breathe in, "Holy Spirit." Breathe out, "Fall on me."
 3. Breathe in, "Shepherd." Breathe out, "Bring home my lost son."
 4. Breathe in, "Holy One." Breathe out, "Keep me true."
 5. Breathe in, "Lord." Breathe out, "Here I am."
 6. Breathe in, "Jesus." Breathe out, "Have mercy on me."
 7. Breathe in, "Breath of Life. Breathe out, "breathe on me."
 8. Breathe in, "Less of me." Breathe out, "More of you."
 - v. As you get distracted come back to this phrase, and then in the meantime, listen to God.
 - b. Let's try this practice together.
- IV. Let's Share about It!
- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with breath prayer.
 - b. If you feel comfortable, share about the invitation and word you heard or saw from God.
 - c. In what ways was this practice challenging for you?
 - d. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- V. Invitation for the Week
- a. Imaginative Prayer
 - i. Autobiographical story with imagination
 - ii. Jesus, God with us, engages our imagination. Thompson writes, "In Jesus, God comes not simply to be in the same room, but rather to walk right up to us, look us in the eye, touch us on the shoulder, and speak our names out loud, smile, and share a drink with us, all the while engaging, persuading, challenging, inviting, convicting, and empowering each of us, loving us into new creation. And in the process, our neural networks are changed."¹⁹⁴
 - b. Five times, throughout the week, practice an imaginative reading with narratives from Scripture.
 - i. Begin by slowing down and noticing your breath.
 - ii. Then read the story slowly. As you read, imagine what you are reading. You might consider finding an auditory reading of the story that you can listen to.

¹⁹³ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 233-234.

¹⁹⁴ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 139.

- iii. As you read, place yourself in the story. Perhaps you are an onlooker. Perhaps you are one of the people in the story. Try and engage your senses. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel?
 - iv. Read or listen to the text at least two weeks. Journal your reactions.
 1. How do you find yourself in the text?
 2. How does the text affect the way you see God?
 3. How does the text affect the way you see Jesus?
 4. How does the text affect the way you see yourself?
 5. Is there an invitation from the Lord in the text?
 - v. If you prefer, you might also consider drawing or painting what you experience.
 - vi. Check in with each other at least two times to discuss your experience with the practice.
 - vii. If time allows, we will walk through one of these practices together.
- c. Here are some options for this reading:
- i. Luke 2:8–20
 - ii. Luke 8:43–48
 - iii. Mark 6:45–52
 - iv. Matthew 17:1–13
 - v. Matthew 26:36–46
 - vi. Acts 9:1–19
 - vii. Revelation 21

Session 5 – Loving God with Our Memories

I. Let's Check in!

- a. How was your experience practicing Imaginative reading this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging?
- b. Share one takeaway with your family.
- c. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.

II. Let's Explore It!

- a. Memory is another way that God invites us to connect with Him.
- b. God calls us to Remember. Thompson notes several of the passages where remembering is central between the relationship between God and humanity:¹⁹⁵
 - i. "I will remember my covenant between me and you and all living creatures of every kind (Genesis 9:15)."
 - ii. "I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them (Leviticus 26:42–43)."
 - iii. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God remembered you (Deuteronomy 15:15)."
 - iv. "Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old (Psalm 25:6)."
 - v. "Remember these things Jacob, for you, Israel, are my servant. I have made you; you are my servant; Israel, I will not forget you (Isaiah 44:21)."
 - vi. "And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me (Luke 22:19)."
 - vii. "I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers (2 Timothy 1:3)."
- c. Memory is a tool that helps to remember God's Word.
 - i. Psalm 119:11 says, "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you."
 - ii. Autobiographical story regarding memory
- d. Memory is also a tool that helps us to remember and see the ways God's presence has been active in your life.
 - i. I appreciate the way Thompson describes this connection with memory: "To love God with all of our mind is to engage our entire memory, not limited parts of it. To love God means not being limited to logical sequences of systematic theology. Loving God is autobiographical. It is remembering our past and

¹⁹⁵ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 64–65.

anticipating our future. It is about a God who will not be kept at a distance but uses each of our stories to confront, terrify, comfort, convict and woo us.”¹⁹⁶

- ii. As we engage our memory and remember the ways that God has been at work in the past, we are apt to notice the ways God is at work in the present.
- e. Memory also moves beyond individual memory toward communal memory. Your memory serves as a witness to your family and to your community. In many ways, this is the nature of the biblical story.
 - i. At the heart of our calling as the people of God is to witness to the ways we have seen, heard, and experienced the Lord (Acts 1:8). Your memory helps your family. It helps your neighbor. It helps your church.
 - ii. Our communal memory helps us to grasp a great understanding of God.

III. Let's Practice It!

- a. Spiritual Autobiography¹⁹⁷
 - i. We're going to close by taking some time to reflect on your spiritual autobiography. Let's break this down into three aspects: people, experiences and circumstances.
 1. Who are the people through whom you have experienced God? List those names and the ways they have witnessed to the presence of God in your life.
 2. What are some of the events that have had a big effect on your life? These events may be big events or small. Good events or bad or neither good nor bad. Reflect on the ways you experienced God through these events.
 3. Are there circumstances that have affected your life with God? This could have to do with circumstances around our world or with your family. Share some examples of circumstances. These might be more ongoing challenges or joys. Reflect on the ways you have experienced God through these circumstances.
 - ii. We want to give you plenty of space to remember the work of God amid the narrative of your life.
- b. We want to create our own communal memory utilizing each of your autobiographies. I will slowly read Psalm 136. As I read, I'd like to invite you to focus on one event or circumstance. This event or circumstances seems especially significant. Perhaps as you reflect on it, it wells with emotion or power. Or perhaps, you can see the way the Lord intervened.
 - i. As I read, on the sheet of paper I have given you fill in the blanks:
When I was _____, God you

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 83.

¹⁹⁷ This practice is inspired by a practice we walked through in Dr. Kris Miller's class on spiritual companionship as a part of the Doctor of Ministry program.

_____ . This can be as specific or vague as you feel comfortable. This will also be anonymous, and you only need to participate if you feel comfortable.

- ii. I will read each of the experiences aloud, and then as a group, we will respond, “His love endures forever.” We are creating our own 136th Psalm.

IV. Let’s Share about It!

- a. Take a moment to share about your experience with tree practice.
- b. If you feel comfortable, share about the invitation and word you heard or saw from God.
- c. In what ways was this practice challenging for you?
- d. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.

V. Invitation for the Week

- a. First, as a family, choose a passage that you’d like to work to memorize this week. Don’t stress about the length of the passage. The goal is for the passage to be on your heart throughout the week.
- b. Second, five times throughout the week, take a moment to have an intentional conversation that engages the memory. Parents, this is a fun opportunity for you to share some stories about your faith story and your relationship with God. Students, the same goes for you!
 - i. Grammy story
 - ii. These conversations can happen around the table for a meal or on the way to school. The goal is to both engage in intentional conversation and witness to the ways you have experienced the Lord in your life.
 - iii. Here are some examples of these intentional questions:
 1. Share a time when you felt close to God.
 2. Share a time when you felt far from God.
 3. Share a time when you experienced forgiveness or reconciliation.
 4. Who is someone that you have seen God in over the course of your life? How so?
 5. Share about a time when you felt judged or attacked for your faith.
 6. What was the world like when you were a kid?
 7. What’s the first significant memory of church you can remember?
 8. Where is a place where God feels most present to you? Why?
 9. Share about the ways you have experienced God in each other.
 10. Share about a moment where you felt misunderstood.

Session 6 – Loving God with Your Community

- I. Let's Check in!
 - a. How was your experience practicing memory this week? As you practiced throughout the week, did you notice or experience anything surprising, challenging, comforting, confusing, helpful, or encouraging?
 - b. Share one takeaway with your family.
 - c. Create space for families to share their collective experience with the group.
- II. Let's Explore It!
 - a. Review from each week
 - b. God has created us with intention for connection. He seeks for us to connect with a number of different faculties.
 - i. Loving God through our attentiveness
 1. Practice of Examen
 - ii. Loving God with our mind
 1. Practice of *Lectio Divina*
 - iii. Loving God with our body
 1. Practices that use the five senses,
 2. Practice that engages in nature
 3. Practice of unplugging
 - iv. Loving God through Contemplation and Imagination
 1. Practices of Silence
 2. Breath Prayer
 3. Imagination
 - v. Loving God through Memory
 1. Practices of Autobiography
 2. Communal Memory
 3. Memorization
 4. Witness
 - c. God desires that we seek him, and spiritual practices and disciplines open us up to his presence.
 - d. The goal is that these spiritual practices shape us more fully into the image of Jesus. (See chart from *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*).¹⁹⁸
 - e. Our focus tonight is on community. We have been created by community for community. At the heart of the character and nature is communal: the Triune God—Creator, Spirit, Son. And at the core, God is love.
 - i. So, at the heart of our nature is communal. We are invited to participate in God's love. To live lives of love.
 - ii. Therefore, it makes sense that we close the series by focusing in on practicing disciplines together.
 - iii. As I have reflected on our series together, there is power in these practices being shared, and the goal is that your family is walking

¹⁹⁸ Howard, *The Brazos Introduction to Christian Spirituality*, 102.

away with a number of new tools for your toolbox, as your family continues to be formed in the image of Jesus through the power of the Spirit for the glory of God.

III. Let's Practice It!

- a. So then, as we close, we want to engage in a practice called *Regula* or "Rule of Life."
- b. Calhoun defines a Rule of Life this way: "[It] offers unique and regular rhythms that free and open each person to the will and presence of Christ. The spiritual practices of a rule provide a way to partner with the Holy Spirit for personal transformation."¹⁹⁹
 - i. These are rhythms and goals that can help lead to our goal: Christlikeness.
- c. This is how we will practice this tonight.
 - i. As a family, put together your family's Rule of Life. Decide on daily, weekly, monthly, annual goals that can lead you all toward that goal.
 - ii. A couple of hints:
 1. Make these goals doable and flexible! You might provide space for different disciplines and practices that lead to deeper connection with each individual
 2. Also, the goal is not legalism; the goal is transformation. We want these rhythms to be life-giving!
 - iii. I want to encourage you to engage several different faculties and gifts from God: Mind, Body, Attentiveness, Contemplation, Imagination, Memory and Community.
 1. Provide samples of different rules of life.
 2. I will also provide a handout with a list of several disciplines that we were not able to practice during the series.

IV. Let's Share about It!

- a. Create space to share your Rule of Life with the collective group.
- b. What did you consider as you put this together?
- c. What are you looking forward to as a family?
- d. What might be challenging for your family?

V. Conclusion

- a. Reminder of the purpose of the series
- b. Give space for final takeaways from families
- c. Give space for the Post-series Questionnaire
- d. Reminder of anonymity as I report findings
- e. Thanks

¹⁹⁹ Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 37.

APPENDIX L

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES FOR FAMILIES – WEEKLY HANDOUTS WEEK 1 – LOVING GOD THROUGH OUR ATTENTIVENESS

Spiritual Disciplines for Families

Week 1 - Loving God through Our Attentiveness

Invitation for the Week

On your own, I want to invite you to practice Examen at least five times throughout the week. You might think about practicing first thing in the morning or right before bedtime. Typically, this takes me between 10 and 30 minutes. During Examen, journal these three questions:

1. When today did you experience faith, hope, and love?
2. When today did you experience fear, worry, agitation, or secrecy?
3. As you look toward your day (tomorrow), how do you hope to see God at work?

As a family, at least two times this week, check in with one another about the practice.

- Share one life-giving moment as a family and one life-draining moment.
- You can do this around the table, in the car together, or before bed. Use your margin.
- Be intentional to pursue this time with each other.
- Notice where your experiences throughout the week align and where they differ. In what ways is God calling you together as a family?

WEEK 2 HANDOUT – LOVING GOD WITH OUR MIND

Spiritual Disciplines for Families Week 2 - Loving God through Our Mind Invitation for the Week

On your own, I want to invite you to practice *Lectio Divina* at least three times throughout the week. Typically, this takes me between 10 and 30 minutes. As a reminder, here are the steps of *Lectio Divina*:

1. Step 1 - *Silencio* - This is the space for quiet preparation and breath. It is similar to our experience with the practice of Examen. Let's begin with our breathe and posture. Sit in a comfortable spot with feet firmly planted on the ground. Notice your breathing. As you breath, imagine you are breathing in the very breath of God. As you breath out, imagine you are releasing any stress, anxiety, nervousness, fear, and insecurity
2. Step 2 - *Lectio* - The first step is called "Lectio," or "Reading." This is where you sit down, and slowly and reflectively read a passage of scripture. This can be any passage of Scripture you'd like. Listen to one word or phrase that the Spirit has given you. Don't be critical or judgmental of the word. Be open to what God is speaking.
3. Step 3 - *Meditatio* - Begin by rereading the passage of Scripture and then "reflect" on it. Allow it to sink deep into the depths of your being. Allow the Spirit to bring to your mind and heart an experience or issue that you are facing right now that seems to connect with your word or phrase. Don't force it. Allow it to emerge.
4. Step 4 - *Oratio* - Step 3 is our "response" to the first two steps. As you reread once again ask the question, "Is God inviting you to do or be something in the next few days?" Listen for an invitation.
5. Step 5 - *Contemplatio* - This final step is an opportunity to enjoy the presence of God, and allow the words you have read and meditated on transform you from the inside out. How can this passage affect the way you see the world and affect how you live everyday?

As a family, at least one time this week, practice *Lectio Divina* together as a family. Share your findings and invitations with each other, if you feel comfortable.

Here are some options for *Lectio Divina* readings:

- Exodus 3:1-6
- Psalm 16
- Psalm 42
- Psalm 130
- Jeremiah 1:4-10
- Matthew 6:25-34
- Mark 10:46-52
- Romans 5:1-5
- Philippians 2:1-11

WEEK 3 HANDOUTS – LOVING GOD WITH OUR BODIES

Spiritual Disciplines for Families Week 3 - Loving God through Our Bodies Prayer Walk Practice

On your own, take a moment to walk around the worship center, listening to the voice of God within you and around you. Allow this prayer to be conversational. I need to speak out loud while I do this type of prayer. Create space between you and the other participants if you'd like.

Here are some ideas for your prayer time:

- Perhaps you feel called to spend some time practicing gratitude. What are you grateful for in your life right now? Name those. What are some of the relationships you feel most thankful for?
- Perhaps you feel called to spend some time praying for some of the people God has placed in your life.
- Perhaps you feel called to spend some time in confession.
- Perhaps you feel called to spend some time releasing some of the anxieties, fears, or insecurities you are feeling right now.

Invitation for the Week - Unplugging

So often, one of the biggest reasons we are unable to experience the Lord is because of the way our mind and body is distracted. Unplugging is a physical way that we can intentionally release one of those attachments. Here are a couple of ways your family can practice this week:

- As a family, declare a time of the day that is technology free. Dinnertime or evening or nighttime is a great option. You might consider keeping the family's phone in a central location to help hold each other accountable.
- Another option is a media fast – social media, television, streaming, or video games. Allow each family member to choose what they would like to give up for the week.
- You might also think about giving up your phones/technology, for an extended period of time one day (perhaps even for an entire day). This could be a phone sabbath or fast.
- Use the time you would normally use engaging in technology, connecting with God and with your family.

WEEK 4 HANDOUTS – LOVING GOD THROUGH SILENCE AND IMAGINATION

Spiritual Disciplines for Families

Week 4 - Loving God through Silence and Imagination

One time this week as a family, take some time to watch one of the Chosen episodes and discuss as a family. Watch your imagination come to life. How does the episode affect the way you see Jesus?

On your own, two times throughout the week, practice silence and breath prayer for fifteen minutes. As your mind wanders, utilize that breath prayer to help you stay connected.

- Take time to journal afterwards
- Here are some examples of breath prayers:
 - Breathe in "Abba." Breathe out "I belong to you." Breathe in, "Holy Spirit." Breathe out, "Fall on me." Breathe in, "Holy One." Breathe out, "Keep me true." Breathe in, "Lord." Breathe out, "Here I am." Breathe in, "Jesus." Breathe out, "Have mercy on me." Breathe in, "Breath of Life." Breathe out, "breathe on me." Breathe in, "Less of me." Breathe out, "More of you."

On your own, two times throughout the week, practice an imaginative reading with narratives from Scripture on your own.

- Begin by slowing down and noticing your breath.
- Then read through the story two times slowly. Try and listen with fresh ears and an open heart as if you have never heard it before. You might consider finding an auditory reading of the story that you can listen
- After reading the story twice, place yourself in the story. Perhaps you are an onlooker. Perhaps you are one of the people in the story. Try and engage your senses. What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? How do you feel?
- Journal your reactions.
- If you prefer, you might also consider drawing or painting what you experience.
- Check in with each other to discuss your experience with the practice.
- Here are some options for this reading:
 - Luke 2:8-20
 - Luke 8:43-48
 - Mark 6:45-52
 - Matthew 17:1-13
 - Matthew 26:36-46
 - Acts 9:1-19
 - Revelation 21

WEEK 5 HANDOUTS – LOVING GOD WITH OUR MEMORY

Spiritual Disciplines for Families **Week 5 - Loving God with Our Memory**

As a family, choose a passage that you'd like to work to memorize this week. Don't stress about the length of the passage. The goal is for the passage to be on your heart throughout the week.

Second, on five separate occasions, take a moment to have an intentional conversation that engages the memory. Parents, this is a fun opportunity for you to share some stories about your faith story and your relationship with God. Students, the same goes for you!

These conversations can happen around the table for a meal or on the way to school.

The goal is to both engage in intentional conversation and witness to the ways you have experienced the Lord in your life.

Here are some examples of these types of questions:

1. Share a time when you felt close to God.
2. Share a time when you felt far from God.
3. Share a time when you experienced forgiveness or reconciliation.
4. Who is someone that you have seen God in over the course of your life? How so?
5. Share about a time when you felt judged or attacked for your faith.
6. What was the world like when you were a kid?
7. What's the first significant memory of church you can remember?
8. Where is a place where God feels most present to you? Why?
9. Share about the ways you have experienced God in each other.
10. Share about a moment where you felt misunderstood.

WEEK 6 HANDOUT – LOVING GOD WITH OUR COMMUNITY

Rule of Life**Defined:** a list of practices, rhythms, or habits that helps us to ABIDE with Jesus

<p>Loving God with your HEART (relational)...</p> <p>Daily practices:</p> <p>Weekly practices:</p> <p>Monthly practices:</p> <p>Yearly practices:</p>	<p>Loving God with your SOUL (contemplative)...</p> <p>Daily practices:</p> <p>Weekly practices:</p> <p>Monthly practices:</p> <p>Yearly practices:</p>
<p>Loving God with your MIND (mental)...</p> <p>Daily practices:</p> <p>Weekly practices:</p> <p>Monthly practices:</p> <p>Yearly practices:</p>	<p>Loving God with your STRENGTH (physical)...</p> <p>Daily practices:</p> <p>Weekly practices:</p> <p>Monthly practices:</p> <p>Yearly practices:</p>

APPENDIX M

“THE MAYFAIR STORY: THE FIRST 60 YEARS”

Written in 2009

The Mayfair story began in 1947 when the Central Church of Christ chose to expand their mission efforts into a new part of South Huntsville. Two lots in the Mayfair subdivision on the corner of Bob Wallace Avenue and Poincianna Street were purchased and the building was constructed for \$25,000.

The first service was held on November 20, 1949, with about 50 people in attendance. Jack Duncan was the first minister and preached Mayfair's first sermon. He was succeeded by O.D. Johns and Everette Alexander. In September of 1955, the first elders and deacons were selected. Russelle Bailey, Herbert Crowson, Henry Jones, and Robert Smith served as elders along with Al Bryan, Raymond Buford, Walden Smith, and Tillman Williams who served as deacons. Elizabeth Williams served as the first church secretary.

Shortly thereafter, Bill Wardlaw became the minister that would lead Mayfair into its next home. By this time, the church had grown to the point that a new building was needed and farm land used to grow cotton was purchased on the outskirts of town on Whitesburg Drive. The elders and deacons had the foresight to recognize this area as a prime location based on Huntsville's projected growth. Our city was being tapped to play an integral part in America's space mission. The projected growth meant souls to be saved and Mayfair positioned itself to serve and share God's word.

In 1960, the first phase of the new Mayfair Church of Christ facility was completed. There were 512 people in attendance at the first worship service in the new building. Soon after moving to the new facility, Brother Paul Hunton served as minister, later resigning to become principal of Madison Academy. He was succeeded by Bob Anderson, who served as minister for 13 years. In April 1965, Mayfair's facility was completed.

During this decade, the foreign and stateside missions realized exponential growth as Mayfair Church of Christ made its mark on the world to the glory of God. Dorsey and Ola Traw began their ministry in Thailand in 1961 and are still serving the Lord in that capacity today. Numerous souls have been saved and the Lord's church has grown significantly in Thailand because of the Traw's dedicated leadership.

In the early 70s, Mayfair's youth ministry was established and has grown tremendously over the years, serving as a model for other churches across the nation. Youth Missions also began during this decade to supplement the steadily growing foreign missions program for which Mayfair was known.

The 70s saw Mayfair continuing to spread God's word to the four corners of the earth. Peter and Cathy Manuel began their mission work in Capetown, South Africa, supported by the Mayfair congregation. Since that time, the gospel has been spread to thousands living in the country of South Africa, where the Manuels are still serving today.

The Mayfair Child Development Center opened in 1975 to serve as an outreach program to the community by supplying quality daycare, preschool and kindergarten programs. The MCDC provides a healthy, safe environment that promotes the physical, social, cognitive, and spiritual development of young children. The Family Life Center was added in 1978. This center houses a large fellowship hall, adult classrooms, and the church office.

In 1979, Mayfair was blessed to have Gary Bradley come to serve as our minister. What a wonderful way to close out this decade. The 70s led up to the 80s with Mayfair and the Lord's church worldwide growing and expanding and spreading the gospel to so many. It is still true that the sun, on its daily journey, never sets on Mayfair's mission outreach.

The decade of the 80s continued to show the need for growth, outreach, and service. The ministry program was developed and implemented and has grown to over 80 ministries serving in all areas from building security, to Internet ministry, to disaster relief. The television ministry "Abundant Living" was begun and has reached thousands of people in the Tennessee Valley of the last 20 years.

The "Mayfair Cares" motto was seen throughout these years as the church reached out to so many in our community during times of need. In 1982, Mayfair donated land just west of the church building to be used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development to build a retirement apartment complex to serve the aging in our community. Mayfair Towers has been a very positive outreach providing care for hundreds of elderly people.

Towards the middle of this decade, Mayfair was faced with the possibility of expansion once again. In 1987, the addition to the auditorium was completed with additional classroom space beneath. This was soon filled to capacity with congregational growth maintaining a rapid rate. In 1989, a deadly tornado came within 500 yards of our property, killing 19 people and devastating the surrounding area. Mayfair responded with emergency relief and support for the community for which it cares so much.

With the decade of the 90s came many changes in the makeup of our nation as well as the world. The Cold War ended, communism fell, and doors to Russia and other countries that had once been closed tightly were now open. Mayfair continued to expand its outreach in every way, both stateside and foreign, to the glory of God. In 1995, Mayfair's involvement in Huntsville's Inner City began. As a result, the Inner City Church of Christ was established with great success. With support of other area churches, Jesus is being taught to the hurting of Huntsville.

In 1996, Mayfair had begun to have three morning worship services to try and alleviate the crowding in the auditorium during Sunday morning worship. A research committee

was established to study the feasibility of adding on to the current building or looking for property to purchase for a new building.

The decision was made to buy 25 acres in beautiful Jones Valley just over the hill from Whitesburg. By 1995, the funds for the purchase were secured and the land was bought. In 1997, the Vision 2000 campaign began with great success. The design for the building was completed and on March 7, 1999, Groundbreaking Day was held with many members and dignitaries in attendance. The construction of the new facility was completed and Mayfair made it's exodus over the hill to Jones Valley in the fall of 2000.

Mayfair has come so far with God's help in serving and reaching the world with the message of Christ. It's new facility marks a renewed commitment to the Tennessee Valley and the world that, with God's continued guidance, we will continue to be a servant minded family of God.

People in Huntsville, Belize, Mexico, and all over the world are the reasons to keep our light shining for Christ in Jones Valley. Because of the vision of a handful of faithful Christians 60 years ago, Mayfair lives on to reach the lost. May God continue to bless this great church so that for generations to come, God's name will be glorified.

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