

Luther Seminary

Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary

Doctor of Ministry Theses

Student Theses

5-20-2018

Nearer My God to Thee: How Biblical Preaching Fosters Intimacy with God

Warren Lee Domenick Jr

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/dmin_theses



Part of the [Biblical Studies Commons](#), [Liturgy and Worship Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Domenick, Warren Lee Jr, "Nearer My God to Thee: How Biblical Preaching Fosters Intimacy with God" (2018). *Doctor of Ministry Theses*. 31.

https://digitalcommons.luthersem.edu/dmin_theses/31

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses at Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Ministry Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Luther Seminary. For more information, please contact tracy.iwaskow@gmail.com, mteske@luthersem.edu.

NEARER MY GOD TO THEE:
HOW BIBLICAL PREACHING FOSTERS INTIMACY WITH GOD

by
WARREN LEE DOMENICK, JR.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
Luther Seminary
In Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

April, 2018

© April, 2018 by Warren Lee Domenick, Jr.

All rights reserved

ABSTRACT

Nearer My God to Thee: How Biblical Preaching Fosters Intimacy with God

We desire it. We long to be in its presence. We look for it in everything we see and hear and smell and touch and taste. We someday hope to have it surrounding us, holding us close. It is intimacy with God. Moreover, in it, we are somehow able to find a connection with God. Intimacy with God first belongs to God. God is the measure by which all intimacy is evaluated. Some would say that God is intimacy. God is revealed to us through intimacy which is both accurate and right; one might say, an intimacy that is authentic or honest about God's essence, being, and character.

An argument will be made for intimacy with God, which was lost, to its rightful place as a vital and indispensable part of the individual journey. By the biblical preacher taking intentional time to unpack the scripture, acknowledging the images present in the text, and by referring to the theology of the hymnody chosen for a given Sunday, a preacher may begin to show that reclaiming intimacy with God is once more attainable. All three of these elements have the power, whether consciously observed or unconsciously absorbed, to affect hearers both personally and corporately as the biblical preacher assists their journey toward a more authentic and deeper intimacy with God.

by

Warren Lee Domenick, Jr.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank all my family and friends who encouraged me to finish my dissertation. A special heartfelt thanks to Jeff Luke, my husband for his constant support and encouragement during this journey.

I also want to thank and acknowledge St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota, for seeing me through this eye-opening and life-changing experience.

I especially want to thank The Rev. Dr. Karoline Lewis and The Rev. Dr. Richard Rehfeldt, my academic advisors, who believed in me from the very start of my DMin program. I would also like to thank my fellow sojourners in the Luther Seminary Cohort 2015: to Cindy for your generous and honest heart which has caused me to realize that everything is going to be fine, to Tricia for your humor and deep love of books which has caused me to laugh more than once, to Elisabeth for your wordsmithing and use of phrase which has caused me to stretch my vocabulary, to Richard for your calming presence which has caused me to pause and take a breath, to Laurie for your accent, genuine love, and being a kindred spirit which has caused me to know better who I am and what God has called me to be, to Steve for your friendship and genuine heart which has caused me to see the world differently, to Chris for keeping me grounded and pushed me which has caused me to look deeper inside myself, to Ramona for your ability to bring real life experiences to my consciousness which has caused me to be real, to Lesley for walking

this journey with all of us, keeping us held in the arms of love which has caused me to feel connected to something greater than myself, and finally to Marion and Wende for being my readers and editors.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	vi
1. INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION, RATIONALE	1
2. THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION	16
Biblical Preaching and Definition	18
Biblical Preaching and Storytelling.....	21
Biblical Preaching and Wisdom	24
Biblical Preaching and the Practice of Service.....	29
Biblical Preaching and Christian History	31
Biblical Preaching and the Practice of Study	37
Biblical Preaching and Worship	40
Biblical Preaching and Music.....	44
Biblical Preaching and Arts and Imagery.....	55
3. REVIEW OF LITERATURE	58
4. PROJECT DESCRIPTION.....	78
5. ANALYSIS OF RESULTS	85
6. EVALUATION.....	93
7. REFLECTION	98
APPENDIX A.....	106
IMPLIED CONSENT	106
APPENDIX B	107
PRETEST AND POSTTEST QUESTIONS	107
APPENDIX C	111
SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY RAW DATA COLLECTED	111
BIBLIOGRAPHY	113

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	Page
Tables	
Table 5.1 Pretest and Posttest Spiritual Assessment Inventory P Result.....	89
Table 5.2 Pretest and Posttest Spiritual Assessment Inventory NP Result.....	90
Table 5.3 Awareness Assessment Result.....	91

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION, RATIONALE

It was a Friday afternoon. Four seminarians whose heads were filled to the brim with history, polity, and ecclesiology, took the bus to another part of Chattanooga. Exhausted from their week of work, pastoral care, and assorted ministry crises, they sought a respite of sorts. They entered the cathedral anxiously, their energies restored at the very thought of it. Tickets purchased, maps in hand, they made their way to the individual exhibit. They rounded the corner to see the paintings. Earpieces in place, they began the guided tour. Painting after painting, room after room they traveled. By the time they reached the final space, they were compelled to sit. They had to sit; it was overwhelming. They did not want to leave the presence of this place. It was not only one painting, or one technique, or one appealing color combination. Instead, it was the whole, the body of work. So they sat, they felt their bodies breathing, the feeling of blood pumping through their veins. They were exhausted, yet more alive than they could describe. They had not merely looked at paintings; they had been invited into a mystery, an experience beyond words. That experience was intimacy. Not the intimacy of fashion models or the latest trends, but an intimacy that spoke of truth and goodness, an intimacy that was genuine to the core. “But what was that core, from where did this intimacy come?,” one pastor queried. Moreover, then it came to me. I was standing in a spiritual space. The work of the artist had brought me to rest in the presence of God. I saw God’s face in the body of work. I felt the essence of God revealed through the experience. In the

midst of this mystery, I was filled, my imagination alive with thoughts of that which was beyond my grasp. The joy I knew as the divine entered my heart, mind, and soul. Additionally, I stayed in that place as long as I could.

As I began in ministry and perhaps even before seminary, I had a relationship with God. A relationship of convenience is knowing full well that God was there but never truly understanding the purpose or extent of that relationship. Before starting this thesis project, I was going through the motions, knew what I needed to have a vibrant and growing ministry. I thought I knew what intimacy was, how to get it, and I could show others where to obtain it. Then as I began to research the ideas, reading, books, articles, and varied other writings, I realized I was completely unprepared for what I was discovering. “Our little lives become great—part of the mysterious work of God’s salvation.”¹ So I decided to go back to the beginning.

During the early years of life, we are exposed to many events, trivial and significant, which usually do not raise questions unless we pay some special attention to them. During the first eighteen months of life, we come to the somewhat frustrating discovery that we are not the center of the known universe.

Most of us will agree that there are people and things outside of us which will continue to exist even when we do not. This is, however, not as self-evident as it seems. It is only through a long often frustrating experience that we are able to discover the objective world. As a baby in the mother’s womb, everything is there for us; mother is a part of ourselves. Later, it can be quite a painful experience to discover that our cry does

¹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 94.

not create the milk, that our smile does not produce the mother, that our needs do not evoke their own satisfaction. Only gradually do we discover our mother as the other, as not just a part of ourselves. Every time we experience that we are not ruling the world by our feelings, thoughts, and actions, we are forced to realize that there are other persons, things, and events which have their autonomy.

Therefore, the first step out of this world is the discovery of intimacy. It can happen that we reach this intimacy only partially. Although we slowly unfold and become able to stand on our own feet and point to the things around us as available for our curious mind, this may not happen so easily in the religious dimension. Many mature, successful people might still treat God as part of themselves.

Nouwen goes on further to state, “The word that is read and spoken wants to lead us into God’s presence and transform our hearts and minds.”² The second step out of this world is the formation of language. Somewhere between our eighteenth month of life and our third birthday, we started mumbling our first sounds which slowly developed into words, sentences, and a language. Although it may be disappointing that there are things around us which do not belong to us, by words we can take authority because our first words give us power over things. The words give us power not only over the object but also over our own instinctual impulses. Before we had words, we could not resist the temptation of grabbing flowers in the garden. But by the word “flower” we became able to substitute the act of grabbing and touching, and without hands clasped together at our back we could then say, “nice flowers, do not touch.”

² Ibid., 46.

The third step out of this world is the formation of our conscience. This is the great event between our third and fifth years. When we had learned that objects existed outside ourselves which kept existing even if we did not, and when we had experienced that words were not omnipotent tools to manipulate the world around us, we were still confronted with a much more important step. The external disciplinary agent, daddy, mommy, and priest slowly is converted into an internal policeman.

Conscience becomes possible by the process of identification. We develop the capacity to interiorize certain aspects of the personality of another person, to make them a part of ourselves. In the case of moral development, we take over judgments, standards, and values of beloved persons and incorporate them into our own personality.

During this time for me, something else was happening. During those young years of life, I felt that my parents could do everything, that they were omnipotent, that they could solve all problems and lift all weights. In our ideal family, our parents are the great athletes, they build houses, write books, create bicycles, and are able to get everything for us. Well, we became disappointed sooner or later. Parents it turns out are out of the loop after all. This was my world growing up.

We now enter school age, adolescence, young adulthood, and now as an adult man. We enter a new perspective, and we call it intimacy with God. It does not create new things, but it adds a new dimension to the basic realities of life. It brings our fragmented personality into a meaningful whole, unifies our divided self. It is the source of inspiration for a searching mind, the basis for a creative community and a constant incentive for an on-going renewal of life.

The purpose of this project is to assist biblical preachers in helping foster intimacy with God for themselves and their congregations. In chapter two, a biblical and theological foundation was presented to support the purpose of this project.

In chapter one, a rationale was presented for this project based on my personal desire of how to become more intimate with God. My personal experience coupled with the experiences of my congregation was used by God to lead me to pursue this project.

Chapter three begins with the review of the literature. Admittedly, I did not find much written directly related to my given project, which at times was frustrating, and yet perhaps this was a blessing in disguise. Although such information may not be directly available, I have found pathways and correlations in the literature that I feel will provide enough evidence to support the points presented in this project.

Intimacy with God and humanity is only possible because God has made it possible. The very act of creation and the fact that humanity is created in the image of God demonstrates that relationship is foundational. God has initiated a relationship with humanity desiring a relationship for all mutually to enjoy.

When I began to preach as a local church pastor on a weekly basis, I was thirty-three years old and in awe of both the incredible privilege and daunting responsibility of proclaiming the good news. Simply put, I was overwhelmed. The feeling of being overwhelmed with the call to preach had a purifying effect on my soul. This feeling caused me to rely more heavily on God and my intimacy with God through the homiletic process than upon my own limited experience and abilities. I prayed and quite often even fasted as I wrestled with God and my lack of intimacy with God in order to gain insight into the coming Sunday's text, an insight that was theologically informed and spiritually

formative. However, I discovered this process still led to a lack of intimacy with God through biblical preaching. I needed God, and I knew it. Preaching was for me, in the earliest days of my pastoral ministry, a quasi-spiritual discipline that formed the character of Christ in me as I sought God's guiding and anointing. The homiletic process of my early days in ministry was more of a devotional journey that shaped me than a rhetorical task to be checked off my weekly to-do list.

The more I preached, however, the more confident I became with my increasing skills and the less overwhelmed I felt. A peculiar thing happened: I began to pray less. Sermon development and delivery became much more comfortable as it was reduced from a spiritual discipline to a technical task. I found my homiletic rhythm by learning how to preach. Preaching, admittedly, became for me a rhetorical technique that overshadowed the spiritual discipline it once was. What I once viewed as an opportunity to engage and to be engaged on an intimate level with God became a task to be completed. This change in perspective eventually diminished the joy of preaching and its spiritually formative nature. The intimacy with God through biblical preaching was no longer there.

Standing in the aisles of the local bookstore, it occurred to me that these resources are for the beginner, infant, in the Christian life. I was confronted with my own journey in the church over many years, and my own ignorance, immaturity as a Christian. I had completed many Bible study booklets, read many commentaries, and attended several series of workbook group studies yet was still a beginner. Even through college and seminary, although I had increased my knowledge, I was still a beginner. For me the transition began with a preaching mentor, who herself was plumbing the depths of

biblical preaching, producing fruit for God. She helped me move beyond milk to meat. I believe that the above-mentioned materials are good for beginners. However, the church needs to go beyond the starting line for biblical preachers. Churches are hampering the growth process, the maturity of the branch and the production of fruit, inhibiting joy by not leading people deeper.

The Holy Spirit guided me to a mentor and this thesis project, having convicted me that my work of abiding was inadequate. Having been introduced to the abiding work of biblical preaching, the Holy Spirit nudged me to learn more about this deeply holy path. Attending Luther Seminary for three years of class work and working on this project for the past year has convinced me that a way of moving beyond the beginning stages of preaching to a deeper, more productive and joy-filled abiding in Jesus can be known through fostering intimacy with God through biblical preaching.

As I have been pruned and nourished, being transformed while doing the work of abiding in the vine, I am being led by the Holy Spirit to aid others in the work of abiding. Acknowledging the abilities and capabilities of others I have worked to produce an aid to help others transition out of the beginning stages of the preaching of their relationship with God. I am in a relationship with several hundred people in my church and community whom I can help to mature while continuing the work of abiding and maturing myself. My project is designed to open a door for intimacy with God they did not know existed or at least did not know how to open. The church as I experienced it was comfortable leaving people in the nursery and was not feeding them appropriately and teaching them how to grow out of infancy.

My work teaches that biblical preaching can foster intimacy with God as a way of understanding the biblical story. We like the biblical characters have a role in the story. By practicing biblical preaching, we experience, through the work of abiding, the reality that just as others have enjoyed intimacy with God, so can we. God is not distant, and an intimate relationship with God is not a fantasy. Rather, God is personal, and intimacy can be a reality through the work of abiding. The vine and vinedresser are fulfilling their responsibilities, but the branches, the biblical preachers, must take up their call and be faithful in their production. I believe that many branches want to cooperate and produce but are not sure of how to do it. My project attempts to guide the biblical preacher into a deeper personal encounter with God through the work of living in, abiding in, a dynamically intimate relationship with God.

People come to faith in God through the message of the scriptures. However, like a relationship between two people, a person's relationship with God has to grow to plumb the depths of who God is and what God is saying to each. There are varieties of spiritual disciplines that individuals use to grow and gain knowledge of God. Bible reading, Bible study, and scripture memorization are some of the most popular disciplines in Western Christianity, and each has a specific value for the individual who uses them. Biblical preaching is a spiritual discipline that can bring individuals to a deeper understanding of God, thereby fostering intimacy with God. In recent years, individuals who seek a more intimate relationship with God have discovered that having a deeper understanding of God's word and seeking to preach biblically become a spiritual discipline. The purpose of this research will be to concretely define biblical preaching and intimacy with God and how biblical preaching as spiritual discipline fosters intimacy with God. The additional

purpose of this research is to measure the impact of a five-sermon series experimental study and practice of biblical preaching on the participants' intimacy with God at St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

We desire it. We long to be in its presence. We look for it in everything we see and hear and smell and touch and taste. We someday hope to have it surrounding us, holding us close. It is intimacy with God. Moreover, in it, we are somehow able to find a connection with God. Intimacy with God first belongs to God. God is the measure by which all intimacy is evaluated. Some would say that God is intimacy. God is revealed to us through intimacy authentic or honest about God's essence, being, and character.

Through intimacy with God, we can behold a glimpse of God. When that glimpse is revealed, our imaginations are awakened to all the possibilities of how God might be seen and what God might be sharing with us. In this awakening, we can see God more clearly and within many examples of intimacy. Our desire to meet God in this way then grows, our longing is fueled, and our journey with God goes more deeply into the human-divine connection that we found in imagination.

We, individual biblical preachers, share intimacy with God. We then provide opportunities to see God through biblical preaching. Through intimacy with God, we open the door for formation through biblical preaching. Intimacy with God, in this way, is an entryway to the divine. When intimacy with God is sought and encountered through biblical preaching, the individual can take God's self into their created self.

In this intimate relationship with God, there emerges a desire to be one with God, to take on the heart of God. It is the transformation made possible through intimacy. By creating desire or intensifying the desire which already exists, intimacy urges one to a

more significant search, which leads to a meeting place, and finally a following. One cannot sit and merely enjoy intimacy; it must be followed.

Intimacy, defined in this way, speaks of God's truth and goodness, not of what the world might consider as intimacy. The idea of intimacy in theological circles has become suspect in recent years and must be reclaimed by the biblical preacher. What is of God is intimate.

God is working everywhere, but we as human beings suffer the difficulties of not being able to see it. Either we are not looking for it, are too busy, or are not aware of how to think theologically, perhaps all three. By awakening the imagination through biblical preaching, we are invited to see what God is seeing and participate in what God is doing.

According to Hans Urs von Balthasar, this is all about form. The form of God is the form of intimacy. Intimacy's value is to be found in its representation of God.³ This form is a mystery, how it gives splendor unknown. Hans Urs von Balthasar states, "We are confronted simultaneously with both the figure and that which shines forth from the figure."⁴ In other words, when we see genuine intimacy, we know it is intimacy because it reflects God. We see not only the thing we call intimacy, but the very essence of the Divine, which it reflects. Somehow, the form of things stand in what von Balthasar calls a "spiritual space." Moreover, "Whether space has been fully crystallized or is only now beginning to define itself," whether complete or incomplete, "only such form is genuine form, and only it can wholly claim for itself the name of intimacy."⁵

³ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1982), 23.

⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵ Ibid., 23.

Also, this “form,” this intimacy is by its very definition a “mystery.” There is “No harmonizing, no skill, no comprehension permitted . . . every such form (human skill and logic) must disintegrate in the face of the ‘contradiction,’ the concealment of everything divine under its opposite, the concealment, that is, of all proportions and analogies between God and man in dialectic.”⁶ It seems to von Balthasar that intimacy is the only thing that can make sense of this paradox, this mystery. Intimacy is allowed to the “human beholder only by the grace of God.”⁷

Von Balthasar would also ask the viewer to consider the question of the experience of faith that within the form of intimacy is found the “encounter of the whole person of God.”⁸ Within the essence of this form which reflects the Divine form, is found not only “measure, number, and weight,” but also the “energy” of the “organizing agent.”⁹ The energy and measure of God, therefore, are revealed through the experience of faith, the experience of intimacy. Von Balthasar calls this connection “indispensable,”¹⁰ and within this place of intimacy and faith, the believer is then able to “squander themselves (oneself) in”¹¹ love. Intimacy, being in the form of God, then “develops as the verification of the form of faith in existence.”¹²

⁶ Ibid., 47.

⁷ Ibid., 154.

⁸ Ibid., 219.

⁹ Ibid., 442.

¹⁰ Ibid., 219.

¹¹ Ibid., 442.

¹² Ibid., 481.

Nearly all people have had the experience of being attracted to intimacy. “What we call intimacy we are attracted to.”¹³ From where does this attraction come? It comes, it seems, from God. “We are made to long for God’s presence . . . thirst for God.”¹⁴ Additionally, because intimacy is found in this form of the Divine, intimacy draws us in, toward that for which we long. “Intimacy in the world that glorifies God will also evoke desire—a yearning to explore and take pleasure in what is intimate.”¹⁵

However, the attraction, the desire to intimacy is only the beginning of this equation. It is true that “intimacy elicits desire,”¹⁶ but beyond desire can be found the longing for more. There is the intimacy itself, and then what lies beyond it.

The intimacy as it appears to us is intimate only because of the delight that it arouses in us is founded upon the fact, in it, the truth and goodness of the depths of reality itself are manifested and bestowed, and this manifestation and bestowal reveal themselves to us as being something infinitely and inexhaustibly valuable and fascinating. The appearance of the intimacy, as the revelation of the depths, is an indissoluble union of two things. It is the real presence and depths, of the whole reality, and it is a real pointing beyond itself to these depths.¹⁷

In the “pointing beyond” is found a new depth of relationship with God through the intimacy with God. “Admittedly, intimacy would not be intimate unless it was fundamentally a sign and appearing of depth and a fullness that, in themselves and an abstract sense, remain beyond both our reach and our vision.”¹⁸ When one realizes the

¹³ Daniel J. Treier, Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin, *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 211.

¹⁴ Ibid., 30.

¹⁵ Ibid., 31.

¹⁶ Ibid., 30.

¹⁷ Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 118.

¹⁸ Ibid., 169.

intimacy of God within the form of intimacy, the desire is flamed, not extinguished.

“When the soul glimpses the intimacy of God, it yearns to see more.”¹⁹ Though the content of what is desired is more than what can be understood, the longing continues to grow, searching passionately for the “Always-More.”²⁰

Within the human being is not only the longing for intimacy but the desire to create it. It is part of who we are as creatures made in the image of God. God is the Creator. Human beings are made in God’s image. Therefore, we are intimate who create intimacy, who have been made to “create something intimate and delight in it,”²¹ as God is intimate. The actions of human beings, if congruent with God’s image, will be of an intimate nature. What the human being does with intimacy matters. It is at the heart of humanity’s identity.

Continually on a journey toward wholeness, toward oneness with the Creator, the created one creates intimacy because it is who they are. Moreover, by creating intimacy, they grow closer to the one who creates, and to one another. “Each of us is called to cultivate intimacy, knowing that as intimate beings, and as those with whom we share our intimate gifts, we became whole and healed in that sharing of intimacy.”²²

It can be said that the human longing for more, this depth of relationship that is desired, is God’s way of drawing the human into a relationship. It is God’s action, not

¹⁹ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 200.

²⁰ Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 320.

²¹ Leland Ryken, *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing* (Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2005), 149.

²² Luci Shaw, *Breath for the Bones: Art, Imagination, and Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007), 37.

that of the person, that defines our attraction to intimacy. As Christian poet Luci Shaw says, “the love which is infused in humankind by the Holy Spirit present within God bestows on humankind the sensorium with which to perceive God, bestows also the taste for God and, so to speak an understanding for God’s own taste. . . . God possesses the full initiative in the person’s relationship to God.”²³ God alone owns the form of intimacy; God is its source, God alone can make its desire. “It is not humankind’s love for God that has set before itself an image of God to be able by this means to love God better: the image offers itself as something that could not have been invented by humankind . . . and the invention of God’s love.”²⁴ Again, God’s grace prevails.

In my thesis, I will explore the individual preacher who has yet to come to see God and those who have come to see God more clearly. I will explore how through biblical preaching, each comes to realize more of who he or she is made in the image of God. I will explore how the individual’s self-identity is realized through the wholeness of one’s own created intimacy, and taking that into the individual’s self with renewal and transformation which can come from intimacy with God through biblical preaching.

Further in my thesis, I will demonstrate that intimacy with God through biblical preaching will be found in offerings of specific pieces of hymnody, musical compositions, from various genres. Each work of music and composition will be analyzed theologically.

²³ Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 249.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 173.

I will focus the discussion on intimacy with God through biblical preaching, and this will be found in the offering of specific pieces of art or imagery also from various genres. Each work of art or imagery will be analyzed theologically.

Intimacy with God speaks of God's truth and goodness, not of what the world might consider as intimacy. The idea of intimacy with God has become suspect in recent years and must be reclaimed by individuals. What is of God is intimate, because it is a reflection of the Divine. I believe that intimacy with God is seeking God as we are sought by God.

In conclusion, an argument will be made for reclaiming intimacy with God, which lost its rightful place as a vital and indispensable part of the individual journey. By the biblical preacher taking intentional time to unpack the scripture, acknowledging the images present in the text, and by referring to the theology of the hymnody chosen for a given Sunday, a preacher may begin to show that intimacy with God is once more attainable. All three of these elements have the power, whether consciously observed or unconsciously absorbed, to affect individuals on a deeply personal level as well as through corporate experience, by aiding or inhibiting the biblical preacher in assisting in a more authentic and deeper intimacy with God. By defining intimacy with God fostered through biblical preaching and concretely defining biblical preaching, educating about intimacy, and the use of intimacy in daily life, the revelation of God for us to know God moves forward.

CHAPTER 2

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Intimacy with God is a hard thing to attain. The word “intimacy” carries with it the aspects of a relationship with someone where you are vulnerable, loving, trusting. To have an intimate relationship with God means that the most profound part is having a relationship with a deep part of God. Of course, we cannot fathom the deepest part of God, but God steps to our level and reveals a part of God’s self.

The model of real intimacy is the Trinity. God is a Trinity of persons: Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. Therefore, our intimacy with God and each other is ultimately a reflection of God’s intimacy among the members of the Godhead. It means that intimacy is an essential part of the very nature of God. Moreover, because we are made in God’s image, intimacy is natural to us as well. It is why we are capable of intimacy with others with God’s help. It is our nature.

Our intimacy with God first began in the Garden of Eden when God walked with humankind (Genesis 2). It was something God desired. As we know, humankind rebelled, and the intimacy with God was lost. However, God had a plan so that the fellowship with humankind could be restored. This was realized at the cross, where, according to Paul, Jesus became sin on our behalf (2 Corinthians 5:21). Therefore, we can come to God through Jesus Christ our mediator, and realize the intimacy humankind had with their Creator at the start (1 Timothy 2:5).

Since Jesus Christ is the Word of God, that is God in the flesh, our mediator, this means that the intimacy we have with God is with Christ. The Word of God we profess, we confess, and the biblical preaching we proclaim, bring us closer to God. By seeking and becoming closer to God, it deepens our fellowship and ultimately our intimacy with God. In fact, we are “called into fellowship with God’s son, Christ Jesus” (1 Corinthians 1:9).¹ The word “fellowship” in Greek is “koinonia” which is also translated as “communion” in 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul is speaking about the communion supper. It is interesting that communion is the place where we accept the ultimate vulnerability of God in Jesus Christ, who humbled himself by becoming susceptible to death. I believe this is a clue to the real intimacy of God: humility. As Christ was humbled to the point of death, so we, too, must be humbled to the point of death, that is, death to ourselves, our selfish desires, and personal wants. When compared to God, our purpose should not be to see what we can get from God. It should be to glorify God and to love each other. Pride seeks its own. Humility seeks others. That is a vital part of intimacy—the seeking of another in the most profound sense. How can we do this if we are proud?

Intimacy with God is a privilege freely given to us by God through Jesus Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. God removed our sin, our separation from God so that we might dwell with God. Therefore, if there is something that distracts our focus from God, it will hinder our fellowship and our intimacy with God.

¹Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation for All Scriptural References* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Biblical Preaching and Definition

Biblical preaching is the communication of truth. It has in it at least two essential elements: truth and personality. Preaching is a significant means chosen by God and used in the early and current church to communicate the good news to people. In my view, very few people speak of biblical preaching, but only about preaching, and preaching has come to take on so many and various forms that it is confusing to know what makes good preaching anymore. Is biblical preaching that of a person who is entertaining, who is easy to listen to, who can quote from various human authors, who has excellent multimedia integration, or what? The only way to know what defines biblical preaching is to look at the scriptures. There are a few elements of scripture that help to define biblical preaching. We should listen to and seek to practice biblical preaching.

John Stott describes biblical preaching as, “To expound Scripture is to open up the inspired text with such faithfulness and sensitivity that God’s love is heard and God’s people listen.”² While Martin Luther puts it this way, “In the pulpit we are to lay the breasts and nourish the people with milk.”³ Theologian Karl Barth refers to biblical preaching like this,

Preaching is the attempt enjoined upon the church to serve God’s own Word, through one who is called thereto, by expounding a biblical text in human words and making it relevant to contemporaries in intimation of what they have to hear from God himself.⁴

² John R. W. Stott, *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God’s Word to Today’s World* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 20.

³ Jerry L. Schmalenberger, *The Preacher’s Edge* (Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 1996), 108.

⁴ Karl Barth, *Homiletics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 44

These written statements above on biblical preaching explore the means of multiple expressions. I want to find out how to better convey the Christian message of intimacy with God through biblical preaching as an effective medium in order to assist the reader/hearer better. I humbly offer my own definition, “Biblical preaching is the authentic proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ, in which the preacher engenders in the listener the meaning and spirit of the text, thus embodying both a spiritual and cognitive connection which leads to an awareness that God’s kingdom is present, here and now.”

Biblical preaching encourages the listeners to have open Bibles to turn to scripture passages, to make notes in their margins, and to take notes as needed. The biblical preacher takes the Word of God and the call of preaching seriously and with reverence.

The tone one conveys needs to be one that is reverent and trembling before a holy God who takes God’s word more seriously than we ever could (Ecclesiastes 5:2, Isaiah 66:2). Preaching is to be passionate, urgent, confident in tone and delivery, and intimate. Preaching by definition is not supposed to be dull and dry. There is a sense that what is being said is of the utmost importance so that biblical preachers do not have to be ashamed on judgment day (Act 2:37, Acts 7:54). Biblical preaching trusts the sufficiency and power of the Word of God. The biblical preacher is not concerned about keeping the attention of the listeners by entertaining antics and gimmicks. The biblical preacher is most concerned that they communicate the message of the text faithfully as Jesus Christ, through the Holy Spirit, leads them.

The purpose of biblical preaching is for the building up of the saints for service and maturity in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 4:14-16). Sadly, The Word is the underpinning of

every exhortation and rebuke. Stories, experience, scientific studies, and analogies are not what the biblical preacher uses to make his case. They may be used to support the scriptures, but the scriptures are the ultimate authority (2 Timothy 3:16-17, Romans 1:16, Romans 10:17, John 17:7). Biblical preaching gets no pleasure out of scolding, insulting, or tearing someone down. Some preachers may get some adrenaline rush by yelling, sweating, and pounding their fists on the pulpit. They enjoy the power trip and the ability to scare their congregation. The biblical preacher is not interested in beating people up, but in building them up (Ephesians 4:11-13, Proverbs 25:15).

Biblical preaching has evidence of thorough study and preparation. It is not “talking from the hip,” but it is organized and examined from every angle (2 Timothy 2:15, Ezra 7:6, 10). Biblical preaching values a historical and grammatical approach to textual interpretation. Every word matters and the original languages are used to ascertain the exact, intended meaning of a text (Romans 15:4, Matthew 5:18). Biblical preaching is not merely an individual standing up front lecturing from behind a pulpit. Biblical preaching requires that the preacher is filled with the Holy Spirit, having sought the will of God (Zechariah 4:6). Biblical preaching is genuine. The preacher does not try to entertain or perform. Neither is preaching merely a religious exercise. The preacher does not change who they are to preach, and lets the reality of their walk with Jesus Christ flow into the preaching (1 Corinthians 2:4-5). The biblical preacher is humble, not speaking in a manner that is condescending or instead: implying that the preacher does not struggle or has everything figured out (James 3:2). Biblical preaching trains the listener in the art of listening, reflecting, and applying. The preacher assists the congregation to know how to listen, take notes, and draw application (Nehemiah 8:8). A

biblical preacher does not draw attention to the preacher. The preacher is merely a messenger.

Biblical Preaching and Storytelling

Reading through the pages of the Bible, we discover story after story of people interacting with God. The Bible is a book (actually sixty-six books), an overarching story, filled with relational experiences between people and God. Some people experience relational intimacy with God while others are distant from God. Establishing a biblical foundation for this project is the purpose of this section, so I will begin with the relational intimacy that Adam and Eve enjoyed with God as a part of God's creation. I will then discuss how they violated that relationship, resulting in a distancing from God. The rest of this section will discuss how biblical persons have practiced intimacy with God as an integral part of their relationship to God as they worked to restore and develop intimacy with the Creator.

Did biblical characters experience intimacy with God? Moreover, if intimacy was experienced, how was it achieved? I am studying these questions to guide me into greater personal intimacy with God, through the lens of biblical preaching. God has seen fit to record the stories of God's interaction with specific persons throughout history, stories that may be used as authoritative teachings for us. We learn about God's relationship with others from this record, and I seek to discover if the same practices used by them lead to intimacy with God for us. So, the focus of this section is to discover what some of those practices were and how I, as a biblical preacher, can use what is learned to foster intimacy with God.

From the very first verse in the Bible, we know that God is the initiator and sustainer of all that is, “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Moreover, John reiterates the truth by saying, “All things came into being through him, and without him, not one thing came into being” (John 1:3). “The Creator” is a name given to God in the light of what God has done, and as the sole Creator, God has authority over all that is, including us.

Adam and Eve joyfully acknowledged the authority of God and happily submitted to God. The Bible says, “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). In these images of nakedness, Adam and Eve enjoyed full exposure before God without embarrassment or shame for any of their thoughts or behavior. They willingly, joyfully exposed all to God and lived in harmony with God fulfilling their role in the created order.

One day an entity entered their lives and invited them to entertain a thought they had never entertained before—to question God. The thought began with questioning what God said and led to questioning God’s motives (Gen. 3:1, 5). Adam and Eve listened to the entity, the serpent, and acted on the advice given (Gen. 3:6). The consequences of their behavior were immediate: then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves (Gen 3:7). No longer did they enjoy full exposure before God without embarrassment or shame; they had violated their relationship with God, and the intimacy that they had known was noticeably altered. When God came to meet with them, they hid from God in shame (Gen 3:8-10).

God did not abandon Adam and Eve. However, their relationship changed. The consequences of their behavior led to certain hardships in life and expulsion from the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:16-19, 24). Sin had altered Adam and Eve's relationship with God. They could never go back to the way things were, but God through grace worked to renew the relationship with them. The consequences of Adam and Eve's choice were death, violence, disharmony, pain; however, God provided a way of life, peace, and harmony, born out of love and grace. God provided the means, the way, to restored humanity, but people must choose. This pathway to restoration is immediately illustrated in the story of Cain and Abel, when God confronts Cain, before Cain slays his brother, Abel. "If you do well, will you not be accepted? Moreover, if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it" (Gen. 4:7).

People are responsible for their actions. "God is gracious," speaks, warns, invites, and guides people into obedience and relational intimacy with God; however, each person must do the work necessary to enjoy intimacy with God. Cain disregarded the wooing of God and killed his brother, who by faith, had offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God (Heb. 11:4). Responding to the wooing of God, entering a growing intimate relationship with God is each person's responsibility. From the very beginning of the biblical text, we read of God's persistence in pursuing intimacy with humanity and humanity's responses. For intimacy to exist, there must be freedom to choose. God has chosen us, and in return, we must choose God. The following pages contain further biblical stories of people in the ordinariness of everyday life choosing God and growing in intimacy with God.

Biblical Preaching and Wisdom

Solomon's mother was Bathsheba, who had been the wife of Uriah the Hittite, but Solomon's father was King David. Solomon may have grown up hearing the story of David raping his mother and having her first husband murdered to hide the crime. Also, David must have known of the subsequent death of that child and ultimately of Nathan the prophet's courage to confront David. Following Bathsheba's grief and purification, David "consoled his wife Bathsheba, and went to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he named him Solomon. The Lord loved him" (II Sam. 12:24). Eventually, Solomon became king due to his mothers and Nathan's maneuvering under the blessing of God. Solomon was a man with a story, just like us, a unique story.

"Solomon loved the Lord" (1 Kings 3:3) and in conversation with God asked for what he lacked, literally "give your servant, therefore, an understanding mind to govern your people, able to discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:9). Perhaps this prayer was influenced by the knowledge that God told Samuel at the time of David's anointing that "for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7), and Solomon wanted to be filled with God's insight. God gave him what he asked. In a dream, Solomon had asked God for a special favor that would enable him to be a wise leader of God's people. Immediately following the granting of this favor is the famous story of the single child claimed by two mothers, and upon Solomon's judgment the author says, "and they stood in awe of the king, because they perceived that the wisdom of God was in him, to execute justice" (1 Kings 3:28).

I used to believe that Solomon was merely given this wisdom. Now I believe the gift was given as Solomon opened to God, allowing God to move through Solomon. Solomon desired God, wanted to honor God, as God desired Solomon and wanted to be honored by Solomon. Through seeking intimacy with God, Solomon worked hard and was given, by the grace of God, immense wisdom and insight into the human heart.

Intimacy with God is a practice of filling the mind with the thoughts of God. Paul urges throughout Romans that humans have minds that need to be renewed. The renewal process involves trusting the ways of God so much that they replace what the human mind produces itself. Intimacy with God is the intentional work of learning the mind of God and trusting God so much that our minds are transformed by absorbing God's way into us. As we do this, God lives through us; we experience intimacy with God in the unpacking of scripture and transformation of our minds, leading to the words and actions of our bodies being God's words and actions. A deep abiding satisfaction is known through the experience of being in God.

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes according to tradition contain many writings of Solomon. These wisdom writings are products passed on to future generations having been born out of deep intimacy with God. The ways of God are contrasted with the ways of humans. The stark contrasts between behaviors categorize those living for God and those not. Solomon's deep insight into the workings of the human heart is used to warn the reader not to trust the desires of humanity. The desires that we all have if fulfilled inappropriately lead to destruction; so, we must fulfill our desires as God sees fit. Through intimacy with God, Solomon knows the nature of the human being taught by God. As we read the wisdom literature, we are reading the product of deep intimacy, an

opening of the mind to be filled with the thoughts of God. Solomon and other wisdom teachers experienced intimacy with God.

The apostle Paul was a very educated man. In Acts 22:3 Luke quotes Paul telling the mob in Jerusalem that he was educated under the tutelage of Gamaliel. In an earlier story after having those arrested taken from the room, Gamaliel gave sage advice reminding the council that human endeavors die out of themselves, but divine initiatives do not stop. So, he warned them that they might find themselves fighting against God (Acts 5:33-39). The council followed his advice and released the apostles.

Paul was educated by Gamaliel, a sagacious and influential man. Evidently, Paul was a good student who rapidly advanced through the religious ranks (Gal. 1:13-14, Phil. 3:5-6). Not only does Paul refer to his educational background; Paul also writes academic treatises. Paul wrote most of the books of the New Testament, the bedrock of Christian theology. From Paul's writings, the church declares authoritative teaching on salvation, the deity of Jesus, the activities of the Holy Spirit, resurrection, judgment, and the list goes on. Paul did not merely receive these teachings without effort; he studied the Old Testament, opening his heart and mind to the Spirit, and was taught. Having learned, he wrote letters to churches guiding other people more in-depth into their relationship and intimacy with God.

For Paul, intimacy with God was not only for the mind, but it was also for life—communion with and service to God. Paul knew that intimacy with God, through study, determines habits that form us, it focuses our thoughts and transforms our minds that lead to our actions. The purpose of studying intimacy with God is to direct our mind continually to specific thoughts about God and human relationships. Through repetition,

concentration, comprehension, and reflection on biblical texts, we learn to think God's thoughts and adopt God's ways; we grow in our intimacy with God.

Reading 2 Timothy, the last letter attributed to Paul before his death, we recognize Paul's belief in the importance of study, a part of intimacy with God. In the midst of a section advising Timothy on how to handle people in the church, Paul says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved by him, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth" (2 Tim. 2:15). Also, later Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, and correction, and for training in righteousness; so that everyone that belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:13-17).

Paul believed that through the study of the scriptures, unpacking those scriptures, we could open ourselves to the mind of God. In absorbing the mind of God, we would be transformed by the working of the Holy Spirit to think the thoughts of God. For Paul study is to transform lives to reveal the kingdom of God. As we learn the ways of God, we are led to yield our lives to the service of God. Through this interchange, this communion, this fostering of intimacy with God through biblical preaching, God is pleased with us, and we are satisfied, confident, and secure in God. Study and biblical preaching is work, intentional dedication to learning and applying the lessons God has for us. Study, biblical preaching is not for the realm of the mind alone; it is for the whole person as the whole person is transformed by the Great Teacher.

Jesus was a man of deep and abiding faith. Jesus lived a relationship with God that was strong, certain, and rigorous. Jesus yielded his life to God's will. Learning and living God's will was the rhyme and rhythm of Jesus' days. To engage people

meaningfully, Jesus had to withdraw in solitude to know God's will. We know that after Jesus began a public ministry, Jesus would withdraw from the crowds to places of solitude to commune with God.

Following Jesus' baptism, he spent 40 days in solitude in the wilderness (Matt 4:1-11). Due to its positioning at the beginning of the gospel account and following Jesus' baptism, this period of solitude was the guiding and affirming encounter where God prepared Jesus. In the wilderness experience, Jesus learned to be alone and deal with his innermost shattered self. This is not to imply that to be shattered is to sin, to be shattered is not to have been led to a focused direction. In solitude, all of Jesus' other concerns evaporated as God led Jesus to a focus. It was time for Jesus to begin what we call public ministry that would lead to the salvation of the world through Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection.

In solitude, Jesus encountered Satan and God. Jesus learned to discern the voices that we all hear. Solitude was a tool used by God to teach Jesus who Jesus was and what God required. Jesus learned the lures of Satan, used through the ages to entice people into destruction. Jesus also learned to trust the scriptures even when other voices were louder, more attractive, and Jesus was exhausted. Ultimately, Jesus preferred to die rather than listen to a voice other than God's.

Jesus would come away from the crowds, and God would offer to teach. Jesus shared the innermost parts of God, exposing questions, circumstances, opening to the will of God. God would share with Jesus, making Jesus aware of those things deep within God's will, deep abiding confidence in pleasing God. In solitude, Jesus learned to be alone and become filled so that Jesus could be with others in a meaningful way.

As with the original disciples and those to follow, Jesus was not using solitude to become in some sense perfect. Solitude was a part of growing more intimate with God so that Jesus more fully pleased God. Jesus focused on solitude, becoming more intimate with God. Through Jesus, being the paradigm of living a holy life, wholly yielding and always pleasing to God, we learn practices of developing union and intimacy with God. Solitude was a bedrock practice of Jesus out of which God gave Jesus' life direction.

What Jesus learned in solitude was lived out for the benefit of the people. Jesus entered into solitude believing life was to be lived in the direction of God and for the benefit of others. From the quietness of solitude, Jesus went into the noise of the crowd empowered and directed by God. Jesus' words and actions were in harmony with God because they were the words and actions of God. Everything Jesus said and did was born out of Jesus's intimacy with God. The beauty of Jesus was the beauty of God. Indeed God was entirely within Jesus. The biblical preacher following the steps of Jesus will learn that moment of solitude, a practice of purification and focus, a part of deepening intimacy with God.

Biblical Preaching and the Practice of Service

Another practice the biblical preacher may seek to obtain is the practice of service by examining the life and story of Lydia. Lydia is only mentioned in Acts 16, but the circumstances under which she is mentioned tell us of a person of service flowing from a heart of gratitude toward God. Paul and the companions went out to speak with the faithful, and the text tells us that Lydia was among them, "The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul" (Acts 16:14). She and her household were baptized, and she prevailed upon the men to stay with her, so they did.

Lydia was a new believer in Jesus. The text says she “urged” and “prevailed upon” Paul and his companions to stay with her. Her reasoning is interesting, “If you have judged me faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home” (Acts 16:15). She understood faithful service to God to be lived out in faithful service to God’s people. There existed a direct correlation between love for God and love for God’s people. As in a relationship of love with a friend, the joy of service is an integral part, so a love relationship between the biblical preacher, text, and God will result in joyful service.

Through her service, Lydia became aware of the broader love and joy of God. While some biblical preachers are afraid that service to others result in being taken advantage of, Lydia demonstrates that in service to God, God became intimate with her through service. Many fear that service to others will kill them, and God affirms that observation and promise that through this service of death to oneself, God will resurrect us. In service Lydia went beyond herself, she died and found her life in God. Lydia’s heart was opened to the Lord, and the discipline of service was her grateful response.

Service for Lydia and the biblical preacher are acts of gratitude and worship and ultimately fosters intimacy with God. Through her service, she lost her life in God and gained a new life as a gift from God to be lived out under God’s direction. As our will dies, we are nurtured in how to believe in God’s pleasure, live with God’s name, on God’s behalf. The biblical preacher’s life becomes a sacrifice of service, pleasing God. Ordinary acts, daily routines are offerings lifted up, poured out to God in service. We are God’s, and we know God’s pleasure, being transformed and deeply satisfied, confident and secure in God.

Biblical Preaching and Christian History

Just as the Bible is full of testimonies of people experiencing intimacy with God, so is history. This section will look through the centuries recalling the experiences of people who adopted intimacy with God as a lifestyle of communion with God. It will not only review testimonies of personal experiences, but it will also review literature that teaches those who listen to sermons, how biblical preachers can foster intimacy with God.

Intimacy with God is a part of the lifestyle of the faithful. History has preserved for us both testimonies of intimacy and instructions for achieving intimacy. Understanding intimacy with God is gleaned from studying the lives of biblical characters who have lived intimacy with God. This section will review selected testimonies and instructions given to us by history, continuing the pursuit to discover intimacy as a part of our relationship with God.

Intimacy with God is both the focusing of the mind on and the opening the heart to God. While eastern religions intimacy with God means seeking to empty, Christian intimacy with God seeks to fill the mind with thoughts of God motivated from a heart full of longing for God. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* cautions us that union with God developed and enjoyed during intimacy is not an intellectual pursuit but a pursuit of intimacy, of love between lovers.⁵ He teaches us that there exists a cloud of darkness, a cloud of unknowing between God and us. If we are to know God, we must “strike that cloud of unknowing between God and us with a sharp dart of longing love, and on no

⁵ James Walsh, *The Cloud of Unknowing* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981), 65, 74.

account whatever think of giving up.”⁶ Repeatedly he tells us of the work we must do to know God intimately, and of the grace God must demonstrate to allow for such unions.

For this to happen, we must also place a cloud of forgetting beneath us, to separate us from all creation, from all distractions.⁷ We must enter solitude of heart and mind focusing our attention on God while opening our hearts to be united with God. Good and evil thoughts alike can be distractions from focusing our attention on God.

So, when you feel by the grace of God that he is calling you to this work, and you intend to respond, lift your heart to God with humble love. And really mean God himself who creates you, and bought you, and graciously called you to this state of life. And think no other thought of him. It all depends on your desire. A naked intention directed to God, and himself alone, is wholly sufficient.⁸

The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* takes his personal experience of growing in intimacy with God and wrote a book teaching others how to experience the same. Written in the latter half of the fourteenth century and still used today, it demonstrates the continuity and development of learning, practicing, and teaching intimacy with God as a necessary part of experiencing God. The author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* teaches us how to achieve intimacy with God, how to experience relationally to God.

Henri J. M. Nouwen, a Catholic priest who was a teacher and writer about spiritual life, published his journal from December 1987 to June 1988 (the most challenging time of his life.) The full title of the book is *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*.⁹ The journal was not written with the intent to be

⁶ Ibid., 68.

⁷ Ibid., 66.

⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁹ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996).

published. However, following Nouwen's journey through this dark time, his friends convinced him that others could benefit from his insights into intimacy through the experience. So, he agreed and had his profoundly personal journal published.

To read the work is to enter Nouwen's soul. He can speak so honestly, so accurately, and use so few words to describe his hurt, confusion, and distance from God's wholeness and health. In his moments of intimacy with God, Nouwen hears the inner voice of love leading him deeper, taking him farther, affirming the pathway through this darkness leading to God's light. The book is a testimony of God's faithfulness, of God's love. It is a story of how Nouwen learned from God through the confusion, the pain, and brokenness of his life, as he faced his nothingness.

The journal reads in the tradition of wisdom literature. Born out of personal experience and observation, combined with deep and focused intimacy with God and creation, Nouwen is guided by the Holy Spirit to write truths. These truths are lights, guiding us to live consistent with God's desire made known to us by grace yet evident in the real intimacy of the created order. For example:

Do not tell everyone your story. You will only end up feeling more rejected. You have to close yourself to the outside world so you can enter your own heart and the heart of God through your pain. God will send to you the people with whom you can share your anguish, who can lead you closer to the true source of love.¹⁰

You have to live through your pain gradually and thus deprive it of its power over you. Yes, you must go to the place of your pain, but only when you have gained some new ground. When you enter your pain simply to experience it in its rawness, it can pull you away from where you want to go.¹¹

Your true identity is as a child of God. This is the identity you have to accept. Once you have claimed it and settled it, you can live in a world that gives you

¹⁰ Ibid., 4.

¹¹ Ibid., 26.

much joy as well as pain. You can receive the praise as well as the blame that comes to you as an opportunity for strengthening your basic identity because the identity that makes you free is anchored beyond all human praise and blame. You belong to God, and it is as a child of God that you are sent into the world.¹²

Every page of the book records Nouwen's very personal experience of struggle that God uses to mature him, and us. Through intimacy with God, Nouwen was guided to record the wisdom of God, and Nouwen experienced a deeper intimacy with God.

Intimacy with God requires work. It requires a longing and commitment to God.

Intimacy with God is a conversation with God. Relationships require conversation, and our relationship with God is no different. As we grow closer to one another our conversations, our intimacy changes, becoming more communion of souls than a verbal exchange of information. Communion, intimacy with God, requires work, intentionality, a longing to be close, intimate. Teresa of Avila experienced ongoing communion, intimacy with God and in the sixteenth century wrote a book entitled *Interior Castle* to teach others how to enter more fully into intimacy with God through communion with God.

Teresa likens the human soul to a diamond in which are many rooms. Intimacy with God is entering into ourselves more deeply to commune with God who has taken up residence within us. Many of us stay in the outer courts, unwilling to enter into the inner rooms of exertion to become more intimate with God. The journey into the inner rooms of the castle is the soul's journey toward perfection and union with God. Each step is a step of suffering and death as sins are exposed and crucified. Each step is also a step of life which is experienced as intimacy with God and transformation into Christ-likeness

¹² Ibid., 70.

results in abundant joy. Teresa uses the metaphor of a silkworm that does the work of preparing its cocoon and then enters into a cocoon awaiting transformation. Spinning the cocoon is renouncing self-love and self-will and attachment to earthly things, letting the silkworm die. “When the silkworm is in this state of intimacy, it is quite dead to the world, it then comes out a little white butterfly.”¹³ She goes on to explain that the soul that has been transformed suffers, it cannot help it, because of the love and life it has found in God results in distress when God is offended.

Teresa describes seven rooms or mansions within the diamond of our souls. In the seventh room, a shift takes place between union or betrothal to God and consummation or marriage with God.¹⁴ Teresa has experienced and through grace can explain stages of a journey that takes us deeper into ourselves and deeper into intimacy with God. She acknowledges that it takes time and hard work, however, she also emphasizes that through the grace of God intimacy with God is possible for all. Teresa affirms the cliché that we are each a diamond in the rough and that through hard-sustained work and increasing communion, intimacy with God can be experienced.

Frank Laubach was a man who took intimacy with God seriously and worked hard to make conversation with God the guiding influence of his life. Learning from the gospel accounts, Laubach strove to live in communion with God just as Jesus did. As he experienced the intimacy of God through constant communion with God, Laubach grew

¹³ Saint Teresa of Avila and Dennis Joseph Billy, *Interior Castle: The Classic Text*, Classics with Commentary (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2007), 106.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 212.

in his faith and sought to lead the rest of the church through example. He wrote a fascinating book called *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World*.¹⁵

In the book, Laubach gives dozens of ideas of how to accomplish his challenge which is to be in communion with God continually. Laubach builds on his experience of an all-day conversation and gives testimonials of this kind of sustained conversation encouraging the reader to do the same.

While on a train in Pennsylvania and staring at the back of woman's head and while praying for her he records:

She suddenly turned around and said, "What the world needs is more religion." Are you a missionary?" I asked her.
 "No," she said, "my husband is the conductor."
 "You must be a very religious woman," I said.
 "No," she replied, "I am a Methodist, but I don't do much at it."
 "Then why," I asked, "did you say the world needs more religion?"
 "I don't know," she replied, "but I felt like talking about it."
 Something of this kind is an everyday occurrence with us who pray for everybody we meet. It never happens unless we are praying.¹⁶

He teaches us how to be intimate with God for all people in our congregations as well as the many that we come in contact with throughout the day by whispering, "Jesus." He says to envision Jesus coming to them, touching them, filling them. Laubach teaches us, proves to us through his life that we can and must be in the constant conversation to have intimacy with God.

At least we shall reach a point where only sleep itself interrupts the day full of prayer—sleep, prayer's sunset; awakening, prayer's new sunrise. Then we shall

¹⁵ Frank Charles Laubach, *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World* (New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1946).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

see answers coming in ever-increasing wonder. One's heart aches to find so few who share this ecstasy.¹⁷

Laubach's testimonial reads like the gospels themselves. His communion, intimacy with God, was lived out dynamically in a relationship with people. He lived differently because he prayed and was intimate with God. He knew God personally because he conversed with God. Laubach changed the world because he knew God. Fostering intimacy with God through biblical preaching is not an ideal or idea, it is a way of life. Laubach testifies and exposes our complacency. As with all of those who teach and practice biblical preaching, Laubach emphasizes the need of our desire for God. God is waiting for our desire.

Biblical Preaching and the Practice of Study

In *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading*,¹⁸ Susan Muto teaches us how to be intimate with God through study. Acting on the premise that all people at some point in their lives, to varying degrees, ask soul-searching questions about the meaning of their existence and what happens after death. While everyone asks the questions, answers are pursued at varying degrees of intensity and endurance. With all relationships desire for intimacy cannot be forced—it must be chosen. Realizing this, Muto does not attempt to sweet talk the reader into intimacy with God through study; she merely presents a program preceded by guidelines to help those who are searching. She teaches us how to

¹⁷ Ibid., 63.

¹⁸ Susan Annette Muto, *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading* (Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976).

be intimate with God based on the belief that answers to our questions come as we work to know God.

In these guidelines, Muto provides practical advice on how to set up and maintain a lifestyle of intimacy with God, and she also shares phases of motivation and distractions that often exhaust the pilgrim and the biblical preacher. By providing the information, she hopes the student will be prepared and hence persist, growing through the challenges. Her goal is not to provide information for head knowledge but to provide the resources to aid in the transformation of lives into union and intimacy with God. A part of intimacy is knowing one's lover and one's self. The guidelines, part one, prepare the biblical preacher with structure, and the process in part two give the biblical preacher biographical lessons to learn about the process and enjoyment of others' journeys into intimacy with God.

In a relationship with God, our questions are answered or clarified. Our questions may drive the biblical preacher to study, but a transformation takes place while studying as we get to know God. The study, intimacy with God, becomes a conversation between biblical preacher and Teacher, as a growing love relationship. The teachings and Teacher are one, and the biblical preacher becomes part of that unity. Muto provides a thorough process teaching us how to study by combining readings of the Bible with readings of spiritually mature people throughout history. She continues the process of intimacy with God by teaching us how to enter the process of intimacy with God.

In *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*,¹⁹ Roland Bainton tells the story of a man who was changed and hence changed the world because he was intimate with God through study. He bounced around a little eventually teaching at a university in Wittenberg, Germany. Luther did not study for information but studied to know God so that he could live pleasingly with God. He took his abhorrent sinfulness seriously and spent much time in confession seeking to rid himself of his offensiveness to God. Studying was a part of his increasing intimacy with God.

While studying the book of Romans, Luther embraced a new interpretation believing now that faith and faith alone justifies. His study led him to a deep abiding intimacy with God and condemnation from the Catholic Church at the same time. After posting and defending his new belief, Luther was excommunicated, and attempts were made on his life. While in hiding he translated the New Testament into everyday German, which he was convinced was necessary for the maturity of the typical German Christian, but the Catholic Church disagreed. Luther's quest was to know God, be intimate with God. He began in the Catholic tradition with no intention of causing problems; he believed that tradition was accurate, and therefore he submitted to its teachings. Then his study eventually brought him to conclusions that were not consistent with the Catholic tradition, and he suffered the consequences.

For the whole of his life, Luther continued to study and change, as he grew closer to God. As a result of his study, he married and had a family, wrote a catechism, began what we call the first Protestant denomination and led the university where he taught to

¹⁹ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther* (New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950).

set a new course in theological studies. His behavior flowed directly from his studies and his pursuit of desiring God. Luther applied all: his abilities to study the Bible, praying and opening himself to be taught by the Holy Spirit of God, as well as considering the input of his contemporaries. As he became convinced of the way of God, he would adjust his teachings and behavior accordingly, being willing to suffer the consequences. Luther experienced study as communion with God, a necessary part of intimacy and worship of and with God.

Biblical Preaching and Worship

To worship is to know, feel, and experience the resurrected Christ, and with this understanding, Thomas A. Kempis teaches in his book *The Imitation of Christ*,²⁰ 114 lessons of how to worship. God alone being the One we are to worship, Kempis teaches how to become more intimate with God by becoming more like Christ. By imitating Christ, we experience a growing union with God. Christ teaches us how to worship by being wholly absorbed into the will and way of God, by entirely yielding one's life to God. The gospels tell the story of Jesus doing this, recording the events. Kempis teaches us how to be like Jesus so that the events of our lives will also be the experience of worship, well pleasing to God.

Worship begins by prostrating oneself before God acknowledging God's full authority over all. From this posture we open ourselves, waiting to hear from God. Kempis masterfully teaches us that God is not found in much knowledge, vain affections, or many words, but God is found in humility, honesty, as well as simplicity of prayer and

²⁰ Thomas A. Kempis and William C. Creasy, *The Imitation of Christ* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007).

the scriptures—getting to know God and also getting to know ourselves. Through worship, a posture and attitude of adoration and vulnerability, an inner conversation is fostered, through moments of silence and speech God exposes issues of the heart, adjustments God would like to make that would lead to a deeper intimacy with God. Following both demonstrates and builds trust leading to a higher openness and stronger relationship for the biblical preacher.

Through worship, we not only lose ourselves in God, but we find our fullness as well. Some might say this appears as a contradiction; the truth is that we are only complete when we are entirely God's. In worship, Kempis teaches us that we please God by giving God our whole selves and God makes our joy abundant, our lives complete, by nurturing us to live God's life, carry out God's will, embrace our place in God's creation. An abiding joy, an eternal hope is only realized by imitating Christ through a fully yielded life in our worship of God. Kempis teaches us how to yield as Christ yielded, live as Christ lived, serve as Christ served, love as Christ loved, all in worship.

St. John of the Cross tells his story of union with God through his experiences of worshipping during the purging of his soul. St. John was a priest in the Carmelite Order and was determined to reform the Order back to their contemplative roots. He worked with Teresa of Avila. Together they are considered the founders of the Discalced Carmelites. Many of his Carmelites vehemently disagreed with him and kidnapped him, imprisoning him for nine months. Through these experiences of hardship and rejection, St. John understood God to be purging him, purifying his soul in growing union, intimacy with God. St. John in worship received direction, followed, and suffered. It is the active

and passive dynamic of growing in intimacy with God. We work, and God works, we act and are acted upon all in worship, for the glory of God.

St. John's life is a testimony to this process resulting from worship. He wrote to help others grow in intimacy with God. St. John defines worship for us as a commitment in a relationship, a yearning to be pleasing to God for God. The experience is active and passive, and in the relationship, the union is developed, enhanced and enjoyed. St. John names our responsibilities to work and wait, persist and be patient, give and receive. Through sustained worship we enter darkness and are led by the Light, we get to know as we are known, we change as we are transformed.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Life Together*²¹ teaches us that true worship leads to the celebration when the members of the community are personally in a relationship with Jesus Christ. A community of celebration is not an idea that someone thought up once-upon-a-time. Fantasy has no place in real Christian celebration. Humans are vulnerable to wishful thinking and falling in love with a personal dream or vision rather than the living God. Bonhoeffer argues for realism that is rooted in the day to day struggles of a personal relationship with all the baggage that goes along with those struggles. These relationships are founded upon a typical relationship with Jesus Christ, the Word of God. Therefore, being spiritual in its essence, Christian celebration flows from a community mutually following Christ in love for and service to one another.

Following the understanding that Christian community is rooted in the reality of a personal relationship with Jesus and not some personal or political fantasy, Bonhoeffer

²¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer et al., *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005).

teaches a way of celebrating the day together in fellowship. With the rising of the sun, the community celebrates that Christ is alive. In common devotions, the fellowship reads scripture, sings and prays together. Large portions of scripture are to be read aloud as the community is reminded that their stories, their salvation is founded in the story of God. In the fellowship, each member is a participant in God's story, so the Word determines the course, not one's own heart. Following the reading of scriptures, the community sings songs of praise to God. Together in song, the Church is one, praising, thanking and worshipping God. Following singing, the community prays together, not personal prayers, but prayers on behalf of the entire fellowship. As the fellowship breaks up and each goes about their own work, an attitude of prayer and service guide the heart into following the Word.

Bonhoeffer warns us of the danger of running to the community to escape one's self. Through solitude, silence, meditation, prayer, singing, images, and intercessions, we must do the work to cultivate a personal relationship with the Word, so that when we do enter the community, we can celebrate one and all. Equipped with communal devotions and personal worship, we carry out ministries that build community. Bonhoeffer described these ministries like the ministries of holding one's tongue, meekness, listening, helpfulness, bearing, proclaiming, and authority. In fulfilling these ministries, we both follow the Word and build community leading to the genuine celebration being led and blessed by Jesus. The final point that Bonhoeffer makes is that all of this work is useless without an admission of personal brokenness and sin. Through confession, the power of sin is broken, the angels rejoice, and we are privileged to celebrate with them. In *Life Together*, Bonhoeffer describes celebration that is "the fruit of Christian

community and teaches us how to toil in the fields cultivating so that the fruit can be abundantly and authentically produced.”²²

Biblical Preaching and Music

As we consider the multiple ways that one can or should foster intimacy with God, the biblical preacher may seek to better understand the role, presence, place, and theology of music in the worship of God. From beginning to end, the Bible is full of music and song. The first musician, Jubal, makes his appearance as early as Genesis 4, where we are told that “he was the ancestor of all those who played the lyre and pipe” (Gen. 4:21). Many biblical characters follow in Jubal’s musical footsteps. Miriam sang a song of praise after the Exodus (Exodus 15). Deborah sang after the victory over Sisera (Judges 5). King David played the harp and wrote many of the Psalms (1 Sam. 16:23). The Lord Jesus sang a hymn with his disciples at the last supper (Matt. 26:30) Paul and Silas sang a hymn of praise to God in jail (Acts 16:25), and the book of Revelation tells us that there is plenty of singing in heaven as the heavenly choir joins in praise of God (Rev. 5:9).

The Bible makes it clear that we are not to wait until heaven; it contains frequent exhortations to us to sing. For example:

“Come let us sing for joy to the Lord” (Ps. 95:1).

“Sing to the Lord a new song, for He has done a marvelous thing” (Ps. 98:1).

“Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19).

²² Ibid., 35.

The question being addressed is, “Why?” Why does the Bible encourage us to sing and make music to the Lord? What is the biblical preacher supposed to do with, read about, inwardly digest, and bring from obscurity to reality regarding the theology of music? We will look at the answer shortly. We are to sing to praise God and to encourage one another. However, first, we will consider an answer that is often given today, but which has no basis in scripture.

Some years ago, I went to the conference. After one of our meetings, another pastor came to me and said, “Why don’t you hold up your hands when you sing?” I have nothing against that practice. There are examples of it in the Bible. It can express something physically of what you feel in your heart. So, I asked him, “Why should I?” he replied, “Because if you hold up your hands, you will receive a blessing from God. He will come close to you, and you will feel his presence with you.”

He was expressing the view of many: we meet with God as we sing praise to God, especially when we do so in a particular way. The role of music is to facilitate that encounter. Here are some of the comments I read during a quick look at the back of some Christian music CDs:

“Songs that lift up the name of Jesus, combined with music, which move the body, provide an avenue for the listener to enter into the presence of the Lord.”

“There are many kinds of music: that enables us to enter the presence of God. We hope that this collection will bless you.”

“We are committed to helping people worldwide experience the manifest presence of God.”

Those comments clearly equate “entering God’s presence” with a feeling. That conference I mentioned earlier spoke of “spine-tingling moments of worship.” A friend of mine refers to “inner shiver.” I guess we know what he means. No doubt there have been moments when we have felt our whole bodies tingling. Our emotions have been switched on, and it has become almost as if we have been transported out of ourselves.

We are all different, so the experience of the senses is induced in us by different things. Some find that a dimly lit medieval building, candles, plainsong and formal choirs create a sensory experience for them. Others are left cold by all that. Acoustic guitars, drums, and synthesizers are what they need. That is the moment of pure worship in their minds when they enter the presence of God, and God draws close to them.

They would say that they want to meet with God, but it is the same thing, as they equate meeting with God with a feeling. They are looking for a choir, group or band that will deliver the experience they want. If their spine tingles or their inner shivers, they go home satisfied. They have had a good time at worship. They have met with God. However, have they?

Music has great power to generate emotion. No doubt you have been deeply moved at a concert or just listening to a favorite CD—Beethoven or the Beatles, Rimsky Korsakov or Robbie Williams. However, did you call that an experience of God? How can you be sure that the feeling you had at the Christian church was God’s presence with you rather than just the effect of some good music?

The Bible never teaches that a feeling can take us into the presence of God. If that had been possible, God would have sent us a musician rather than a savior. Only Christ

can take us into the Most Holy Place in heaven, where we have direct access to God through faith, by grace in God.

In many churches today, people experience more music and fewer Bible teachings in a given service. I personally wonder if it is because many do not want to think. They want instead to feel God's presence with them and look to music to give them that feeling. However, we only encounter God through faith in Jesus, not through music. Moreover, how can we have faith in Jesus unless we hear about Jesus? Paul writes, "Faith comes through hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17).

What is more important to a person: music or the Bible? When a person chooses a church, does that person choose the one that has the best music group or the one that teaches the Bible best? To the biblical preacher, music is essential. It is by God's word that God brings us into a relationship with God as we hear about Jesus and put our faith in God. It is also by God's word that we are maintained in our Christian faith as the living God addresses us with both challenges and encouragements.

Some respond by saying, "That is fine; we do need the Bible. However, we also need the Spirit. God speaks to our minds through God's word, but God deals with emotions through God's Spirit." However, that reveals a serious misunderstanding of the relationship between God's word and God's Spirit. The Bible never allows us to split the two. The Spirit of God is the divine author of the Bible and continues to speak through it today (1 Cor. 2:13; 2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Peter 1:21; Heb. 3:7; Rev. 2:7). The Word of God is "the sword of the Spirit" (Eph. 6:17). So, if we want to be in close touch with the work of God the Spirit, it is vital that we listen to God's word.

If the biblical preacher and those hearing the word were to associate the presence of God with experience, what happens when they no longer feel it? They are bound to assume that they are no longer close to God. So, those involved may suffer a crisis of faith when they move from a church with a large music group. "My new church does teach the Bible, but Mrs. Jones's organ playing can never deliver the high that I used to get in the last place."

However, our assurance of God's love does not depend on our feelings. It depends on the finished work of Christ. My feelings cannot take me any closer to God or further from God. If I trust in Christ, then I am already in God's presence by faith, "seated with him in the heavenly realm in Christ Jesus" (Eph. 2:6). So, I must look to Christ if I want assurance, not to my feelings, which go up and down.

Huge expectations are placed on the music within a given setting or Sunday. Musicians are asked to play a priestly role and bring us into the presence of God by producing an experience. Churches are increasingly appointing "worship leaders" who bear the weight of this expectation on their shoulders. If they fail to deliver, they are soon replaced by someone else. The most skillful discover what it is that works for their particular congregation. They know the songs, instruments, and fundamental changes that produce the desired effect. Those musicians are in high demand. Their names appear prominently in all the publicity.

There are inherent dangers in all of this. We can be too quick to give significant responsibilities to those who plan music worship. That young man or woman may be a brilliant guitar player and have a dynamic, upfront manner, but how well does he or she know the Bible? Do the songs he or she chooses indeed teach the truth clearly, or do they

convey unbiblical emphases? Does he or she leave us with a sense of wonder of Christ or just with a warm glow? The best Christian musician will not primarily be seeking to produce an experience, which is easily manipulated once a few techniques are learned. He or she will be pointing to Christ and focusing attention on the truth about Jesus.

If I identify experience with a genuine encounter with God, and only a particular kind of music gives me that experience, then it will be essential to me that that kind of music is played regularly in the church. That will cause no problems if everyone shares my tastes. However, if others feel they need different kinds of music, there is bound to be trouble. That explains why music is one of the most significant causes of division in Christian circles and the biblical preacher needs to be keenly aware of this matter. There is very little tolerance for differing opinions when it comes to music in the church. Particular music styles are associated with an authentic encounter with God. Those with other preferences are dismissed as unspiritual old fuddy-duddies or mindless, or in my particular tradition, frozen chosen. However, the style of music is irrelevant. Of course, we will have our preferences, but they are of no significance compared with the words that we sing. Truth is what matters, not tunes.

All I have said so far has been designed to warn against too high a view of music. However, we must not overcorrect and go to the opposite extreme. The Bible has high regard for the place of singing in the Christian's life and so should we. It gives two reasons why we should sing. First, we should sing to praise God.

The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. Moreover, whatever you do, in word or

deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col. 3:16-17).

Music and song continue to play a vital role in the life of God’s people today. Contemporary culture and modern technology bring new possibilities and new challenges to the music ministry of the church. People’s lives are surrounded by music – television and radio, the background music of video games, the Muzak of shopping malls, CDs, and synthesizers. Much of the time music functions as ‘background’ rather than as an opportunity for serious listening, much less participation. Outside the church, there are few occasions or opportunities in North American culture for people to sing together. Much of the favorite music (including popular Christian music) composed today is for performance rather than for in-depth theological participation.

Secondly, in churches where “the word of God, as contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only infallible rule of faith and practice,” a convincing theology of music must begin with a biblical text. However, among Protestant traditions, there has been not only disagreement on the interpretation of these texts, but also on the question of what weight to give musical references in the Old Testament. Nevertheless, a comprehensive survey of these texts in context ought to be revealing.

It should be taken as the default posture by children of Israel and Christians that Old Testament holds authority when investigating questions of faith and practice. Sadly, some church traditions have ignored this rich heritage, and so we cannot presume to argue theological points from the Old Testament without solid defense. St. Paul’s widely-known statement, “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3:16), in its original context,

explicitly applied to the Old Testament, which were the only scriptures Paul knew. Still, it has been argued by some that since Christians are under the new covenant with Christ and not under the old covenant with Abraham, the Old Testament is not only unbinding but actually must be disregarded regarding informing ecclesiastical practice. The only honest scripture defense of this must be based on the letters of Paul, which contains numerous statements that are often interpreted to be a partial or full negation or removal of the Law under which the Old Covenant life was governed, “Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith” (Gal. 3:24). However, in the gospel of Matthew, Jesus states almost the opposite. Even if the interpreters of Paul are right and he did teach the passing away of the Law, he was a Pharisee: (Acts 23:6), “the Law” for him had a specific identity and scope, and was not synonymous with the authority of all scripture. Judaism traditionally recognized 613 commandments found in Hebrew Scriptures, and these made up the Law. But not an iota, of any of these commandments, mentions music. A passage from Chronicles directly testifies to this distinction, in the narrower context of worship:

Jehoiada assigned the care of the house to the Lord to the Levitical priests whom David had organized to be in charge of the house of the Lord to offer burnt offerings to the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses with rejoicing and singing, according to the order of David (2 Chron. 23:18).

The internal acknowledgment that musical directives were not part of the Law lends even more strength to the argument that there is no scriptural basis for the exclusion of Old Testament teaching on music.

The first scriptural reference to music in a setting of corporate praise is Exodus 15 (the song of Moses given in praise to God for deliverance from the Egyptians). “Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the Lord” (Exod. 15:1), this stands as a model

of corporate singing in worship of God and also demonstrates that God did not expect God's people to ask permission to praise God for God's mighty acts. One argument against instrumental music in corporate worship stipulates that instrumental music was allowed in the Temple, but not until God specifically authorized it. Nowhere does God authorize Moses to have the entire nation of Israel sing to God in corporate praise; there is likewise no authorization for Miriam to use a tambourine nor to incite "all the women" (Exod. 15:20), to dance. Moses' song also establishes the use of imagination to praise God; the text is not limited to literal, dry or calm statements—it is highly exuberant. Within the song is the line, "The Lord is my strength and my song, and he has become my salvation," (Exod. 15:2), which suggests that reasons for singing praise originate not only in God's acts but also in God's character and relationships with God's people.

Deuteronomy 31 and 32 detail the succession of leadership from Moses to Joshua. Moses gives a command that the Levites would read the Law to all Israel every seven years,

so that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and to observe all the words of this law diligently, and so that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God (Deut. 31: 12-13).

But almost immediately after this, God tells Moses that,

then the people will begin to prostitute themselves to foreign gods in their midst, the gods of the land into which they are going; they will forsake me, breaking the covenant that I have made with them (Deut. 31:16).

So, the reading of the law is not expected to be particularly useful in safeguarding the faithful of Israel. For this purpose, God enlists music:

Now, therefore, write this song, and teach it to the Israelites; put it in their mouths, in order that this song may be a witness for me against the Israelites. For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I promised on oath to their ancestors, and they have eaten their fill and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, despising me and breaking my

covenant. And when many terrible troubles come upon them, this song will confront them as a witness, because it will not be lost from the mouths of their descendants. For I know what they are inclined to do even now before I have brought them into the land that I promised them on oath (Deut. 31:19-21).

In this, God implements a preferred method of re-orienting God's people toward a strong faith: through song. God intends that this song will be retained over time and taught to each new generation, and God recognizes as self-evident the power and usefulness of song—that part of the passage could be paraphrased, they may forget my law, and me, but they cannot forget this song once it is engraved in their memories. It is instructive, again, to look at the nature of the song text—it is highly imaginative and emotionally charged, but also densely packed, a high concentration of ideas is encoded into the poetry.

It is natural for us to praise God. It is also natural for us to sing. In the book of James, we find, “Are any among you suffering? They should sing songs of praise” (James 5:13). In the act of singing, we find ways in which to allow our emotions to get out. As discussed earlier, we should not equate emotions with the definitive presence of God. We can experience emotion, feeling, or some other visceral phenomenon, but that does not constitute in fact that we have met God. We cannot make the assumption that we have experienced or met God just because we have a feeling. It may merely be the fact that our preference for what is happening has caused us to enjoy the beauty of the moment or that the song may have merely moved us emotionally.

Be aware I do feel that we can and do get emotional about our walk with God. Many of us in more traditional churches are scared or timid to show our emotions. We can with full voice sing the most amazing truths of our faith and journey and not show one iota of emotion. Sometimes songs will assist us in expressing feelings and emotions.

Other times, songs will bring forth emotions, as the music helps us to feel something of the wonder of the truths we are singing.

The fact that we sing to praise God should, by all means, express that our songs be focused on God and not us. For example, some of them are very personal, “I love you, O Lord, my strength (Ps. 18:1) or Psalm 89, “I will sing of your steadfast love” (Ps. 89:1). However, we must remember that the psalmist’s words are not merely declarations of the psalmist’s feelings.

An examination of many contemporary songs used in worship reveals they put emphasis on us, how we feel about God, and what we will do for God. We must confess that we can speak of our abiding love for God, only after we are reminded of God’s love for us.

Paying close attention to the theology of hymnody should also include the biblical preacher giving heed to the words we sing. Participants in worship can become so used to singing certain melodies, they forget to pay attention to the words and what they are saying. Musicians should seek to use their gifts to play, and not seek to impress others. Everything we do can be an expression of praise for God. Psalm 150 speaks,

Praise the LORD!
 Praise God in his sanctuary;
 praise him in his mighty firmament!
 Praise him for his mighty deeds;
 praise him according to his surpassing greatness!
 Praise him with trumpet sound;
 praise him with lute and harp!
 Praise him with tambourine and dance;
 praise him with strings and pipe!
 Praise him with clanging cymbals;
 praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
 Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!
 Praise the LORD!

Any instrument can be used to praise God at any time. In Ephesians, Paul is not urging us to receive a previous experience when he instructs us to “to be filled with the Spirit” (Eph. 5:18). If one pays close attention to the actual verb that Paul uses, it is in the present continuous. Perhaps if we were to translate that same passage literally, it might read, “keep on being filled with the Spirit.”

In Colossians Paul writes,

“Let the words of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”

We are to sing to each other in praise to God. Christians since the third century have used Psalm 95 in Matins, Morning Prayer, singing “Come, let us sing to the Lord; let us shout for joy to the Rock of our salvation” (Ps.95:1).

So, when we sing, we are not merely a collection of people praising God. We are a community of faith talking to one another. The revelation of truth about God simultaneously brings praise to God and encouragement to us. Most songs, therefore, have two hearers. We should keep both in mind as we choose songs and as we sing them. Remember it is in the beauty of the gifts God gave us that prompts us to use the gift for the glory to God.

Biblical Preaching and Arts and Imagery

The Word of God tells us God is the original Creator (Gen. 1:1). God created the original creation from nothing. Not only does God create, but God also reflects upon, evaluates, and enjoys that which God creates declaring them to be good and beautiful (Gen. 1:31, Ps. 8:3-4). God provided a beautiful place (Gen. 1:19-20, Ps. 104:30-31).

God gave us the ability to enjoy the imagery and beauty in that place (Gen. 2:15). God wanted us to experience imagery and beauty not just view it as an observer.

The imagery within the context of the physical plant of the church and the imagery within the text can and are very important for the biblical preacher. To recognize the images before us and those within the text, the biblical preacher begins to use those aesthetic qualities of perception that are not necessarily evident to the conscious mind. For example, God has created us to reflect God (Gen. 1:26-27), and we are gifted with and capable of beautiful creation, reflection, self-evaluation, and visual communication. The gift of imagery is given to enhance the Tabernacle, specifically in Bezalel (Exod. 31:1-14), who was filled “with the Spirit of God in wisdom, understanding, in knowledge, and all kinds of craftsmanship.” Oholiab shared some of the same gifts as they worked together on the furniture and fittings for the Tabernacle (Exod. 31:6). In 2 Chronicles 2:13-14 Hiram-abi is mentioned as a gifted man in every area of art. Two men alone could not produce everything needed. Therefore, God gifted female artists for the work on curtains, accessories, uniforms, and hangings for “glory and for beauty” (Exod. 28:2, 35:25, 30-35). David had musicians and singers appointed to serve in the Tabernacle (2 Chron. 15:16).

Imagery is to be found throughout the Old and New Testament. The biblical preacher may seek to find ways to use the imagery present and those reflected in the text to the hearer to experience intimacy with God. Both Isaiah and Paul speak of God as the Potter, one who shapes God’s creation as God pleases (Isa. 29:16; Rom. 9:21). The Psalms are inundated with statements of imagery and beauty. David is the most famous artist: a poet, dancer, writer, singer, musician, architect, and appreciator of God’s imagery

(2 Sam. 6:14; 16:14-23; Ps. 27:1-6; 149:4). God made humanity to live with imagery and beauty in their lives, placing the man and woman in Eden, the Garden of God (Gen.2:15). Beautiful music, imagery, moments, words, sounds, and people all make us appreciate the creation of God, which makes us appreciate God all the more intimately. Jesus speaks of a woman's worship as beautiful when she breaks an alabaster jar of precious ointment on Jesus' feet, to which Jesus says to the disciples' grumbling, "Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a beautiful service for me" (Matt. 26:7-10).

Jesus was a storyteller. The stories Jesus told were metaphors, word paintings. The whole concept of spiritual gifts envisions for the reader that God enables every believer to reflect God's beauty of imagery and grace through those gifts that are made to "create" love and community in the church (1 Cor.; Eph. 4:1; 1 Peter 4:10).

From my own reading, it appears that the annals of history are apparently full of testimonials and explanations of lives and ways the biblical preacher can assist in fostering intimacy with God. Biblical preachers throughout the centuries have lived and fostered intimacy with God by embracing the lifestyle of seeking to find multiple ways of unpacking the text, using hymnody, and acknowledging the imagery present in the nave and in the text, to foster a more profound, authentic intimacy with God. As people experience intimacy with God, they record not only the dynamics of their relationship with God but also the stages of their journey. We as biblical preachers are privileged to have not only the heritage of the writings, imagery, and hymns, but also have the Creator to help us foster intimacy in our preaching, with each other, and ultimately with God.

CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The approach used in writing this Literature Review chapter is one that begins by taking a step back and looking deep within myself to find the path that I had taken in my journey toward intimacy with God. There were a good many published works on intimacy with God but most of them referred to a method, a practice, a spiritual discipline leading to intimacy. None spoke directly to the subject of using biblical preaching, as described in this project, as a means or path to fostering intimacy with God.

Hans Urs von Balthasar was a Swiss theologian and priest who was nominated to be a cardinal of the Catholic Church. He is considered by many to be one of the most important theologians of the twentieth century. Von Balthasar is very eclectic in his approach, sources, and interests to intimacy and remains difficult to categorize. An example of his eclecticism was his long study and conversations with influential Reformed Swiss theologian, Karl Barth, of whose work he wrote the first Catholic analysis and response.

My biblical preaching crisis and the broader contemporary crisis in my intimacy with God is described and lamented by Michael Pasquarello:

The most unquestioned homiletic assumption of our time: that the primary task of preaching is a matter of finding the right rhetorical technique, homiletic style, and evangelistic strategy to translate and make Christianity useful, appealing, relevant, and entertaining in terms dedicated by a consumerist culture. This understanding of preaching in practice shifts the weight of dependence from the efficacy of the

Spirit to an almost exclusive dependence on human personality, ingenuity, and skill.¹

Pasquarello does not deny the importance of skill or technique. He is, however, rightfully concerned with the shifting “weight of dependence” from the Spirit to technique. The shift of dependence eventually leads to a divorce between biblical preacher and biblical preaching, witness and words. Andre Resner notes the divorce when he writes, “To preach the cross of Christ and not to live out the cross for others effects a separation of witness: one’s lived witness is separated from one’s verbal witness.”²

The different approaches to preaching (i.e., rhetorical technique versus spiritual technique) can be evidenced by the focal point of the preacher in the homiletic process. My homiletic process, over time, became consumed with matters such as putting together an intelligent and relevant sermon, finding biblical text that would fit somehow with a captivating story I heard, or utilizing props and multimedia images that would help me to communicate the message most effectively. While these concerns are not necessarily wrong and might well be considered, they are not the first and primary focal points for the biblical preacher, in my view and in the view of authors Pasquarello and Resner. These matters focus exclusively on rhetorical technique and can be addressed without any relational connection to the Christ whom the biblical preacher is called to proclaim.

When intimacy with God through biblical preaching is viewed as a spiritual discipline and not merely a rhetorical technique, the biblical preacher begins with a

¹ Michael Pasquarello, *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006), 166.

² André Resner, *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999), 149.

different set of focal concerns that drive the homiletic process. Intimacy with God through biblical preaching as a spiritual discipline causes the preacher to be consumed with what God is saying through the text to the preacher and to the church according to the pattern of Christ through the text. The process of developing and delivering Sunday's sermon can and should be a maintained congruence between the message (Christ) and the messenger (biblical preacher) so that the divine wisdom proclaimed shapes the people of God to live into the intimacy of the story of God revealed in scripture. These primary issues cannot be addressed unless the biblical preacher has an innate relationship with the Triune God, the One who must drive the homiletics process for preaching to have an intimacy with God beyond the scope of human rhetorical ability (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God.³

The intimate relationship of the biblical preacher, what I define as a deep identification with and abiding grace in Christ, adds something to a sermon that mere technology cannot. Throughout the history of the church, many individuals have written about this something, though the literature over the past several decades seems scant at best. These historical thinkers and writers, artists and composers suggest that “the something” that draws listeners into a biblical preaching event beyond eloquence of the

³ Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation for All Scriptural References*.

sermon is the ethos of the biblical preacher. Richard Baxter, in the later 1600's, affirms this reality by stating:

All work must be done spiritually, as by one who is possessed by the Holy Ghost. There is in some men's preaching a spiritual strain which spiritual hearers can discern and relish, and in some men, this sacred tincture is so wanting that, even when they speak of spiritual things, the manner is such as if they were common matter.⁴

While rhetorical eloquence can most certainly assist the biblical preacher in the homiletic process, the ethos of the preacher is a more significant, or at least equal, factor in the power of Christian proclamation. John H. Westerhoff directs his readers to a key biblical verse. "Christian ethos can be defined as faithful obedience to the Great Commission which is to love God and love people" (Luke 10:27).⁵ This love is not only taught but modeled by Christ and incarnated in the life of the biblical preacher through the consistent and authentic practice of the spiritual discipline of intimacy with God that promotes these two loves. Charles B. Bugg puts it this way: "Genuine intimacy with God will heighten one's capacity to love God and love others."⁶

Love for God and others, as embodied by Jesus, demanded extreme self-sacrifice. This love goes well beyond surface sentimentality. That is, Jesus' love for God was evidenced by the cruciformity of his will to God's will, and Jesus' love for others was evidenced by the cruciformity of Jesus' well-being for the needs of others. Cruciformity demands the subordination of personal ego, ambition, will, and desire in favor of God's glory and the well-being of people. The biblical preacher's love for God

⁴ Richard Baxter and Hugh Martin, *The Reformed Pastor* (London: SCM Press, 1956), 138.

⁵ John H. Westerhoff and College of Preachers, *Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching*, 1st ed. ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 27.

⁶ Charles B. Bugg, *Preaching from the Inside Out* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 37.

and others, which heightens ethos, will demand no less a sacrificial subordination. Resner describes this costly love when he writes, “The preacher’s life is to be a cruciform life, consonant with the message of the cross.”⁷

Marva Dawn alludes to the practical self-sacrifice entailed by a preacher’s cruciformity, writing, “Unless I die to myself and my pride, I have nothing to give those who hear my sermons.”⁸ Self-sacrificial cruciformity, loving as Jesus loved, is quite a challenge. This kind of love cannot ultimately be developed by trying harder or being nicer. Nor is the cultivation of this love merely a matter of trying to imitate Christ. The only way for the preacher to love like Christ is to abide in Christ so that the actual love of Christ itself flows through the preacher’s life and preaching.

As stated in John 5:1-15, Jesus called his followers to “abide” in him and then immediately respond to this call with a challenge to love as he loved. Karoline Lewis in her book suggests the following when interpreting the word abide, “but in Jesus, not only will God be seen, but the entire sensorium of sight, sound, feeling, taste and hearing will now be possible in experiencing and knowing God.”⁹ Jesus recognized and taught his disciples that the only way for them to love as he did was for them to remain as intimately connected to him as possible. Spiritual disciplines are one of the main ways of developing and maintaining this intimate connection with Christ so that “the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16) develops in those who follow Christ. Authentic engagement with God through disciplines that incorporate biblical preaching, prayer, and fellowship

⁷ Resner, *Preacher and Cross*, 150.

⁸ Marva Dawn, *“Not What, but Who?” What’s the Matter with Preaching Today?* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 79.

⁹ Karoline M. Lewis, *John* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014), 10.

enable this abiding by Christ that fosters the development of these two loves in the life of the biblical preacher. The love of Christ cultivated through the biblical preacher's engagement in the spiritual discipline enhances the preaching ethos that gets a hearing and is the basis for the homiletic process.

Based on my observations, countless conversations with people who listen to biblical preaching today, this Christian ethos is lacking on the preaching landscape. Several factors may contribute to the problem. For one thing, the pastoral ministry can become so demanding of one's time and energy that so little of both are leftover for the cultivation of Christian ethos through biblical preaching as a spiritual discipline. Another factor is the ease with which preachers become infatuated with acquiring better technique to enhance their eloquence. The development of rhetorical skills, of course, is not, in and of itself, a hazard. A problem only exists when the preacher is more concerned about becoming a better orator than becoming a better lover of Christ and others, in other words, more concerned with technique than spirituality. This productivity can lead to what John Wesley calls "practical atheism." Although most preachers would profess their deep dependence upon God, the practice of developing and delivering sermons can potentially become atheistic in their overreliance upon scientific methodology and their under-reliance upon revelation, wisdom, and power from God.

Dawn alludes to the problem of "practical atheism" in preaching today:

Our society so much values credentials, expertise, savvy, technique—but these can so easily be used to manipulate and deceive. . . . The question, instead, is whether my preaching will spur them more to love God and their neighbors. . . . I am the problem with my preaching when I do not rely on the Holy Spirit to produce the results of my sermons.¹⁰

¹⁰ Dawn, *"Not What, but Who?"*, 82.

Dawn's comments challenge me and all biblical preachers who tend to tackle the preaching task with more self-reliance than Spirit-dependence. Spirit-driven preaching, not technique-driven preaching, is what enhances the Christian ethos of the biblical preacher and the impact of the preaching event because it draws attention and bears witness to the Triune God. Oden writes bluntly, "No amount of technical instruction or objectives data gathering can finally call preaching into being. It cannot be reduced to art or natural talent."¹¹ Preaching is fundamentally a spiritual discipline.

Some might present the argument that preachers are like the artist ghost in C. S. Lewis' *The Great Divorce*.¹² The artist ghost focuses more on the craft of the art than what the art is intended to convey. Similarly, biblical preachers often become more enamored with the technicality of the craft than the Christ the homiletic craft is intended to reveal. The craft (the how) is important and should be carefully approached and developed. However, Christ (the who) must have the more prominent place in the heart, mind, and soul of the biblical preacher. This Christocentric prioritization is essential because the ultimate goal of preaching is not merely the holy wisdom and love that invites people deeper into Christ. This goal cannot be achieved with better skill or technique alone. It can be facilitated by the biblical preacher's Christian ethos, which is fostered as a spiritual discipline through intimacy with God, as evidenced by the cruciform love of God.

¹¹ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983), 139.

¹² C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce* (New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1946), 83.

The power of music is also evident in the Christian world, the biblical preacher would be wise to heed the depth of theology reflected in the hymns chosen and sung on a given Sunday. One church leader has said, “I do not mind who writes the theological books so long as I can write the hymns.”¹³ Watson in this quote was reflecting on the significant influence, power, and depth of intimacy with God, that our songs have on our theology. The heretic Arius, who denied the divinity of Christ in the Fourth Century, used hymns and choruses with catchy tunes to spread the message. But if the words are good, the effects can be very positive.

Some were verses of scripture literally put to music. “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, they follow me” is one example. Other songs were distillations of biblical teachings. “At the cross of Jesus, a pardon is complete; love and justice mingle, truth and mercy meet.” Other songs were exhortations to live the Christian life. “Be valiant, be strong, and resist the powers of sin.” Still, other songs exhibited a desire for intimacy with God, “Nearer my God to Thee.”

Let's face it; it is tempting to select hymns and songs which are the most popular. But what do they teach? Are the songs that were chosen, faithful to scripture? Is it really true that I can trade in my sorrows and sickness for the joy of the Lord, as one song I have been invited to sing suggests?¹⁴ And will God actually give us all the ground we claim?¹⁵

¹³ David Watson, *I Believe in the Church* (York: England: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1979), 192.

¹⁴ Greg Leavers, *Complete Mission Praise*, ed. Peter Horrobin (New York, NY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 60.

¹⁵ Samuel Beverly, *Spring Harvest Praise* (Nashville, TN: Spring Harvest, 2013).

Perhaps in the discussion of songs, we need to consider the thought that we should not leave songwriting to those who are gifted musically, but who may not have depth or grasp of theology. One of the best classic hymns, like Charles Wesley's "And, can it be," is full of profound theology. There is an urgent need for biblical preachers to play close attention to contemporary songs which follow that tradition. They need not be long songs. One truth clearly stated can be enough. The Bible itself should provide many of our lyrics.

The biblical preacher seeking to foster intimacy with God, might wish to consider if the songs are focused on God, not merely so that we can praise, but also so that we can be encouraged. If the majority of our songs on a given Sunday are focused on ourselves, our feelings, and expressions of devotion to God, we will have little to sustain us for the rest of the week.

True, songs may be true and God-focused, but they will not build anyone up unless they are also clear. We slip into sayings and jargon so quickly, "On the wings of eagles, we ride upon the breeze of your Spirit's lifting, our minds are being freed from the things that have torn us."¹⁶

If the biblical preacher would grasp that one of the reasons why we sing is to build up others, it will make sure that they have them in mind. Having paid close attention to this for almost twenty years of ministry, I have become aware of the horizontal dimension and not just the vertical. Those who sing and play should have others in mind. Some musicians are more concerned about their performance than serving others. We have all heard of choirs who have resigned because they have been restricted

¹⁶ Ibid., 97.

to one anthem, or a pianist leaving churches because they are no longer allowed to choose the songs.

It can be difficult for musicians to find a balance between holy and entertainment. They often have to play music they do not like, or that is not very challenging for them. Other songs might give them a chance to show off their talents better, but that is not why they are the musician in a church setting.

The people of God like to sing. After escaping from the Egyptians and crossing the Red Sea, the people of Israel sang a song to the Lord (Exod. 15). Singing was part of Israel's formal worship in both tabernacle and temple (1 Chron. 6:31-32, 16:42). The Psalms bear a rich testimony that in joy and sorrow, in praise and lament, the faithful raise their voice in song to God. Hymn singing was practiced by Jesus and his disciples (Matt. 26:30). The Apostle Paul instructed the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly: teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Col. 3:16-17). Of course, the biblical preacher should be able to use imagery and metaphor from the songs chosen. Clarity does not demand dull expression. But the imagery should be such that it conveys the truth of which it speaks rather than leaving us scratching our heads.

It has been said that tools have no morality, and this is true. Tools are mere instruments in the hands of the users, but the user of the tools and how the tools are used make the difference. Tools are simply extensions of our capabilities to interact with our environment. These extensions allow us to live outside of ourselves and beyond our

limitations.¹⁷ A rake, for example, is simply an extension of the hand and the arm. It, however, has use in the hands of the user and its use is defined by the user. Similarly, an image's meaning is defined by its use. Marshall McLuhan maintains that media (imagery), influences humanity and all of society. When talking about imagery, McLuhan suggests that more thought and attention is placed into development and creation of the image than the editorials and features.¹⁸

Imagery, as a means of expression, creates both emotional and cognitive connections. Imagery engenders a deeper connection, an intimacy with a message. These intimate connections create a sense of personal ownership and identity. When the church or any institution uses imagery to express meaning, it must understand the nature and purpose of the imagery. When nature or purpose is not clearly defined, or the objective of the image understood, the result is a confusing or ineffective image.

If the church is to engage in using imagery as a means of expression, the biblical preacher must be aware of the social context and the theological context within the imagery used. The social and theological contextual understanding cannot be separated. God's activity does not occur in one place and fails to be present in another; God's presence is not limited by time or place. Simply stated, we must ask the question, what does the image say about God's relationship to creation and what does this image convey about humanity's relationship with creation. After identifying these relationships, the

¹⁷ Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1964), 37.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

next task must revolve around addressing the faithfulness of the message being communicated.

Using both cultural reference and theological semiotics, Ephesians 6 expresses meaning in an entirely new way. By incorporating a visual representation of the keywords as well as the words referenced, there is little confusion over the nature or meaning of the imagery.

The task of the biblical preacher is to tell, to communicate how it is God is real in the world and what this means to us. In order to “tell” or “preach,” the biblical preacher must begin with the Bible, and share what it both says and means. And while there are many approaches to preaching, ultimately it is a process of revelation, the preacher reveals or unveils both God’s activity and its meaning. Sometimes the most challenging aspect of sharing the message to be communicated is making the transition from the biblical text to the modern context. To transition from one context to the other requires knowledge of both. Otherwise, the transition will ultimately fail.

For the church to use imagery as a means of expression, the church must understand how and why imagery has been used and is currently used. Imagery, as with all media, is currently used to influence understanding and meaning.¹⁹ As the church creates imagery to express the truth of the gospel, it must be aware that it will be revealing and proclaiming how it is God is working in the world today. It will be speaking to a people not in minutes, but in seconds. The church will also place its

¹⁹ Ibid., 230.

interpretation under the scrutiny of those who will be working to understand what is being conveyed.²⁰

The imagery present and that which is present in the biblical text is indeed another item the biblical preacher needs to acknowledge and bring into to focus. The imagery within the text and present in the immediate context is infinite and is of God. There is no limit, nor are there boundaries to the reflections of God that may be found both in the biblical text and the physical images present in the church. “Imagery is a part of intimacy with God and should be thought through first of all in terms of infinity.”²¹

Imagery is “supratemporal,” but standing within time and space, it is the expression of the form of Jesus which, “cannot be detached from the place in space and time in which it stands.”²² Imagery is limited, and also fragmented, revealing the “meaning of the eschatological promise it contains.”²³ Imagery points toward eternity.

Imagery present in the text of the sanctuary or nave is universal in its approach. Imagery is abundant. “Eternal imagery always pours itself out in the superabundant irradiation that is beyond every demand and expectation.”²⁴ Imagery is a “re-creation exceeding all balance, a love that is absurdly lavish and profligate, surplus to all

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Treier, Husbands, and Lundin, *The Beauty of God*, 211.

²² Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 198.

²³ Ibid., 460.

²⁴ Ibid., 417.

requirement, overflowing beyond anything demanded or expected, generous beyond measure.”²⁵

Biblical and contextual imagery has the power to transform. The biblical preacher can foster intimacy with God through acknowledgment that “imagery means facing the otherness of God, transcending, redemptive, imagery alone is salvific.”²⁶ As the biblical preacher brings to the forefront the images present in the sanctuary, it allows the hearer to understand that all of this is far more than a means to get to God, it is a means of transporting, which exacts imitation, a pliancy of the whole person which places one’s entire existence at their disposal as malleable material to be shaped into God’s image. Imagery has the ability to transform profoundly, so that “in the end, something quite new” comes into being.²⁷

Imagery, like God, can be mysterious. Through the senses and the imagination, it “clearly aims at making the mystery in the nave.”²⁸ As the biblical preacher begins to seek in contemplating imagery means contemplating the mystery of God-Man not in the margins, but in its very center. The complexity of imagery is able to open the door to what words alone cannot express.

At this point, there needs to be a discussion on the problems to be found with the idea of imagery in the biblical text and context where people worship. The problem comes not from within, but without. After reading and unpacking the literature that I

²⁵ Treier, Husbands, and Lundin, *The Beauty of God*, 29.

²⁶ Ibid., 214.

²⁷ Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought*, 27.

²⁸ Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 378.

uncovered, it became quite apparent to me that there is a lack of human perception or lack of perception of imagery.

The youth in my particular congregation have said that bigger is better. The physical mass is the most important. Big cars, big money, significant power are what is sought and revered. Often, this is a usual approach to the acknowledgment of imagery, thereby limiting the depth to what one can measure in human terms, in the terms that matter. Von Balthasar asks the question,

Are we objectively justified in restricting the imagery to the area of inner-worldly relationships between ‘matter and form,’ between ‘that which appears and the appearance itself; justified in restricting it to the psychic states of imagination and empathy which are certainly required for the perception and production of such expressional relationships?’²⁹

The problem of human perception is compounded by the human pattern of subjectivity regarding imagery. “We will know it when we see it,” is frequently heard. Imagery is then reduced to an individual like or dislike, far from the reality of the mysterious partner of truth and goodness. “Man’s habit of calling or paying attention to images that strike him as beautiful as such appears insurmountable.”³⁰

The imagery within the text and presented within the sanctuary assists the biblical preacher, help the congregation to think theologically. In the imagery, we are led to notice God’s presence. Being in the presence, acknowledging the presence of imagery is akin to revelation, “what is revealed has been there all the time, but it has gone unnoticed in our humdrum everyday experience.”³¹ The images within the text and within the

²⁹ Ibid., 38.

³⁰ Ibid., 39.

³¹ Jeremy Begbie, *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 17.

church building calls for receptivity. By “its ability to receive,”³² the hearer is called by the imagery to become receptive to the Divine presence. In this place of indwelling with God, imagery demands the contemplation of faith. Imagery not only brings and leads the creation to the place where God may be found but challenges and persuades interaction with and thought about the relationship between creation and the Creator.

Imagery makes space for this interaction, promoting recognition and response, causing humanity to become involved. Imagery is relational. The call of humanity’s name is spoken by God and heard through imagery. This call cannot be ignored. It is representative of “God’s venturing forth to humanity and humanity to God.”³³ God’s imagery invites dialogue. Similarly, the imagery that “bubbles up within us, cries out for recognition and response.”³⁴ The motion of responding, then, comes from both the imagery initiated by God’s hand and that of humanity, a further demonstration of the relational and dialogical nature of imagery. Imagery present and in context was made to “elicit some response from humanity.”³⁵

In this way, imagery may be seen as that which is from God, of God and for God. In its transformative way, imagery calls and encourages response, engages in dialogue, and draws humanity into the reality of the Creator. “Imagery converts all things to itself

³² Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 246.

³³ Treier, Husbands, and Lundin, *The Beauty of God*, 71.

³⁴ Ryken, *The Christian Imagination*, 94.

³⁵ Begbie, *Beholding the Glory*, 17.

sets them in motion, causes them to be possessed by the Divine, and recalls them to itself through the intermediary of love.”³⁶

Imagery is that which belongs to God, always reflective of the truth found in God’s essence. In its power, imagery is significant in not only in presence but in meaning as well. “Imagery feeds the soul, which would otherwise be distorted and warped.”³⁷

Above all, imagery is a form, harmonious with that of the Divine form. Mysterious is the way, the form of imagery is not separate from the form of God, but rather, “breaks forth from the form’s interior,”³⁸ from its core, its very definition. The form of the imagery is to be found in the form of the Divine: God within imagery, imagery within God.

The “imagery object is a revelation: it is the image of God that appears in humanity and the image of man which is to be found in God and God alone.”³⁹ Imagery is incarnational, irresistible as Christ and constant in its revelation. Imagery is that which opens the door through which humanity is able to catch a glimpse of the real self, the image of God.

In conclusion, intimacy with God being fostered by biblical preaching is proven by cooperating with God in the nourishing and pruning process being willing to be formed by God, doing the work that God requires. Yielding control to God, cooperating with God’s touch through self-understanding is a part of the journey and is

³⁶ Treier, Husbands, and Lundin, *The Beauty of God*, 73.

³⁷ Ibid., 222.

³⁸ Urs von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord*, 151.

³⁹ Ibid., 477.

complemented, deepened through biblical preaching. The work of abiding is the work of growing, maturing in the vine and hence producing fruit. The journey of self-understanding happens in the reflection of our behavior occurring in the midst of life's events. God speaks to us directly or indirectly making known to us our motives, attitudes, and reasons for our actions. Our relationship with God is evident through the health of the branch and the health of the fruit. Biblical preaching is done with God, opening ourselves to God, receiving nourishment from God resulting in the production of fruit for God.

Authentic biblical preaching enhances self-understanding and self-understanding enhances biblical preaching. God has designed these to work hand in glove with one another but is effective only when done in conversation with God. If done without God it becomes nothing more than self-help—us forming ourselves for ourselves; if done with God it is and becomes spiritual formation—God working with us for God's self, others and us. The process of intimacy with God, fostered through biblical preaching, is personal. God working with us, speaking with us, speaking and listening to us, caring about us. We realize and experience God's love, we yield to God's touch discovering our life. In this our fulfillment is only known to God, in the vine. As we work to abide in God, God nourishes us, and we produce for God abundant, healthy fruit.

Reflecting on Jesus' metaphor of the vineyard, there are multiple things happening simultaneously. The vinedresser is pruning the branches, the vine is providing nourishment to the branches, and then the branches are to be producing fruit while abiding in the vine. In the text, the only potential breakdown is with the branches, never with the vine or the vinedresser. Fruit production is the designed purpose of the entire

vineyard operation to be focused on one particular spot—the branch abiding or not abiding in the vine.

Being in the vine allows for the exchange, interaction. Jesus says that only by abiding can fruit be produced. Jesus goes on to promise that if one is abiding, whatever requests that are made will be granted, because granting requests will always produce more fruit providing that the person requesting is abiding in the vine, hence glorifying God. Jesus declares love for us and tells us to abide in love by following the commandments just as Jesus abides in God's love and follows God's commandments. Our cooperation with the fruit production design of God results in the joy of Jesus being made complete in us.

Knowing our tendencies, Jesus sent us the Holy Spirit both to convict us with righteousness and judgment, and to guide us into truth (John 16:7-15). The scriptures are clear that upon becoming one with God, the Holy Spirit resides within the person (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; Eph. 1:13-14). The Holy Spirit is our aid in abiding in Jesus and hence producing fruit for God. The work of abiding, the work of maintaining a healthy relationship is mutual. God has faithfully done God's part, how can we more effectively do ours?

From biblical times on, faithful followers of God have testified of the Holy Spirit working in their lives resulting in the abundant joy, confidence, and satisfaction of being one with God. These believers, either in writing, telling or openly living (or a combination of all three), passed on to others ways of more completely abiding in the vine. Over the centuries hundreds of texts have been produced testifying of what has aided others in the work of abiding in Jesus. Today the church triumphant is inundated

with devotionals, workbooks, biblical studies, and other resources vying for space on bookstore shelves, not only Christian bookstores, claiming to aid in abiding. Over the course of my years in the church, I have led or participated in dozens of classes generally using the more popular resources that were readily available on bookstore shelves. At first, these resources were enlightening, very helpful, but after some time my soul longed for more. What I have discovered is that the bookstores are filled with materials for the beginner in the Christian life, but lacking in aids for the more advanced stages. Yes, the masters can be ordered but are hard to find on the shelf. Eugene Peterson put into words in his book *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, a scathing assessment that has been accurate to my experience. Peterson writes the following:

I'm not at all pleased with the list of books you and your pastor came up with. I meant for you to start reading theology, not books on spiritual trend-setting and religious motivation. I meant the Masters. It appears to me that your pastor has a very low opinion of your mental capabilities and little respect for your vocation. It is a very condescending list.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Eugene H. Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994), 58.

CHAPTER 4

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

This project was developed to provide a way, a structure for biblical preachers to engage their congregations in fostering an increasingly intimate relationship with God. Chapter one introduced the project. Chapter two presented biblical, historical, and theological foundation upon which this project is built. Chapter three (based upon an examination of some of the more influential literature I've uncovered for the thesis topic) demonstrated that fostering intimacy with God requires work and a part of the work is searching, paying attention to hymnody, textual and contextual images present, and for the biblical preacher to unpack the scriptures to foster intimacy with God. In chapter four the reader will be given a description of the method, procedures, and design used in this project.

The purpose of this project was to assist the biblical preacher in fostering intimacy with God by unpacking the scriptures, paying attention to the hymnody, as well as to the images present in texts and physical surroundings, a framework in which to teach and practice intimacy with God. This project was born out of my own struggle to experience intimacy with God coupled with my observation that others were struggling with the same. As I struggled to become more intimate with God my spiritual director taught me different ways to see God so that I could grow in my relationship, my intimacy with God. Over time I have increasingly chosen and worked to embrace a lifestyle of practicing what I preach, that is to unpack the scriptures, pay heed and reference the

hymnody, and make visual aid of the images present to foster intimacy with God.

Experiencing a correlation between all three and intimacy with God, I reflected on my journey into this lifestyle believing that this way, this work is a part of God's created design. I shared my idea with congregants in my church, and they wanted to know more, to themselves grow in their intimacy with God, to learn to practice and acknowledge this intimacy for themselves.

In light of the congregation's openness and my convictions, this project was designed to aid in the work of seeing, acknowledging, abiding, and fostering intimacy with God. As we reflected in real time on who we are and the lives we have lived, we compared our discovery to the desire of God made known through fostering intimacy with God. Being challenged to look deeply at the scriptures, referencing the hymns, and imagery present, we were all journeying together to live in harmony with God.

For five weeks, during the season of Lent, St. Luke's Minneapolis took part in the project. The participants in this project were regularly attending members of the congregation, with a few newcomers present each week. Being their priest, I had observed them and sensed in each a desire to grow closer, more intimate with God. The members of the congregation come from diverse professions: nurses, lawyers, teachers, factory workers, retired civil servants, married, single, divorced, bartender, housewives, bank vice president, small business owner, restaurant owner, and part-time cook. Some of the participants had college or attended college; most graduated from high school. Most would identify as Christian, although a few would state they were still seeking. Most of those that participated in the survey were regular church attendees (meaning attended church most Sunday mornings).

This diverse group of people came together knowing of one another, but not knowing one another. By the end of the five weeks, the majority of the congregation had indeed grown and had experienced a change. They affirmed that by the end of the five weeks, their ability to see the depth of scripture engagement, acknowledging the words of the hymns chosen, and paying close attention to the images present and in the text, had connected them in a new way and in a more in-depth engagement with God. Using biblical stories, characters, and the roles they played in the ever-evolving story of God meant that those who experienced the project realized they mattered to God and that we need to grow, find ways to foster intimacy with God. By fostering intimacy with God, we could then begin to mature in what God's will for our daily lives is, and we can then mature in the role God desires of us. By fulfilling God's desires, we experience the joy of God's joy of seeking and, in turn, being sought.

An inner conversation begins transpiring, being lived, and fostering intimacy with God becomes a part of that conversational event. God speaks, and we respond, we speak, and God responds, it is dynamic as is any other relationship.

The work of discovery, acceptance, and fulfillment is a substantive part of fostering intimacy with God as it requires the biblical preacher to have interaction, intentionality in one's own relationship with God.

Reading scripture, singing hymns, and seeing the imagery (conscious and unconscious acknowledging each) has something to offer. Churches teach their members that to foster intimacy with God they should read, sing, and do a certain number of items each day, depending on whether the day is a workday or a weekend day. It is my observation, and in my conversations with pastoral colleagues that, in general, the church

places little emphasis on letting the biblical material, the theology of the hymns, and images speak to the reader. This type of experience can become similar to reading a novel rather than experiencing what God is saying from God's word. Reading and studying the Bible produces good results if readers are looking for knowledge and information about God and the disciples. This type of experience is necessary and appropriate at times, but it seldom draws readers of scripture, those that engage the reading of scripture on their own, into more authentic and deeper intimacy with God. However, reading, the singing of hymns, and acknowledgement of images, (those images present in the scriptures, as well as those present in the physical structure and visible to the congregation in a particular place) these very elements plus a biblical preacher who communicates an obvious personal seeking of a deeper intimacy with God, and who open up the scriptures to a way that allows the Spirit to draw the hearer into the presence of God encourages scripture readers to choose experience and to be open to God's openness to them. These three forms focus on developing a relationship with God, not merely words on a page, notes in a book, or images on a wall.

The collection of data and timeline was planned as follows: just before the season of Lent (during the month of February-prior to Sunday, March 5, 2017), I had voluntary congregation members take a pretest of the SAI (Spiritual Assessment Inventory) to establish a baseline. I then preached a five-sermon series (Sundays, March 5, 12, 19, 26, and April 2) using scripture, hymnody, and the acknowledgment of images. After the five-sermon series was preached, I then asked the voluntary participants to take the SAI once more and see if there was a measurable difference of acknowledged depth of understanding and acknowledgment of their intimacy with God.

The SAI is a standardized instrument developed by Dr. Todd Hall in 1996. Permission from Dr. Todd Hall to use the SAI was obtained for pretest and posttest. The SAI is a relationally-based measure designed to assess two dimensions of spiritual development. This instrument has multiple questions used to assess five scales: awareness, realistic acceptance, disappointment, instability, and grandiosity. The Awareness factor of the SAI will provide a quantitative data for the research project is encouraging quantitative data for the research project.

This chapter has explained the reasons, methods, procedures, and design that were used to structure this project. Participants were invited to be a part of a series of five sermons that were focused on unpacking the scriptures, paying attention to the hymns chosen for the given Sunday, and the images in the text and present in the church, all to assist those present to grow in intimacy with God. The congregation walked with me in this project and were perceived to be serious about their relationship with God and desirous of becoming more intimate with God as I observed in the context of the congregation's alertness while preaching. Using the SAI assessments focused on measuring specific information, yet was open for the participants to express him or herself uniquely. This created a more reflective work for the participants.

For the five Sundays in Lent, the theme was "Be Still." This became the overarching theme that covered the services, the social activities, the music selections, and overall emphasis of the liturgical season. The scripture passages were taken from the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL) and music (both hymns, offertory, and sermon response) chosen were specific to the lessons and liturgical season. The scriptural

passages used were as follows: (Lent 1) Matthew 4:1-11, (Lent 2) John 3:1-17, (Lent 3) John 4:5-42, (Lent 4) John 9:1-14, (Lent 5) John 11:1-45.

Each Sunday all three possible platforms were used, having the biblical preacher call attention to unpacking the scriptural passage, note the hymnody used, and the images present in the text and the visuals present in the nave. All of this happened during the appointed sermon time. An image appropriate for the Sunday lectionary was chosen and placed on the front cover of the bulletin. Here is an example of the bulletin cover for Lent 3: The Woman at the Well.



For the sake of continued discussion, let us look at the scriptural passage for Lent 3, which is John 4:5-42. This passage is classically called the “Woman at the well,” but there is so much more happening in the text. The myriad of themes were discussed during the sermon. Jesus is taking a different way from Galilee to Judea. Jesus is in the wrong

(or right) place at the right time. The woman boldly addresses Jesus. Jesus fires back in a volley of words. Both the woman and Jesus begin to size each other up. The woman at the well is being marginalized culturally, socially, economically, and religiously. The woman leaves, leaving the jar, that which weighed her down, that which represented her past and present life at the feet of Jesus. More profound perhaps is the 'I am' (which is the same 'I am' statement) which bring forth images of Moses and the burning bush from Exodus chapter three. This is a story of redemption and of God being present, not in a temple, not on a mountain, but here and now.

There is one side note that needs to be addressed, something that had not been planned or could have been scheduled in advance and was substituted at the last minute and bulletins were reprinted. Due to a scheduling conflict and not having enough people in the choir on a particular Sunday to sing the offertory that had been assigned six months earlier, the music director decided to choose a different offertory and did not inform me of the change. I had discussed with the congregation what I was doing for the five weeks of Lent and what the project was for and how it would be conducted. As I explained to the congregation the title of my dissertation project and began to preach the sermon, it dawned on me that the song chosen as the substitute offertory was *Nearer My God to Thee*. Coincidence, I think not.

Chapter five will consider and examine the results of this project. The goals will be measured and the data displayed in graph form. Success will be measured using the measurements described in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The purpose of this project was to lead participants into greater intimacy with God by having the biblical preacher unpack the scriptures, reference the hymns chosen for a given Sunday, and to bring acknowledgment of the images present and within the text, to foster a deeper understanding of intimacy with God. The research statement was, “How biblical preaching fosters intimacy with God.” This particular project was designed to assist congregants in growing in their relationship with God. As presented in chapter two and affirmed in chapter three, followers of God, since the beginning of recorded history have sought to become more intimate in their relationship with God. Through the work of abiding, listening, reading, looking, and seeking, the faithful have matured, become more fully the people God has created and designed them to be.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze, organize, and report on the most important findings in this project. The results will be examined in relation to the established goals as stated in chapter one.

Believers come to seek Christ because they recognize their need for something outside of themselves to deliver them from behaviors that rebel against God. Biblical preachers along with others in ministry invite people into a relationship with God, instructing new believers to read Bibles, daily devotions, and to pray to God for help in their needs and needs of others. However, followers of Christ mainly read for content about God and God’s actions, not for cultivating an intimate relationship.

Intentional, focused time between two people is required in order for an intimate relationship to grow between them. The same is true of a person and God. Intimacy with God is becoming aware of God's presence and growing in relationship with God through shared experiences, and this takes time.

The purpose of this research was to measure the impact of a five-sermon series on the participants' intimacy level with God as indicated by a measurable change in their relationship with God. This is accomplished by asking the biblical preacher to unpack the scriptures, pay heed to the hymnody on Sunday, and acknowledge the imagery present and in the text.

The entire congregation was invited to participate in the project. This was announced five consecutive weeks prior to the SAI pretest being offered. All those seeking to participate were asked to take the Spiritual Assessment Inventory (SAI) prior to the five-sermon series being conducted (pretest). After the five-sermon series, the participants were asked to take the Spiritual Assessment Inventory once again (posttest), the same questions as the pretest, to see if there was a measurable change in participants' perceived intimacy with God.

Each participant was asked to respond to each statement by writing the number that best represented their experience in the box provided to the right of the statement. It is best for each person taking the pretest and posttest to answer according to what really reflects their experience rather than what they think their experience should be.

Participants were asked to give the answer that comes to mind first and not to spend too much time thinking about each question. Each person was asked to give the best possible response to each statement even if it does not provide all the information they would like.

Each person was told that their responses would be kept entirely confidential. The possible answers to each question are as follows: (1) Not At All True, (2) Slightly True, (3) Moderately True, (4) Substantially True, (5) Very True. According to the instructions for scoring the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, the score for each is the average of the answered items.

The Spiritual Assessment Inventory was given to set a base number to measure the level of the participants' intimacy and awareness of the intimacy with God. The SAI is a standard instrument that provided a baseline of the participants' intimacy level with God prior to the project intervention. The SAI measured the dimension of participants' awareness in both positive and nonpositive questions.

What was the impact on the participants' intimacy level with God (awareness of God and quality of the relationship with God) as measured by the SAI subsequent to the five-sermon series? The participants' responses to the posttest provided qualitative data to compare with the pretest SAI. The posttest SAI measured whether a five-sermon series affected the participants' self-assessment of their awareness of God and their quality of relationship with God. Additionally, the responses to the nineteen questions, Awareness Questions (A) (1, 3, 6, 9, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 28, 30, 31, 34, 36, 40, 42, and 44) explicitly cross-reference the awareness factor to prove or disprove the case further and demonstrate a measurable change.

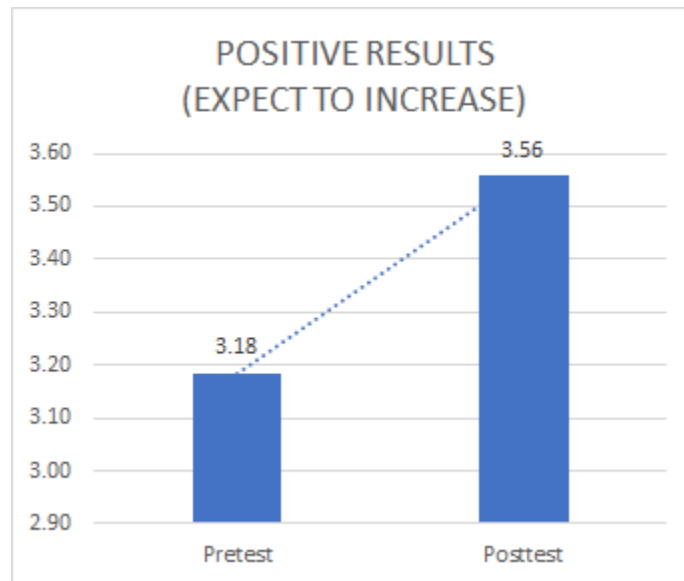
One must also realize that the questions of the SAI are not all framed in the usual terms of positive and nonpositive responses. For the purposes of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory, we will use positive and nonpositive questions. "Positive Questions" (P) (1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 14, 15, 17, 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 35, 36, 37, 39, 40, 42,

46, 48, 50, 54) are used to measure whether there is or is not a positive change. That is to say that if there is an increase from the pretest to the posttest, the results would be read and considered positive.

“NP Questions” (NP) (2, 5, 9, 12, 13, 16, 18, 21, 23, 26, 30, 31, 34, 38, 41, 43, 44, 45, 47, 49, 51, 52, 53) measure what one would seek a nonpositive response to decrease from pretest to posttest. These particular questions seek to make known those factors that separate participants from God. That is to say, if there is a decrease from the pretest to the posttest, the results would be read as positive.

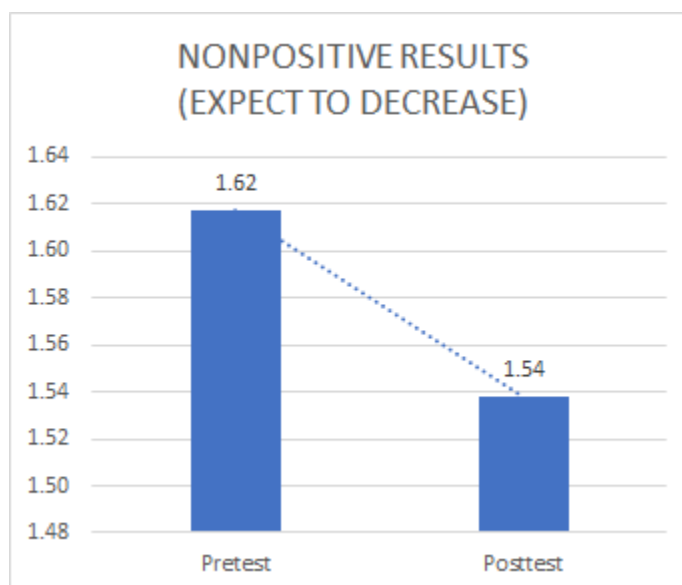
After the last of the five-sermon series was preached the posttest SAI was offered online for people to take. There were a total of twenty-seven people who took the pretest. As the numbers were tabulated of the “P” Questions and then averaged, the total was 3.18. The five-sermon series was delivered, and then the posttest SAI was offered online for people to take. There were a total of fifteen people who took the posttest. As the numbers of the “P” Questions were tabulated and then averaged, the total was 3.56. There was an increase of .38. This means and indicates that there was a discernable increase from the pretest to the posttest of the “P” Questions, which constitutes a positive result in my study. This was the desired result.

Positive Result Chart: Table 5.1



A total of twenty-seven people took the pretest. As the numbers were tabulated of the “NP” Questions and then averaged, the total was 1.62. The five-sermon series was delivered, and then the posttest SAI was offered online for people to take. A total of fifteen people took the posttest. As the numbers were tabulated of the “NP” Questions and then averaged, the total was 1.54. There was a decrease of .08. This means and indicates that there was a discernable decrease from the pretest to the posttest of the “NP” Questions, which constitutes a positive result. This was the desired result.

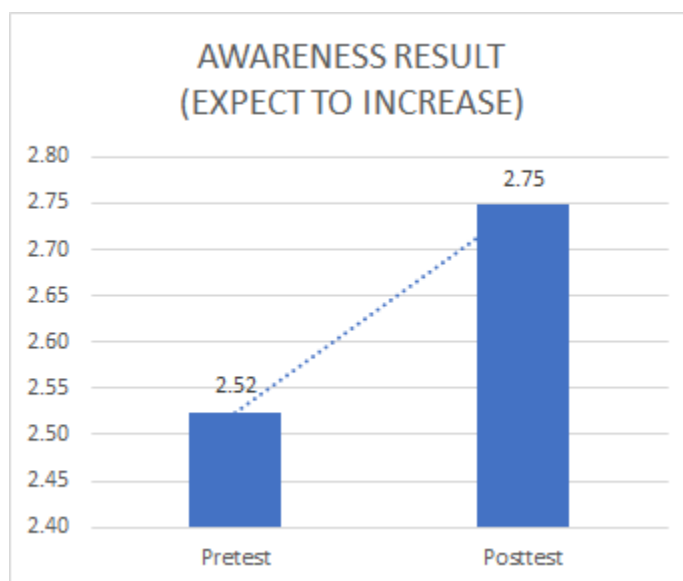
Nonpositive Result Chart: Table 5.2



To cross-reference the results, I decided to extract the Awareness Questions (see above description) to see if it would indeed correlate with a positive response.

A total of twenty-seven people took the pretest. As the numbers were tabulated of the A Questions and then averaged, the total was 2.52. The five-sermon series was delivered, and then the posttest SAI was offered online for people to take. A total of fifteen people took the posttest. As the numbers were tabulated and then averaged, the total was 2.75. There was an increase of .23. This means and indicates that there was a discernable increase from the pretest to the posttest of the A Questions, which constitutes a positive result in the SAI. This was the desired result.

Awareness Result Chart: Table 5.3



Worship services, hymn sings, text studies, and Sunday school classes abound within many churches. In each of these settings, participants hear about God, God’s ways, and God’s principles for daily living. As stated above, a growing relationship with anyone, including God, requires intentional, focused time with that person. The purpose of this research was to measure the impact of a five-sermon series on the participants’ intimacy level with God, as fostered by the biblical preacher unpacking the scripture, paying heed to the hymns, and acknowledging the imagery, thereby, fostering an environment for the awareness of intimacy with God.

When asked to talk about one of the positive aspects of this five-sermon series and project, a participant said, “What you have done, made me aware of so much more and it seems to me to be common-sense.” One of the positive aspects that the participants noted was experiencing God’s presence, which came about as the participants began to feel, see, understand, and become more at ease with what God was doing. From this

experience, the participants began to hear God speak personally to them as they read the scriptures, sang the hymns, and took note of the imagery. Some participants verbalized to me after the service, saying they were hearing the convictions of God, while others talked about a deeper, more profound, and prayerful worship experience. All of these experiences and expressions, I believe, came from intentionally making known how God seeks us as we seek God. These conversations occurred as people felt compelled to speak with me right after the services. The conversations were passionate, exciting, immediate, and gave me a sense that what I was doing was, in fact, working toward the desired result.

Participants recognized and verbalized many benefits to the five-sermon series. In describing the process, the participants used such adjectives as blessed, grand, active, helpful, meaningful, and eye-opening. The participants praised the process because of the format and order it brought to their time and experience with God. Other positive comments duplicate some of the words of the questions offered during the SAI, comments on God's presence, feeling closer to God and listening to God.

CHAPTER 6

EVALUATION

The results of the findings suggest the need for further research. Its awareness scale appears reliable for measuring the awareness dimension.

There are some limitations of this study. The participants of the study volunteered to participate through a general sign up by agreeing to participate in a pretest survey, listen to a five-sermon series, and then complete the project by participating in a posttest survey. Some would argue that the small sample size (of those who participated in the project study) might have contributed to a lack of statistical significance of the findings, as well as to the researcher's generalizability to other populations. Responses of larger sample size may have provided better qualitative and quantitative analysis. The small sample size cannot compensate for outlying observations while a more substantial sample might. Additionally, a larger sample size might have provided a more extensive variety of responses to the Positive, Nonpositive, and Awareness questions.

Several participants experienced either a renewed or fundamental understanding that by being made aware of unpacking the scriptures, paying heed to the choice of hymns, and acknowledging the imagery, that these three factors became relevant for the hearer and provided a way to foster intimacy with God. This observation is beneficial for those who seemed to have gained this understanding, and hopefully, they will follow through and spend more time being aware of the intentionality of the biblical preacher

(who is committed to addressing these key factors in a sermon) in providing a path to foster intimacy with God. See the examples listed in the table section.

Having completed this project, I have five suggestions to make. First, I would recommend a larger sample size, ranging from at least 40 to 50 participants. This would provide a more substantial range and scope for the project to be conducted. Second, I would include a strong, personal urging of the participants to complete both the pretest and posttest. Third, I would recommend that participants become part of a text study group, to better understand the context of the scriptures presented. One participant that joined and completed the entire project immediately started using a text study group, and he reported that scripture has come alive for him. Before he was reading the Bible almost every day but only reading a section of the Bible once and going on. Now that he is reading the Bible more contextually, several times at a sitting, he hears God speak more clearly than before. Fourth, I would recommend lengthening the number of weeks in the project. One participant who was having difficulty attending all five Sundays reported that she benefited from the experience, but wished I had done the project over a more extended period of time. I would be willing to conduct this project over a liturgical season or part of a year to see if that would indeed provide more positive results. Also, note that those that missed any part of the sermon series were encouraged to go to the website and listen to the podcast. Fifth, I would recommend that there be a place and time after the pretest and posttest that participants could elaborate on the questions and possibly make a comment or two about the experience and what other factors may have changed for them, that were not represented in the fifty-four questions presented.

Nearer my God to thee: How biblical preaching fosters intimacy with God, is both the title of this project and the drive behind it. Over the course of the last twenty years or so my relationship with God has been blooming. I have enjoyed a depth and richness that I had read about in the Bible but had neither experienced nor thought that I could experience. God in God's abiding grace has continuously worked and provided opportunities for me to grow closer to God. God has brought people in my life, put books in my hands, and stirred my heart to work, as we have become closer. The blossoms have achieved their purpose; there is fruit—this project.

The rationale behind this project was to help me and others become closer, more intimate with God. Five-weeks is a set time to teach a method of unpacking the scriptures, paying heed to the hymns chosen, and acknowledging the imagery, within the framework to begin the process of implementing this new learning into one's preaching life. But is five weeks enough time, perhaps not. Perhaps it was enough time for participants to experience an increasing closeness, experimental events of intimacy with God to which others will be added, building a shared history with God, an intimate relationship. The participants in the project did grow closer to God over the short time as the data shows.

This project has been a significant contribution to my relationship with God as it has given me so much to ponder and talk about. This experience had matured me as a person, forcing me to work when I preferred to play. I have learned and concluded many things from this project that will be further developed in the Reflection chapter to follow.

The pretest results covered a broader spectrum than I anticipated at the outset of the project showing me that the participants were intentionally working to deepen their

relationship with God before we even started. A number of the participants were, prior to the project, involved in Bible studies, prayer groups, healing ministry, choir, handbells, and recorder consort. Plus most who took the pretest and posttest were active in the church.

At a minimum, the project exposed the participants to new and meaningful ways to grow in intimacy with God. As an observer of the project, I was able to see changes in how participants engaged me, as the biblical preacher, in the asking of questions after the service.

A combination of experience and desire, on both the part of the participant and the biblical preacher, being forged through what I was seeking to accomplish as the biblical preacher, seemed to shape the participants in wanting to know more about fostering intimacy with God. A fair number of participants related to me following worship, that the stories they heard, the music they sang, the imagery they were exposed to, inspired and challenged each participant to do the introspective work of abiding in ordinary experiences of life with God-causing a deepening assurance that their lives matter and their relationship with God is dynamic.

This chapter evaluated the project entitled, “Nearer my God to thee: How biblical preaching fosters intimacy with God” in light of inviting participants into a relationship with God. The survey sampling showed that there was measurable effectiveness for the biblical preacher to unpack the scriptures, paying heed to the hymns chosen, and acknowledging the imagery present and in the text. Further study and evaluation, in the humble opinion of this writer, need to be conducted both for the sake of uncovering more

evidence and for the sake of worshippers who are eager to grow in their intimacy with God.

CHAPTER 7

REFLECTION

The purpose of this project is to assist the minister in fostering intimacy with God through biblical preaching. The research, pretest, five-sermon series, and posttest were all designed to show and measure changes and awareness of intimacy with God.

Many Christians, in my observations throughout over twenty years in the pastoral ministry, lack the knowledge and discipline to make their desires of an intimate relationship with God a reality. The focus of this project is to teach people, through biblical preaching, how to journey through life experiencing an increasingly intimate relationship with God. Specifically, it is my goal in this project that people would encounter connections between their stories and God's, both in the scriptures, hymnody, imagery present, and the imagery in the text.

The Bible records the history of God working to restore the broken relationship between God and humanity, providing the hope that God would and finally has succeeded (Luke 24:36-53, the story of the road to Emmaus). Throughout the centuries that the biblical story covers, we read of the work God has done, the love God has demonstrated to restore an intimate relationship with all creation. We also read of people like Abraham, Ruth, Moses, Hannah, Peter, Mary, Paul, and Lydia who through prayer, service, confession, and hardship, struggle to live in joyful intimacy with God, loving God and their neighbors. These people and others in the biblical narrative experienced transformative intimacy with God in the midst of the everydayness of life. The Bible

teaches us the dynamics of how, through Divine abiding grace and human willingness, intimacy was and still can be achieved and maintained. We can learn from their lives and experience intimacy with God ourselves as the story continues.

I did not realize it, but I was working on my own relationship with God as though I was following a formula. I pondered: when you decide to bake a cake, you get out all the ingredients, mix them together as the recipe states, put the batter in the preheated oven and let it cook. After a specific amount of time, you take the cake out, and you have your finished product ready to eat. The goal of the baking is to eat the product, so you will follow the recipe to get it right. I was looking at intimacy with God as a finished product. I was convinced that if I did the right things, in the right order, at the right time, in the right environment, that I had the recipe for successful intimacy with God. I thought that before I could experience intimacy with God, I had to do this work, finish the work in a particular order, follow a prescribed formula, and make myself ready to be close to God.

The idea that biblical preaching could foster the means of entering into greater intimacy with God is this very notion that there is work that we must do before we can begin to enjoy the abiding grace of being intimate with God. My spiritual director questioned me on this very point asking if biblical preaching was ‘a means of’ or ‘a part of’ growing in greater intimacy with God. This option, this new way (at least for me) of understanding the idea of what biblical preaching could be, radically changed me. Previously I would read, study, listen, pore over commentaries, and want to experience intimacy with God in the ordinary, but I was convinced that I had not worked hard enough to be that close to God yet. It sounded sad then, and also to me now, to reflect on

my own words and understanding or in this case misunderstanding. I was so confused about what it meant to be intimate with God that I was making intimacy with God impossible.

After my spiritual director exposed me to the fact that I was scared to be intimate with God, the proverbial light came on, and my innermost-self paused for contemplation. I now understood something different from before, that communion with God while practicing biblical preaching in a new way was like cleaning the kitchen with my husband or lying in bed talking at the end of the day. We had time to talk, a time to reflect on our day sharing highs and lows, catching up on what is happening, laughing and crying, sharing hopes and dreams, all of life. These times with my husband build a relationship, they are the events of fostering intimacy, and so with God, biblical preaching, in the new way I have presented it, is the event of fostering intimacy in times of sharing. I realized that I could know God intimately in the ordinary and in the sacred—and I did not have to be perfect and go through all kinds of motions to finally arrive.

For me, this was the most significant lesson learned from this project. The rationale for this project was for others to grow in intimacy with God, and in doing the work of this project, intimacy found me. This simple change of being found while seeking became a profound, intimate moment with God. These words remind me of the man (in John 9) who was born blind, whom Jesus went to search for and found. In the man's seeking to understand who this person (Jesus) was that gave him sight, Jesus went in search of him and found him, and it was after this encounter that he (the blind man) learned from Jesus, who Jesus was.

The notion about clergy being more theologically educated and intimate with God than laity has always been a distinction that I have genuinely rejected, yet even I had been poisoned by the lie. Usually, when clergy get together and begin discussing what is happening in their respective congregations, the conversation gets around to the lie that if the congregants would only listen to us, their pastors, the church would be so much better off. It is always the congregants' fault that there are problems in the church and the pastor is distracted by being the rejected problem solver. This type of lie I have been able to name and not buy into. However, the more subtle platform of this lie, the belief that the pastor is more spiritually attuned than the congregation, I am afraid I had been poisoned by and did not know it.

It is actually exciting to be one of them, to name the fact that we are on this journey together. As the Bible emphasizes, it is not about them or me it is about all of us being transformed in service to God. Being one of, one with the people of God is a vital lesson that I learned through the project by evaluating the intimacy with God of the participants. When we think of our personal relationship with God, it is easy to think of ourselves alone with God, just the two of us walking in the garden talking. In this interaction with God, we lay out what is happening in our lives, seeking God's wisdom, forgiveness, guidance, and intervention. We expose the fullness of ourselves to God asking for God's help. The misunderstanding and inappropriateness occur when we interact with God for ourselves in isolation. In other words, when we meet with God and share our life with God seeking God's counsel, it should not be for our personal motives, comforts, or ideals. We seek intimacy, but it is not us alone, it is for us as followers of God in the midst of the broader context.

Personal intimacy with God is for me to be close to God for us. The ‘us’ includes me, others, and God. My intimacy with God is being rooted in a deep abiding relationship with God and is about furthering God’s purposes and the kingdom, not providing me with a sense of fulfillment for me alone.

God has given us gifts to share as resources to be used for God’s purposes through this journey of biblical preaching to foster intimacy with God. This project has changed me from the inside out. I have to rightfully admit that the results of this project have opened my eyes. I am reminded of the blind man “Then he went and washed and came back able to see”¹ (John 9:7). The man was not sure how he got his sight or how it happened, but welcomed the experience and looked forward to the future. We selfishly want to focus on our limited story, rather than find joy in contributing to the larger story. Participants will encounter as in future projects like mine, their stories of greater intimacy in the biblical preacher fostering intimacy with God. Also, due to the level of sharing during the project, a trust has developed between the members of the congregation. It has been amazing how vulnerable we have become to each other, sharing weaknesses and doubts that trouble us, as well as the growth that inspires us. I am not arguing that this project created this; however, I am convinced that this project helped develop and mature a longing that was in each of us.

The discoveries of this project have also affected my preaching as I have developed a deeper understanding that the person I am reading about in the Bible is just like me, a broken human. I do not distance myself from those humans, but see their struggles as the struggles of us all. This has affected my preaching as I work to connect

¹ Levine and Brettler, *The Jewish Annotated New Testament*

the humanity of the biblical character with the humanity of us all – temptations, mistakes, growth, and faith, just to name a few. I believe the deep reflection the project initiated within has made my sermons more relevant to the congregation as they have commented that they have known biblical stories, but not the humanity of the persons involved. This is the work, the hard work of biblical preaching, the work of understanding that one story is being told with infinite sub-stories. We are all connected as we all matter to each other and not just ourselves alone in God's sight. Through my biblical preaching, I work to increase intimacy with God as I work to help others grow in their intimacy with God.

Also, the project has affected my expectations of the leaders in the church. We had a vestry meeting a few weeks ago, and I asked the members to have a short Bible study before the meeting. I asked them to pray for details of what, when, how, and whom they encountered in their Bible reading. The “why” part has already been answered, and we have recognized as a congregation that it is God who will bring this to fruition. The leadership, not just the pastor, is expected to be in prayer, to read, mark, and inwardly digest to seek God's guidance. It is not just words we say, it is a life we live, asking questions, comforting each other as we walk this journey together. The conversations are thoughtful, not judgmental. The project and its influence have changed the atmosphere of the church. Now we are not looking for the best ideas or the greatest thinkers; we are being led by people who are growing in intimacy with God as a group, a church, open to doing God's will as led by the Holy Spirit. I realize this sounds a bit idealistic, but it is a messy reality in our church. I say messy because there is struggle involved, yet there is also wisdom and yielding and the courage to say and do what the Holy Spirit is leading us to do.

As our church continues to grow, we continue to welcome new stories into our story which we realize is a part of a great story, greater intimacy with God. Doing the work of being organized and prepared, coupled with an openness to the Holy Spirit who is at work in all people, changing, teaching, convicting, guiding us into God's will, has created a serious but fun, a structured but open atmosphere in the life of the church. Within this atmosphere, much fruit is being produced as God transforms lives through us, sometimes despite us.

Working on this project has caused me to reflect on the people and structures in my life that have formed me. God brought me into this place and through this journey to guide me into the practice of biblical preaching. Further, God has used new experience and area of study to alter my relationship with God, others and myself radically. We do not, with the exception of one, talk about our relationship with God or acknowledge what God is doing. I am as guilty as any other, as I have not initiated or worked to guide the conversation in a way that acknowledges the presence of the Holy.

Upon reflection, I believe that colleges and seminaries that are graduating pastors would benefit from a focus on biblical preaching as I have described it above. In addition, I believe that the wider church could help individuals who gather for weekly worship grow in their intimacy with God. If these humble suggestions were to be considered and even implemented, perhaps people would be drawn into relationships with God and others that bear the fruit of love and service and outsiders exclaiming "see how they love one another."

In all honesty and humbleness, this project has contributed greatly, helping me grow in my intimacy with God, while helping others experience the same. As I mature, I

help others mature also. As I write these words and reflect back, it was about four years ago, that I was writing my first major papers for the Doctor of Ministry program and it was then that I began to think about my proposal and rationale for this project. From the beginning, I entered Luther Seminary desiring to grow, to be formed by the Holy Spirit being mentored by professors, authors, and fellow students, sojourners on this path. This desire has been achieved through the dynamics of the abiding grace of God, intentional hard work, cooperation, and the mutual desire of us all. I have become more comfortable with my own intimacy with God as I have done the work of abiding in the Word. God has changed me, transformed me.

As I read my papers, scan my class notes, look at the array of books I have collected, have discussions with project participants, read both sets of tests, re-analyze the results, as well as observe the changes in the congregation, all of this combined has confirmed that others have grown more intimate with God through the work of this project.

I have had the privilege of mentoring other people as I myself was mentored. The affirmation is leading me deeper into biblical preaching to foster intimacy with God as I continue working at my own formation so that God can use me to form others for God's glory. The wisdom that God has given me as I have yielded my will to God's has greatly helped me to help others as they have come to me. It is both humbling and beautiful to experience such deep confidence as I let go of me and am transformed into something more. I become more fully me when I let go, and that is for the benefit of all and above all, to the glory of God or to the glory of an intimate God.

APPENDIX A

IMPLIED CONSENT

January 25, 2017

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a study of Intimacy with God. I hope to learn how each participant, after taking a pretest SAI (Spiritual Assessment Inventory), hearing a five-sermon series, and then taking a posttest SAI (Spiritual Assessment Inventory), to measure distinct changes in each participant's Intimacy with God.

If you decide to participate, please complete the enclosed survey. Your return of this survey is implied consent. The survey is designed to assess any measurable change in one's perception and/or actual intimacy with God. It will take about 10-15 minutes per testing. No benefits accrue to you for answering the survey, but your responses will be used to assess a deepening of your intimacy with God. Any discomfort or inconvenience to you derives only from the amount of time taken to complete the survey.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will not be disclosed.

Your decision whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relationships with Luther Seminary and/or St. Luke's Episcopal Church. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you have any questions, please ask. If you have additional questions later, you may contact me at the following address. The Reverend Warren Lee Domenick, Jr. 2833 Lyndale Ave S. Apt #402, Minneapolis, MN 55408, 612-849-3477, saintlukesfatherlee@gmail.com. You may also contact my advisor. Dr. Richard Rehfeldt at (507) 993-0564 or rrehfeldt001@luthersem.edu.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

The Reverend Warren Lee Domenick, Jr.

APPENDIX B

PRETEST AND POSTTEST QUESTIONS

SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY

Instructions:

1. Please respond to each statement below by writing the number that best represents your experience in the empty box to the right of the statement.
2. It is best to answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.
3. Give the answer that comes to mind first. Do not spend too much time thinking about an item.
4. Give the best possible response to each statement even if it does not provide all the information you would like.
5. Try your best to respond to all statements. Your answers will be completely confidential.
6. Some of the statements consist of two parts as shown here:
 1. 2.1 There are times when I feel disappointed with God.
 2. 2.2 When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue.

Your response to the second statement (2.2) tells how true this second statement (2.2) is for you when you have the experience (e.g., feeling disappointed with God) described in the first statement (2.1).

1. **Not At All True**
2. **Slightly True**
3. **Moderately True**
4. **Substantially True**
5. **Very True**

Questions:

1. I have a sense of how God is working in my life.
- 2.1 There are times when I feel disappointed with God.
- 2.2 When this happens, I still want our relationship to continue.

3. God's presence feels very real to me.
4. I am afraid that God will give up on me.
5. I seem to have a unique ability to influence God through my prayers.
6. Listening to God is an essential part of my life.
7. I am always in a worshipful mood when I go to church.
- 8.1 There are times when I feel frustrated with God.
- 8.2 When I feel this way, I still desire to put effort into our relationship.
9. I am aware of God prompting me to do things.
10. My emotional connection with God is unstable.
11. My experiences of God's responses to me impact me greatly.
- 12.1 There are times when I feel irritated at God.
- 12.2 When I feel this way, I am able to come to some sense of resolution in our relationship.
13. God recognizes that I am more spiritual than most people.
14. I always seek God's guidance for every decision I make.
15. I am aware of God's presence in my interactions with other people.
16. There are times when I feel that God is punishing me.
17. I am aware of God responding to me in a variety of ways.
- 18.1 There are times when I feel angry at God.
- 18.2 When this happens, I still have the sense that God will always be with me.
19. I am aware of God attending to me in times of need.
20. God understands that my needs are more important than most people's.
21. I am aware of God telling me to do something.
22. I worry that I will be left out of God's plans.

- 23. My experience of God's presence impacts me greatly.
- 24. I am always as kind at home as I am at church.
- 25. I have a sense of the direction in which God is guiding me.
- 26. My relationship with God is an extraordinary one that most people would not understand.
- 27.1 There are times when I feel betrayed by God.
- 27.2 When I feel this way, I put effort into restoring our relationship.
- 28. I am aware of God communicating with me in a variety of ways.
- 29. Manipulating God seems to be the best way to get what I want.
- 30. I am aware of God's presence in times of need.
- 31. From day to day, I sense God is with me.
- 32. I pray for all my friends and relatives every day.
- 33.1 There are times when I feel frustrated by God for not responding to my prayers.
- 33.2 When I feel this way, I am able to talk it through with God.
- 34. I have a sense of God communicating guidance to me.
- 35. When I sin, I tend to withdraw from God.
- 36. I experience an awareness of God speaking to me personally.
- 37. I find my prayers to God are more effective than other people's.
- 38. I am always in the mood to pray.
- 39. I feel I have to please God or he might reject me.
- 40. I have a strong impression of God's presence.
- 41. There are times when I feel that God is angry with me.
- 42. I am aware of God being very near to me.
- 43. When I sin, I am afraid of what God will do to me.

44. When I consult God about decisions in my life, I am aware of God's direction and help.
45. I seem to be more gifted than most people in discerning God's will.
46. When I feel God is not protecting me, I tend to feel worthless.
- 47.1 There are times when I feel like God has let me down.
- 47.2 When this happens, my trust in God is not completely broken.

APPENDIX C

SPIRITUAL ASSESSMENT INVENTORY RAW DATA COLLECTED

PRETEST AND POSTTEST

	Pretest Question	Hopeful Result	Awareness Respondent																											Pretest Average		
			R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	R16	R17	R18	R19	R20	R21	R22	R23	R24	R25	R26	R27			
	Q1	P- Increase in value	Awareness	4	3	3	4	2	5	3	2	3	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	3	2	2	2	5	4	3	2	2	4	3.22		
	Q2	NP- Decrease in value		2	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	4	2	3	5	1	1	2	3	1	1	3	1	1	1	4	5	2	2	2.07	
	Q3	P	Awareness	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	4	3	3	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4.56		
	Q4	P		4	5	3	5	5	5	5	3	3	2	4	3	3	4	3		4	4	3	4	3	4	3	3	2	4	5	3.69	
	Q5	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.22	
	Q6	P	Awareness	1	1	5	1	1	4	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	3	1.56	
	Q7	P		5	5	4	5	1	5	5	3	2	2	4	3	3	4	3	5	2	3	2	2	4	5	4	2	1	5	5	3.48	
	Q8	P		4	5	3	4	2	4	3	2	2	2	5	3	4	4	3	3	2	3	1	1	2	3	1	3	3	4	3	2.93	
	Q9	NP	Awareness	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	4	4	3	4	5	3	2	5	2	1	1	2	2	1	2	5	3	2	2	2.41	
	Q10	P		5	5	5		5	5	5	4	3	2	5	4	4	4	4	3	4	3	3	2	5	5	4	4	4		4.04		
	Q11	P	Awareness	5	4	5	3	1	4	2	3	2	2	4	3	1	3	3	4	3	1	2	3	5	4	3	2	2	5		3.04	
	Q12	NP		2	1	3	1	3	1	2	2	4	5	1	3	5	4	1	1	3	1	2	2	2	1	3	4	4	1		2.38	
	Q13	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	3	1	1	1.44	
	Q14	P		4	1	2	3	1	2	3	2	2	2	5	2	2	4	1	3	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	3	2	4	5	2.33	
	Q15	P	Awareness	5	5	2	3	1	4	2	2	2	3	3	4	4	2	4	3	5	3	2	2	3	3	2	3	4	1	5	4	3.11
	Q16	NP		1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1.22	
	Q17	P	Awareness	4	5	3	1	2	5	3	2	1	2	5	4	2	4	3	5	3	1	2	3	4	5	4	2	2	4	4	3.15	
	Q18	NP		2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	3	4	2	5	4	1	2	5	1	1	1	2	3	5	2	4	2	3	2	2.41
	Q19	P	Awareness	5	5	5		5	5	5	4	1	4	5	5	4		3	4	3	3	4	4	5	5	1	4	2	5	5	4.04	
	Q20	P		4	5	4	3	2	5	4	3	1	3	5	5	3	4	4	5	4	1	3	3	3	4	4	2	2	5	5	3.56	
	Q21	NP	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	
	Q22	P		5	2	5	5	1	4	2	3	1	2	3	3	1	4	2	3	3	1	2	3	3	3	2	1	2	4	3	2.70	
	Q23	NP	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	3	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.30
	Q24	P		4	5	5	5	1	5	4	2	1	2	4	3	3	4	3	5	3	4	2	3	5	4	3	3	1	4	4	3.41	
	Q25	P	Awareness	4	5	5	5	2	5	3	2	1	2	3	4	2	4	3	5	3	3	2	3	5	4	3	2	1	4	4	3.30	
	Q26	NP		1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	2	3	5	4	2	1	5	1	1	2	3	3	1	1	4	2	2	3	2.15
	Q27	P			5	5		5	5	5	4	1	1	3	5	4	4	2	4		3	4	3	4	5	1	3	2	5	4	3.63	
	Q28	P	Awareness	4	5	3	4	1	5	3	1	4	4	4	2	1	4	3	3	2	2	4	1	3	1	1	3	5	4		2.96	
	Q29	P		4	5	2	4	1	5	3	2	1	2	5	3	2	4	3	4	2	1	2	2	4	3	3	1	4	5		2.96	
	Q30	NP	Awareness	1	4	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	1	4	1	3	2	3	1	1	1	1	2	2	2	5	1		1.92
	Q31	NP	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	4	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.30
	Q32	P			5	5		2	5	4	3	1	2	4	4	3		2	2		1	3	4	5	2	2	2	3	2	3.04		
	Q33	P		5	4	3	3	1	5	3	2	1	3	3	4	2	4	3	5	2	2	3	2	4	4	3	1	2	5	5	3.11	
	Q34	NP	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	
	Q35	P		5	2	2	4	2	5	5	5	2	2	4	4	3	5	4	4	4	2	4	3	4	4	3	2	2	4	5	3.52	
	Q36	P	Awareness	4	3	3	5	1	5	4	3	2	2	5	3	2	5	3	5	4	2	3	2	4	4	4	3	3	1	5	4	3.33
	Q37	P		4	1	1	1	1	3	4	1	3	2	3	1	2	5	2	3	1	1	2	1	3	4	2	3	1	4	3	2.30	
	Q38	NP		2	1	1	1	2	1	1	4	4	4	3	4	4	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	2	2	4	2	2	2	2.11	
	Q39	P		5	5	5		2	5	4	3	1	1	4	4	3		2	5		3	2	2	5	4	2	2	1	5	5	3.33	
	Q40	P	Awareness	4	2	5	2	1	5	3	3	1	2	4	3	1	3	2	4	3	1	2	4	4	3	3	2	2	5	4	2.89	
	Q41	NP		2	1	1	4	2	1	2	4	1	1	3	2	4	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	2	5	2	1	3	3	2	2.33	
	Q42	P	Awareness	4	2	5	2	1	4	3	2	1	2	2	2	1	3	2	3	2	1	1	1	2	3	1	3	1	4	3	2.26	
	Q43	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00	
	Q44	NP	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	3	2	3	1	1	2	1	1	4	2	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	1	3	1	1.63	
	Q45	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.07	
	Q46	P		4	5	3	3	3	5	4	3	1	2	3	3	2	4	3	5	3	2	3	2	3	3	2	3	2	5	4	3.15	
	Q47	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1.26	
	Q48	P		4	5	4	3	3	5	5	3	1	2	2	2	4	3	4	3	1	3	2	3	3	3	2	2	1	5	4	3.00	
	Q49	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	3	5	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	4	2	1	1.59	
	Q50	P			2	5	3	2	5	3	4	1	3	4	3	1	4	3	5	3	1	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	5	5	3.04	
	Q51	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	3	1.26	
	Q52	NP		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	4	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.37	
	Q53	NP		2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	2	5	2	4	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	2	2	1	1.74
	Q54	P		5	5	5		4	5	5	4	3	2	4	4	4		4	5		3	4	4	1	5	5	3	5	4	5	4.08	

Posttest	Awareness	Respondent															Posttest		Pretest	Posttest
Question		R1	R2	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9	R10	R11	R12	R13	R14	R15	Average		Average	Average
Q1	Awareness	4	5	4	5	5	3	3	5	2	4	4	3	3	4	2	3.73		3.22	3.73
Q2		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	4	4	4	3	4	2	2	1	2.13		2.07	2.13
Q3	Awareness	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	5	4.77		4.56	4.77
Q4		4	5	4	5	4	4	2	5	3	4	4	4	4	4	3	3.93		3.69	3.93
Q5		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1.07		1.22	1.07
Q6	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1.13		1.56	1.13
Q7		5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	3	3	3	4	3	5	4	4.20		3.48	4.20
Q8		4	3	3	5	1	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	3	5	3	3.33		2.93	3.33
Q9	Awareness	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	3	4	5	2	3	3	3	1	2.13		2.41	2.13
Q10		5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	3	4	4	4	5	4	4.50		4.04	4.50
Q11	Awareness	4	4	4	5	4	3	3	4	1	5	3	3	2	3	2	3.33		3.04	3.33
Q12		2	1	1	1	1	3	2	1	4	3	3	2	2	2	2	2.00		2.38	2.00
Q13		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00		1.44	1.00
Q14		4	3	1	3	4	3	1	4	2	3	2	4	2	3	2	2.73		2.33	2.73
Q15	Awareness	5	3	3	5	4	3	2	5	3	5	3	3	3	3	2	3.47		3.11	3.47
Q16		1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	2	1	1.27		1.22	1.27
Q17	Awareness	4	5	5	5	5	3	2	4	1	5	2	3	3	3	1	3.40		3.15	3.40
Q18		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	4	5	2	4	1	2	1	1.93		2.41	1.93
Q19	Awareness	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	5	4	5	4	4	3	4.60		4.04	4.60
Q20		5	5	4	5	5	4	2	5	3	4	3	5	3	4	2	3.93		3.56	3.93
Q21	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00		1.00	1.00
Q22		4	4	3	5	1	3	2	3	1	4	3	3	4	3	1	2.93		2.70	2.93
Q23	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	1.13		1.30	1.13
Q24		4	5	4	5	5	4	4	5	3	3	4	2	4	4	2	3.87		3.41	3.87
Q25	Awareness	4	5	4	5	3	3	4	4	3	5	4	3	2	4	2	3.67		3.30	3.67
Q26		1	1	2	1	1	2	1	3	4	5	2	4	2	2	1	2.13		2.15	2.13
Q27				5	5		5	5	5	3	4	3	5	4	4	2	4.17		3.63	4.17
Q28	Awareness	5	4	1	5	4	4	3	4	2	5	1	2	4	3	3	3.33		2.96	3.33
Q29		4	4	4	5	5	3	2	4	1	4	2	3	4	4	1	3.33		2.96	3.33
Q30	Awareness		5	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	4	2	1	1	1.71		1.92	1.71
Q31	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	2	1	1.20		1.30	1.20
Q32		5		4	5		3	5	1		2	2	5	4	4	1	3.42		3.04	3.42
Q33		5	5	5	5	5	3	3	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	2	3.87		3.11	3.87
Q34	Awareness	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00		1.00	1.00
Q35		5	5	4	5	5	4	2	5	3	5	3	3	4	4	2	3.93		3.52	3.93
Q36	Awareness	5	5	5	5	4	4	2	5	2	4	3	4	3	4	2	3.80		3.33	3.80
Q37		5	5	4	2	3	4	1	4	1	2	2	2	2	4	1	2.80		2.30	2.80
Q38		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	5	4	1	4	2	2	1	1.93		2.11	1.93
Q39		5		4	5		3	5	5	3	3	2	5	2	4	1	3.62		3.33	3.62
Q40	Awareness	5	5	4	5	4	3	2	4	1	4	3	4	3	4	2	3.53		2.89	3.53
Q41		1	2	5	1	1	2	1	2	4	2	4	5	2	3	2	2.47		2.33	2.47
Q42	Awareness	4	4	2	5	4	3	2	5	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	2.87		2.26	2.87
Q43		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.00		1.00	1.00
Q44	Awareness	4	5	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	3	1	4	2	2.40		1.63	2.40
Q45		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.20		1.07	1.20
Q46		4	5	3	5	4	4	2	4	3	3	3	4	3	3	2	3.47		3.15	3.47
Q47		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1	2	1	1.27		1.26	1.27
Q48		4	5	3	5	4	4	2	3	2	3	3	4	3	3	2	3.33		3.00	3.33
Q49		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	4	1	1	1	1	1	1	1.27		1.59	1.27
Q50		4	4	2	5	3	3	2	5	1	3	2	3	4	4	2	3.13		3.04	3.13
Q51		1	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	3	1	1	1	1.27		1.26	1.27
Q52		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	2	2	1.20		1.37	1.20
Q53		1	1	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	3	1	4	2	2	1	1.67		1.74	1.67
Q54		5		5	5		5	5	5	5	4	2	5	1	4	1	4.00		4.08	4.00

P Average	Pretest	Posttest
	3.18	3.56
NP Average	Pretest	Posttest
	1.67	1.54
Awareness	Pretest	Posttest
	2.52	2.75

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bainton, Roland H. *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1950.
- Barth, Karl. *Homiletics*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991.
- Baxter, Richard, and Hugh Martin. *The Reformed Pastor*. London: SCM Press, 1956.
- Begbie, Jeremy. *Beholding the Glory: Incarnation Through the Arts*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Beverly, Samuel. *Spring Harvest Praise*. Nashville, TN: Spring Harvest, 2013.
- Bonhoeffer, Dietrich, Geoffrey B. Kelly, Daniel W. Bloesch, and James H. Burtness. *Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005.
- Bugg, Charles B. *Preaching from the inside Out*. Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992.
- Dawn, Marva. *"Not What, but Who?" What's the Matter with Preaching Today?* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004.
- Kempis, Thomas A, and William C. Creasy. *The Imitation of Christ*. Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2007.
- Laubach, Frank Charles. *Prayer: The Mightiest Force in the World*. New York, NY: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1946.
- Leavers, Greg. *Complete Mission Praise*. Edited by Peter Horrobin. New York, NY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999.
- Levine, Amy-Jill, and Marc Zvi Brettler. *The Jewish Annotated New Testament: New Revised Standard Version Bible Translation for All Scriptural References*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Lewis, C. S. *The Great Divorce*. New York, NY: The Macmillan Company, 1946.
- Lewis, Karoline M. *John*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2014.
- McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1964.
- Muto, Susan Annette. *A Practical Guide to Spiritual Reading*. Denville, NJ: Dimension Books, 1976.
- Nouwen, Henri J. M. *The Inner Voice of Love: A Journey Through Anguish to Freedom*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1996.
- . *With Burning Hearts: A Meditation on the Eucharistic Life*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003.
- Oden, Thomas C. *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1983.
- Pasquarello, Michael. *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation*. [in English] Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- . *Christian Preaching: A Trinitarian Theology of Proclamation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration in Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1994.

- Resner, André. *Preacher and Cross: Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 1999.
- Ryken, Leland. *The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature and Writing*. Writer's Palette Book; Writers' Palette Book. Colorado Springs, CO: Shaw Books, 2005.
- Schmalenberger, Jerry L. *The Preacher's Edge*. Lima, OH: CSS Publishing Company, 1996.
- Shaw, Luci. *Breath for the Bones: Art, Imagination, and Spirit*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2007.
- Stott, John R. W. *The Contemporary Christian: Applying God's Word to Today's World*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992.
- Teresa of Avila, Saint, and Dennis Joseph Billy. *Interior Castle: The Classic Text*. Classics with Commentary. Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2007.
- Treier, Daniel J., Mark Husbands, and Roger Lundin. *The Beauty of God: Theology and the Arts*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1982.
- Walsh, James. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1981.
- Watson, David. *I Believe in the Church*. York: Eerdmans Pub Co, 1979.
- Westerhoff, John H., and College of Preachers. *Spiritual Life: The Foundation for Preaching and Teaching*. 1st ed. ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994.
- Wilken, Robert Louis. *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.