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Breathing With God: Inhaling God's Spirit, Exhaling God's Reign

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BREATHING WITH GOD:

INHALING GOD'S SPIRIT, EXHALING GOD'S REIGN

by

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ABSTRACT

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This action research project engaged transformative mixed methods to determine the effect of directed interventions on a cohort's participation with the triune God. "Breathing with God" embraces an *inspiring* by God, *aspiring* to be Christ-like, and *conspiring* with the Holy Spirit. Theoretical lenses included respiration and personality preferences. Biblical lenses included Genesis 11:1-9 (Babel), Psalms 42-43 (the deer pants), Acts 2 (Pentecost), and Romans 12:1-8 (church as body). Theological lenses included spiritual capacity and discipleship. Findings revealed that improved comprehension of personality preferences and spiritual gifts coupled with consistent spiritual practices improved participation and willingness to engage in *missio Dei*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

NRSV   New Revised Standard Version

AR   Action Research

IBM SPSS   The International Business Machines Statistical Package for the Social Sciences

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CHAPTER 1

BREATHING WITH GOD

Breathing is necessary to maintain life. Breathing is a naturally reflexive action.

Breathing occurs without our consciously thinking about it or willing it to happen. The

human diaphragm habitually flexes, and oxygen is drawn into the lungs and transferred to

the blood. This oxygenated blood is then pumped throughout the body by the heart

muscle, providing oxygen and nutrients so the body can function. Human adults breathe

an average of 12 to 20 times per minute, adding up to 20,000 breaths each day.[1]

Breathing with God is not as instinctive or automatic. Breathing with God, for the

purposes of this thesis, means living in communion and community with the triune God

and acting in partnership with God for the redemption of the world. Human beings

frequently find themselves out of step, out of sync, and ultimately out of breath before

God. Such breathlessness may lead to a sense of alienation from God or an empty

existence in which we struggle to find meaning and purpose. When this occurs, we yearn

to breathe again with God and for God's purpose.

As an asthmatic child in the days before effective inhalers, I knew what it felt like

to struggle for breath. My lungs burned and my body fought for each breath. It was a

terrifying sensation. To be deprived of air is to be deprived of life. Similarly, to be

disconnected from God, the source of our breath-life, is to die spiritually. When we put

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[1] Melanie Waldron, *Your Respiration and Circulation: Understand Them with Numbers* (Chicago, IL: Raintree, 2014), 5.

our human purpose before God's divine purpose, we deflect the flow of God's breath to us and through us to the world.

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote, "Our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."[2] I would reword Augustine's statement to declare that our spirits are breathless until they breathe with God. The aim of Christian discipleship, indeed the whole of Christian life, is to discover how to breathe in harmony with God. When we learn to breathe with God, we begin to breathe deeply with Jesus Christ, and to breathe in harmony with the Holy Spirit for the reclamation of the world. Yet, the human encounter with and experience of God's presence ebbs and flows throughout life. It is possible to lose contact with God, initiating a time of breathlessness until we rediscover and reconnect to God. "To be sure, God remains true to Godself, but God is also alive," and human beings can "lose clarity" about God and God's purpose.[3] This thesis proposes to show one way to connect more fully with God, to breathe more deeply with God.

Respiration (from the Latin, *respirare*, "to breathe") is both physical and spiritual. Breathing is the physical means to maintain life and the spiritual means to connect with the source of life, God. Spiritually, breathing with God means recognizing that we are *inspired*, and then seeking to *aspire* and *conspire* with the triune God. Human beings may, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, achieve spiritual development and learn to "breathe" with God, participating in God's redemptive work on behalf of the world.

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[2] Saint Augustine, *Confessions* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1991), 3.

[3] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 50.

Inspire. To *inspire* means to "exert an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on."[4] Inspiration begins with God who breathes life into humankind (Genesis 2:7).[5] God also fills humankind with the desire and the ability to achieve something for the greater good. Inside each person is the innate longing to make a mark on the world, to embody the transformation we hope will shape the world. God provides the impetus for this deep yearning and delivers the means to achieve it through endowed personality traits and gifts of the Spirit. Breathing with God means reconnecting with the source of our inspiration.

Aspire. To *aspire* is "to seek to attain or accomplish a particular goal."[6] Breathing with God carries within it the aspiration to align ourselves with God's goals as revealed to us in Jesus Christ. As we seek to be more Christ-like in our words and actions, we direct our hopes and ambitions toward achieving the things that mattered to Jesus (e.g., peace, justice, kindness) and which will usher in the promised reign of God. Breathing with God means aspiring to embody the life and values of Jesus Christ before the world.

Conspire. The Latin words *con* and *spirare* mean to "breathe together with" someone. Although modern ears may hear the word "conspire" in a negative way (a conspiracy theory), my use of the word is defined by one of its derivatives, *conspiration*, which means acting in combination or pursuing a joint effort toward a particular end.[7] Picture the disciples huddled in a locked room after the resurrection of Jesus, trying to

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[4] Frederick C. Mish, Editor in Chief, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Tenth edition (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, 2001), 604.

[5] All scripture citations are from *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments, New Revised Standard Version* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1989) unless otherwise noted.

[6] Frederick C. Mish, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 68.

[7] Frederick C. Mish, *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 247.

decide what to do next. As their breath mingles in their shared distress, Jesus appears among them and breathes the Holy Spirit upon them (John 20:22). Now the disciples breathe together with the Spirit of God to determine how best to share the good news of Christ's Gospel with a world that is out of breath. Breathing with God means conspiring with the Spirit for the restoration of God's creation. Breathing with God means inhaling God's Spirit and exhaling God's reign.

The Research Question

Underlying the concept of breathing with God is the assumption that each of us is called to Christian discipleship and empowered by the Holy Spirit with gifts for ministry. Many church members feel unworthy, underequipped, and unsure about their call from God. They prefer to leave ministry to the ordained clergy or trained mission partners. Leaving such work to one person or one group, however, runs counter to the triune God, who is social by nature and communal by disposition.[8] Delegating God's community-building work to a small group of people undermines a core Reformation belief, the Priesthood of All Believers, which claims for every Christian the Holy Spirit's guidance and support to perform a ministry in God's service. Learning to breathe with God arrests the fatal human tendency to avoid such ministry. I believe that connecting individuals and congregations to the triune God, who is the source and power of life, may help them to breathe freely with God and for God's purpose. My research question is:

> How might action research interventions with a congregational cohort encourage greater participation with the triune God?

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[8] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 172.

Answering this question involved leading a cohort of church members through a series of guided interventions which offered new understanding of the missional God we serve and assisted members in discovering their God-given personality preferences and Spirit-given gifts. The project expected to connect participants to the source of their inspiration, encourage participants to aspire to more Christ-like discipleship, and embolden participants to conspire with the Holy Spirit to achieve God's purpose through their congregation in their local neighborhood and beyond.

Variables

The action research intervention (group sessions) was the independent variable in this research project. The interventions engaged participants in an extended practice of learning to breathe with God with the goal of increasing their capacity for Christian discipleship. The dependent variable is the capacity for Christian discipleship. I know every Christian has the capacity for genuine discipleship. I believe that with purposeful training and conscious reflection Christian disciples may claim the ability to name God's involvement in human life, understand individual personality preferences and recognize them as gifts from God, identify their Spirit-given gifts and apply them to individual and congregational ministries, and envision God's "preferred and promised future"[9] for the individual, the congregation, and the community. Intervening variables for this project included age, gender, length of time associated with the congregation, and the willingness to participate in spiritual practices.

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[9] Patrick Keifert and Nigel Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church: Creating Deep Cultural Change in Congregations* (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, Inc., 2014), 7.

Importance of the Research Project

The question of how breathing with God might encourage greater participation with the triune God is important to me both personally and professionally. As a child of God, I yearn to breathe deeply with God so that I might know God's will and purpose for my life. As a parent, my hope is that my children will be emboldened to become the disciples God created them to be. As a teacher, my wish is for my students to reach their full potential in the Spirit. As a pastor, my desire is for members to embrace their call from God and to be a source of hope and comfort to their neighbors.

How, then, do we become more aware of and nurture our breathing with God? There are times in everyday life when we are more aware of our breathing. A singer is conscious of the breath marks in a musical score. A woodwind player measures out his breath to sustain a musical phrase. An athlete trains her breath to optimize her body's capacity. A sharpshooter exhales to steady his aim. We hold our breath at the movies during suspenseful moments. We listen closely to a loved one's breathing in the last moments of life.

What would life and ministry be like if we consciously attended to how we breathe with God? How might certain spiritual practices (breath prayers or meditation, for example) connect us to the Living God? How might the practice of breathing as partners with God for the good of the world revitalize individuals and congregations to pursue greater deeds for God's glory? How might a community be blessed by a church that acknowledges and responds to the Holy Spirit nudging it to action? How might an invigorated congregation attract people to the transforming power of the Gospel? How might deeper meaning and purpose be realized when breathing with God?

This research project is part of a much bigger initiative to engage the members of the congregation with their neighbors in the greater community. There is a strong congregational history of supporting social justice issues like hunger, homelessness, and prison ministry, but there is also a genuine uncertainty about how to address some current issues like bullying and human trafficking. Knowing where to begin and how to contribute often seems to be the biggest hurdle to addressing such issues. This project emphasized breathing with God as the starting point and provided space for participants to explore what God is already doing, to hear how Christ is calling, and to discover where the Spirit is inviting them to engage. There are implications for the larger church, too, in that local actions can have global impact. When a single breath is taken, the whole body feels the effect.

Theoretical Lenses

Lenses provide focus and help to break down large, complex theories into useful and manageable sections. I chose *respiration* and *personality preferences* as the theoretical lenses for this thesis. A study of respiration, the physical act of breathing, helped to explain the metaphor of breathing with God. An examination of personality preferences assisted in understanding how God formed each of us and prepared us to interact with God and the world.

Respiration

Respiration is the process of drawing oxygen from the outside environment through the respiratory system and into the cells and tissues of the body. Oxygen is drawn through the mouth and nose through the pharynx and larynx into the lungs as the diaphragm flexes and is transferred via the bronchi to the cells. The cells use the oxygen

to break down sugars in the body (cellular respiration), releasing energy which the body needs to move and function. The by-product of cellular respiration is carbon dioxide, which the body exhales as the diaphragm relaxes. We call this process breathing.

Respiration is essential for life: without oxygen, the body dies. A study of the physical act of breathing and its significance to the life of the organism provides a better appreciation for the necessity of breathing in harmony with God for our spiritual life and health. This thesis drew on sources (discussed in chapter 2) which described the physical process of respiration, briefly traced the history of scientific understanding regarding respiration, outlined a treatise on respiration by Aristotle, and addressed the interplay between respiration and movement.

<div align="center">Personality Preferences</div>

Each person breathes with God in a distinctive way because each person is a unique creation of God. Personality is the combination of an individual's distinguishing character traits, attitudes, and habits.[10] Personality is what makes each of us a unique part of God's creation. Understanding how God made each of us should orient us to God's call in our life and enable us to discern which gifts of the Spirit are most suited to our personality preferences. Understanding our personalities can have an extraordinary impact on our lives and influence our impact on the world. This thesis drew its understanding of personality preferences from the pioneering work of Carl Jung, Katharine Briggs, and Isabel Myers Briggs.[11] Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane Kise apply

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[10] Philip Babcock Gove, editor, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language* (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc. Publishers, 1986), 1687.

[11] Isabel Briggs Myers with Peter B. Myers, *Gifts Differing: Understanding Personality Type* (Palo Alto, CA: Davies-Black Publishing, 1995).

Myers-Briggs' theories to spirituality.[12] Roy Oswald and Otto Kroeger apply Myers-Briggs' theories to religious leadership.[13] Malcolm Goldsmith explores the shadow side of our personality to create a more complete picture of self.[14] Together, these authors provide a clearer picture of how personality preferences aid us in understanding how we "breathe" with God.

Biblical Lenses

The idea of breath and breathing features prominently throughout scripture. Both Hebrew and Greek have words to express "breath of God" as the Spirit of God which gives life and expresses God's love and power. In Hebrew, the word is *ruach*. In Greek, the word is *pneuma*. The biblical lenses which shed light on breath and the Spirit of God are Genesis 11:1-9 (the Tower of Babel), Acts 2 (Pentecost), Psalms 42-43 (the panting hart), and Romans 12:1-8 (Paul's analogy of the church as a body).

Genesis 11:1-9 & Acts 2

At Babel (Genesis 11:1-9), humanity shared a common language and purpose. They attempted to build a tower to heaven. God observed this and acted to confuse their language, with the result that building stopped and the people scattered throughout the earth. The people breathed as one, but they did not breathe with God, and their effort came to nothing.

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[12] Sandra Krebs Hirsh and Jane A. G. Kise, *Soul Types: Matching Your Personality and Spiritual Path* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Books, 2006).

[13] Roy M. Oswald and Otto Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership* (Washington, DC: The Alban Institute Inc.,1988).

[14] Malcolm Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God: Exploring Your Spirituality with Myers-Briggs* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1997).

This thesis utilized sources which described the circumstances of Babel within the context of God's covenant with humanity.[15] Walter Brueggemann asserts that God seeks to be in relationship with humanity, but humankind acts out of fear, choosing to make its own way in the world.[16] The descendants of Noah disobeyed God's command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, choosing instead to stay in one place. Gerhard von Rad proposes that humanity's disobedience stems from a naïve desire to gain fame which forces God to act in a preventative way in order to fulfill God's greater purpose.[17] Juan Luis Segundo cites this scattering as the intentional work of the Trinity, which is never confused in person or in purpose toward humanity.[18] God's plan, however misunderstood by the people at Babel, ultimately meant good news for humanity. The confusion of language which scattered humanity allowed God's purpose for creation to be realized.[19]

The Pentecost experience (Acts 2) reversed the confusion and dispersion of Babel. At Pentecost, God's Spirit enabled the first Christians to speak in multiple languages so that they could share the Gospel message and form a new community. The unity at Pentecost came from the common message, not a common language. God's message of salvation in Jesus Christ unified them, by the Holy Spirit, as God's people and formed the

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[15] Bruce C. Birch, Walter Brueggemann, Terence Fretheim, and David L. Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 56.

[16] Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis.* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, edited by James Luther Mays (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1982), 98, 100.

[17] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1961), 145.

[18] Juan Luis Segundo, *Our Idea of God* (Ossining, NY: Orbis Books, 1974), 65.

[19] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 104.

basis for the church. At Pentecost, God offered God's people a chance to breathe with God in a new way.

This thesis briefly revisits the theme of language to discuss if the gift of languages given by the Spirit in Acts 2:4 is a matter of knowing the foreign languages of the Empire or if it is the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*).[20] Each view offers an interpretation of how to breathe with God. William Willimon asserts that the true gift of Pentecost is not language but proclamation: the ability to hear, understand, and testify to the mighty acts of God.[21] Luke Timothy Johnson avows that the real gift of Pentecost is the Holy Spirit forming a new community based in God's Word, making them "ministers of the word," and reversing the confusion and dispersion of Babel.[22]

Psalms 42-43

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God."[23] This rendering of the psalm from the King James Version of the Bible is most consistent with the breathing metaphor of this thesis. Panting is the intake and outlet of quick, shallow breaths which occurs when the body is desperately short of air. A dog pants when its body is overheated. An athlete pants after a major exertion. A woman

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[20] William Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles,* The Daily Study Bible Series (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1976), 21.

[21] William H. Willimon, *Acts*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, edited by James L. Mays (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 32.

[22] Luke T. Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament: An Interpretation* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1986), 224.

[23] A. F. Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1903), 228.

pants when giving birth. A man pants when he is anxious. Panting occurs as the body attempts to deliver oxygen to meet an emergent, and usually stressful, situation.

Panting may also denote times of spiritual transformation in life. As we become aware of our breathlessness before God, God's grace allows us to reconnect with the Living God who is the source of our breath and life. Such panting, then, becomes deep desire for God, a holy longing to breathe with God and for God's purpose, and not simply a panicked, out-of-air experience. The wordplay in Psalm 42 suggests this type of panting. As the hart (deer) pants for streams of water, so does the heart (soul) of the psalmist pant for the living water (John 4:10-14). The words of Psalms 42 and Psalm 43, according to John Goldingay, speak for us and to our deep yearning to be (breathe) with God.[24] James Mays' stark image of a deer crying out pitifully over watercourses gone dry[25] is powerfully enriched by Artur Wesier's image of the estranged soul which cries out to receive the Living Water which only the Living God can provide.[26] The psalmist yearns to be near to God again, on God's holy mountain,[27] and he steadfastly believes that one day God will hear his cries and bring him back into God's presence.[28]

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[24] John Goldingay, *Songs from a Strange Land: Psalms 42-51* (Toronto, Canada: Clements Publishing, 1978), 17.

[25] James L. Mays, *Psalms*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1994), 173.

[26] Artur Weiser, *The Psalms,* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1962), 348.

[27] A. F. Kirkpatrick, ed., *The Book of Psalms* (Cambridge, England: University Press, 1903), 230.

[28] Walter Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1995), 71.

Romans 12:1-8

The apostle Paul compares the people of God to a body in Romans 12:1-8, each body part performing a different function, but all body parts being members of the same organism. The church, as the Body of Christ, seeks to breathe with God: to commune and to work cooperatively with God and for God's purpose. As part of this synergetic relationship, the Spirit gifts God's people with talents and abilities to be used for the common good and in common purpose with God's overarching goal of creation's redemption. This thesis studied the new life Christians have because of Jesus, and Paul's assertion that this new life is demonstrated by their behavior before the world.

As the Christian is renewed and transformed by Christ and his Gospel, so the Christian is called to transform the world according to his Gospel principles. Paul Achtemeier calls the Christian community a *colony* of heaven, with the same language and customs as heaven, but living as resident aliens in the world.[29] Anders Nygren asserts that this new community is built on God's grace and mercy, and echoes Paul's call for the faithful community to show these same qualities to the world: to breathe in harmony with God and not the world.[30] To have new life in Christ is to be a member of the Body of Christ. C. H. Dodd calls the church a *social organism* that incorporates the unity and diversity of Christian community for the common good, just as a "body corporate"[31] combines the function of disparate organs in the service of the whole body. The "one

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[29] Paul Achtemeier, *Romans,* Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, edited by James Luther Mays (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1985), 196.

[30] Anders Nygren, *Commentary on Romans* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1949), 417.

[31] C. H. Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans,* The Moffatt New Testament Commentary, edited by James Moffatt (Glasgow, Scotland: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1963), 202.

grace" bestowed by God upon the church in the form of "many gifts" is what Karl Barth calls "service," the primary purpose of the church.[32] This service is rightly rendered when each task, however prominent or humble, is performed for the greater good and as a grateful response to God's salvific actions toward humankind.[33]

Theological Lenses

Theological lenses provide another way to examine our spiritual life and offer the promise of insights to deepen our understanding of a life lived before God. I explored the theological lenses of *spiritual capacity* and *discipleship* for this research project.

Spiritual Capacity

Capacity is defined as the "the power or ability to hold, receive, or accommodate" something.[34] Richard Blackaby supports this definition by proposing that, as our relationship with God deepens, God increases our capacity to experience God.[35] The concept of spiritual capacity focuses on the practices that help the Christian grow in ability and power to understand the triune God and to realize God's purpose for the Christian. The purpose of such practices always leads toward God and God's purpose. Stephanie Spellers states, "spiritual capacity yields missional practice."[36] This project

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[32] Karl Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1960), 152.

[33] William Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1957), 172.

[34] Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 330.

[35] Richard Blackaby, *Unlimiting God: Increasing Your Capacity to Experience the Divine* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2008), 31.

[36] Stephanie Spellers, "Missional Leadership Cohort Presentation, Session #4: Spiritual Formation for Missional Leadership" (Mustang Island: TX, 2015), 8.

introduced participants to spiritual practices intended to increase their spiritual capacity and improve their ability to engage in missional activity.

Cynthia Butler promulgates the four principles of spiritual capacity which are integral components for increasing individual capacity: spatial capacity, impacting capacity, ability capacity, and positional capacity.[37] Margaret Wheatley argues that human beings will change only to preserve the *status quo*,[38] and thus obedience to God (using our spiritual capacity) occurs only when we attach a greater meaning to God and God's will for us.

Capacity may also be defined as the amount that something can contain. Spiritual capacity is the amount of God's Spirit that we can comprehend or "hold" within us. Does God increase (or decrease) the amount of God's Spirit within us over a lifetime? Does God increase (or decrease) the size of our "spiritual tank" as need or circumstance require? Doug Kelley insists that God purposely stretches human beings until they become the person God created them to be,[39] and Paul Chappell maintains that the Holy Spirit's power makes it possible for human beings to accomplish things for God beyond their natural capacity.[40]

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[37] Cynthia L. Butler, *Spiritual Capacity and the Power of Being Sanctified* (Bloomington, IL: West Bow Press, 2014), 59.

[38] Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2006), 147.

[39] Doug Kelley, *Increasing Your Capacity: 7 Timely Steps for Personal Growth* (Lexington, KY: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016), vii.

[40] Paul Chappell, *Living Beyond Your Capacity: Understanding the Spirit-Filled Life* (Lancaster, CA: Striving Together Publications, 2010), 56.

Ultimately, it is the Holy Spirit that stimulates us and gives us the courage and strength to increase our spiritual capacity. The Spirit guides, encourages, convicts, and comforts us. The Spirit promotes faith and understanding in us. Increasing our spiritual capacity is possible only as the Spirit continues to work within us.

Discipleship

Disciples are those who learn from a teacher. Christian disciples are individuals called by God who learn from Jesus Christ how to serve God in a specific way. The pattern of Christian discipleship is *following*, *learning*, and *sending* (being sent) as disciples are called by God, taught the ways of Jesus, and propelled by the Spirit to make real the reign of God.

Following. N. T. Wright explains that Jesus' invitation to follow him presents both the instant challenge to a transformation of life right now and the harder challenge of sustaining a life of discipleship over time.[41] Wright also calls Jesus the *inspiration* for our discipleship. Dallas Willard insists that the invitation of Jesus is extended not because human beings are worthy but because Jesus is worthy of the human desire and decision to become more Christ-like.[42]

Learning. Ben Cooper uses the phrase *incorporated servanthood* to define the process of learning to be more Christ-like and translating head-learning into actions

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[41] N. T. Wright, *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), xii.

[42] Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission: Reclaiming Jesus's Essential Teachings on Discipleship* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2006), 7.

which promote God's plan to redeem creation.[43] Dietrich Bonhoeffer insists that discipleship is about obedience to Christ, exchanging our old ways for Christ's ways.[44] William Blair Gould offers that it is by living within Christian community that a disciple learns how to serve in the world and is prepared by the Spirit to accept the call from God in the face of the world's challenge.[45]

Sending. Christian discipleship is a countercultural way of life, what David Augsburger calls *dissident discipleship*. The disciple is sent into the world to show the world a new and better way, God's way, often in the face of great adversity.[46] This new and better way is best exemplified by Christian community (*koinonia*), avows Stanley Hauerwas, because Christian community reflects the God whom it serves. Suzanne Henderson claims that Mark's Gospel most clearly shows this kind of community-based discipleship as Jesus forges a relationship with his followers both by his presence and his practice. The disciples learn from Jesus, but they are ultimately sent out by the Holy Spirit to bear witness to God's breaking into and transformation of the world.[47]

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[43] Ben Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood: Commitment and Discipleship in the Gospel of Matthew* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013), 242.

[44] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 63.

[45] William Blair Gould, *The Worldly Christian: Bonhoeffer on Discipleship* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1967), 14.

[46] David Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship: A Spirituality of Self-Surrender, Love of God, and Love of Neighbor* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 194.

[47] Suzanne Watts Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 97.

Methodology

This project used an action research methodology. Action research seemed

particularly suited to congregational life since this methodology aims to examine and

improve the lives of congregants, empowering them to have greater impact on the lives of

people in the community the congregation serves. David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick

write of action research:

> The foundational characteristics reflect the intentionality of the researcher to
> change an organization, that the project has some implications beyond those
> involved directly in it, and that the project has an explicit aim to elaborate or
> develop theory as well as to be useful to the organization.[48]

Action research aims to generate knowledge and effect transformation within the

organization, making it the ideal methodology for a pastor and a congregation seeking to

expand its missional imagination and practice. As Coghlan and Brannick note, "Action

research builds on the past and takes place in the present, with a view to shaping the

future."[49] The potential to transform the people we are and the work we do makes this

methodology appealing and motivating. This action research project proposed to increase

the spiritual capacity of and stimulate action among the research project participants.

This action research project employed transformative mixed methods with a

group of participants, the research cohort, drawn from one congregation. Specific

members of the congregation received letters of invitation (appendix E) with the result

that group participants represented a diversity of ages, genders, and experiences.

Transformative mixed methods are conventionally used within a social justice framework

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[48] David Coghlan and Teresa Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), 16.

[49] Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization*, 9.

to give power to a marginalized group.[50] I chose this methodology because there is a perceived power differential between the ordained clergy and lay persons with regard to the suitability and preparedness for ministry. This research project intended to empower lay persons to claim God's mission as their own and to accept a greater part in ministries that advance God's reign. The advantage of this methodology is the use of quantitative and qualitative data to facilitate discovery and foster transformation which emerges from within the group itself.

The Research Design

The interventions consisted of six group sessions (November 2017-April 2018). Each ninety-minute session included prayer, Dwelling in the Word,[51] a learning component, and time for group discussion. A technician recorded each session (audio and video), and a transcription service provided written documentation of each session and participant interview. The technician and the transcription service each submitted a confidentiality agreement (appendix G). I engaged a Journey Team of six individuals from the congregation who reviewed the research project instruments and reviewed the six intervention sessions prior to presenting each element to the research cohort.

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[50] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* Fourth ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014), 228.

[51] Patrick Keifert describes Dwelling in the Word as "a practice of a group of people listening to the Word of God, usually in relatively short chunks of the Bible, over long periods of time." This practice invites participants into a double listening process: first listening to scripture and then listening to "a reasonably friendly-looking stranger" about what that person heard from the scripture. Participants are prompted to consider two questions: (1) Where was your imagination captured by the scripture? and (2) What question might you like to ask a biblical scholar regarding the text? Participants share with the larger group what they heard from the reasonably friendly-looking stranger. By regular repetition, this practice becomes a way of forming Christian community within the Word of God and forming our decision and actions within the biblical narrative. See Patrick Keifert, *We Are Here Now: A Missional Journey of Spiritual Discovery* (St. Paul, MN: Church Innovations Institute, Inc., 2006), 163; and Patrick Keifert and Nigel Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church*, 21.

Cohort members learned more about the project in the first session. I introduced the concept of *missio Dei* and initiated a discussion on "breathing with God" with its three components: inspire, aspire, and conspire. Cohort members focused on the theory and praxis of spiritual practices in session two. Between sessions two and three, cohort members independently completed a personality preference inventory.[52] Cohort members utilized their personality preferences as a means of understanding how God created them and how they interact with the world in session three. Between sessions three and four, cohort members completed an inventory of spiritual gifts.[53] Cohort members discussed the gifts of the Spirit as presented in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13 in session four. Cohort members then reflected on how their personality preferences and spiritual gift(s) work in harmony (breathe together) to achieve God's purpose.

Cohort members addressed the questions of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit does in session five. They also engaged in conversation about how to listen for the Holy Spirit as individual Christians and how to hear the Holy Spirit as a community of faith. Cohort members revisited the *missio Dei* concept in the final session and engaged in extended conversation about how they, as individuals and as a congregation, might become more faithful partners with what God is doing in the larger community.

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[52] David Keirsey, *Please Understand Me II: Character, Temperament, Intelligence* (Del Mar, CA: Prometheus Nemesis Book Company, 1998), 4-9.

[53] Kenneth C. Haugk, *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life: You and Your Spiritual Gifts* (St. Louis, MO: Tebunah Ministries, 1998).

The quantitative portion of the project included baseline and end line questionnaires administered electronically via Survey Monkey[54] (appendix A). The Journey Team assisting with this research project field tested all instruments. These quantitative instruments measured the change in participants' understanding of key missional ideas and in their preparedness for discipleship. The descriptive statistics used to analyze the data included frequencies, percentages, and the mean where appropriate.

Participants wrote short reflections on the topic presented (appendix D) during the intervention phase of this project. This qualitative aspect of the project offered participants space for more considered responses to a specific set of questions. These reflections, submitted to the researcher, chronicled each participant's journey through the project. Lastly, I conducted an interview with each participant to clarify points raised in the reflection, to answer questions from the participants, and to gauge the development of the participant's self-understanding of his or her role within the church and God's wider purpose in the community (appendix C).

I used Charmaz's process of coding qualitative data for interviews and reflection questions, beginning with word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. *Focused coding* clustered the *in vivo* codes into similar concepts and noted the frequency. *Axial codes* grouped the focused codes into categories, relating them to the lenses of this thesis. The final step, *theoretical coding*, identified the relationship and possible directions of influence between the axial codes.[55]

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[54] SurveyMonkey is an online survey development, cloud-based software and service company founded in 1999 by Ryan Finley. More information available at https://www.surveymonkey.com.

[55] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006), 50-60..

Definition of Key Terms

Action Research: a type of social science research which empowers members of a group to "construct and use their own knowledge" to transform some aspect of their situation or organization.[56]

Aspire: to direct one's hopes and ambitions toward achieving something. For the purposes of this thesis, disciples aspire to be Christ-like and to embody Jesus' life and values before the world.

Conspiration: acting in combination or pursuing a joint effort toward a common goal. For the purposes of this thesis, conspiration is defined as breathing with the Holy Spirit for the restoration of creation.

Conspire: from the Latin *con* and *spirare*, meaning to "breathe together with."

Disciple: one who accepts the invitation to follow Jesus Christ, learns how to be more Christ-like in speech and actions, and is sent by the Holy Spirit to share the good news of God's salvation with and for the world.

Dwelling in the Word: the practice of listening to the Word of God and attending to what others hear in scripture as a means of forming Christian community within the Word of God and forming our decisions and actions within the biblical narrative.

Inspire: to exert an animating, enlivening, or exalting influence on, as God does in breathing life into human beings and filling them with the desire to embody the transformation we hope will shape the world.

Journey Team: six members of the congregation who reviewed the research project instruments and previewed the six teaching sessions.

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[56] Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization,* 55.

Missio Dei: Latin for "sending of God." A theological perspective centered in the work of the Trinity. The triune God—Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit—forms, partners with, and sends the church into the world to help fulfill God's ultimate purpose, the transformation and reclamation of creation.

Missional Church: a church whose identity lies in its participation in the triune God's mission in all of creation.[57] Each congregation must discern in their particular time and context how to partner with what God is doing.

Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory: a tool, based on the theories of Carl Jung, Katharine Briggs, and Elizabeth Myers-Briggs, for understanding the different ways people receive information, process information, and make decisions about how to interact with the world.

Personality: the combination of behavior, emotion, motivation, and thought patterns that define an individual or corporate entity.

Personality Preference: a person's behavioral tendencies. There are four pairs of opposing preferences: Extraversion/Introversion, Sensing/Intuition, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving. While all eight are used by every person to different degrees, there is a decided inclination toward one preference over the other in each pairing.

Personality Type: the psychological classification of different types of individuals. A person's personality preferences (behavioral tendencies) are grouped into a four-letter personality type. There are sixteen possible personality types.

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[57] Dwight Zscheile, ed., *Cultivating Sent Communities: Missional Spiritual Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 6.

Praxis: the practical application of a theory. For this thesis, praxis means breathing with God by inhaling God's Spirit and exhaling God's reign.

Research Cohort: the congregants who participated in this research project.

Respiration (physical): the movement of oxygen from the outside environment into the cells of the body and the removal of unnecessary by-products from the body.

Respiration (spiritual): the ability to connect with God the Life-Giver (inspiration); to learn how to be Christ-like in our words and deeds (aspiration); and to participate with the work of the Holy Spirit for the reclamation of creation (conspiration).

Spiritual Capacity: the ability or power to partner with God, to experience God, comprehend what God is doing in and through us, and to exercise our God-given gifts.

Spiritual Practice: any regular activity that promotes spiritual development or increases spiritual capacity to assist breathing with God and for God's purpose.

Spirituality: the alignment of souls with heart, mind, and body by pursuing a relationship with God to fulfill one's God-intended purpose.

Ethical Concerns

This research project complied with the ethical standards of Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN) and the parameters outlined by Luther Seminary's Institutional Review Board. Efforts to maintain confidentiality and anonymity included the use of pseudonyms for the participants and organizations. Participants did not receive compensation or any kind of reward for participation in this project.

Participants received an invitation letter (appendix E) and an informed consent form prior to the start of the project (appendix F). These documents emphasized the voluntary nature of the research project and assured participants that they could withdraw

at any time without negatively impacting their relationship with me, the congregation, or Luther Seminary. The informed consent form, which participants signed and returned to me, indicated their acceptance of the project requirements, allowed me to quote them anonymously in this thesis, and permitted the use of recording devices (audio and video) for groups sessions and interviews. All recordings and transcripts are kept in password-protected files on a computer. Access to all data is limited to me and my thesis advisors. All data will be destroyed in May 2022.

Summary

The world will not come to the church, so the church must find a way to reach the world. The *missio Dei* concept seeks to bridge this divide by linking God and God's people in a life-giving, life-affirming, life-empowering way. We begin by connecting to the source of life, being grounded in God and God's Word. We strive, as disciples of Jesus, to be more Christ-like in our approach to the world. We work with the Holy Spirit to fulfill God's vision of a world reclaimed. The prophet Isaiah said: "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). The job of the church is the promotion of God's reign over all creation.

Such a task is impossible for humanity without the triune God's power and guidance. A congregation that seeks to be missional in nature must, by definition, be united to the God who sets the vision. This project attempted to connect people to the triune God in ways that allow them to breathe easier with God, with themselves, and for the world.

At the heart of the study is discovering what it means to live as a community drawn into relationship with the triune God and with one another. There are several far-reaching implications for this research. When human beings connect with God, they will literally breathe easier, they will be healthier and happier as individuals, and they will present a united, non-anxious presence to a divided, fretful world. As more people are inspired to breathe with God, and as they begin to breathe with God in their homes, workplaces, churches, and communities, their impact on the culture will become greater and more beneficial. As God's purpose becomes humanity's purpose, the world will move ever closer to regaining its God-given design. Breathing with God, inhaling God's Spirit and exhaling God's reign, has the potential to change the world.

I introduced the metaphor of breathing with God in this chapter. I outlined the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses for this thesis. I explained the methodology and the research design. I provided definitions of key terms and disclosed the ethical concerns. I introduce the context for this research project in chapter two and present the theoretical lenses of respiration and personality preference. I present the biblical lenses of Genesis 11:1-9 (the Tower of Babel), Acts 2 (Pentecost), Psalms 42-43 (the panting hart), and Romans 12:1-8 (the Body of Christ), and the theological lenses of spiritual capacity and discipleship in chapter three. I present the research methodology in chapter four. In chapters five and six, I present the results of the study, provide interpretation, and offer some concluding thoughts about the research project.

CHAPTER 2

CONTEXT AND THEORETICAL LENSES

In the first chapter I presented the research project and outlined the theoretical

lenses (respiration and personality preferences), the biblical lenses (Genesis 11:1-9,

Psalms 42 and 43, Acts 2, and Romans 12:1-8), and the theological lenses (spiritual

capacity and discipleship) of this thesis. In this chapter I provide some notes on my

research context and explore the theoretical lenses in greater depth.

Context

The Alliance Church[1] is a cooperative ministry of two mainline denominations.

Each congregation formed in the early 1870s, erecting their respective buildings about

three blocks apart. Midwestern pragmatism prompted their union in 1911 as one

congregation outgrew its worship space and the other congregation occupied a facility big

enough to accommodate both worshipping communities. The Alliance Church celebrated

a centennial of working and worshipping together in 2011. The approximately 550

members of the Alliance Church are modest, Midwestern folk of predominantly northern

European heritage (Scandinavian and German). They are dependable, hardworking,

practical people.

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[1] This is a pseudonym.

The Alliance Church is situated in a town of 13,419 residents (2016)[2] which is solidly middle class with a median income of $53,361.[3] Most families work in one of the five major industries in town: government (city, county, and state), utilities, retail, healthcare (hospital, clinic services, nursing homes and assisted living facilities), and education. The town draws in people who patronize retail, education, healthcare, and assisted living facilities from the smaller outlying communities. There is also a large farming community surrounding the town. The town serves as a regional center for the 58,345 people who live in the county.[4]

Although members of Alliance Church represent a broad spectrum politically and theologically, they consider themselves to be one faith family and are passionately devoted to one another. The congregation is unfailingly committed to serving the larger community. When they see a need, they act to meet that need. When the local Salvation Army lunch program foundered for lack of a cook, Alliance Church members stepped in to cook and serve for several months. The congregation maintains a fund to assist its neighbors in meeting their financial obligations. Members fill care packages for the local cancer center with items designed to provide comfort for patients. The Alliance Church, working with other congregations, established a community food shelf and a jail ministry. Such coordinated efforts are new to this congregation. The success of these ministries, however, empowered the congregation to reach out and try more new things.

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[2] U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov, (accessed March 28, 2018).

[3] U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov, (accessed March 28, 2018).

[4] U.S. Census Bureau, https://www.census.gov, (accessed June 25, 2018).

In 2010, the Alliance Church leadership adopted a more streamlined approach to the congregation's ministries, focusing primarily on hunger-related ministries in an attempt to increase the congregation's impact on the community. Alliance Church now supports and participates in six hunger ministries locally and one hunger ministry internationally. The congregation is also developing relationships with a transitional housing facility for men leaving prison, the local Habitat for Humanity chapter, and the Episcopal congregation across the street. There is a genuine desire by Alliance Church members to engage with and to improve life for their neighbors.

Two factors frustrate this desire. First, the problems of modern life—terrorism, hunger, homelessness, mental illness, bullying, and the plight of the working poor—are overwhelming for a single congregation, making any attempt to help seem like a small drop in a big ocean. To combat any disillusionment, the Alliance Church leadership stresses the importance of making a difference to one person or one family at a time. This approach works. Members are more willing to participate in local mission work if they see results and if a lasting relationship is built. Second, a strongly held value of humility among Alliance Church members makes it challenging to get members to use their gifts and talents in leadership roles. While church members are generally willing to pitch in and able to help, many hesitate to lead for fear of seeming boastful or prideful. Some members genuinely do not understand or harness the power for ministry available to them through the Holy Spirit. Individual members' inability to name their spiritual gifts, to articulate the work of the Holy Spirit, or to trust the Holy Spirit to lead them forward limits the effectiveness of this congregation.

Yet, the Holy Spirit is active within this congregation. Alliance Church members are starting to take tentative steps forward in faith, lend a hand, take a risk, and try new things. For example, the decision to hire more staff for youth and family ministries is a clear response to the Holy Spirit encouraging Alliance Church to provide more programs for the community. The move to one worship service on Sunday mornings is another example. The congregation believes itself to be stronger in the Spirit when it works and worships together. The outreach of young families, inviting their friends and neighbors to worship and into membership, is a sign that the Spirit is doing something exciting within the congregation, even if members cannot yet identify what that is. This is not yet a congregation-wide movement, but it is a promising start. This is a church poised and ready to do great things with God, for God's creation. Intentional training about the *missio Dei*, spiritual practices, personality preferences, spiritual gifts, and the person of the Holy Spirit can empower members for greater participation with the triune God.

Introducing the Lenses

A lens is "a medium that focuses or clarifies."[5] Lenses help us interpret the world around us. As an amateur photographer, I use a variety of lenses: fish eye, telephoto, macro, wide-angle, tinted, and so on. Each lens offers a new perspective that may clarify or distort my view of the world. Lenses provide focus and help to break down large, complex theories into useful, manageable ideas. It may be disconcerting when we are challenged to look through a new lens, but the wonder of a new lens is the possibility of seeing the world afresh, discovering hidden meanings and deepening our understanding.

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[5] Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 1294.

Theoretical Lenses

Respiration

Respiration is the process in living organisms of inhaling and exhaling. In common parlance this is called "breathing," as the word "respiration" comes from a Latin word, *respirare*, which means "to breathe." Respiration is essential for life, physically and spiritually. Respiration occurs at two levels: external and internal. External respiration is the act whereby living organisms take in oxygen from their surroundings and give out carbon dioxide. Internal respiration involves the chemical breakdown of organic substances, such as carbohydrates and fats in the cells of animals and plants, during which energy is released and carbon dioxide is produced. This chemical reaction fuels the body's function and movement. Breathing is the interface between these two levels: the level of organs and the level of movement.[6]

The human body is in constant motion. The diaphragm and other muscles routinely flex to draw oxygen in and relax to expel carbon dioxide. The heart continually pumps the blood throughout the body. The lungs and the ribs expand to accommodate the increased volume of oxygen drawn into the body. The alveoli, tissues, and organs facilitate the exchange of gases so that oxygen may nourish the body and carbon dioxide may be eliminated. The process of respiration happens automatically: the brain regulates respiration to adapt to the changing demands of the body. This physical activity produces energy which the body needs to function properly. This energy provides the power the body needs to live.

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[6] Blandine Calais-Germaine, *Anatomy of Breathing* (Seattle, WA: Eastland Press, Inc., 2006), 13.

Physical exertion changes how the respiratory system functions. During exercise there is an increased need for energy to fuel the body. At the cellular level, respiration is the process of breaking down complex, energy-bearing molecules from food, such as glucose and fatty acids, into much simpler molecules of carbon dioxide and water to release energy. This energy goes into the production of the compound adenosine triphosphate (ATP) which, in turn, is broken down to release energy that is used in various metabolic processes.[7] The respiratory system is responsible for ensuring that the blood supply flowing to the active muscles is completely saturated with oxygen. When oxygen levels are depleted, the respiratory system works harder to supply the needed oxygen to the body.

Although respiration is usually involuntary, higher organisms can manually override brain function and change the rate of respiration. An adult respires at a rate of twelve to fifteen breaths per minute while at rest.[8] In anticipation of physical exertion or to portray an emotion, the rate of respiration may increase dramatically. Then there are times when respiration involuntarily ceases briefly: moments of anticipation or fear or surprise, for example. These moments are necessarily short-lived. The brain jump starts respiration because the body would die if starved of oxygen for too long. The body's overriding desire for self-preservation maintains respiration.

Breathing is necessary for living. That fact remains unchallenged. Modern science possesses a keen grasp of the physical nature of respiration, but throughout history many

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[7] Susan Whittemore, *The Respiratory System, The Human Body: How It Works* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publishers, 2009), 23.

[8] Calais-Germain, *Anatomy of Breathing,* 15.

cultures attached a spiritual significance to the act of breathing. According to ancient

Egyptian medical papyri (2750-2625 B.C.) the air we breathe is imbued with a spiritual

quality. Breathing, in this ancient view, took in air/spirit through the nostrils and then via

the heart and lungs. From these organs the air/spirit is distributed throughout the

remainder of the body, animating the body. The Egyptians also believed that the breath of

death, the counterpart to the breath of life, entered the human body through the left ear,

effectively choking the body and inducing the end of life.[9] Although mistaken in their

anatomy, the Egyptians did make a noteworthy contribution to understanding the process

of respiration; for "spirit" read "oxygen," and the explanation in the papyri makes sense.

The Greeks and Romans (beginning around 500 B.C.) also commented on the

spirit-infused nature of air. Greek philosophy held that there is an unquantifiable yet vital

essence within all things called *pneuma,* often translated as "spirit," "breath," or "air."

Empedocles (490-435 B.C.), a physician and philosopher, listed *pneuma* as one of the

four elements (along with earth, fire, and water) which are the basis for all matter, an

imbalance of which caused disease. Respiration served to heat or cool the heart and

blood, keeping the elements in balance and the body in good health.[10]

The Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) championed the theory of

vitalism which claims that living things are fundamentally different from non-living

things because they contain a non-physical element absent from non-living things.

Aristotle called this non-physical element the "psyche," an animating spirit or soul.[11]

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[9] Peter Sebel, D. M. Stoddard, Richard E. Waldhorn, Carl S. Waldmann, and Phillip Whitfield, *Respiration: The Breath of Life* (New York, NY: Torstar Books, 1985), 16.

[10] Sebel, *Respiration: The Breath of Life,* 16.

[11] Sebel, *Respiration: The Breath of Life,* 17.

Aristotle wrote a treatise, "On Respiration," to illustrate his understanding of breathing's purpose and physiology. This treatise offered some incredibly fundamental insights into respiration's purpose. Aristotle stated, "respiration is made up of inspiration and of expiration" which "must go on in constant alternation."[12] Aristotle believed that respiration is powered by the heart, "the seat of the soul."[13] The soul requires a certain level of warmth to survive and the respiratory system exists to heat and cool the heart and blood for the preservation of the soul.

Although he intended this treatise to be scientific, there are nonetheless many theological overtones in Aristotle's words. Respiration involves both inspiration and expiration. In Genesis 2:7, God breathes into Adam and Adam becomes a living being (inspiration) who then acts as the caretaker of God's creation (exhalation). Catherine Mowry LaCugna claims this is a "chiastic model of emanation and return, *exitus* and *reditus*, [which] expresses the one ecstatic movement of God outward by which all things originate from God through Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, and all things are brought into union with God and returned to God."[14] As God exhales, humankind inhales. As humankind exhales, God inhales. The triune God, who is communal by nature, reaches out to us (emanation) and draws us back into communion and community with the triune God (return).

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[12] W. Ogle, *Aristotle on Age, Life & Death and Respiration* (New York, NY: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 73.

[13] Ogle, *Aristotle on Age, Life & Death and Respiration*, 40.

[14] Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity & Christian Life* (Chicago, IL: HarperOne, 1973), 223.

The process of drawing breath, respiration, evokes the written words of James: "Draw near to God, and God will draw near to you" (James 4:8). The triune God is the motivating force, from without and within, that provokes us to breathe and stirs our hearts toward God and God's preferred and promised future.[15] The Creator God, from whom we draw our breath, continues to be our inspiration, our source of power and life. To be like Christ is our aspiration, to be transformed and invigorated for the work of God's impending reign. Then, with the Holy Spirit, we conspire with and are sent out to do the work of claiming God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. This is the basic movement of Christian life. We inhale the Spirit of God and exhale the reign of God.

Personality Preferences

Personality is the combination of an individual's distinguishing character traits, attitudes, or habits.[16] This definition incorporates the whole individual and calls to mind the words of Jesus when he says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. . . and love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 10:37, 39). LaCugna, drawing on John MacMurray's notion of the Self as an agent (a doer), states that we are defined by what we do on behalf of the world. LaCugna writes, "The Self as agent must be a person directed toward other persons" and she concludes that, "The Self can be a Self only in relation to other selves."[17] We are created by a God who is relational, within God's Self and with creation, and we are created to be in relation

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[15] Keifert and Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church*, 7.

[16] Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 1687.

[17] LaCugna, *God with Us*, 256.

with God and all of creation. It is vital for us to understand ourselves, our personality preferences, and how that impacts our relationship with God and creation.

Understanding how our God-endowed behaviors, emotions, motivations, and thoughts form our personalities can help us to recognize God's call in our life and discern which gifts of the Spirit are most suited to our work for God's imminent reign. Speaking metaphorically, each personality breathes in a different way. Understanding how our personality type impacts our spirituality will make it easier to breathe with God and to breathe more deeply with God's purpose for our life with and for creation.

The analysis of personality type is a relatively new field of study. Swiss psychologist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) is considered a pioneer in the study of personality type for his groundbreaking theories and work as published in *Psychological Types* (1923). Jung believed people are born with a "predisposition for certain personality preferences, although environment and personal experience also tend to shape us."[18] Jung theorized that we have natural preferences for how we gain energy, receive information, make decisions, and choose to respond. According to Jungian theory, people generate their personality type by exercising combinations of these preferences. "The interests, values, needs, and habits of mind that naturally result from any set of preferences tend to produce a recognizable set of traits and potentialities."[19]

The first pair of personality preferences, *Extrovert-Introvert*, describes the pathway to energy. Extroverts are energized through contact with other people or through engaging in activities that require group processing. Introverts are energized through the

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[18] Oswald and Kroeger, *Personality Type and Religious Leadership*, 16.

[19] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 9.

world of ideas, pulling back from activities, and utilizing solitude and stillness to generate thoughts and ideas. Table 1 lists traits common to Extrovert and Introvert personality preferences.

Table 1. Personality Preferences: Extraversion-Introversion[20]

Extraversion	Introversion
People and things	Thoughts and ideas
Try, then consider	Consider, then try
Action	Reflection
Breadth, different subject	Depth on one subject
Outer energy	Inner energy
Interruptions are stimulating	Interruptions are distracting
Focus outside	Focus inside
Say what they are thinking	Keep thoughts to themselves
Discuss to process ideas	Introspect to process ideas
Offer suggestions freely	Hold suggestions until clear

The second pair of personality preferences, *Sensing-Intuition*, indicates the pathway to discovery. People who lean toward the Sensing preference absorb information in a literal, concrete fashion, preferring information that is empirical and quantifiable, and classifying information through the five senses: seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, and tasting. People who lean toward the Intuitive preference are comfortable with information that is more theoretical in nature, allowing the engagement of the intuition and imagination in decision making, and generating abstract possibilities from information that is gathered. The intuitive preference taps into the sixth sense: the unseen world of meanings, inferences, hunches, insights, and connections. Table 2 lists traits common to the Sensing and Intuitive personality preferences.

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[20] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types*, 26.

Table 2. Personality Preferences: Sensing-Intuition[21]

Sensing	Intuition
Five senses	Sixth sense
Common sense	Insight
Accuracy	Creativity
Past experience	Inspiration
Real world	Unseen world
Current reality	Future potential
Immediacy, concreteness	Anticipation
Master, then apply skills	Learn new skills, then innovate
Simplicity, clarity	Complexity
What experiences offer people	What possibilities offer people

The third pair of personality preferences, *Thinking-Feeling*, denotes the pathway to decision making. People who lean toward the Thinking preferences base decisions on impartial criteria, cause-effect reasoning, constant principles or truths, and logical analysis. People who lean toward the Feeling preference weigh the impact of their decisions on others, consider their own needs and the needs of others, the values to be served, and indirect or community variables. Table 3 lists traits common to the Thinking and Feeling personality preferences.

Table 3. Personality Preferences: Thinking-Feeling[22]

Thinking	Feeling
Easily sort ideas about data and things	Easily sort ideas about people
Acknowledge differences	Acknowledge common ground
Critique	Appreciate
Logical, analytical	Harmonious, personal
Reasons	Values
Head knowledge	Heart knowledge
Fair but firm	Empathize, make exceptions

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[21] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types*, 29.

[22] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types*, 31.

Table 3. Personality Preferences: Thinking-Feeling (continued)

Thinking	Feeling
Analyze	Sympathize
Content of message	Impact of message
Convince through impartiality	Convince through personal meaning

The final pair of personality preferences, *Judging-Perceiving*, signifies the pathway to action and, by extension, to soul work. People who lean toward the Judging preference like to order life, formulate plans, reach conclusions, and accomplish established goals. People who lean toward the *Perceiving* preference live life as it unfolds, keep their options open, and enjoy what comes along. Table 4 lists traits common to the Judging and Perceiving personality preferences.

Table 4. Personality Preferences: Judging-Perceiving[23]

Judging	Perceiving
Planned events	Serendipitous events
Work before play	Work and play coexist
Stress reduced by planning ahead	Stress reduced by identifying contingencies
Enjoy making the decision	Enjoy gathering information
Goal-oriented	Discovery-oriented
Tasks in order	Several tasks at random
Settled and decided	Open to late-breaking information
Choose one option, then explore	Explore many options, then choose
Select the best experience	Experience as much as possible
Settled, orderly	In the moment

Jung focused a portion of his personality type study on spiritual matters. He believed that a better understanding of our personality type would accordingly lead to a deepening of our spiritual nature. This melding of the spiritual nature and psychological

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[23] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types*, 33.

type is natural, according to Jung, since *psyche* comes from the Greek word for spirit or

soul, and *soul* refers to the intangible part of us, our spirit. Hirsh and Kise agree,

emphasizing that "to tap into our spiritual side through the psyche is to combine two

intellectual disciplines, psychology and theology, about intangible concepts made

tangible by looking at their expression in our everyday behavior."[24]

Jung limited his study of personality type to people who deviated from the norm.

Jung tended to portray personality types in sharpest focus and with maximum contrast,

creating theoretically "pure" types which have little or no practical application in

everyday life.[25] The mother-daughter team of Katharine Cook Briggs (1875-1968) and

Isabel Briggs Myers (1897-1980) developed and refined Jung's ideas, making Jung's

basic theory applicable for the average person. Briggs and Myers studied the differences

among people and how people might relate to one another with the "minimum of friction

and the maximum of understanding."[26] Briggs and Myers proposed a process whereby

people could grow and develop and be able to fulfill their potential in life by

understanding how personality preferences influence their interactions with others and

the world.

Expanding on Jung's eight personality preferences, Briggs and Myers formulated

a preliminary personality preference indicator during World War II as a response to

observing men and women performing tasks that supported the war effort but which

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[24] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul* Types, 23.

[25] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 17.

[26] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 24.

"went against their grain instead of using their gifts."[27] Briggs and Myers believed that a

better understanding of personality preferences would enable people to live and cope

better in a complex world, which would result in a more fulfilling and meaningful life.

The study of personality preferences also has important implications for the spiritual

component of human life, influencing how human beings interact with and choose to

serve God. The resulting Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) evaluates the eight

personality preferences and identifies the sixteen personality types.

> The theory behind the MBTI goes on to suggest that our behavior (the
> combination of ways of taking in information, processing it, and developing
> responses and actions in the world) is not random but follows certain patterns.
> These patterns are not determined so that they take away our personal
> responsibility. Instead we remain free to choose how we behave, but we are more
> likely to act in certain ways because of the preferences which we have
> developed.[28]

Human beings are constantly bombarded with information. Our bodies and brains

must choose how to process the information received and then decide how to process and

apply that information. Personality preference is a tool for understanding the different

ways people take in information, make decisions, and choose to act.[29] These basic tasks

of perceiving and judging are aspects of every person's personality preference.

"*Perceiving* is here understood to include the processes of becoming aware of things,

people, occurrences, and ideas. *Judging* includes the processes of coming to conclusions

about what has been perceived."[30]

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[27] Mary McCaulley, "An Appreciation of Isabel Briggs Myers," *MBTI News*, 2, no. 4 (July 1980): 1-7.

[28] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 24.

[29] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types,* 16.

[30] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 1.

Humankind is equipped with two ways of perceiving: *sensing* and *intuition*. Sensing occurs when human beings acquire information through one of the five senses: sight, sound, taste, smell, and touch. Intuition is the incorporation of "ideas or associations that the unconscious tacks on to perceptions coming from outside."[31] These two kinds of perception compete for a person's attention, and generally individuals come to favor one form of perceiving more than the other. Similarly, there are two ways of judging (coming to conclusions): *thinking* and *feeling*. Thinking is a logical, step-by-step process which aims at an impersonal, objective finding. Feeling confers a more personal, subjective value on information. As with perceiving, individuals usually favor one form of judging over another. The corresponding manner of perceiving and judging is always present and will show itself depending upon the circumstances. The well-balanced individual learns to be attuned to both and to use the preference best suited for the situation.

Briggs and Myers assigned a letter to each preference: <u>E</u>xtrovert, <u>I</u>ntrovert, <u>S</u>ensing, i<u>N</u>tuition, <u>T</u>hinking, <u>F</u>eeling, <u>J</u>udging, and <u>P</u>erceiving. Once the preference in each pair is identified, a four-letter personality type is generated. Based on the combinations of letters, there are sixteen possible personality types, each with a *dominant* function, an *auxiliary* function, and a set of *shadow* functions. The *dominant* function, as the name suggests, is more influential than the others in shaping the personality type. The dominant function is identified by one of the two central letters in the personality type. For example, in an ISTJ the dominant function will be either S (sensing) or T (thinking). The dominant function is ultimately determined by the first and the final letters of the

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[31] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 2.

personality type. If the first-final letters are E-P or I-J, then the dominant function is the

second letter (S in our example). If the first-final letters are E-J or I-P, then the dominant

function is the third letter (T in our example). The fact that these letters affect the

dominant function illustrates clearly that all the preferences are interrelated. Table 5

illustrates how the dominant function of a personality preference is determined.

Table 5. Personality Preferences Showing Dominant Function

Receiving Information	Processing Information	Developing Responses	Acting
Extrovert (E)	Sensing (S)	Thinking (T)	Judging (J)
Introvert (I)	iNtuiting (N)	Feeling (F)	Perceiving (P)

Dominant Function

2nd Letter Dominant	3rd Letter Dominant
E + P = S/N	E + J = T/F
I + J = S/N	I + P = T/F
Example: I-S-T-J	Example: E-N-F-J
I + J = S-dominant	E + J = F-dominant

The *auxiliary* function supports the dominant function and is indicated by the

central letter that is not the dominant function. In the ISTJ, the dominant function is the

second letter, S (sensing), meaning that the auxiliary function is the third letter, T

(thinking). In the ENFJ, the dominant function is the third letter, F (feeling), meaning that

the auxiliary function is the second letter, N (intuition). Every personality type includes

both a dominant and an auxiliary function which "work together to produce a dynamic

personality, which has movement and life."[32] Healthy type development requires that the

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[32] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 35.

auxiliary function supplement the dominant function by supplying a useful degree of

balance not only between perception and judgment but also between extroversion and

introversion.[33] A failure to do so leaves the individual unbalanced and retreating into the

preferred world of the dominant function, and consequently afraid or unwilling to interact

with the outer world or the inner world.

With the dominant and auxiliary functions identified, there remains the need to

identify the inverse preferences that make up the *shadow* side of the personality type.

Shadow is the name typically given to the least preferred or inferior functions in a

personality type. In the previous example (ISTJ), where the dominant function is Sensing

(S) and the auxiliary function is Thinking (T), the shadow side of the personality type

would be represented by Intuition (N) and Feeling (F). These shadow functions are

always present in the background but will be used less than the preferred dominant and

auxiliary functions. An ISTJ prefers to gather information impartially through the five

senses (the S-preference) and to make decisions that are rational and logical (the T-

preference). ISTJs will distrust, under-value, or ignore information gathered from insight

or intuition (the N- preference) and disparage decisions based on emotions (the F-

preference). As the N and F preferences are always present there will be times and

circumstances when intuition and feeling come to the forefront, which can surprise and

bewilder an ISTJ.

Evidence shows that even as these opposites tend to confuse us, they also attract

us. We typically find it difficult to understand or relate easily to people who exhibit the

opposite or shadow side of our personalities because they represent all the preferences

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[33] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 20.

which we reject. Interestingly, however, we often choose to marry our opposite type,

seeing in them all the qualities we do not ourselves possess.[34] People tend to dismiss or

downplay the shadow side of personality because they do not represent their preferred

mode of operation, but their existence and contribution to personality type should not be

ignored or denied. Malcolm Goldsmith observes:

> Substantially more harm is done by denying and repressing the shadow than by coming to grips with it. Those who deny their shadows only project their evil on to others, and see it in them. Those who repress their shadows to maintain their purity and innocence are sometimes overcome by them and swept away in their very own evil . . . I am not a complete person until I incorporate into my conscious self that dark side of my person which is every bit as much part of me as is that bright side which I parade before the world.[35]

Greater interaction with the shadow side can enhance and complete a personality

type if it is permitted to develop, particularly in the realm of spiritual development. As

with the approach to life in general, the approach to spirituality is most often managed

according to our personality preferences. When we offer our very best to God, we do that

which comes naturally using our preferred personality preferences. The danger, however,

is that because we are so good at approaching God through our preferred functions, we

may miss God completely if God appears through one of our shadow functions. Being

attuned to our shadow side as well as our dominant side is important.

> It is precisely in the realm of the inferior function, where the depth of one's commitment to his relationship with God, in humble acceptance of himself and desire for transformation, meets the real test. The religious experience of conversion will always be accompanied in some manner by an eruption of the inferior function as it reveals the individual's state of disintegration, rendering him helpless and in need of the healing of God's love and acceptance in grace.[36]

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[34] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 90.

[35] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 88.

[36] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 90.

Since we cannot control the shadow side in the way that we control the dominant and auxiliary functions there may be a greater opportunity for God to use the shadow side to break into human life. With control comes barriers. Barriers make it more difficult to appreciate the in-breaking of God. Conversely, it is when we are dealing with the lesser used personality preferences, when we are in less familiar territory, that receptivity to the promptings and presence of God's Spirit is at its highest. Goldsmith concludes that perhaps it is better for us to recognize that "when approaching spiritual matters…all of our functions are weak and inadequate, and that we handle them all rather clumsily."[37] Recognizing the interplay between the dominant, auxiliary, and shadow functions, and developing and using all the personality preferences available, can lead to a greater sense of wholeness and fulfillment in life.

Isabel Briggs Myers made it clear in her writings that no one personality type is better or preferred over another, for each offer gifts and insights to the others, and each finds it difficult to cope with certain things. The study of personality preferences assists individuals in identifying strengths in their own personality by pinpointing the personality preferences used to understand the world. There remains a mutual interdependence between all personality types, as Myers noted:

> When people differ, a knowledge of type lessens friction and eases strain. In addition, it reveals the *value of differences*. No one has to be good at everything. By developing individual strengths, guarding against known weaknesses, and appreciating the strengths of the other types, life will be more amusing, more interesting, and more of a daily adventure than it could possibly be if everyone were alike.[38]

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[37] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 94.

[38] Myers and Myers, *Gifts Differing,* 201.

It is this positive approach to human difference and the value placed on human beings as unique creations that makes the work of Briggs and Myers a suitable tool through which to explore spirituality. "Our experiences of God, and our longing for God are different and unique to ourselves even though they may sometimes be shared by some other people, but not by all other people."[39] Each of the sixteen personality types is the product of its dominant function, supported and influenced by its auxiliary and shadow function. A thorough understanding of how personality preferences shape us facilitates a better understanding of God's purpose for us. Personality preferences impact how we are formed as disciples of Jesus. Grasping how God breathes life into us and through us will stop us from gasping for breath in our life and work as disciples of Jesus.

Summary

I outlined the context for this research project and explored respiration and personality preferences as theoretical lenses which inform our understanding of "breathing with God" from physiological and psychological perspectives. I now turn to the biblical and theological lenses which support our "breathing with God."

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[39] Goldsmith, *Knowing Me, Knowing God,* 24-25.

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL LENSES

I outlined the context for this research project in chapter two. I also explored respiration and personality preferences as theoretical lenses which inform our understanding of "breathing with God" from physiological and psychological perspectives. I now explore the biblical and theological lenses which support our "breathing with God."

The concept of breath and breathing features prominently throughout scripture. A quick look at a concordance reveals 116 references to breath, breathe, breathed, breathes, and breathing; eight of these references are specific to the "breath of life."[1] From the moment of creation, it is God who gives the breath of life: "Then the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed (*nasham*) into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). The Hebrew word for soul, *neshama*, derives from the verb *nasham*, or "to breathe." Thus, the animating part of creation is the very breath of God, the power of God's Spirit to give life. Every creature endowed with the breath of life is enjoined to give praise to God the Creator: "Let everything that breathes praise the LORD!" (Psalm 150:6).

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[1] John R. Kohlenberger III, *The N.R.S.V. Concordance Unabridged* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 180.

From among the numerous biblical references to breath, I chose to focus on four passages that illustrate most clearly the process of learning to breathe with God. Genesis 11:1-9, the tower of Babel, shows how humanity breathed together but did not breathe with God. In Psalms 42 and 43, the psalmist desperately desires to breathe with God again. At the first Pentecost, Acts 2, God's Spirit breathed new life and purpose into the community of faith and this community of believers breathed with God and for God's purpose. Paul compares the community of faith to the body in Romans 12:1-8 and describes how we might use our spiritual gifts to breathe in community and with God.

Biblical Lenses

Genesis 11:1-9

> Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, 'Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.' And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." The LORD came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the LORD said, "Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth. (Genesis 11:1-9)

A cursory reading of the Babel story conveys that the people built a tower to gain fame and that God confused their language to thwart this arrogant human endeavor. The lesson often preached is "pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). Such a superficial reading is, however, an inadequate understanding of the larger biblical narrative. The tower of Babel story is set after the great flood narrative (Genesis 6:9-

9:17), when God saw the "wickedness of humankind" (Genesis 6:5) and swept it from the earth. But God saved Noah, "a righteous man, blameless in his generation" who "walked with God" (Genesis 6:9). God instructed Noah to build an ark by which his family would be saved from destruction, along with two of every kind of creature (Genesis 7:2). Emerging from the ark, God twice commanded Noah and his descendants to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth" (Genesis 9:1, 7). This command, the same command given to Adam and Eve at the dawn of creation (Genesis 1:28), is given to Noah as another sign that God still cares for creation and seeks the welfare of all God creates.

Despite humankind's propensity toward sin, "the divine relationship to the world still holds."[2] God seeks to be in relationship with a creation that breathes according to God's good purpose. "As they spread and multiply, they are still to be one interrelated people, faithful to [God's] purposes."[3] With the flood and the command to Noah, God tries again to initiate the spread of God's ruling influence through humanity. Sadly, it did not work. The people chose to go their own way and work against God's plan for creation.

The descendants of Noah shared "one language and the same words" (Genesis 11:1), but their language remained one of disobedience.[4] As they migrated, the people stayed together and settled in the plain of Shinar, where they planned to build a city with a great tower "with its top in the heavens" (Genesis 11:4). Their decision to settle as a group is a direct violation of their charge from God to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill

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[2] Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 56.

[3] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 97.

[4] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 97.

the earth" (Genesis9:1, 7). The people knew what God expected of them, but they chose

deliberately to defy God's command. Their own words condemn them. "Let us make a

name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered abroad upon the face of the earth"

(Genesis 11:4).

The motivation of the people is twofold: to make a name for themselves and to

prevent being scattered across the earth. As they make a name for themselves, the people

are at risk of returning to the sins of their ancestors (before the flood) who were men "of

renown" (Genesis 6:4) and of turning their hearts and minds from God's ways and toward

their own self-interest. This self-interest puts all of creation at risk as the people "attempt

to secure their future isolated from the rest of the world."[5] This isolation, this desire to

seek self-preservation at the expense of creation, is demonstrated by the people's choice

to settle and build.

Gerhard von Rad argues that "nationalities tend to emerge from great migrations"

as groups of people "step out of the shadows of the obscurity of their previous

unhistorical existence into the light of history and climb to cultural power."[6] The people

of Genesis 11 chose to settle in the plain of Shinar and establish a cultural center, with a

city and a tower, and they determined that they would not be scattered (Genesis 11:4).

Humankind feared such scattering and acted to prevent it, prompting God to scatter them

(against their will) to fulfill God's purpose.

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[5] Birch, Brueggemann, Fretheim, and Petersen, *A Theological Introduction to the Old Testament*, 58.

[6] von Rad, *Genesis,* 144.

In Genesis 11:5-6, God descends to see this great tower being built by the people. In a moment of divine parental pride, God announces that nothing will be impossible for these people, but God's initial delight is offset by the awareness that the people will now look to their own resourcefulness rather than to God, and to their own designs rather than to God's greater purpose. "Thus the city arises as a sign of their valiant self-reliance, the tower as a sign of their will to fame."[7] God is simultaneously delighted and dismayed, and with a care for the people and all of creation, God resolves to curb the people's tendency toward disobedience. "Come," says God, "let us go down and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another's speech" (Genesis 11:7). The result of this confusion of language is that the people are scattered throughout the earth and the building of the city is abandoned (Genesis 11:9).

The word "us" (Genesis 11:7) is noteworthy because it resembles the trinitarian language used during creation when God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). The presence of the Trinity at Babel would be consistent with the whole of scripture which portrays the Godhead as united in purpose from the beginning as God created, as the Spirit moved over the waters, and as it is through the Word (*logos*) that all things came into being (Genesis 1:1; John 1:3). The intervention of the triune God is evidence that God still maintains the divine connection to humankind.

Juan Luis Segundo suggests that God's desire for humanity is a community modeled on the life of the Trinity which is "neither confused or divided."[8] God wills that

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[7] von Rad, *Genesis,* 144.

[8] Segundo, *Our Idea of God,* 65.

humanity should not be "confused" as to their purpose (serving God and one another), nor should humanity be "divided" in its nature (love your neighbor as yourself). The human community, as both dispersed and gathered, is much like the character of God who is one in three (unified in purpose) and three in one (united in nature). "Thus, what may be discerned in our text as the judgment of God may also be another way of forming a community genuinely loyal to the creator and dependent upon God's gifts and purposes."[9] Such a community may have multiple languages and still be united in its allegiance and purpose.

The scattering of humanity at Babel, then, is intentional. It is a direct and divinely proportional response to humankind's disobedience toward God. Brueggemann contends that although humanity may consider scattering in the negative sense of exile, in the case of Genesis 11 the scattering or "spreading abroad" is part of God's plan for creation. As this scattering at Babel is blessed, sanctioned, and willed by God, "the intent of creation finally comes to fulfillment."[10] Brueggemann expands this idea: "The scattering God wills it that life should be peopled everywhere by his regents, who are attentive to all parts of creation, working in his image to enhance the whole creation, to being 'each in its kind' to full fruition and productivity."[11] The reason God allows this scattering is so that all parts of humanity may look to and respond to God in unity. In Brueggemann's exposition there are three possibilities envisioned by the Babel story: a unity desired by the people but resistant to God's will; a scattering which is feared by the people as a

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[9] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 100.

[10] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 98.

[11] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 99.

punishment from God; and a unity willed by God and based on loyalty to God.[12] Only this last option will lead to a community that models true faithfulness to God and exhibits God's unifying reign amid creation's diversity.

The Babel text prompts us to reflect upon language as a peculiarly important human activity. It raises questions about the function of language, such as how and to whom humans speak and listen. Brueggemann explains the function of language. "The faithful community exists (among other things) to maintain a faithful universe of discourse against the languages around us which may coerce, deceive, manipulate, or mystify."[13] A person may become a scattered person, pulled by the voices of the world and "whose members are at war with each other" (Romans 7:23; James 4:1; 1 Peter 2:11). Or a person may be united, falsely, by self-competence, self-discipline, or self-sufficiency like the rich fool in Jesus' parable (Luke 12:15-19). The Babel text "envisions persons who practice openness based on trust and integrity based on knowing the true language of the faithful Speaker,"[14] God, whose call truly unites humankind.

God's goal remains for all peoples to unite in worshipping God and serving as agents of God's reign. Isaiah envisions this new reign beginning in Jerusalem and spreading throughout the world, a world which is to be characterized by glad pilgrimages, the adoption of God's law, and disarmament designed to bring peace among nations (Isaiah 2:2-4). Isaiah offers a more universal vision of the political world of the Middle East, with many cities speaking many different languages but all swearing allegiance to

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[12] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 99.

[13] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 102.

[14] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 102.

the God of Israel (Isaiah 19:18-25). Brueggemann believes, "There is no hint of giving up different national identities. But there is an overriding common allegiance to Yahweh, the practice of worship of Yahweh, establishment of free interaction among the participants, and most strikingly, a hint (v. 18) of a common language."[15]

This alternative world begins with hearing God's call and listening to God's directive. The people of Babel failed to hear and heed God's command, so God confused their language. Genesis 11:7 is commonly translated "so that they will not <u>understand</u> one another's speech," but it may more appropriately be translated as "so that they do not <u>listen</u> to one another's speech." The word in Hebrew is *shema'* (hear). If *shema'* is translated as "understand," then Babel is simply a linguistic miscommunication. If *shema'* is translated as "listen," then the meaning changes to one of transformation.

Transformative listening means attending to someone and participating in the dialogue, which requires energy and engagement. Brueggemann develops this idea, asserting that, "The capacity to listen in ways which transform depends upon trust in the speaker, readiness to be impacted, and willingness to have newness come into one's life."[16] Transformative listening asks three questions. To whom should I listen? Am I ready to attend? Am I willing to be transformed? There are many voices in the world clamoring for our attention and our allegiance. Sifting the trusted voices from the false voices is difficult. A trusted voice will seek our well-being. Finding a trusted voice is a gift. Once we find that trusted voice, we must be prepared to attend to it. Trusted voices will speak the truth to us, even if the truth is painful or uncomfortable to hear. We need to

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[15] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 101.

[16] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 103.

take those words to heart, recognizing that something in us may need to change. When we are open to the possibility that what needs to change is us, then we are properly attuned to hear what those trusted voices may tell us. Lastly, we must be prepared to act on what the trusted voice says. If the voice is trusted, then we will want to heed the voice and act in ways that transform our lives. When we discern the true voice from the crowd, and when we position ourselves to hear that voice, we will be ready for the transformation being offered.

The people of Babel failed to listen to the trusted voice of God, failed to position themselves to hear God, and therefore failed to reap the transformation available with God. When God confused their language and they could no longer practice *shema'*, they needed to develop new ways of listening. Their distrust of God marred their relationship with God, effectively declaring God to be unimportant and irrelevant. "A society which suffers failed speech, as in our text, not only cannot build towers, it cannot believe promises, cannot trust God, cannot be human."[17] The judgment against the people at Babel for not hearing or heeding God is a charge that will later be laid against God's people, Israel. The people of Babel labored together to build a city and a tower. They remained united in language and purpose but failed to hear God's word and heed God's command. The story ends with a scattering. There is no ability to listen or to hear. However, there is a populating of the earth, as God willed from the beginning (Genesis 1:28), and there is waiting. The people wait for a new word from God and a new call which will invite breathing with God's good purpose and create a new community. There

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[17] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 103.

will not be restoration of genuine speech and listening until the Holy Spirit is given again at Pentecost (Acts 2:2) like the first wind that blew across the waters (Genesis 1:2).[18]

The failure of Babel's citizens to hear and heed God's call disappoints God and provokes God to confuse their language. By their choice to remain together and settle, the people of Babel cease to breathe with God and for God's purpose. Their new reality, with its multiple languages, obliges the people to learn new listening skills if they are to reconnect with God. This inability to listen is not just the problem of an ancient people. Modern men and women likewise struggle in their attempts to hear God's call. The myriad of voices calling out to modern men and women easily drowns out God's voice and requires the assistance of the Holy Spirit to facilitate hearing and breathing with God.

<center>Psalms 42-43</center>

As a deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God.
My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. (Psalm 42:1-2)

Athanasius is famously quoted as saying, "Most of scripture speaks to us, while the Psalms speak *for* us."[19] Psalm 42 and its companion, Psalm 43, are the lament of someone who is physically and spiritually separated from God. This pair of psalms expresses the heartache of someone who lost contact with God and cannot yet find his way back to God. The psalmist yearns to breathe freely with God and return to the intimacy he once experienced with God.

Psalm 42 opens with a simile that articulates the psalmist's yearning for God: "As the deer longs for flowing streams, so my soul longs for you, O God. My soul thirsts for

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[18] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 104.

[19] Goldingay, *Songs from a Strange Land,* 17.

God, for the Living God. When shall I come and behold the face of God?" (42:1-2). This is a powerful image of thirst: deer braying over watercourses gone dry. Just as the body cannot live without water, the soul cannot survive without God. Second only to breath is the body's need for water and the soul's need for the Living Water, which only God can provide. Artur Weiser writes of these verses:

> . . . his soul, which, thirsting for the Living God, stretches itself far out in prayer towards God, without whom it is bound to pine away, is like the hind which, in the blazing heat of the summer, stretching its neck forward as far as it possibly can, searches in vain for water in the dried-up bed of the brook to quench its burning thirst. . . For him, God is really a "Living God", and what he longs for is only and solely that he may be permitted to appear before God's "face" and, coming into close contact with him, may have the most intimate communion with him.[20]

The exact nature of the psalmist's distress and the reason for his alienation from God are unknown. The lack of precise context makes these psalms relevant for the greater human condition. John Goldingay proposes that these two psalms may apply to one individual cut off from Jerusalem, or to a congregation living in exile, or to a king during a period of crisis.[21] Clues within the psalm's verses, however, support the idea of one individual who is no longer physically near the Temple in Jerusalem where the psalmist may have once held high office or played some part in the Temple rituals. The psalmist recalls journeying to the Temple with other worshippers, leading them "in procession to the house of God, with glad shouts and songs of thanksgiving, a multitude keeping festival" (Psalm 42:4). Now, the psalmist is compelled to sojourn far from

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[20] Weiser, *The Psalms*, 348.

[21] Goldingay, *Songs from a Strange Land*, 26.

Jerusalem's Temple and he feels this distance deeply both physically and spiritually: "My tears have been my food day and night" (Psalm 42:3a).

It is possible that the psalmist is in exile, under the control of a foreign power (Psalm 43:1), surrounded by enemies who continually pose the question, "Where is your God?" (Psalm 42:3b, 10). The question summons images of Samson being taunted by the Philistines (Judges 16:23-25) or David being mocked by Goliath (1 Samuel 17:41-47). The question reinforces the psalmist's estrangement from God and dispossession from the Temple. For the psalmist, there is no access to God or to the place where word and sacrament, praise and prayer are offered to God.

The psalmist's location is unknown, but the psalm offers some tantalizing hints. The land of Jordan and of Hermon (Psalm 42:6) in the northernmost region of Israel, near Dan, and around the area of Caesarea Philippi, are the site of magnificent waterfalls which swell in the spring thaw. Mount Mizar (Psalm 42:6), "the little mountain," may refer to a hill in the vicinity, or it may "contrast its significance with the fame and splendour of God's holy mountain where he desires to be."[22] The ambiguousness of these psalms allow them to function as a symbol of our own displacement and estrangement from God. The lack of specificity gives the psalms a universal feel, applicable to every person, in every age, in every circumstance. This endows the psalms with great power and hope to comfort us in our discontent.

It is painfully evident that the psalmist feels overwhelmed with a flood of misfortunes, all stemming from his separation from God. The psalmist references how "deep calls to deep" (Psalm 42:7), a cry for communion with God as the deep places of

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[22] Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms,* 230.

God and the deep places of humankind reach out to find one another. It is a cry for the Spirit of God to reach down and touch the psalmist's spirit. Such imagery is reminiscent of Jonah's cry to God: "You hurled me into the depths, into the heart of the sea" (Jonah 2:3). Both the psalmist and Jonah cry out to God, who controls the depths and the seas, acknowledging that it is "your waves and your billows" which wash over them (Psalm 42:7; *cf.* Jonah 2:3).

Whenever God's people are in trouble, they cry out to God. The Hebrew slaves cried out to God for deliverance (Exodus 2:23). The Israelites cried out to God for relief from their enemies (Judges 3:9). Elijah cried out to God on behalf of the widow's son (1 Kings 17:20). Judah cried out to God when attacked (2 Chronicles 14:11). The psalmist cried out to God in his distress (Psalm 34:6; 61:2). Jesus cried out to God from the cross, using the psalmist's words, "Why have you forgotten me?" (Psalm 42:9). When we find ourselves unable to hear God's voice or feel God's presence, then we need to connect with the yearning implanted in us by and for God. When we act on this yearning by crying out to God, that cry becomes our first breath with God. Scripture proves repeatedly that God hears and is faithful, and when God responds we begin to breathe with God again.

The psalmist cries out to God, seeking refuge in God as his enemies persist in their attacks. The question "Why?" appears four times in these psalms (42:9a, 9b, 43:2a, 2b), and the psalmist wrestles with why God would let these things transpire. As these psalms progress, the emotional condition of the psalmist deteriorates. The psalmists' physical dislocation from God (42:1-2) becomes the belief that God has forgotten him (42:9) and cast him off (43:2). The psalmist is in the classic position of a Job or a

Jeremiah; but even in this dark place, the psalmist knows that God is the only One who can save or redeem the situation. The psalmist could seek redress from human sources (*cf.* Isaiah 30:2), for "there are other places to get water…but they are mere cisterns, at best capable of storing water (but not of producing it), and in fact cracked and incapable even of that."[23] The psalmist knows that only the "Living God" may provide the "living water" (Jeremiah 2:13) that he needs.

In the thrice-repeated refrain, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God" (42:5, 11; 43:5), the psalmist:

> . . . takes refuge in his memory . . . For a brief moment the bitter present ceases to exist for him . . . his soul takes hold of his communion with God which now threatens to become obscure for him. He reaches the point, though at first only for a brief moment, at which a way is opened to him which will lead him beyond suffering and distress.[24]

The way that will lead the psalmist out of darkness into light is expressed in these words: "Hope in God!" The psalmist, from the depths of his despair, is still able to turn in hope to God for help; and where there is hope, there is life. The psalmist begs God to "send out your light and your truth; let them lead me; let them bring me to your holy hill and to your dwelling" (43:3). In this, there are suggestions of our ongoing need for and God's promise to provide a Messiah. For Christians, Jesus is the "light of the world" (John 8:12) and "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), and in him humanity's prayer for union with God is answered. In Jesus, Ezekiel's prophecy is fulfilled:

> A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put

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[23] Kirkpatrick, *The Book of Psalms,* 33-34.

[24] Weiser, *The Psalms,* 349.

my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God. (Ezek. 36:26-28)

Being with God is still the psalmist's unwavering desire. The yearning of the psalmist's soul is to be in intimate communion with God, and neither the insults of enemies nor the wretchedness of the situation will shake the psalmist's confidence that God will find him and restore him. God's absence does not paralyze prayer, it prompts prayer.[25] When the psalmist does not feel the presence of God, it makes prayer more urgent. The psalmist's belief that God is behind the current trouble is less frightening a prospect than that of a God whose purpose is continually challenged and frustrated by evil. God's absence (real or imagined) draws us forward, inviting us to breathe toward God, and on finding God to breathe with God. Prayer and praise remain options for the psalmist because God sits enthroned over the floods (Psalm 29:10) and God's lordship can never be broken.

The assurance that God will hear, and answer, is characteristic of the psalms of lament,[26] and one of the reasons these psalms remain powerful testimonies to God's power and faithfulness in modern life. The thirst that disturbs the psalmist exists because God created human souls to correspond to God, and "where that correspondence is weakened, disturbed, or interrupted, the experience of its lack becomes like the thirst and hunger that is the opposite of being satisfied."[27] The longing to be close to God, to feel God's presence, to know and to breathe with God and for God's purpose is the basic

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[25] Goldingay, *Songs from a Strange Land,* 35.

[26] Brueggemann, *The Psalms and the Life of Faith,* 71.

[27] Mays, *Psalms,* 173.

desire of human beings. The psalmist has the advantage of knowing what is missing

(Psalm 42:4). God recognizes our yearning, and in Jesus, satisfies our hunger and thirst

for God and gives us the breath we need to live.

Acts 2

> When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:1-4)

The obvious connection between Genesis 11 and Acts 2 is speech. God confused

the peoples' speech at Babel making it impossible for them to communicate. Now the

coming of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples as wind and fire equips them with a new

form of speech which enables them to share the gospel message (Acts 2:2-4). Some

scholars claim this new speech is the gift of speaking in tongues. Other scholars affirm

this new speech as the ability to speak in other, earthly languages.

William Barclay is one of the scholars who believes this new speech is the gift of

speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*). He cites this as a phenomenon familiar in the first

century church (Acts 10:46; 19:6). Barclay claims that at Pentecost, "someone, in an

ecstasy, began to pour out a flood of unintelligible sounds in no known language."[28]

Early Christians coveted this gift as proof of possession by the Holy Spirit. The apostle

Paul listed the gift of speaking in tongues among his *charismata* (1 Corinthians 12:10),

along with, but distinct from, the gift of interpreting tongues. Paul wrote, "So if the whole

church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and some who do not understand

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[28] Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 21.

or some unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind?" (1 Corinthians 14:23). By this we may conclude that Paul did not admire this gift too highly, preferring the gospel message to be shared clearly and openly for all to hear and understand. The gift of speaking in tongues is difficult to comprehend and easy to manipulate because it "did not edify unbelievers, tended to disorder, and could be easily counterfeited."[29]

Barclay considers the Holy Spirit's gift of speech at Pentecost to be the gift of tongues because he claims it was unnecessary for the disciples to speak in foreign languages. The crowd visiting Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost consisted of Jews and Proselytes, Gentiles who accepted the Jewish religion and customs (Acts 2:5, 10). As such, only two languages would be required: Aramaic, which every Jewish person spoke, and Greek, which most citizens of the greater Roman Empire spoke or understood. Barclay concludes that "Luke, a Gentile, confused speaking in tongues with speaking in *foreign* tongues."[30]

By contrast, other scholars support the view that the Holy Spirit endowed the disciples to speak in foreign languages, which facilitated the sharing of the Gospel plainly to the visitors from around the Empire. The presence of so many visitors in Jerusalem reinforces this view: if the disciples speak in the languages of the various peoples of the Empire, it will facilitate the movement of the good news to "the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Consider, too, that Luke does not indicate the presence of an interpreter to explain

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[29] Theodore Ferris and G. H. C. Macgregor, *The Acts of the Apostles,* The Interpreter's Bible (New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1978), 37.

[30] Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 22.

this new speech to the crowd. Paul is clear that to one is given the gift of tongues and to another is given the interpretation of tongues (1 Corinthians 12:10). Without interpretation, the gift of tongues falls on deaf ears; it is a confusing language which divides (as at Babel) rather than unites.

William Willimon abandons the argument between speaking in tongues and speaking in foreign languages and declares that the real gift of Pentecost is "proclamation,"[31] the true first fruit of the Spirit. The disciples, men denigrated for their provincial background, now astonish and bewilder the crowd by their command of multiple languages. "Those who had no 'tongue' to speak of the 'mighty works of God' now preach."[32] The Spirit sets proclamation in motion, the disciples are urged to stand and speak, and Peter is emboldened to preach to the crowd. "In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God breathed life into dust and created a human being. In Acts 2:1-4 the Spirit has breathed life into a once cowardly disciple and created a man who now has the gift of bold speech."[33]

Peter begins his first proclamation as an apostle immediately upon receiving the gift of speech by the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Peter's sermon is designed to convince the Jews that Jesus is the promised Messiah, the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies. Here Peter shares the truth about Jesus: Jesus performed many powerful signs and wonders (Acts 2:23); Jesus' own people rejected him (Acts 2:23); Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at God's right hand (Acts 2:33); Jesus sends the promised Holy Spirit

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[31] Willimon, *Acts,* 30.

[32] Willimon, *Acts,* 32.

[33] Willimon, *Acts,* 31-32.

(Acts 2:33); Jesus is both Lord and Messiah (Acts 2:36); and that Jesus offers forgiveness (Acts 2:38). Peter's whole argument is that the peoples' hope for a Savior, not fulfilled in David, is now fulfilled in the resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:29-32).

The effect of Peter's sermon on the crowd is immediate. "They were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). The impact of his words, the truth of the gospel message, point beyond Peter to the God who saves. "It is the God who keeps promises that matters in this sermon . . . a God who is busy in the world."[34] Convinced, the crowd asks Peter, "What should we do?" (Acts 2:37). Peter answers them: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (v. 38). Here we begin to see the true intent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost: to create a new community, based on the gospel of Jesus, which will help to usher in the reign of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. "A new wind is set loose upon the earth, provoking a storm of wrath and confusion for some, a fresh breath of hope and empowerment for others."[35]

In the sense that the crowd responds to Peter's speech, the emphasis of Acts 2 may not simply be on proclamation, but also on hearing. In the experience of Pentecost there is evidence of the crowd's ability to hear and understand: "…each one *heard* them speaking in the native language of each" (Acts 2:6); "…how is it that we *hear*, each of us, in our own native language?" (Acts 2:8); "…in our own languages we *hear* them speaking about God's deeds of power" (Acts 2:11); "…give *ear* to my words" (Acts 2:14); "Now when they *heard* this, they were cut to the heart" (Acts 2:37). Perhaps one of

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[34] Willimon, *Acts,* 39.

[35] Willimon, *Acts,* 33.

the miracles of Pentecost is the "fresh capacity to listen because the word of God blows

over the chaos one more time."[36] The history of the church begins in a new language

community where we are granted both ears to hear and tongues to speak God's good

news in Jesus Christ. The new speech of the faithful community means that disparate

voices may now be raised with a common message. "Although their language may differ

in sound, they all speak the same thing, while they cry, 'Abba, Father.'"[37]

The Holy Spirit gives the disciples something worth hearing and something

powerful to speak, and this gives birth to a new community of the faithful. It is the Holy

Spirit who empowers proclamation, who opens ears to hear and hearts to accept, who

unites believers around the gospel of Jesus. Peter's response makes Luke's perception of

the first community clear:

> If the people repent and are baptized, they also will receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). And what is the Spirit? It is the "promise" (2:39). Here the visitation of God according to the promises made to Abraham is brought to fulfillment. For whom is the promise? "To you and to your children." First of all, then, for the Jewish population of Jerusalem and, as with Abraham, "their descendants." But for them only? No: "and to all that are far off, everyone whom the Lord God calls to him" (2:39; cf. 2:21). Those who respond make up the restored people of God.[38]

This new Spirit-created community is marked by certain characteristics: "They

devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and

the prayers" (Acts 2:42). The apostles shared their recollections of Jesus and his

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[36] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 104.

[37] Brueggemann, *Genesis,* 104.

[38] Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament,* 225.

teachings with the gathered community. A new fellowship formed: a *koinonia*[39] which revolved around the gospel, a mutual purpose, and shared possessions, for they "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44). They broke bread together, experiencing fellowship at the table as a tangible expression of the Spirit working among the new community.

> In good Jewish fashion, when the blessing is said at the table, the table becomes a holy place and eating together a sacred activity . . . In their eating and drinking the resurrection community is already a partial fulfillment of that promise, enjoying now what shall soon be consummated in the kingdom of God.[40]

They also prayed, keeping God at the center of the community. In these four key activities, we see a community which embodies the Spirit of God, a "divine disturbance"[41] which united and galvanized the community to become "the blessing to the nations" promised through Abraham (Genesis12:3). The fruit of participation with God is the ability to build this new community. Pentecost reverses the confusion and scattering of Babel. Human language, so confused at Babel, is now restored at Pentecost. The community, scattered after Babel, is reconstituted at Pentecost. The Spirit of Pentecost brings fulfillment to the promise made to Abraham, and "those who heard in their own tongues of the praise of God, were drawn together."[42]

This new community experiences the Holy Spirit's power, breathing new life and purpose into their midst, providing the gospel message to share, and inspiring them to go out as witness-bearers. This newly inspired community aspires to transform the world by

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[39] I am defining *koinonia* as a community of individuals with a deep attachment to Jesus (the living center of the group) and to fellow disciples.

[40] Willimon, *Acts,* 41.

[41] Ferris and Macgregor, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 37.

[42] Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament,* 224.

conspiring with the Spirit which transformed it first. "The Spirit is the power to witness, the engine that drives the church into all the world."[43] The interior transformation by the Holy Spirit leads to an outward movement by the community to transform the world according to God's principles. Pentecost afforded humankind the opportunity to breathe with God once again. The desire to breathe with God now becomes, through the Holy Spirit, the momentum which drives the community to fulfill God's goals.

Romans 12:1-8

> For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us: prophecy, in proportion to faith; ministry, in ministering; the teacher, in teaching; the exhorter, in exhortation; the giver, in generosity; the leader, in diligence; the compassionate, in cheerfulness. (Romans 12:4-8)

A consistent theme in Paul's letters is the newness of life that Christians have because of Jesus. In Romans 6:4, Paul speaks of how, through baptism, we are incorporated into Christ and united with him in participation in his death and resurrection. From that he immediately draws the conclusion that we should walk in newness of life. Our actions should reflect the new age ushered in by Christ. In Romans 8, Paul writes that life is given by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God and of Christ, and where the Spirit of Christ lives and works, a new mode of life results. To the Galatians, Paul writes, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit" (Galatians 5:25). Paul pleads with the Ephesians to "lead a life worthy of the calling" to which they are called in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 4:1). Participation with the triune God generates this new life and new community for the redemption of all creation.

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[43] Willimon, *Acts,* 32.

This "newness of life" is demonstrated by the life Christians lead in the world. In Romans 12, Paul encourages his readers to present their bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God (Romans 12:1). He further entreats them to "be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). It is the Gospel which renews and transforms us. We are called to transform the world according to the Gospel's principles.

Paul Achtemeier compares this new Christian community to a "colony," with the same language and customs as the heavenly realm but living as resident aliens in this world.[44] Christians are inspired by God, literally made alive in God. Christians aspire to live the values important to Jesus (i.e., love, grace, mercy). Christians conspire with the Holy Spirit to realize God's goals of redemption and reclamation. Christians conform their lives to this new community, this citizenship of God's realm, even though they live in the world. Christians speak and act as a light to the nations, so that the world may come to know the triune God and to usher in God's reign on earth as it is in heaven. This new age, this new community, experiences God's grace and mercy (Romans 12:1, 3) and is expected to live a life which is in harmony with that experience.

> Through baptism the Christian has been incorporated into Christ. Thereby the basis has been laid for the transformation of which Paul speaks (cf. 6:4). But since the Christian must live his life in this world and serve God in its relationships, the temptation always arises to be conformed to the nature of this world and to copy its fashion . . . It is indeed in this world that the Christian must serve God, but not with a mind that belongs to this world and is conformed to its nature. He must serve God with a mind that bears the mark of a new aeon, of membership in Christ.[45]

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[44] Achtemeier, *Romans,* 196.

[45] Nygren, *Commentary on Romans,* 419.

> But to be in Christ is to be a member of the body of Christ. A member without connection with the body would be nothing. It is a member only in relation to the body and its other members. It has existence only by the fact that it is incorporated in the body and has its special function therein. In that relation his place is assigned to him, and he must respect its limits as determined by God.[46]

The "Body of Christ" now becomes the dominant metaphor for Paul: "For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another" (Romans 12:4-5). Paul's use of the "body corporate" or the "social organism"[47] encapsulates both the unity and diversity of the Christian community. The human body is comprised of a wondrous array of organs and appendages each with its own purpose, but all composing the body corporate. The various organs and appendages work together for the good of the social organism, providing for its health and welfare. Paul extends the metaphor to the church, asserting that Christians are united in Christ and gifted by the Holy Spirit for the uplifting of one another and for the welfare of creation.

The Holy Spirit unites the community to serve as Christ's disciples in achieving God's purpose. It is the same Holy Spirit that furnishes specific "spiritual gifts" to certain individuals within the community. Every Christian is given such a gift for the "common good" (1 Corinthians 12:7). The plurality of gifts is to be used in ways that promote unity rather than discord, breathing with and for God and one another. Every Christian should:

> …regard and conduct his life in the Church as a service. That service is regulated by the act that the *one grace* has been bestowed on the Church in the form of many *gifts*, which are not separate and competitive, but diverse, and in their very diversity coherent and harmonious. And the faith which apprehends grace as such

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[46] Nygren, *Commentary on Romans,* 420.

[47] Dodd, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans,* 202.

and in its various gifts, shows (as *the* Christian faith) every man his purpose in common with that of all the others.[48]

In Christ there is oneness, but that does not abolish or negate individual distinction. Here again, the analogy of the body is helpful. The eyes, ears, hands, feet, heart, lungs, and kidneys are distinct in function, but all serve to promote the welfare of the entire body. "The members of the body neither argue with each other or envy each other or dispute about their relative importance. Each part of the body carries out its own function, however prominent or however humbly unseen that function may be."[49] Each member of the body, each member of the Christian community, has a task to perform, and it is only as each member contributes that the body functions as it ought to function. Where there is discord among the members of the body, there is inevitably a breakdown of the body corporate and an inability to function effectively.

Aesop's fable about the Belly and the Members illustrates this breakdown:

It is said that in former times the various members of the human body did not work together as amicably as they do now. On one occasion the members began to be critical of the belly for spending an idle life of luxury while they had to spend all their time laboring for its support and ministering to its wants and pleasures. The members went so far as to decide to cut off the belly's supplies for the future. The hands were no longer to carry food to the mouth, nor the mouth to receive, nor the teeth to chew it. But, lo and behold, it was only a short time after they had agreed upon this course of starving the belly into subjection when they all began, one by one, to fail and flop, and the whole body to waste away. In the end the members became convinced that the belly also, cumbersome and useless as it seemed, had an important function of its own, and that they could no more exist without it than it could without them.[50]

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[48] Barth, *A Shorter Commentary on Romans,* 152.

[49] Barclay, *The Letter to the Romans,* 171-172.

[50] *Aesop's Fables* (Kingsport, TN: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc., 1947), 46.

Each member serves a different function. It is not the intention that all members should be alike or serve the same function, because their differences are required to meet all the needs of the body. When the different members of the Body of Christ, the church, work together God's will is accomplished.

The Holy Spirit gives gifts according to the needs of the Body. No gift is greater than any other. No gift is dispensable. No gift is irrelevant. For the Holy Spirit gives with purpose, and each gift is to be used for the building up of the Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:12). Paul lists some of the possible spiritual gifts: prophecy, ministry, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and compassion (1 Corinthians 12:6-10). The list offers some of the essential characteristics of Christian community, characteristics that contribute to the operational success of the Body.

Life shaped in the way Paul describes it in Romans 12:1-8 is life lived as a "grateful response to the God who has delivered us from our slavery to sin."[51] Such life inhales the Spirit: receiving the mercy and grace God offers, accepting Christ's invitation to serve, and consenting to use the gifts the Spirit offers. Such life exhales God's reign. It builds up the Body of Christ and assists in the transformation of the world through the One who makes all things new (Revelation 21:5).

Each one of these biblical lenses examines a form of breathing with God and for God's purpose. Babel depicts humanity working with common purpose but not according to God's purpose. Psalms 42-43 describe the plight of a man who lost his connection to God and yearns to participate with God and in God's service again. The Holy Spirit at Pentecost enables the followers of Jesus to partner with God and gives them the

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[51] Achtemeier, *Romans,* 200.

opportunity to establish a new community based on God's purpose. Paul's words to the Romans illustrate the new community made possible when humanity breathes with God and participates in God's purpose to redeem creation. When we inhale God's Spirit, we can exhale God's reign.

Theological Lenses

Spiritual Capacity

Stephanie Spellers claims that "spiritual capacity yields missional practice."[52] This claim is foundational to my research project. If focused interventions can augment spiritual capacity, then the yield will be increased missional practice. *Spiritual* may be defined as anything that is "of God" (particularly the Spirit of God), while *capacity* may be defined as "the power or ability to hold, receive, or accommodate" something.[53] *Spiritual capacity* is our ability to partner with God, to experience God, to understand what God is doing in and through us, to exercise our God-given gifts for God's reign, and to identify and appreciate God who is within us. Each of us has the God-breathed, Christ-led, and Spirit-driven spiritual capacity to partner with the triune God for the reclamation of the world. When we engage the spiritual gifts and abilities given to us by God, we become agents of God's reign, and thus our spiritual capacity yields missional practice.

The missional church perspective views the triune God as the source and impetus for missional activity. God is actively at work in the world and invites human beings to

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[52] Spellers, "Missional Leadership Cohort Presenttion, Session #4: Spiritual Formation for Missional Leadership," 8.

[53] Gove, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary of the English Language*, 330.

join what God is doing on behalf of the world. Spiritual capacity means partnering with God for the reclamation of the world. The question for each person or congregation then becomes: How might God be inviting me/us to participate?

Spiritual capacity is also about experiencing God in a real and life-transforming way. The writer Anne Gordon affirms that "all of us are born mystics, for the capacity to experience wonder and a primal sense of connectedness with all of life is our birthright."[54] God, who is community, created human beings with whom to associate. God, who is relational, chose to be known and to be experienced by God's creation. Human beings are both "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) and are meant to experience God, whose presence and power is both marvelous and terrifying to behold. Maintaining this divine-human connection is crucial. Exploring ways to experience God is inherent in deepening our spiritual capacity.

Understanding God is another aspect of spiritual capacity. This speaks to how God is revealed to us. Where do we see God, hear God, and sense God? In seeking to understand more of God, we too often ask: "God, where are you in all this?" This question, often asked during dark and difficult days, seeks God's presence as a means of alleviating distress. However, since God is never truly absent, the question is flawed and will ultimately yield an inadequate answer. We must ask instead: "God, how will you reveal Yourself to me?" Understanding God, in terms of spiritual capacity, means discerning God's will and purpose for life. When we access the power of God and use the

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[54] Anne Gordon, *A Book of Saints: True Stories of How They Touch Our Lives* (New York, NY: Bantam Books, 1994), 65.

gifts the Holy Spirit gives us for the work Christ calls us to do, we may begin to realize our full spiritual capacity.

Finally, spiritual capacity refers to the amount of God's Spirit that we can comprehend or "hold" within our human frames. Compare spiritual capacity to lung capacity. There are times in life when our spiritual lungs are full, and we are prepared to use our gifts and abilities to achieve God's purposes. Then there are other times when our spiritual lungs are deflated, and we struggle to partner, experience, and understand God's will for us. At these times, the quality of our connection to God and the volume of God's Spirit within us is depleted. This fluctuation in spiritual capacity persists throughout our lifetime. But just as we may increase the physical capacity of our lungs through exercise, we may also increase our spiritual capacity through the exercise of spiritual practices.

A sports metaphor links this idea to our breathing imagery. One reason athletes exercise is to increase their lung capacity. This is necessary because extra oxygen is required to provide the fuel an athlete needs. Many athletes train with a coach who offers specific exercises designed to enhance the athlete's lung capacity. Such training is purposeful. Athletes may run farther or swim faster with improved lung capacity.

This means that the volume of our spiritual capacity may change over time. When we are new to faith and spiritually immature, our tank may be small or empty. Over time, as our capacity to understand and respond to God increases, our tank may grow and fill proportionately. As Paul wrote, "I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food" (1 Corinthians 3:2). As food is fuel for the body, so is the Holy Spirit the power (fuel) for the servant of God, and the Holy Spirit is given to us incrementally as we can receive and exercise the Spirit's power. As we demonstrate our

willingness to serve God and prove our ability to work in the Holy Spirit, our tank is expanded and our power (fuel) increased. Conversely, when we fail to utilize the Spirit's power or underperform in the use of our gifts, our tank may be contracted, and our power lessened until we learn to work with God's Spirit appropriately. "Our human minds can only handle so much. Our spiritual maturity limits us. If we have a shallow walk with God, we cannot expect to receive deep revelations from Him. God will match His words to us with our capacity to receive them."[55]

Christian discipleship requires participation with the triune God who actively indwells and who works with and through human beings to accomplish God's objective of reconciling the world. We accept God's invitation by initiating spiritual practices in our life which encourage communion with the Holy Spirit of God. Spiritual practices are actions or rituals that refocus our hearts and minds on God and God's greater purpose. Spiritual practices are not the goal, but they help to increase our spiritual capacity by drawing us closer to God, deepening our understanding of God's purpose, and making it easier for us to breathe freely with God. Spiritual work requires spiritual resources and "the Holy Spirit is eager to empower us that we might be used beyond our capacity."[56] The Holy Spirit "trains" us for a purpose: to serve God and creation.

In this sense, God is "no respecter of persons," for God "wants to stretch each of us into the person we're called to be."[57] God wants every person to maximize his or her spiritual capacity. This is possible only when we permit God to increase our capacity.

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[55] Blackaby, *Unlimiting God,* 31.

[56] Chappell, *Living Beyond Your Capacity,* 56.

[57] Kelley, *Increasing Your Capacity,* vii.

God's plan for our lives is that we would increase more and more (1 Thessalonians 4:10), expanding our spiritual capacity to reach our God-designed potential. It is said that the apostle Paul "became increasingly more powerful" after his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:22). Paul tells the Corinthians that he planted, Apollos watered, but it is God who gave the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). God takes us from where we are and "gives the increase" to our faith and strength so that we can achieve our God-given task. The Bible is filled with stories of people who experienced a similar increase in their spiritual capacity, allowing them to do amazing things on behalf of God and God's people (i.e., Moses, Miriam, Gideon, Hannah, Esther, David, Daniel, Mary, Peter, Matthew, and Luke).

These faithful men and women accomplished great things for God because they opened themselves to God and allowed God's Spirit to work through them. "When we make more space for God we are increasing our spiritual capacity for the great and wonderful plans of God in our lives."[58] Being open to God requires an awareness of the four principles of spiritual capacity: spatial capacity, impacting capacity, ability capacity, and positional capacity. *Spatial capacity* is about making room for more of God.[59] Christians increase their spatial capacity by emptying themselves of the things that crowd God out and seeking the in-dwelling of God's Spirit. Spatial capacity is, to paraphrase John the Baptist, decreasing ourselves so that God may increase within us (John 3:30). *Impacting capacity* refers to the ministry assignments which God determines for each of us. When Christians embrace their God-intended tasks and tap into the Holy Spirit's

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[58] Butler, *Spiritual Capacity and the Power of Being Sanctified,* xiii.

[59] Butler, *Spiritual Capacity and the Power of Being Sanctified,* 63.

power, they realize the impact of being Christ's disciples.[60] *Ability capacity*

acknowledges that "no matter how small, each gift and ability we have should be offered

to God as an instrument of his purpose."[61] Discovering and using those gifts and abilities

is a combination of personal discernment and communal affirmation. As Christians

struggle to recognize their spiritual gifts and abilities, the faith community will validate

true God-given gifts and abilities. *Positional capacity* acknowledges the diversity of

ministries provided by God and the variety of gifts made available to accomplish God's

plans. Christians positioning themselves in areas of ministry that employ their gifts and

abilities advance God's reign.

Humankind is predisposed to oppose any kind of change, even change that

improves life. Referring to the human view of change as the enemy, Margaret Wheatley

comments, "Strangely, we assert that it's a particular characteristic of the human species

to resist change, even though we're surrounded by tens of millions of other species that

demonstrate wonderful capacities to grow, adapt, and change."[62] Wheatley adds that

human beings will change, but only if the change is viewed as the means of preserving

the self. Using the process of "self-reference," human beings are "free to choose, but we

choose on the basis of self…Self-reference explains *why* any living system is motivated

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[60] Butler, *Spiritual Capacity and the Power of Being Sanctified,* 71.

[61] Butler, *Spiritual Capacity and the Power of Being Sanctified,* 91.

[62] Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science,* 138.

to change. It will change to stay the same."[63] Wheatley concludes that humans change only if "a new insight, or a new form helps them become more of who they are."[64]

The process of self-reliance and the human desire to stay the same both work against the growth of spiritual capacity. Compliance with God often runs counter to human self-interest, but assent to God's will and purpose is compulsory for humanity to reach spiritual capacity. We are fortunate, therefore, to have the Holy Spirit to help us. It is only through the work of the Holy Spirit that we may change and grow and reach our spiritual capacity. If we are out of step with God, it is the Holy Spirit who points out our error. If we are out of sync with God, it is the Holy Spirit who helps reposition us before God. If we are lost and alone, it is the Holy Spirit who gathers us into the community of faith. If we are open to transformation, it is the Holy Spirit who provides new life. If we are called to act, it is the Holy Spirit who provides gifts and power for service.

The Christian life, then, is a process of becoming. We become more Christ-like in our actions and attitudes when we see the wisdom of life lived in God's Word and way, and when we are willing to work with the Holy Spirit to achieve God's purposes. As we become aware of and work to increase our spiritual capacity with the Holy Spirit's guidance and encouragement, we become more fully who God created us to be. As our spiritual capacity yields to missional practice, we become able to breathe freely with God and for God's purpose.

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[63] Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science,* 147.

[64] Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science,* 148.

Discipleship

There is a Greek word for disciple, *mathetes*, which incorporates the idea of intentional learning and of thought accompanied by effort. A disciple is the pupil of a teacher or the apprentice of a master craftsman who learns how to do something from one more qualified. When Jesus called his first disciples, the brothers Simon and Andrew, they were fishing in the Sea of Galilee. He called to them and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people" (Matthew 4:19). Here we see the three fundamental movements of discipleship: *following*, *learning*, and *sending* (being sent). First, Jesus invited Simon and Andrew to follow him, and scripture says they "immediately left their nets and followed him" (Matthew 4:20). Discipleship begins when the invitation to follow is accepted. Second, Jesus promised to "make" something of them. In this context, the word "make" might be understood to mean that Jesus would teach the disciples, mold and shape them, making them into something new. Then again, it might be understood to mean that Jesus compelled the disciples to "fish for people," that is to perpetuate his message and promote God's reign. This is sending, the final aspect of discipleship.

Following. N. T. Wright, in a series of sermons, addresses the primary question of discipleship: "How does following Jesus actually play out in the midst of fears, anxieties, pressures from within and from the wider world, temptations, and personal disaster?"[65] Wright explains that Jesus' invitation to follow him presents both an instant challenge to a transformation of life right now, and the harder challenge of sustaining a life of discipleship over time. Discipleship means allowing the compelling love and the radical

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[65] Wright, *Following Jesus,* xii.

agenda of Jesus to grasp us afresh each day. Wright highlights several New Testament books that focus on Jesus as the inspiration for discipleship.

The book of Hebrews encourages us with the idea of Jesus as our high priest who knows and sympathizes with our weaknesses because he experienced human life. Consequently, we may approach God "with boldness, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Hebrews 4:15-16). As Jesus summons us to follow him, we may be initially hesitant because of our perceived unworthiness. Wright explains that, "Following Jesus appears hard because we feel we start off with a deficit to wipe off. Hebrews not only summons us to follow Jesus; it explains that the moral deficit is already dealt with."[66] Jesus is one of us and who inaugurated a new covenant with and for us. Hebrews reminds us that God chooses to work through flawed human beings to fulfill God's purpose, and that God's ultimate design for creation is not yet fulfilled.

Paul writes to the Colossians that the battle against the worldly powers is already won through Christ. God created all things "through Christ, and for Christ" (Colossians 1:16), including the powers so that God's world might have order. When humanity abdicated its responsibility to God's world and handed power over to earthly powers, Christ came to right the balance of power. The great irony of Colossians is that "the cross was not the defeat of *Christ* at the hands of the *powers*; it was the defeat of the powers at the hands—yes, the bleeding hands—of Christ."[67] Disciples need no longer fear the powers of the world because they have been "reconciled" to Christ: not annihilated, but realigned for God's purpose. Disciples are free from the powers, free to follow Jesus.

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[66] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 11.

[67] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 20.

Matthew's Gospel drives home the divinity and presence of Jesus who is "God with us" (Matthew 1:23) and summons us to "fresh allegiance to our sovereign and savior."[68] When Peter says that Jesus is "the Messiah, the Son of the Living God" (Matthew 16:16), Jesus accepts that title and with it the covenants God made with Abraham (a great nation) and David (an everlasting throne). The cross and resurrection show that all authority is now committed to Jesus and that there is no corner of the universe over which he does not claim rightful sovereignty. We pledge our allegiance to follow this Sovereign-Savior. "We are to be his agents, his ambassadors, in bringing the word of his kingdom to all his subjects."[69]

John's Gospel focuses not on the kingship of Jesus but on the glory of God expressed in Jesus. John lifts Jesus up as a "replacement for the Temple"[70] where he is both the sacrifice and the great high priest. Just as the original creation story ended in triumph with God pleased and resting within God's creation, so the crucifixion of Jesus ends with the word "finished" (John 19:30), for on the cross God incarnate inaugurated the work required to redeem the world. Although the work is not yet complete, the victory is assured, and so Jesus breathes on the disciples, as God breathed on Adam in the beginning, and gives them God's own Spirit, God's own breath of life to help them as they follow God. "The love which [God] incarnated, by which we are saved, is to become

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[68] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 27.

[69] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 31.

[70] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 40.

the love which fills us beyond capacity and flows out to heal the world: so that *the Word may become flesh* once more, *and dwell* (not just among us, but) *within us*."[71]

Mark's Gospel offers the vision of a servant king who calls his people to follow him, and who would draw the evil of the world to himself. The Jews always believed that their history, their national life, was the focal point of the history of the whole world. "Their God was the creator of the universe; Jerusalem was the centre of the world; their history was the rudder that would steer the ship of world history."[72] According to Isaiah, their sacrificial suffering would be the salvation of the world. Mark claims that this suffering would be focused on one man, the Servant King, Jesus. Those who follow Jesus must be prepared to become for the world what Jesus was for the world: heralds of the God's reign, agents of healing, and contenders with the power structures that "keep anger and pain in circulation."[73]

Wright's final sermon makes the claim that "Easter is the beginning of God's new world."[74] In this redeemed reality, the heavenly city comes to earth and God chooses to dwell among God's people once again (Revelation 21:1-3). As Easter people, Christian disciples are called to minister to a world filled with Calvary experiences and to "find that the hand that dries *our* tears passes the cloth on to us, and bids us follow him, to go and dry one another's tears."[75] The invitation to follow Jesus is not issued because we are

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[71] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 42-43.

[72] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 48.

[73] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 52.

[74] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 55.

[75] Wright, *Following Jesus,* 63.

worthy, but because Jesus whom we follow is worthy of our "desire" and our "decision" to become like Christ.[76] We are free to follow Jesus because his victory over the world's powers is already achieved. We are no longer beholden to anyone or anything except Jesus and his mission, which fulfills the covenant-promises God made to our spiritual ancestors. Jesus, our Servant King, summons us to follow him into and serve the world in love, ushering in God's promised future for creation.

Learning. The second movement within discipleship is learning. This is when a disciple discovers the values of God, walks in The Way of Jesus, and begins to breathe freely with the Holy Spirit. In the learning phase the disciple begins to make The Way of Jesus the disciple's way, too. This progression is substantiated by the numerous accounts in scripture of Jesus taking the disciples aside to give them private instruction (Matthew 20:17; Luke 18:31), and it is validated when Jesus says to the disciples, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15). Then Jesus gives the disciples authority to witness in his name through the power of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:8).

During the learning phase, disciples begin to value what matters to Jesus and to weep for those things that break his heart. Disciples learn to share the good news of the Gospel, to have a special concern for the poor and oppressed, and to proclaim God's reign here and now, even as they await its final consummation (Luke 4:18-19). It is during this phase that disciples learn spiritual practices which inform their life with God:

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[76] Willard, *The Great Omission,* 7.

reading scripture, worshipping God, attending to the poor and needy, loving enemies, joining a Christian fellowship, and praying for the Spirit's guidance.

Ben Cooper calls this the commitment phase because disciples must decide where to pledge their heart and energies and are subsequently entrusted with Christ's mission.[77] Cooper, using the Gospel of Matthew, shows how the "unbounded" message of Christ's Gospel (a message open to everyone) is utilized by those seeking to be "drawn in" to stand alongside the disciples in Christ's narrative of "constructive empathy" toward their neighbors, and who then translate what they learn into actions with and for God's ultimate plan for the redemption of the world.[78]

Cooper calls this process of learning, internalizing, and acting "incorporated servanthood."[79] Disciples who make this kind of theocentric commitment are so persuaded that Jesus came to bring salvation to God's people that they cannot help but serve as messengers of this salvation to the nations. Incorporated servanthood may be likened to Isaiah's call for God's people to be "a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6). Disciples become incorporated into Christ's program of salvation, trusting in Jesus by trusting what he says, and claiming the promises made by God. Disciples are dependent on God for help and vindication. This "vertical dependency" is then expressed by a "horizontal righteousness" that reveals God to the world.[80]

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[77] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood,* 1-2.

[78] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood,* 241.

[79] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood,* 242.

[80] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood,* 242.

Such incorporated servanthood takes time and discipline to mature as the disciple steadily submits any personal will to the will of God. For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ's call demands an obedient response, not simply a confession of faith.[81] Discipleship means adherence to Christ. It means forsaking the old way of life and adopting Christ's way of living. The road to faith passes through obedience to the call of Jesus.[82] As such, it is a response to the One who alone has the authority to bridge the gap between God and humanity and is always "on Christ's terms."[83] It is Christ who calls the disciple and who demands a response in concrete acts of obedience.

Obedience to the call of Jesus is never fully within the power of the disciple,[84] who must rely on the community of faith and the Holy Spirit for instruction and encouragement. Bonhoeffer understands discipleship as being firmly anchored in the life of the community of faith, a community whose life is based on obedience to God's word. "From within the community of faith the disciple learns how to take his stance in the world. The community is the place where the word is studied and preached, so that the disciple can discover its validity and significance for his own age."[85] It is from the community of faith that the presence of Christ is clearly shown to the world: through the preaching of the word, the sacraments, and the lives of Christ's followers. Others come to belief in Christ by seeing the community that is obedient to him.

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[81] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 57.

[82] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 63.

[83] Gould, *The Worldly Christian,* 27.

[84] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 84.

[85] Gould, *The Worldly Christian,* 52.

Such obedient discipleship also requires the power of the Holy Spirit to attain. William Gould, drawing on Bonhoeffer's writings, writes: "In the power of the Holy Spirit, the disciple is enabled to accept the pattern of the crucified and risen Lord and to sacrifice all self-interest to him."[86] Bonhoeffer writes:

> It is only because he became like us that we can become like him. It is only because we are identified with him that we can become like him. By being transformed into his image, we are enabled to model our lives on his. Now at last deeds are performed and life is lived in single-minded discipleship in the image of Christ, and his words find unquestioning obedience.[87]

A disciple who is obedient to the call of Jesus becomes fully self-actualized. An obedient disciple is able to reach their God-given, Christ-oriented, and Spirit-guided potential. A disciple may realize their true self only in relationship to the triune God and to one another. It is through Christ that a disciple's relationship to the world becomes realistic, and it is through Christ that a disciple is enabled to reach others in a meaningful and holistic way.[88]

Sending. Disciples who are incorporated into Christ and obedient to his mission are ready for the final phase of discipleship: sending. The disciple now shows his or her true discipleship by acting in Christ's name before the world. This requires engagement with, not withdrawal from, the world. A disciple is never called to leave the world, but to engage the world through the community of faith, proclaiming the nearness of God's reign and working for the advancement of others. When the disciple does not engage, writes Bonhoeffer, "by withdrawing our bodies from the Body of Christ, we render them

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[86] Gould, *The Worldly Christian,* 13.

[87] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 304.

[88] Gould, *The Worldly Christian,* 28.

incapable of serving our neighbors."[89] Sending requires committing our whole self—

mind, body, and spirit—to proclaiming Christ's Gospel to the world. A biblical example

of this is Jesus sending the seventy ahead of him, proclaiming the reign of God and

relying on the hospitality of strangers (Luke 10:1-12).

David Augsburger styles this "dissident discipleship"[90] because being sent in

Christ's name to proclaim his Gospel of love runs counter to the principles of the world.

The dissident disciple possesses a "tripolar spirituality" which links the discovery of self,

the desire for God, and the valuing of people into a seamless reality. "Persons who find

love of God inseparable from love of others discover that tripolar spirituality leads

through love of God to love of neighbor (who stands in for God in our daily encounters)

and ultimately to becoming a loved and loving self."[91] This is how Achtemeier's

"colony" of God's realm partners with the colonies of the world.

Being a dissident disciple means having an encounter with the Jesus of the

Gospels and engaging with his utterly radical claims on us and for the world. Dissident

discipleship means being utterly convinced that Jesus is the Christ, the Lord of creation,

and that life may only be understood in terms of his intentions for our lives and for

creation. Dissident discipleship means understanding and exercising Christ's nonviolent

renunciation of power, shouldering the weight of restoring love toward offenders, and

accepting his way of *agape* love, which is:

> a radical commitment to the welfare of others that sees the other with an equal
> regard in spite of the other's response; that seeks to be understanding without

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[89] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship,* 284.

[90] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship,* 189.

[91] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship,* 14.

need to be understand or to be understood; that risks, cares, gives, and shares with no need for reciprocity, no need to be respected, no need to be appreciated, no need to be thanked, and no need to enjoy the process. Agape love is love of neighbor given because the neighbor is also a creature, a precious creation of God.[92]

Such discipleship is not real until it is embodied. Like Bonhoeffer, Augsburger believes the kind of discipleship Christ calls us to is best achieved in and through the community of faith which unites the love of God and love of neighbor. The community of faith is a community of deeds. "Such community is the natural setting for healing, and in positive community, persons are sustained and guided, sometimes confronted and corrected, always accepted and prized."[93] This kind of community is formed by the slow, deliberate invitation to trust, to belong, to finally join in common purpose.

The New Testament term for such community is *koinonia*. This is a community of individuals with a deep attachment to Jesus, the living center of the group, and a deep attachment to fellow disciples. As Stanley Hauerwas notes:

> To describe the original Christians as persons of spirituality who believe in God is true enough, but it is neither interesting nor truly accurate. What is interesting is that they thought that their belief in God as they had encountered him in Jesus required the formation of a community distinct from the world exactly because of the kind of God he was.[94]

The apostle Paul set *koinonia* as the capstone of our experience of God. "The grace (*charis*) of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love (*agape*) of God, and the communion (*koinonia*) of the Holy Spirit, be with all of you" (2 Corinthians 13:13). This unique form of community exhibits what sixteenth-century literature calls *Gelassenheit*: a

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[92] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship,* 51.

[93] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship,* 77.

[94] Stanley Hauerwas, *Against the Nations: War and Survival in a Liberal Society* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 34.

relinquishment, submission, and resignation to God's will. This yielding to God and to others in God's family aims at "fulfillment in community, not self-actualization in isolation; it is a commitment to seek consensus through sacrifice, service, respect for others, and obedience to the collective will of the group."[95]

The idea of discipleship in community is most clearly seen in Mark's Gospel. Jesus is everywhere in the company of his disciples. Jesus forges a relationship with his followers that is characterized both by *presence* and *practice.* The original disciples are summoned to be in Jesus' presence as they bear witness to his mission of initiating God's reign. They are also meant to continue Jesus' practice of wielding the power associated with God's reign. Jesus "deliberately summons and equips his followers to carry his program forward."[96] The first disciples are called to follow Jesus (Mark 1:17), trained for discipleship by Jesus (Mark 3:14), and finally sent out in Jesus' name to proclaim the reign of God (Mark 6:7).

Jesus is the authorizing agent who commissions disciples to play an active role in redeeming creation. The disciples are no longer students but full participants in Jesus' salvation scheme. Suzanne Henderson asserts that "the act of sending seems equally to imply the sender's delegation of authority."[97] She cites Mark's Parable of the Wicked Tenants (Mark 12:1-12) as an example of delegated authority. The vineyard owner sends three servants and a beloved son as his authorized agents to collect past due rents from tenants. The parable underscores the full authority with which the owner endows his

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[95] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship,* 93.

[96] Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark,* 4.

[97] Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark,* 148.

emissaries. "When Jesus begins to 'send' his disciples forth in Mark 6:7, then the Twelve become full participants in their teacher's own eschatological agenda, endowed with the same authority that has characterized Jesus' own ministry to this point."[98]

The theme of "giving" is characteristic of discipleship in Mark's Gospel. Jesus summons the disciples, giving them identity and purpose (following). Jesus gives the disciples knowledge of God's coming reign and of God's intention for creation (learning). Jesus gives them a message to declare and gives them his authority to employ as power to be shared (sending).

The disciples become vessels of God's power at work in the world on behalf of God's reign. Jesus appoints and empowers his disciples as collective agents of God's in-breaking reign. This succession plan ensures that trained and commissioned disciples will share the good news of God's impending reign, drawing others to follow and learn from Jesus (through scripture and through them) who will then be sent out in the power of the Spirit.

Summary

The biblical and theological lenses examined in this chapter engaged the concept of breathing with God as individuals and as a community of faith. In the next chapter the discussion turns to a detailed description of the research methodology and methods.

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[98] Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark,* 148.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The biblical and theological lenses examined in the previous chapter engaged the concept of breathing with God as individuals and as a community of faith. In this chapter the discussion turns to a detailed description of the research methodology and methods.

Action Research Methodology

This research project studied the extent to which individuals might be emboldened to participate in the *missio Dei* by understanding how God fashioned them and by accepting God's invitation to use their Spirit-given gifts to further God's purpose. The research question was: How might action research interventions with a congregational cohort encourage greater participation with the triune God?

I chose action research methodology for this project because "action research builds on the past and takes place in the present, with a view to shaping the future."[1] This is research which aims to produce practical knowledge: "the knowing that shapes the quality of your moment-to-moment actions."[2] I worked with my congregants, building on our past, acting in the present, and shaping our ministry toward God's future by offering practical ways to live and breathe with God moment by moment. Coghlan and Brannick

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[1] Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization,* 9.

[2] Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization,* 44.

write that "action research is defined as a procedure in which the participants of a social system are involved in a data collection process about themselves and utilize the data that they have generated to review the facts about themselves to take some form of remedial or developmental action."[3]

Greenwood and Levin argue that action research must contain three key components: action, research, and participation.[4] As *action*, this form of research is "carried out by a team that encompasses a professional action researcher and the members of an organization, community, or network (stakeholders) who are seeking to improve the participants' situation."[5] The research question for this project asked if specific interventions would encourage greater participation by congregation members with the triune God. The underlying presumption was that the research project would empower participants to live and work more closely—to act—in harmony with God and God's purpose. I believe this research could have major implications for the effectiveness of this congregation in the larger community.

I conducted the *research* portion of this project with nine congregation members, the research cohort, who attended group sessions (interventions), completed questionnaires (baseline, personality preference, spiritual gifts, and end line), submitted reflection questions, and participated in a personal interview. An audio technician recorded all group sessions and I recorded all interviews. A professional service provided transcripts for all group sessions and interviews. A Journey Team of six additional

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[3] Coghlan and Brannick, *Doing Action Research in Your Own Organization,* 47.

[4] Davydd J. Greenwood and Morten Levin, *Introduction to Action Research: Social Research for Social Change*, 2nd edition (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 6-7.

[5] Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research*, 3.

congregation members assisted me in this research project by field testing all instruments and group sessions.

The *participation* aspect of this action research project utilized a "trained social researcher" (me) who served as a facilitator-teacher for members of the local community (the research cohort) working together to enhance the participants' situation.[6] This action research was participatory in nature because I serve as the pastor of the congregation with whom I worked, a sampling of whose members were the co-researchers for this study. I prepared and led each of the group sessions. Participants discussed corporately and wrote reflections individually on those sessions. Participants conducted personal inventories to ascertain their personality preferences and spiritual gifts. Participants shared thoughts and ideas privately in interviews. Members and I worked together to understand how God is calling them to serve in our church and community.

Action research aims to "increase the ability of the involved community organization members to control their own destinies more effectively and to keep improving their capacity to do so within a more sustainable and just environment."[7] I hoped to provide training and encouragement that would energize people for ministry. The desire to generate knowledge and affect transformation within the organization makes action research the ideal methodology for a pastor and a congregation seeking to expand their missional imagination and impact.

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[6] Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research*, 7.

[7] Greenwood and Levin, *Introduction to Action Research*, 5.

Transformative Mixed Methods

I used a transformative, mixed methods design for this action research project.

The components of this these methods involved the collection of quantitative data and the

compilation of qualitative data to enhance the quantitative data.[8] John Creswell explains

the advantage of such method: "This 'mixing' or blending of data, it can be argued,

provides a stronger understanding of the problem or question than either by itself. This

idea is at the core of a reasonably new method called 'mixed methods research.'"[9] The

benefit of mixed methods is that the quantitative and qualitative data enrich the findings

of the other.

Quantitative methods assume that "social phenomena can be systematically

measured and scientifically assessed."[10] I electronically distributed two self-administered

questionnaires (baseline and end line), a standard method for collecting quantitative data.

The questions on these surveys sought to determine the change (if any) in participants'

views and actions due to the project interventions. For example, sets of questions

attempted to ascertain a participant's understanding of their role in the church,

consciousness of personality preferences, and knowledge of the Holy Spirit. Other

questions used a succession of Likert scales to measure the frequency with which

participants engaged in certain spiritual practices. Such quantification, "counting

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[8] Creswell, *Research* Design, 224.

[9] Creswell, *Research Design*, 215.

[10] Peter M. Nardi, *Doing Survey Research: A Guide to Quantitative Methods*, Third ed. (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 19.

something and then statistically analyzing the findings,"[11] is important when ascertaining

a participant's point of view or specific practice at a specific point in time, but

quantitative data is not as well suited to identifying the yearning to breathe with God (the

research project's overarching metaphor) or the desire to be a more integral part of God's

purpose for the world.

Qualitative methods are an invaluable complement to quantitative methods.

According to Herbert and Irene Rubin, "Qualitative researchers focus on depth rather

than breadth; they care less about finding averages and more about understanding specific

situations, individuals, groups, or moments in time that are important or revealing."[12] In

conversation, anecdotes, experiences, and interpretations are shared in a way that "re-

creates a culture or describes a process or set of events in a way that participants would

recognize as real."[13] Utilizing group discussions, reflection questions, and personal

interviews, I engaged the members of the Research Cohort as conversation partners in

exploring how God created them, how the Holy Spirit gifted them, and how Christ might

be calling them to serve in new ways.

Combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, the mixed

methods research employed in this project provided rich data and a more comprehensive

representation of cohort members' views and motivations. The transformative mixed

methods design of this study administered the quantitative and the qualitative instruments

concurrently, then analyzed findings of both, comparing and relating the results so that

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[11] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: Sage Publications, Inc., 2012), 2.

[12] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 2.

[13] Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing*, 7.

interpretations could be articulated. Transformative mixed methods are conventionally used within a social justice framework to give power to a marginalized group.[14] I chose this methodology in part because there is a perceived power differential between the ordained clergy and lay persons with regard to the suitability and preparedness for ministry. One goal of this research project was to empower lay persons to claim God's ministry as their own, reducing that disparity. The advantage of this methodology is the use of quantitative and qualitative data to facilitate discovery and foster transformation from within the group itself.

This method suited the research methodology well, providing a quantitative snapshot at the beginning and the end of the project to determine change, while allowing the qualitative material to enrich the overall data yield. The transformative mixed methods design supported the purpose of my research question by allowing me to: (1) determine if and how participants "breathe" with God; (2) identify and connect cohort members' personality preferences and spiritual gifts; (3) explore the concepts of spiritual capacity and discipleship; and (4) begin the conversation about how the Holy Spirit might invite cohort members and the congregation into the *missio Dei*.

Biblical and Theological Grounding of the Methodology and Methods

The apostle Paul wrote, "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect" (Romans 12:2). Paul also wrote that a life transformed in Christ is demonstrated as one that "bears fruit in every good work" and is "growing in

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[14] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches,* Fourth ed. (Los Angeles, CA: Sage, 2014), 228.

the knowledge of God" (Colossians 1:10). This action research project endeavored to break the pattern of the world by introducing a transformative awareness of God's greater mission: the *missio Dei*. With this transformative renewing of our minds, we may begin to see what God is doing all around us and discover how we might join with God in achieving God's goals.

The irony here is that Paul did not always think this way. At one time, as Saul of Tarsus, Paul was thoroughly of this world. He wrote of himself: "If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more," and then he catalogued his near-perfect pedigree within Judaism (Philippians 3:4-6). This Pharisaic excellence made Paul proud and stiff-necked, unwilling and unable to countenance a new way of thinking and being. When Paul encountered the followers of Jesus, he preferred to rely on his own experience and training rather than to accept the good news of Christ's Gospel. He was, in fact, still "breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples" as he traveled the road to Damascus with letters of authorization from the high priest to arrest the people of The Way (Acts 9:1-2).

Along that way, Paul discovered The Way. Physically blinded, but spiritually enlightened by his encounter with the Risen Christ, Paul is transformed from a servant of the world to a servant of the Living God. In Damascus, Ananias laid his hands upon Paul and said, "The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 9:17). Through the Holy Spirit, Paul's physical sight is restored, and his heart is turned to Jesus. He is baptized and begins to preach that Jesus is the Son of God (Acts 9:20).

As the quantitative and qualitative properties of Paul's life merged, he realized a life transformed. That which could be measured and proven in Paul's life (heritage, pedigree, citizenship, righteous deeds) converged with the truly essential and life-giving understanding of God's mission, a genuine relationship with the Risen Christ, and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Writing of this convergence later, Paul said,

> Yet whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but one that comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God based on faith (Philippians 3:7-9).

As much as Paul later tried to discount his previous life as "loss," those quantitative traits served him well in his service to God. His citizenship allowed for easier access throughout the Empire, and his training as a Pharisee provided him with a grounding in the scriptures and good debating skills. Coupling the transformative experience with Jesus on the road to Damascus with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, Paul could meld the many facets of his life into a new life in which he now breathed with God and for God's purpose.

It is God, the catalyst in our lives, that makes "all things possible" (Matthew 19:26). It is the encounter with the Risen Christ which gives us strength to do all things (Philippians 4:13). It is the Holy Spirit dwelling within us who provides the power to witness to the surpassing greatness of God's reign (Acts 1:8). Action research methodology and transformative mixed methods join the quantitative aspects of our humanness with the qualitative experience of God-with-us to produce a more holistic approach which transforms our ability to breathe with God through practice as disciples of Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Research Cohort

The design of this research project required ten members from one congregation to complete a series of questionnaires, reflection questions, and a personal interview to determine how attitudes and actions might be modified in ways which would permit them to breathe more readily with God and for God's purpose. I sought cohort members based on gender: sixty percent women and forty percent men, which closely matches the gender composition of the congregation. I chose individuals between the ages of twenty and seventy as these are the primary leaders of the congregation. I also considered longevity with the congregation (from less than two years to over thirty-five years), and prior experience in leadership within the congregation to create a diverse cohort.

I knew all of the cohort members prior to the research project. That pre-existing rapport enabled me to form a research cohort that would provide feedback and engage with me in meaningful conversation. It was not the case, however, that members of the cohort knew one another well. This brought some accountability and objectivity to the research project. I had prior work experience through the ministries of the congregation with some of the cohort members. I had no prior work experience with others. I knew all of the cohort members to be capable individuals, yet many seemed hesitant to step into church leadership roles. Some of the cohort members actively resisted attempts by the congregation's Nominating Committee to recruit them for leadership positions. One of the participants even questioned his fitness to be a member of the congregation and whether God truly had a purpose for his life. Ultimately, I formed a research cohort willing to engage with God, with me, and with one another as they explored their call to ministry.

The cohort members matched the parameters of the research project: six women and four men, all members of the congregation, varying in age from thirty-three to sixty-six, and with a wide range of longevity and leadership experiences in the congregation. Cohort members received an official letter of invitation (appendix E) that included the informed consent form (appendix F) in October 2017. I conducted the baseline questionnaire in November 2017 and the first group session in December 2017. One participant dropped out of the research project after the first session and subsequently left the congregation citing theological differences with the pastor and congregation (not due to the research project).

The Research Design

The initial phase of the research project consisted of a baseline questionnaire administered electronically using Survey Monkey[15] (November 2017). The twenty-three questions encompassed statistical data and invited views on the mission of the Church, spiritual practices, awareness of personality preferences, spiritual gifts, and the Holy Spirit. This initial questionnaire created a point of reference from which to measure cohort members' potential growth over the course of the research project. Participants all completed the baseline questionnaire prior to the first group session. In the six group sessions (December 2017-April 2018), participants practiced Dwelling in the Word, received a learning component connected to the thesis topic, engaged in discussion, and spent time in prayer. I present the research diagram in figure 1.

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[15] SurveyMonkey is an online survey development, cloud-based software and service company founded in 1999 by Ryan Finley. https://www.surveymonkey.com.
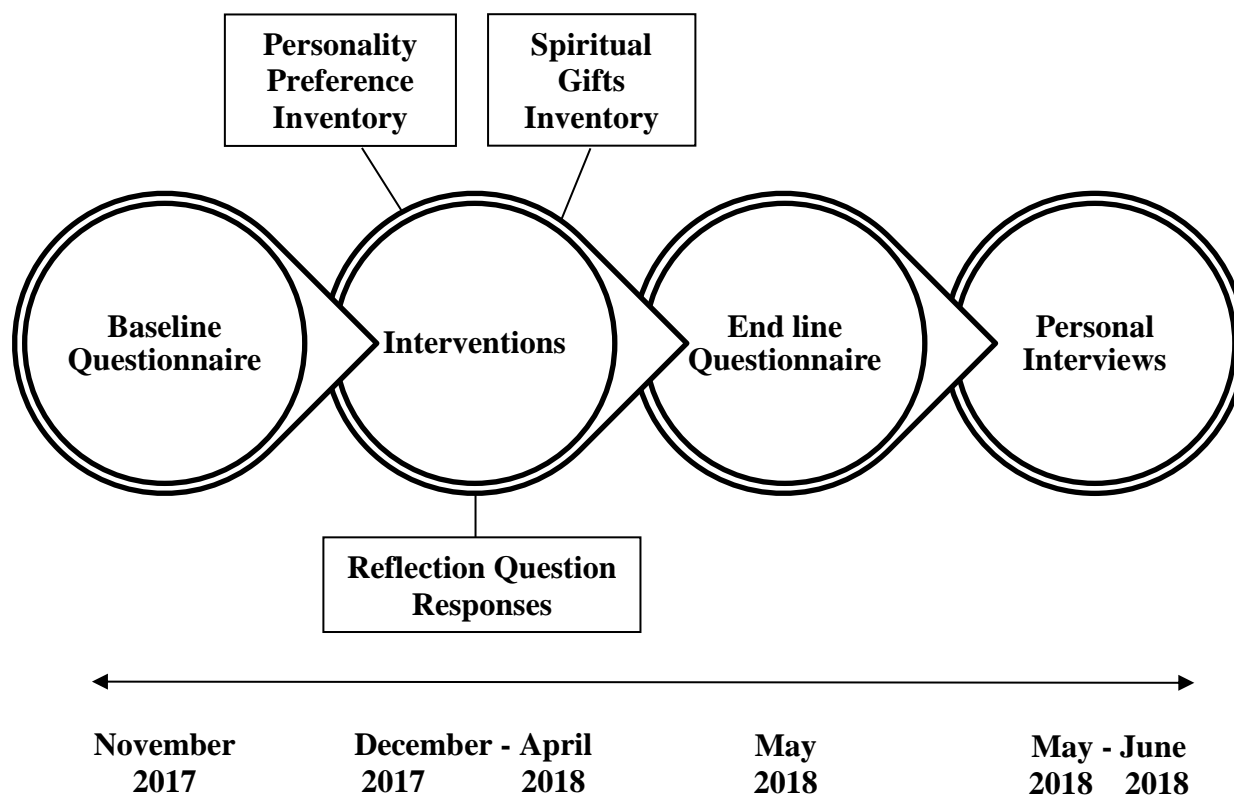
Figure 1. Breathing with God Research Design

    I presented the scope and theme of the project in session one. I introduced the

concept of the *missio Dei* using Craig Van Gelder's six assertions summarizing God's

story,[16] and initiated a discussion on the three component parts of "breathing with God":

inspire, aspire, conspire. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Genesis 11:1-9, the

tower of Babel, and the cohort members explored the consequences of humanity

breathing together but not breathing with God.

    I focused on the theory and praxis of spiritual practices in session two. Cohort

members learned about different spiritual practices and how and why to use them. Cohort

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[16] Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in relation to Hermeneutics," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 3, no. 1-2, (2004), 51-52.

members agreed to explore spiritual practices on their own and formed prayer partnerships for the duration of the research project. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Psalm 42. Cohort members explored how the metaphor of the deer panting for water deepens the understanding of how the soul yearns to breathe with God. Between sessions 2 and 3, cohort members completed a personality preference inventory.[17]

Cohort members explored their personality preferences and personality type in session three as a means of understanding how God created them and how they interact with the world. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Psalm 139 and explored how each person is "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) by God, uniquely created to accomplish a specific purpose for God. Between sessions 3 and 4, cohort members completed a spiritual gifts inventory.[18]

Session four focused on the gifts of the Spirit as outlined in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13. Cohort members reflected on how their personality preferences and their spiritual gifts might breathe together to achieve God's purpose. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Romans 12:1-8 and explored how Paul's description of the body informs an understanding of the Church with different parts working together to realize God's reign.

The mystery of who the Holy Spirit is and what the Holy Spirit is engaged cohort members' attention in session five. Cohort members discussed how to listen for and how to hear the Spirit as individual Christians and as a community of faith. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Acts 2:1-4, the first Pentecost, and explored how the Holy

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[17] Keirsey, *Please Understand Me II*, 4-9.

[18] Kenneth C. Haugk, *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life.*

Spirit worked in the lives of believers to achieve God's intended purpose of spreading the Gospel of Jesus to the world.

The cohort revisited the *missio Dei* concept in session six. I encouraged cohort members to think how they—as individuals and as a congregation—might become more faithful partners with what God is doing in and among us in our community. The Dwelling in the Word exercise studied Luke 10:1-12, the sending of the seventy, and explored the implications of Christian discipleship.

After each session, cohort members wrote short reflections on the topic presented (appendix D). This qualitative aspect of the project offered cohort members space for more considered responses to a specific set of questions. These reflections chronicled each cohort member's journey through the project.

At the end of the group sessions, cohort members completed an end line questionnaire, administered electronically using Survey Monkey (May 2018). The end line questionnaire contained the same questions as the baseline questionnaire (to evaluate any changes in cohort members' attitudes or actions) with one additional question asking cohort members to rate their personal growth in fourteen areas of the congregation's ministry on a Likert scale. The final phase of the research project entailed personal interviews with cohort member to clarify points raised in reflection papers, answer questions from cohort members, and gauge the development of the cohort members' self-understanding of their role within the church and God's wider purpose in the community (appendix C).

My Journey Team assisted me throughout this research project by field testing each questionnaire, reviewing each group session, and providing valuable feedback

which streamlined and improved the questionnaires and groups sessions. One member of
the Journey Team graciously read each chapter of this thesis, providing encouragement
and offering helpful insights which focused my writing.

Analyzing the Data

I analyzed the quantitative data using SPSS software.[19] The descriptive statistics
included frequencies, percentages, and the mean (where appropriate) to analyze the
participants' age, gender, education, denominational association, longevity with the
congregation, and role in the congregation. A comparison of the baseline and end line
frequencies measured the change in cohort members' understanding of self, the church's
mission, spiritual practices, and knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

I employed Charmaz's process of coding qualitative data for the reflection papers
and personal interviews. This involved an *initial coding* process of word-by-word, line-
by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. *Focused coding*
clustered the *in vivo* codes into similar concepts, noting the frequency and significance of
these initial codes. *Axial coding* provided a further level of refinement, grouping the
focused codes into categories and relating them to the lenses of this thesis. The final step
in the process, *theoretical coding*, identified the relationship and possible directions of
influence between the axial codes.[20] The benefit of Charmaz's method of coding is that
the research data are grounded in the unaffected words of the participants, not artificially

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[19] The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences currently produced by IBM. For more
information: https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics.

[20] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory,* 109-161.

placed into categories predetermined by the researcher. After completion of the coding

process, I considered patterns, similarities, and contrasts across the data received.

Summary

I employed an action research model with transformative mixed methods for this

research project, concurrently gathering quantitative and qualitative data to enrich the

overall yield. This approach enhanced the ability of the researcher to listen and to hear

what was truly expressed by cohort members, and to gather data individually and

corporately. I present the results of this project's social science research in the next

chapter using a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to gauge any change in

the cohort members' understanding or motivation.

CHAPTER 5

ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING THE RESULTS

The previous chapter presented the methodology and methods employed in this research project. I present the results of this project's social science research in this chapter using a combination of quantitative (baseline and end line questionnaires) and qualitative data (interviews and reflection questions) to gauge any change in the cohort members' understanding or motivation.

This research project sought to determine if engaging cohort members in directed learning sessions and activities would increase their ability to "breathe" with God. Would exposure to spiritual practices facilitate communing with the triune God? Would an awareness of personality preferences help participants better understand their call from God and for the world? Would identifying spiritual gifts encourage participants to become more involved in the mission and ministries of the congregation? Would an appreciation of *missio Dei* lead to new ways of realizing God's "preferred and promised"[1] future? The research question is: How might action research interventions with a congregational cohort encourage greater participation with the triune God?

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[1] Keifert and Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church*, 7.

Review of the Research Question and Process

This research project employed an action research methodology with transformative mixed methods, concurrently gathering quantitative and qualitative data to enrich the overall yield. Nine research participants completed baseline and end line questionnaires, attended six directed group sessions, wrote responses to reflection questions, and contributed data through personal interviews.

I analyzed the quantitative data using SPSS software.[2] The descriptive statistics included frequencies, percentages, and the mean (where appropriate) to analyze the participants' age, gender, education, denominational association, longevity with the congregation, and role(s) in the congregation. I compared the baseline and end line frequencies to measure any change in cohort members' understanding of self, the church's mission, spiritual practices, and knowledge of the Holy Spirit.

I employed Charmaz's process for coding qualitative data. This involved an *initial coding* process of word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. *Focused coding* clustered *in vivo* codes into similar concepts, noting the frequency and significance of the initial codes. *Axial coding* further refined and grouped the focused codes and related them to the lenses. Finally, *theoretical coding*, identified the relationship and possible directions of influence between the axial codes.[3]

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[2] The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences currently produced by IBM. For more information: https://www.ibm.com/products/spss-statistics .

[3] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory,* 109-161.

Profile of the Research Cohort

> I was honored that you asked me. I wondered if you really knew what you were getting yourself into . . . I just thought that you were asking me [to do] something at a time when my life was in an upheaval, and I felt like it was some kind of sign.
>
> Jane, cohort member[4]

The research and analysis presented are based on data from the nine cohort members who completed the project. Cohort members ranged in age from thirty-three to sixty-six. Two-thirds (66.7%) were female, and one-third (33.3%) were male. The gender ratio reflects the gender ratio of the Alliance Church.[5] The four oldest members of the cohort had the least amount of formal higher education. I present a profile of the nine cohort members in table 6 and cohort members' highest level of education in table 7.

Table 6. Cohort Profile

Name	Birth Year	Age	Gender	Highest Level of Education	Years with Congregation
Ken	1951	66	Male	High School/GED	Over 35 years
Jane	1954	63	Female	High School/GED	16-25 years
Diana	1957	60	Female	Associate's	16-25 years
Joe	1973	44	Male	Trade School	6-15 years
Linda	1977	40	Female	Bachelor's	6-15 years
Victoria	1978	39	Female	Master's	16-25 years
Shirley	1979	38	Female	Doctorate	2-5 years
Rachel	1981	36	Female	Bachelor's	2-5 years
Luke	1984	33	Male	Bachelor's	2-5 years

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[4] All names are pseudonyms.

[5] According to the Alliance Church database (accessed January 7, 2019).

Table 7. Highest Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
High School or GED	2	22.2	22.2
Associate Degree	1	11.1	33.3
Bachelor's Degree	3	33.3	66.7
Master's Degree	1	11.1	77.8
Doctorate	1	11.1	88.9
Trade School Training	1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0

The four oldest cohort members had the longest associations with the congregation, perhaps due to age and opportunity. Nearly half of the cohort members (44.4%) hold memberships with the congregation over sixteen years. What the numbers do not show is the true length of membership. For example: Ken listed his membership as "Over 35 years," while his actual membership is forty-five years. Victoria is thirty-nine years old and lists her membership as "16-25 years." Her actual membership is twenty-four years. I present length of association with the congregation in table 8.

Table 8. Length of Association with Congregation

Years	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
2-5 years	3	33.3	33.3
6-15 years	2	22.2	55.6
16-25 years	3	33.3	88.9
Over 35 years	1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	100.0

All cohort members had experience with other denominations, mostly mainline, prior to joining Alliance Church and some had experience with multiple denominations (see table 9). Just under half of the responses (5 of 11 or 45.45%) indicated prior experience with congregations of the same denominations as Alliance Church. This leads to an assumption that cohort members joined Alliance Church from a sense of denominational loyalty. That assumption, however, is challenged by the data in table 10.

Table 9. Prior Experience with Other Denominations

Denomination	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Congregational/UCC	2	18.18	18.18
Lutheran (ELCA)	2	18.18	36.36
Free Lutheran Church	1	9.09	45.45
Missouri Synod Lutheran	1	9.09	54.54
Non-denominational Church	1	9.09	63.63
Presbyterian	3	27.27	100.0
Total	11	100.0	100.0

Table 10. Reason for Joining

Reason	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Hospitality/Warmth of Welcome	7	25.03	25.03
Quality of Worship/Preaching	6	21.45	46.48
Family Ties	4	14.30	60.78
Ministries of Congregation	3	10.72	71.50
Theological Beliefs	3	10.72	82.22
Youth Programs	3	10.72	92.94
Denominational Loyalty	2	7.14	100.00
Total	28	100.0	100.0

I asked cohort members to list all the criteria they used to decide on membership with Alliance Church (see table 10). Cohort members primarily based their decision to join on the gracious welcome extended (25.03%) and, secondly, on the congregation's high quality of worship and preaching (21.45%). Most did not list theological beliefs (10.72%) or denominational loyalty (7.14%) as essential criteria for joining.

Rachel's family of origin attended a small, rural church during her elementary and adolescent years. She and her husband married at Alliance Church. After moving away for a time, Rachel's family moved back and joined Alliance Church because she feels the congregation is "very open…I mean we wouldn't be going here if we didn't feel like we weren't welcoming of everyone." She likes that there is "no preconceived notion of what you need to be to belong here."

Joe agrees that Alliance Church is a welcoming place. "I've always felt that this church is very, you know, welcoming, and I think that…I hope we're seen as that." He explains the work of the congregation as "being grounded in the word…yet being open to people and being welcoming and not being judging. I don't think it's our job to judge and so I think…that's God's work for our church and to get that message to the broader community."

Ken faced personal struggles throughout his adult life. He believes the "church's main function in the world is to, hopefully, provide stability through the message…when things are at their worst." He is satisfied that Alliance Church does this, adding, "Probably the thing I'm most proud about this church is their openness to literally anybody that walks in the door…nobody has to feel uncomfortable walking in our door."

Victoria shared, "I think part of what I love about our church is how open and how accepting and how positive and welcoming we are." She believes the welcoming environment established by the congregation would benefit the larger community. "It's that taking what we have here and just expanding it…like you could throw a rock in the lake and, you know, the ripples go out."

Linda is thankful she belongs to "an organization that is open and…welcoming and wanting to be diverse," although she recognizes that the demographics of the community "do not allow us to be as diverse as we might like to be." She believes it is important to know our neighbors. "Loving your neighbor for who they are, whatever that might mean…[is] a really bold…position to take, and I love that!" There is clearly a sense of welcome among these members and a deep desire to extend that same gracious hospitality to others.

Affirming Our Ministries

> I was kind of looking forward to really digging into something that was outside my element . . . it's exciting to see people that can take a story from real life and relate it to scripture . . . maybe this is a step in that direction for me of getting my foot in the door.   Luke, cohort member

I invited cohort members to indicate their past and present involvement with the congregation's ministries (see table 11). Two questions asked cohort members to name their knowledge of the congregation's mission and ministries (see table 12) and any awareness of their personal role in the congregation's ministries (see table 13).

Table 11 shows the diversity of activities in which cohort members currently participate or in which they formerly participated. I provided a list of congregational activities but also offered cohort members the chance to list other areas of congregational engagement. One cohort member self-identified participation with the congregation's

"visioning team" and the church softball team. Congregational worship is intentionally missing from this list because it is included in the list of spiritual practices (see table 17).

Baseline scores showed cohort members most involved in helping ministries: serving on committees and participating in worship (musician). Involvement with youth ministries and servant ministries also scored highly among cohort members. Only one cohort member indicated no previous or current activity with the congregation. These numbers show that cohort members have been and are consistently involved in the life and work of the congregation.

End line scores showed an overall increase in cohort members' engagement in the congregation's mission and ministries. This is encouraging news. Either more cohort members are engaged in the life of the congregation than were at the beginning of the research project, or they are more willing to report and claim their engagement in the congregation's ministries.

Table 11. Involvement with Congregation

Ministries	Activity	Baseline Participants	End line Participants
Leadership	Committee Member	7	9
	Deacon or Elder (currently)	1	2
	Deacon or Elder (previously)	2	2
	Musician	2	3
	Visioning Team	1	0
Youth	Kids' Club or VBS	1	3
	Sunday School Teacher	4	3
	Youth Worker/Chaperone	2	2
Helping	Volunteer (Kitchen)	5	5
	Volunteer (Property)	0	1
Education	Bible Study	3	3

Table 11. Involvement with Congregation (continued)

Ministries	Activity	Baseline Participants	End line Participants
Missions	Mission Participant	1	2
Other	Softball	0	1
Total		29	36
No involvement		1	0

Shirley previously indicated no involvement in the work of the congregation, but she now serves on the Christian Education committee. Shirley has a young family and is excited to be working with youth in the community. She asks, "How do we help these kids? How do we reach these kids? How do we know who the kids are who need to be helped?" Shirley admits feeling discouraged at the scope of the task: "I don't even know how to do this." She considers it best to be "helping the ones we have. Teaching them and they can teach their peers."

Rachel, a newer member of the congregation, shared that "anytime you settle into a new church [you] kind of try to find your place and figure out where [the] needs are." She recently accepted the congregation's invitation to become an ordained elder, to serve on the governing board, and to chair the Personnel Committee. When asked how her involvement in the congregation's ministries might change in the future, Rachel quipped, "You'll probably see more of me!"

Luke, who's previously played with the softball team, now serves on the Mission Committee. When the Nominating Committee called, Luke initially said, "No, I wasn't interested in the Mission Committee. I got other stuff going on." But he reconsidered and accepted the invitation. Reflecting on his work with the committee, Luke says,

it's not a huge time sink and it's a fun thing to be involved with, and you get to see a different side of the church than just sitting in the pew and, and listening to the sermon and, and being there for the one hour of church. You kind of get a different aspect of things, and I think that other people would probably enjoy some of that, too.

Luke also agreed to share his faith story with the congregation during a Lenten worship service, a decision he credits to the backing of the cohort members. He said, "I think being part of the group made it easier…for me to accept the Lent speech. That was a difficult area for me to talk about—my faith."

Jane previously worked "behind the scenes" in the kitchen. She is now an adult leader for the congregation's weekly after-school program, sharing her love for Jesus with kids. "I think it's important...for them, for the outside to see what a wonderful family we have here 'cause it's important to me," says Jane. "It's not stuffy…we're fun!" Jane is also talking more about her church to friends and coworkers. She invites others to experience the "wonderful feeling" you get by belonging to a faith community and serving God and helping people. She says, "I keep inviting people…[and] they say, 'You sound like you got one of the funnest churches in town.' I'm like, 'I do. Come along!'"

Ken is becoming more of an evangelist, too. He recounted two "God moments" he experienced recently: encounters with neighbors which led to opportunities for Ken to share his faith. Ken says such God moments "get me excited…knowing that with God's help I can actually make an impact in somebody's life." Ken faithfully served on the Mission Committee for years; he is now actively engaged in ministries supported by the congregation in the community (i.e., Community Food Shelf, Habitat for Humanity). He also currently serves on the congregation's Stewardship Committee.

Two cohort members are less engaged now than they were previously. Linda accepted a major promotion at work and reduced her congregational commitments to

meet the demands of her new job. She accepts short-term commitments on behalf of the

congregation but is not currently able to serve on committees with recurring duties. Joe

also scaled back his involvement with the congregation to better balance his business'

needs, his family life, and his responsibilities as an elected city official. Joe considers his

community service a natural extension of his faith. He says, "the more we can get in the

community and just do, just show the example that Jesus gave helping others" the better

for the church family and the larger community.

The data in table 11 present a mixed message. Some cohort members are

increasing their involvement and others are decreasing their involvement. Overall there

seems to be a greater commitment by cohort members to the congregation's ministries. I

present an analysis of cohort members' knowledge of the congregation's ministries in

table 12 and their belief in a personal role in the congregation's ministries in table 13.

Table 12. Knowledge of the Congregation's Ministries

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Baseline			
Little Understanding	0	00.0	00.0
Some Understanding	5	55.6	55.6
Solid Understanding	4	44.4	100.0
Total	9	100.0	
End line			
Little Understanding	0	0.00	0.00
Some Understanding	2	22.2	22.2
Solid Understanding	7	77.8	100.0
Total	9	100.0	

Table 13. Personal Role in Congregation's Ministries

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Baseline			
Unsure of My Role	4	44.4	44.4
Confident of My Role	5	55.6	100.0
Total	9	100.0	
End line			
Unsure of My Role	1	11.1	11.1
Confident of My Role	8	88.9	100.0
Total	9	100.0	

Over half of cohort members (55.6%) indicated "some" understanding and just under half (44.4%) indicated a "solid" understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries at the beginning of the research project. None of the cohort members signified "little" understanding of the congregation's ministries. The end line data in table 12 indicate an increase in the knowledge of the congregation's mission and ministries when compared with the baseline data. Cohort members now assert a "solid" (77.8%) understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries with only a few cohort members (22.2%) expressing "some" understanding. This means that one-third (33.3%) of cohort members increased their understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries during the research project.

Although all the cohort members initially indicated a good understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries, nearly half of those cohort members (44.4%) indicated uncertainty about their personal role within the congregation's mission and ministries. Possible reasons for this insecurity might include a lack of individual

confidence or knowledge of spiritual gifts, an absence of affirmation from the congregation, or an absence of opportunity to participate in ministry, but these are suppositions and not corroborated by the data. The end line data (see table 13) indicate three cohort members (33.3%) increased the level of confidence in their personal role within the congregation's ministries during the research project. The baseline data show that 55.6% of cohort members are confident in their role within the congregation. This is encouraging.

Cohort members' personal role in the congregation's mission and ministries approached the heart of my research question. I wanted to discover if expanded knowledge of and experience with spiritual practices, personality preferences, spiritual gifts, the concept of *missio Dei,* and engagement with the Holy Spirit would encourage participants to assume a greater personal role in the congregation's mission and ministries. I assumed that greater understanding and experience would increase cohort members' confidence and willingness to become more involved in the congregation's mission and ministries.

The end line data showed that cohort members are far more confident of their role at the end of the research project. Only one member, Ken, still showed some insecurity about his role. Ken's personal struggles often cause him to doubt his own worth. In his own words, he felt "impotent" and "like a freak of nature." Consequently, he held back, fearing to share his story or his faith with others for fear of rejection or judgment. Ken is becoming more open about his struggles and how his faith helped him overcome difficulties. He says, "I have a story to tell [and] it would be much more dismal if I didn't have faith… [without faith] I wouldn't have an exciting story to tell." Ken says he is

encouraged by "realizing that other people had the same struggles, questions." This new appreciation of personal ministry roles led many cohort members to a new awareness of the church's role.

A New Awareness of the Church's Role

There's something, and we're going to work towards it, but we're not quite sure what it is yet . . . I think we all have a lot of shared values and shared visions and we're all kind of like searching, like with a flashlight . . . I truly believe we'll find it and it will impact…the community for the greater good . . . not like a glorifying thing of like, "This is what [the congregation] has done." You know, it's gonna be more like a quiet . . . infiltration of goodness.   Victoria, cohort member

I designed the question about the church's role to explore if cohort members see themselves as working <u>for</u> God for the redemption of the world, or if they considered themselves partnering <u>with</u> God for the redemption of the world. I found it challenging to determine cohort members' view of the church's role in the world for two reasons. First, it proved difficult to design a question with an appropriate ranking system. I believe that a Likert-scale question with statements attached to each score (rather than one statement at each end of a spectrum) would better determine cohort members' true beliefs about the church's role in the world. Second, the frequency of responses is thought-provoking since the spread spans the entire range (1-7), but it is not as useful in determining an exact numerical value which indicates cohort members' beliefs about the church's role.

A study of the mean, median, and mode scores is more revealing. The baseline scores reveal that cohort members' initial view of the church's role in the world to be in the range of 3-4, or about midway along the scale. Another way to state this might be that the cohort members initially believed the role of the church to be a balance between the commission from God to work in the world and the invitation from God to partner with what God is already doing in the world.

The end line data, by comparison, show a shift in cohort members' thinking about the church's role. The end line mean and median suggest that cohort members are beginning to see themselves as partners with God for the redemption of the world. The end line data present a bimodal distribution of 2 and 5 indicating two groups within the cohort. One group more closely adheres to the assertion that the church is appointed by God to do God's work in the world (2), and one group more closely adheres to the assertion that the church partners with what God is doing in the world (5). It is interesting to note that both groups have more clearly defined views of God's agency at the conclusion of the research project. I present cohort members' responses in table 14.

Table 14. The Church's Role

Cohort members ranked their understanding of the church's role on a Likert scale (1-7).

    1 = God appointed the church to do God's work in the world

    7 = God invites the church to partner with what God is doing in the world

Ranking	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Baseline			
1	1	11.1	11.1
2	0	00.0	11.1
3	2	22.2	33.3
4	3	33.3	66.7
5	1	11.1	77.8
6	1	11.1	88.9
7	1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	

Baseline Mean (μ):   3.44

Baseline Median (M):   4

Baseline Mode (Mo):   4

Table 14. The Church's Role (continued)

Cohort members ranked their understanding of the church's role on a Likert scale (1-7).

   1 = God appointed the church to do God's work in the world

   7 = God invites the church to partner with what God is doing in the world

Ranking	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
End line			
1	0	0.00	0.00
2	3	33.3	33.3
3	0	0.00	33.3
4	1	11.1	44.4
5	3	33.3	77.8
6	1	11.1	77.9
7	1	11.1	100.0
Total	9	100.0	

End line Mean (μ):   4.22

End line Median (M):   5

End line Mode (Mo):   2, 5   (a bimodal distribution)

Victoria describes the church's work on behalf of the world as an "infiltration of goodness." She explains, "We're servants. We love to serve. We love to serve each other, and I think we've grown within our town or community. We have learned that we love serving other people, and we're not doing it because we want the recognition…we just do it because we like to." Victoria sees "a lot of daily random acts of kindness" within the church family, but she also advocates for a think tank to help the congregation in "narrowing the focus down to what is achievable" and connecting the members with existing community groups and services. She acknowledges that the congregation has done a really good job of addressing crises, "tentatively at first, but then more and more

of partnering with other organizations within town." Victoria believes such partnerships

are essential and will "have a long-standing impact in certain areas."

Linda thinks that the work of the church is an organic process. "It's what is

happening, and I can feel it and I can see it and I can, um, sense it. Can I measure it yet?

Maybe, maybe not, but I feel like we will in time be able to, but right now, I feel like we

are where we need to be, and we just need to stay the course." For Linda, that means

being open to a diversity of people and opinions and bringing "personal passion to very

important issues" that affect the welfare of the whole community.

Personal investment is the essential element for Luke. "We're trying to take…

take a lead," he says, "and hopefully that'll show people like, 'Hey, what if we could do

this or I could do this?'…We can make a difference if we did something ourselves

instead of just think about it or talk about it." Luke, speaking in the wake of the tragic

death of a child in the community confesses, "We do have some problems that need

hands-on attention rather than, you know, posting on social media." Luke admits,

"There's more people maybe taking the…taking the bull by the horns and starting to try

and implement things and spearhead things." Rachel agrees that this kind of engagement

is what changes communities for the better.

> I think we do a really good job of addressing current situations in the world, things that are going on, things that affect us, things that don't affect us but might affect other people . . . I think that we will just constantly fine-tune that a little bit . . . I think we're learning as a church, too, that we can't do everything that we want to do . . . and we just need to focus our energies here.

Jane identified some practical areas where the congregation focuses its energies:

food and faith. "We make sure that people have food and everything, but maybe we need

to get out there and make sure that people have [a] church to go to and invite them into

our church." She professed the hope that the church would spend as much time on spiritual needs as it does on physical needs, because both are equally important.

These comments reflect the growing awareness among cohort members of the need to integrate the faith community with the larger community. These comments also indicate a desire to move outward and to share the positive aspects of faith in such a way that enriches the surrounding culture. In this I see the underpinnings of a *missio Dei* theology for this congregation.

Engaging Spiritual Practices

Maybe [there's] something that I need to stretch on: at work we call them *stretch assignments*. Like, we're just gonna branch out a little bit here and I think that I'll be more open to seeing those as they happen instead of just thinking, "Oh, that's not for me" or "I have no interest in that."   Rachel, cohort member

Spiritual practices are one way that Christians engage with the triune God. Table 15 presents cohort members' motivation for engaging in spiritual practices. Table 16 presents deterrents encountered by cohort members in the engagement of spiritual practices. Table 17 presents the spiritual practices employed by cohort members.

I provided cohort members with four possible motivations for using spiritual practices as well as the opportunity to write in a response. The baseline data in table 15 show that cohort members primarily utilize spiritual practices to determine God's will for their lives (66.7%). This suggests that cohort members genuinely desire to know God's purpose for their lives. One cohort member uses spiritual practices to pray for self and others, and another cohort member uses spiritual practices to promote mental health. The single write-in answer offered the use of spiritual practices as an example to children. None of the cohort members initially used spiritual practices to find inner peace.

The end line data in table 15 show that the primary reason cohort members engage in spiritual practices changed during the research project. Three cohort members (33.3%) continue to utilize spiritual practices to discern God's will. One cohort member (11.1%) indicated using spiritual practices primarily to find inner peace. The biggest change appeared in the number of cohort members (five) who now engage in spiritual practices to pray for themselves and others (55.6%), an increase of four members (44.4%). This finding is consistent with the data in table 17 which identify prayer as the most frequent spiritual practice engaged in by cohort members.

Table 15. Motivation for Spiritual Practices

Primary Motivation	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Baseline			
Discern God's will for me	6	66.7	66.7
Pray for myself and others	1	11.1	77.8
Promote mental health	1	11.1	88.9
Provide example for kids	1	11.1	100.0
Find inner peace	0	0.00	
Total	9	100.0	
End line			
Pray for myself and others	5	55.6	55.6
Discern God's will for me	3	33.3	33.3
Find inner peace	1	11.1	44.44
Promote mental health	0	0.00	100.0
Provide example for kids	0	0.00	
Total	9	100.00	

Linda explained her feeling surrounding spiritual practices as the desire to be filled spiritually so she could be a springboard for helping others to fill their spiritual tanks.

> It's sort of like sitting on the airplane before it takes off and they always remind you, even if you're with your children, you put the . . . if we're going down you put the oxygen mask on yourself first. And I . . . and that's never been me. I always put the oxygen mask on everybody else to make sure they're safe and sound, and then if there's time I'll grab the oxygen . . . What good am I to my loved ones who are fully oxygenated when I am not there anymore? You've got to put the mask on so that you really can help others.

Many cohort members struggled with regular spiritual practices. Luke disliked the spiritual practice of Dwelling in the Word. He felt uncomfortable sharing his thoughts on biblical texts with the group, not wanting to sound "off-base" or "absurd" in front of his peers. Luke learned to appreciate Dwelling in the Word as the research project progressed, and he continues to use this spiritual practice to expand his knowledge base so he can be "better off and more prepared…for life as it comes…and hopefully then as my kids start growing up and going through stuff to be able to, to help them as they're trying to maybe understand some of this." Luke's struggle with spiritual practices was common among cohort members.

The baseline data in table 16 indicate that cohort members are discouraged in their efforts by a lack of knowledge about spiritual practices (37.5%), a shortage of time to perform spiritual practices (37.5%), and the inability to select a spiritual practice that bears fruit (22.2%). Deterrents to spiritual practices not chosen by cohort members included not being able to maintain a spiritual practice for any length of time and not seeing the value in spiritual practices.

Cohort members indicated two equally influential deterrents for not engaging in spiritual practices at the end of the research project: lack of time to pursue spiritual

practices (50.0%) and the inability to maintain a spiritual practice over time (50.0%). It appears that knowledge of spiritual practices increased sufficiently to rule out that out as a deterrent. It also appears cohort members discovered spiritual practices that they enjoy or which work for them, but there remains an inability to sustain the exercise of those spiritual practices. The influence of time on maintaining spiritual practices would be an interesting line of inquiry to pursue in another study.

Three cohort members (33.3%) failed to record an answer about deterrents on the end line questionnaire. Perhaps the choices provided proved inadequate. Perhaps they no longer find themselves deterred in the use of spiritual practices. We can only wonder.

Table 16. Primary Deterrent to Spiritual Practices (N=9)

Primary Deterrent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Baseline				
Don't know enough about them	3	33.3	37.5	37.5
Don't have enough time	3	33.3	37.5	75.00
Not found one that works for me	2	22.2	25.0	100.0
Total	8	88.9	100.0	
Missing	1	11.1		
Total	9	100.0		
End line				
Don't have enough time	3	33.3	50.0	50.0
Unable to maintain	3	33.3	50.0	100.0
Total	6	66.7	100.0	
Missing	3	33.3		
Total	9	100.0		

Diana admitted, "I have a hard time praying." She expressed the desire to learn how to pray more effectively to "see what is out there…what I can do with the church and with the community."

Victoria wrestled in her relationship with God in the wake of a divorce. "There's been a period now where I felt somewhat separated from God and that's…it's totally my fault. You know life is situational." She professed a tendency to turn inward during tough times and to go it alone, which does not work. She recognized that reconnecting with God's Spirit by "becoming more prayerful or becoming more willing to listen" opened her life again. "The wonderful thing about God," shares Victoria, is that "you just pick back up right where you left off and, and it's a good feeling." She is focusing now on not pushing God away but letting God into her life.

Cohort members experimented with a variety of spiritual practices during the research project. They formed prayer partnerships to support one another during the research project. We practiced Dwelling in the Word as a group. I encouraged cohort members to try at least one new spiritual practice and to reflect on its helpfulness in drawing them closer to God. I present the frequency of spiritual practices utilized by cohort members in table 17.

Prayer was the most employed spiritual practice among respondents (88.9% prayed daily or weekly) at the onset of the research project, followed by Worship (50.0% worshiped daily or weekly and 50.0% worshiped at least monthly). All nine cohort members practiced some form of community service during the year (55.5% serve weekly or monthly, and 44.4% serve a few times each year). About half of the cohort members employed some form of Bible study (55.5%), devotional readings (88.9%), or reading scripture (88.9%) at least a few times per year, but each of these spiritual practices also had at least one cohort member who never studied God's Word. The least utilized spiritual practices were journaling (44.4% journal only a few times per year and

55.6% never journal) and meditation (33.3% meditate occasionally and 66.7% never meditate).

Prayer remained the preferred spiritual practice for respondents (77.8%) throughout the research project. Participation in worship increased during the research project: 66.7% of cohort members indicated worshipping weekly on the end line compared to 50.0% on the baseline. Journaling and meditation, previously the least employed types of spiritual practices, are now utilized by 44.4% of cohort members on a regular basis, although the majority continue never to engage in these spiritual practices. All cohort members continue to offer some form of community service, but the frequency changed slightly from the baseline responses with one cohort member doing community service more frequently and one cohort member doing community service less frequently. There was a slight drop in frequency among practitioners of Bible study and devotional reading, but a slight increase in frequency among those who read scripture as a spiritual practice.

A review of the mean scores indicates that prayer remained the preferred spiritual practice among cohort members (M = 2.78 for both baseline and end line).[6] Worship also remained a strongly preferred spiritual practice, posting a slight gain at the end of the research project (M = 2.50 baseline; M = 2.67 end line). Community service remained steady as cohort members' third preference of spiritual practice (M = 1.78 for both baseline and end line). Reading scripture increased slightly among cohort members during the research project (M = 1.33 baseline; M = 1.67 end line) as did meditation (M = 0.67 baseline; M = 0.89 end line).

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[6] The range of mean scores was (0 to 3). The higher the mean, therefore, the higher the frequency.

Devotional reading declined slightly as a popular spiritual practice among some cohort members (M = 1.67 baseline; M = 1.37 end line). The use of Bible study as a spiritual practice also declined slightly among cohort members (M = 0.78 baseline; M = 0.67 end line) during the research project. The least preferred spiritual practice among cohort members continued to be journaling (M = 0.44 for both baseline and end line).

I make several deductions from these data. First, the lack of significant change in mean scores indicates that cohort members stayed loyal to their preferred spiritual practices throughout the research project. Second, cohort members favored or had more experience with the traditional spiritual practices of prayer, worship, community service, and engagement with scripture, and rejected or had less experience with alternative spiritual practices such as meditation and journaling. Third, there is a communal aspect to cohort members' three preferred spiritual practices of prayer, worship, and community service (although prayer may be individual as well). The three least preferred spiritual practices of meditation, Bible study, and journaling are solitary endeavors (although Bible study may be communal). I do not know if the communal versus individual nature of spiritual practices is a factor, but it would be worthy of further inquiry. Fourth, the decline in Bible study and devotional reading as spiritual practices is in the frequency; cohort members did not cease using these spiritual practices. Finally, the strong posting of prayer, worship, and community service as preferred spiritual practices bodes well for a congregation seemingly primed to shoulder a larger role in the surrounding community. The combination of listening to God, encouraging one another in the Holy Spirit, and serving one another in the name of Jesus Christ all speak to a congregation beginning to actualize the *missio Dei*. I present the frequency of spiritual practices in table 17.

Table 17. Frequency of Spiritual Practices (N=9)

Spiritual Practice	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
Bible Study				
Occasionally (few times/month)	2	22.2	1	11.1
Seldom (few times/year)	3	33.3	4	44.4
Never	4	44.4	4	44.4
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	0.78		0.67	
Community Service				
Often (daily/weekly)	2	22.2	3	33.3
Occasionally (few times/month)	3	33.3	1	11.1
Seldom (few times/year)	4	44.4	5	55.6
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	1.78		1.78	
Devotional Reading				
Often (daily/weekly)	2	22.2	1	12.5
Occasionally (few times/month)	3	33.3	2	25.0
Seldom (few times/year)	3	33.3	4	50.0
Never	1	11.1	1	12.5
Total	9	100.0	8	100.0
Mean (μ)	1.67		1.37	
Journaling				
Seldom (few times/year)	4	44.4	4	44.4
Never	5	55.6	5	55.6
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	0.44		0.44	
Meditation				
Occasionally (few times/month)	3	33.3	4	44.4
Never	6	66.7	5	55.6
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	0.67		0.89	
Prayer				
Often (daily/weekly)	8	88.9	7	77.8
Occasionally (few times/month)	1	11.1	2	22.2
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	2.78		2.78	

Table 17. Frequency of Spiritual Practices (N=9) (continued)

Spiritual Practice	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
Reading Scripture				
Often (daily/weekly)	1	11.1	1	11.1
Occasionally (few times/month)	2	22.2	4	44.4
Seldom (few times/year)	5	55.6	4	44.4
Never	1	11.1	0	0.00
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Mean (μ)	1.33		1.67	
Worship				
Often (daily/weekly)	4	50.0	6	66.7
Occasionally (few times/month)	4	50.0	3	33.3
Total	8	100.0	9	100.0
Missing	1			
Total	9			
Mean (μ)	2.50		2.67	

Jane shared that spiritual practices deepened her relationship to God. She now prays more regularly, and she is more conscious of praying "with gratitude" for the many blessings God gives her. Joe is currently utilizing books that offer readings from the Psalms and Proverbs for his devotional reading. He finds these books especially helpful because they are "introspective" and "based on life experiences." He relates to the struggles of the psalmist and appreciates the practicality of the Proverbs.

Rachel summarized cohort members' desire to be more deliberate about spiritual practices. "There are some things that I want to do better…you know my daily devotions had been just a 'check the box' type of thing…so I'm gonna do it quick so that I can mark it off my 'to do' list…my goal is to be much more intentional about how I set aside time for that, and how I think about it, and what I do with that after." Cohort members

recognized that spending some quality time on themselves by exercising spiritual

practices changed how they viewed themselves as children of God.

Valuing Ourselves

> We have different personalities, different interests, but we are all children of God, so we have to come together and work together and do what God wants us to do.
> Diana, cohort member

> We're instruments in His [God's] orchestra, continuing to work together with everyone and for His purpose. And continuing to learn His purpose and to be open to what His purpose may mean for us.   Shirley, cohort member

The baseline questionnaire asked cohort members to indicate their personality

preferences using the following pairs of terms: Introvert (I) or Extrovert (E), Sensing (S)

or Intuitive (N), Thinking (T) or Feeling (F), Judging (J) or Perceiving (P). I described

each pair of terms using Hirsh's and Kise's brief descriptions of each personality

preference.[7] I present cohort members' initial self-identification of their personality

preferences in the baseline questionnaire and their identified personality preference based

on the Keirsey Temperament Sorter[8] from the end line questionnaire in table 18.

Cohort members split nearly evenly between Introverts (55.6%) and Extroverts

(44.4%) at the onset of the research project. Those who relied on their intuition (55.6%)

outnumbered those who relied on their senses to receive information (33.3%). Those who

processed information through their emotions (77.8%) appreciably outnumbered those

who processed information through logic (22.2%). Those who acted through careful

planning (77.8%) outnumbered those who acted more on instinct (22.2%).

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[7] Hirsh and Kise, *Soul Types*, 25-32.

[8] Keirsey, *Please Understand Me II*, 4-9.

The personality preference exercise proved to be one of self-discovery for many cohort members. For some it revealed different personality preferences, and for many it altered their perceptions of themselves and their call from God. A few Introverts discovered more Extrovert inclinations. The end line cohort featured seven Extroverts (77.8%) and two Introverts (22.2%). A few Intuitive types discerned more Sensory proclivities. The end line cohort featured four Intuitive types (44.4%) and five Sensing types (55.6%). One Thinker realized more Feeling tendencies. The cohort featured a predominance of Feelers (88.9%) and only one Thinker (11.1%) according to the end line data. One Judging type recognized a more Perceiving preference. The cohort featured a two-to-one ratio of Judgers (66.7%) to Perceivers (33.3%) according to the end line data.

The biggest changes over the course of the research project occurred in the first two pairings: Introvert-Extrovert and Sensing-Intuitive. The first pairing designates how an individual prefers to interact with the world. An Introvert may interact with others but will also require periods of solitude and silence to recover and prepare for future social interactions. Extroverts prefer constant stimulation and interaction with other people and do not require regular times of solitude or silence. That cohort members overwhelmingly identified as Extroverts is consistent with the findings of this research project. Such extroverted preferences would be most naturally exhibited in group activities such as corporate worship and community service. Extroverts would also be likely to serve on church committees or participate in mission trips.

The second pairing designates how an individual prefers to receive information. Sensory individuals prefer information that is factual, and which can be verified through empirical knowledge. Intuitive individuals are comfortable with information that is more

abstract in nature. When seeking to connect (breathe) with God, I would expect Sensors to exercise spiritual practices that provide more practical information (i.e., Bible study, reading scripture). Similarly, I would expect Intuitive individuals to exercise spiritual practices that offer more conceptual and imaginative forums (i.e., meditation). I present cohort members' personality preferences as self-identified on the baseline questionnaire and as reported on the end line questionnaire based on the Keirsey Temperament Sorter in table 18.

Table 18. Personality Preferences

Preferences	Self-identified Frequency	Self-identified Percent	Keirsey Frequency	Keirsey Percent
I am an:				
Introvert (I)	5	55.6	2	22.2
Extrovert (E)	4	44.4	7	77.8
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
I acquire information through my:				
Senses (S)	3	33.3	5	55.6
iNtuition (N)	5	55.6	4	44.4
Total	8	88.9	9	100.0
Missing	1	11.1		
Total	9	100.0		
I process information primarily through:				
Thinking (T)	2	22.2	1	11.1
Feeling (F)	7	77.8	8	88.9
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
I act on information by:				
Judging (J)	7	77.8	6	66.7
Perceiving (P)	2	22.2	3	33.3
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0

Ken, who never before completed a personality profile, called the experience an "eye opener." He also said the experience was "funner than heck," and he hopes everyone will take such a test to discover more about themselves.

Jane pinpointed the connecting of personality preferences to spiritual gifts as her favorite part of the project. Linking the two confirmed for her why she has a fondness for certain types of ministry and affirmed for her God's call to service-oriented ministries.

Diana, like Ken and Jane, never experienced a personality profile prior to this research project. She marveled at the "different personalities, different interests" God gives to God's children, and how God weaves them together so that we "come together and work together and…and do what God wants us to do."

Victoria thought it was "fun to see people find out more about themselves or feel validated" by other cohort members, both with personality preferences and spiritual gifts. As cohort members made connections with one another, Victoria enjoyed hearing their affirmations. She said, "I think people need to hear that more often."

Joe discovered new "empathy" with others who have different personality preferences. By stepping back, he learned to put himself "in other people's shoes" and to see how each personality preference and spiritual gift is important to the whole entity. "If we realize our roles" in the larger group, said Joe, "we're going to achieve…the end goal that we want."

Linda exposed some preconceptions and laid them to rest. Recognizing God's creative hand in her design allowed Linda to let go of the "weaknesses" she saw in herself. She began to accept that God constructed her with a purpose and to see how her personality preferences steer her in the direction God intends for her life. This new knowledge, according to Linda, takes the "pressure" off her heart and mind.

Shirley felt affirmed by her unique personality preferences. They confirmed that she has a place in God's orchestra. If there is to be harmony, there must be different

instruments. Shirley is happy to be one of God's instruments "continuing to work together with everyone and for His purpose…We're all better together."

Rachel believes that it is fine to have different personalities and different ways of seeing the world. She says, "I think that God speaks to all of us differently…the way that He tells us is different because that's how I need to hear it and He made me that way, so He will deliver it to me the way that I need to hear it." The takeaway for Rachel is permission to hear God speak to her in ways that make sense to her.

Luke recognized his aptitude for organization and his preference for numbers: "Data kind of speaks more to me." This fits nicely with his committee work, where he is more likely to help with structure and budgetary matters. He is pleased his skills are being put to good use in God's service.

We discussed personality preferences in our third group session and paired them with spiritual gifts in session four. As theory gave way to praxis, cohort members came alive. These sessions proved to be the highlight of the research project for many cohort members and for me as well.

Appreciating Spiritual Gifts

> It was [an] affirmation of things that I knew about myself in terms of personality and style and, you know, what I formerly would have called strengths . . . I now see those strengths as gifts. I don't see them as strengths versus weaknesses. Like, here's what I'm good at, here's what I'm not good at . . . It's bigger than that to me . . . These are gifts that I have been given. Not everyone has been given these gifts . . . So, if they use their gifts and I use mine, that's how the world was meant to function. And so, to me, it has also taken some pressure off that I don't have to be everything to everyone because somebody else has those gifts and will do better than I can anyway.   Linda, cohort member

The baseline and end line questionnaires asked cohort members to indicate their awareness of spiritual gifts and self-identify which spiritual gifts they possessed. The end

line questionnaire asked cohort members to re-assess their awareness of spiritual gifts and to identify their highest scores on the spiritual gift inventory. The list of spiritual gifts originated with the Haugk Spiritual Gifts Inventory[9] and is based on the spiritual gifts identified by the apostle Paul in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13.

Cohort members initially indicated a low level of knowledge about spiritual gifts. Two cohort members (22.2%) avowed no knowledge of spiritual gifts. One cohort member (11.1%) suspected the existence of a spiritual gift but professed no knowledge of what it might be. Four cohort members (44.4%) acknowledged having a spiritual gift but admitted they had no idea how to apply it. Only two cohort members (22.2%) felt confident identifying and using their spiritual gift(s).

At the end of the research project all cohort members could identify their spiritual gifts. One cohort member (11.1%) still felt uncertain in how to apply spiritual gifts, but eight cohort members (88.9%) felt confident employing their spiritual gifts. This signifies a decisive shift in cohort members' appreciation for their spiritual gifts and their ability to employ them. I present cohort members' awareness of spiritual gifts in table 19.

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[9] Kenneth C. Haugk, *Discovering God's Vision for Your Life*.

Table 19. Awareness of Spiritual Gifts

Statement	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
I know my Spiritual Gift(s) and I feel confident using them	2	22.2	8	88.9
I have at least one Spiritual Gift, but I am unsure how to apply it	4	44.4	1	11.1
I really don't know much about Spiritual Gifts	2	22.2	0	0.00
I may have a Spiritual Gift, but I am unaware what it is	1	11.1	0	0.00
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0

Cohort members originally self-identified the spiritual gifts of encouragement and helping (88.9% each) which relate to serving others (see table 20). Other self-identified spiritual gifts included faith, generosity, and servanthood (55.6% each). One or two cohort members self-identified gifts of apostleship, discernment, healings, knowing, mercy, nurturing leadership, proclamation, shepherding, visioning & managing leadership, and wisdom. No cohort member self-identified the spiritual gifts of evangelism, interpretation of tongues, miracles, speaking in tongues, or teaching the faith. None of the cohort members indicated that they had no spiritual gifts.

This conflicts somewhat with the data in table 19, where one-third of the cohort members indicated no knowledge or awareness of their spiritual gifts. Did cohort members not know what qualified as a spiritual gift before seeing the list? Did cohort members indicate the spiritual gifts they wished they possessed? Did cohort members base their answers on past service to the congregation or where the Nominating Committee asked them to serve? This project did not address these questions.

The end line responses in table 20 show that cohort members continued to test highly on spiritual gifts that have a strong service component. Six cohort members identified helping, nurturing leadership, and servanthood as spiritual gifts (66.7% each). Four cohort members identified the compassionate spiritual gifts of generosity and mercy (44.4% each). Three cohort members identified the community-building spiritual gifts of encouragement, faith, and visioning & managing leadership as spiritual gifts (33.3% each). The new set of spiritual gifts is still solidly based in service-oriented activities but is now expanded somewhat to include the more intangible and visionary gifts. This represents a more diverse set of spiritual gifts than initially self-identified by cohort members on the baseline questionnaire.

There were nine spiritual gifts that no cohort members identified in the end line responses: apostleship, discernment, evangelism, healings, interpretation of tongues, miracles, proclamation, speaking in tongues, and teaching the faith. These spiritual gifts may be less familiar or more uncomfortable to cohort members. For example, Joe equated discernment with "being judgmental," and subsequently downplayed that as a spiritual gift. There was considerable skepticism in the room when we discussed speaking in tongues and the interpretation of tongues. Cohort members distrusted the validity of these spiritual gifts. Likewise, cohort members dismissed performing healings and miracles as the purview of charlatans and television evangelists. Cohort members also shied away from apostleship, evangelism, and proclamation as being too bold in a culture which observes a reserved, private life of faith. I present cohort members' spiritual gifts in table 20.

Table 20. Cohort Members' Spiritual Gifts (N=9)

Spiritual Gift	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
Apostleship	1	11.1	0	0.00
Discernment	1	11.1	0	0.00
Encouragement	8	88.9	3	33.3
Evangelism	0	0.00	0	0.00
Faith	5	55.6	3	33.3
Generosity	5	55.6	4	44.4
Healings	1	11.1	0	0.00
Helping	8	88.9	6	66.7
Interpretation of Tongues	0	0.00	0	0.00
Knowing	1	11.1	1	11.1
Mercy	1	11.1	4	44.4
Miracles	0	0.00	0	0.00
Nurturing Leadership	2	22.2	6	66.7
Proclamation	1	11.1	0	0.00
Servanthood	5	55.6	6	66.7
Shepherding	2	22.2	1	11.1
Speaking in Tongues	0	0.00	0	0.00
Teaching the Faith	0	0.00	0	0.00
Visioning & Managing Leadership	1	11.1	3	33.3
Wisdom	1	11.1	2	22.2

The spiritual gifts inventory dispelled some previously held beliefs and biases and revealed new spiritual gifts to cohort members. Jane expressed "surprise" at some of the spiritual gifts on which she tested highly, in particular the gift of wisdom, but she admitted that it may come from the fact that "I've lived a lot in my sixty-three years," gaining valuable life experience along the way. Whereas previously Jane stayed in the

background, she is now taking on more leadership roles, specifically with the congregation's after-school youth programs.

Shirley felt that clearly identifying and matching personality preferences and spiritual gifts would "really help me see [God's] purpose." She felt encouraged to use her gifts of nurturing leadership, encouragement, and faith "a little bit more." Shirley agreed to serve on the Christian Education Committee and now helps to direct the learning opportunities for the entire faith family.

Rachel expressed delight in definitively knowing her spiritual gifts, which would help her "focus better on what's gonna have the most impact because I know what my skills are." Rachel put this into practice with the congregation's governing board by serving as chairperson for the Personnel Committee, a role that suits her gifts of nurturing leadership, mercy, and servanthood.

Cohort members quickly affirmed these newly identified gifts in one another. This proved to be meaningful for a few cohort members. Ken said, "What I learned was that we all have our spiritual gifts…I assumed everybody was like me and they're not, and that's not bad…My spiritual gifts are God-given [and] just as important as any other spiritual gift…and knowing that now, I walk in with a little more confidence." Ken is now showing up in surprising places to do ministry and is much more vocal about his faith and his struggles. He is also exercising his spiritual gifts of encouragement, generosity, helping, mercy, and servanthood more intentionally throughout the community.

Linda, also has new-found appreciation for spiritual gifts. What she used to call "strengths," she now calls spiritual gifts, and her perceived "weaknesses" no longer

"seem as weak" because the spiritual gifts she lacks are given to someone else. A gift implies a giver, which is God, who has a greater plan. "You don't feel bad about not having these gifts because you have these [other] gifts and they're beautiful. So, use them, and find out how to work with others to bring, you know, raise the bar where you can't raise it yourself." She goes on to say,

> I have come to really respect . . . the different gifts that people bring . . . when I might have otherwise found them frustrating . . . somebody who's a visionary and…and has these wonderful ideas but can't implement them to save their soul, would be frustrating to me, used to be frustrating to me. Now, I see it as God need[ing] somebody to be able to get it out . . . get the idea out there. That person might not be able to do the idea and that's fine because the ideal person got the idea out there. And there are other people who have other strengths that can make it happen, and, and similarly, some of the doers, they do, do, do, do, do and they create work, create work, and do, do, do, do, do, but for what and why and what bigger purpose? Now, that's okay. Because [you] find the one who has the bigger purpose and align them and get them working together and then, you know, you have created a synergy that's pretty tough to beat…and so, I really have come to appreciate rather than get frustrated by the fact that we all are very different and do things in very different ways and have different strengths. It is . . . it is for a reason.

Linda continues to be an encourager of others, even though she is not presently engaged with one of the ministries of the congregation. Linda's work managing a marketing team allows her to use her gifts of nurturing leadership and visioning & managing leadership.

Luke initially experienced some uneasiness when he tested zero on some spiritual gifts, but he came to recognize the strength in each person having different gifts. "Hopefully everyone on our, our team is sectioned in their areas [so] that we're covering all the bases…I've got my position just like in softball. I'm doing the things that I was made to, to be doing." Luke's "position" within the congregation's ministries is currently with the Mission Committee, using his gifts of nurturing leadership and of visioning & managing leadership, and in seeking out opportunities to serve in the community, using his gifts of generosity and helping.

Victoria showed little surprise about her identified spiritual gifts. She says her family of origin modeled servant leadership and she tested highly in servant-based spiritual gifts. Victoria uses her spiritual gifts of helping, servanthood, and wisdom teaching confirmation, serving on governing boards, and taking part in mission projects.

Joe is using his spiritual gift of nurturing leadership every day as a small business owner who manages employees. Joe uses his gift of visioning & managing leadership as an elected city official by helping to effect positive change for the whole community. Diana is also using her gifts to grow the community, but her efforts are focused on the congregation itself. She uses her gifts of helping and servanthood to provide for the welfare of the members. She uses her gifts of encouragement, generosity, and shepherding to model faithful, Spirit-led discipleship to others.

Connecting with The Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit is just, is one of those things that is really intriguing . . . God and Jesus are kinda, well, they're relatively easy to just put into roles. The Holy Spirit . . . how it plays with the other two is interesting.   Joe, cohort member

It was fun to break down the Holy Spirit. I mean the Father and Son are kinda self-explanatory. The Holy Spirit always kinda mystified me and . . . now I think I have much more understanding what the Holy Spirit is. It's like God doing mouth-to-mouth with you. He's breathing into you, and that's the Spirit.
Ken, cohort member

Cohort members' new evaluation of spiritual gifts accompanied a new assessment of the Holy Spirit's role in their lives. The last series of questions asked cohort members to indicate their understanding of the Holy Spirit (see table 21), the Holy Spirit's primary role (see table 22), and the degree to which the Holy Spirit is present in their life and the life of the congregation (see table 23).

One-third (33.3%) of the cohort members indicated a good understanding of the Holy Spirit on the baseline questionnaire (see table 21). Over half of the cohort members (55.6%) said they have some understanding of the Holy Spirit. Only one cohort member (11.1%) admitted having no understanding of the Holy Spirit. Cohort members expressed frustration over this question. What does "some understanding" really mean? Have cohort members simply heard of the Holy Spirit, or have they had some direct, personal experience with the Holy Spirit? The range of interpretation is too broad to be conclusive. (The data in table 24 provide more precision in this regard.)

The end line data in table 21 show an increase in cohort members' understanding of the Holy Spirit when compared to the baseline data. All cohort members now express some (55.6%) or a good (44.4%) understanding of the Holy Spirit. At the end of the research project none of the cohort members expressed no understanding of the Holy Spirit. Although the increase is slight, it is a positive result. There is now a better understanding of the Holy Spirit among cohort members.

The next question asked cohort members to choose one of six options as the primary role of the Holy Spirit. The baseline data in table 22 show that cohort members overwhelmingly chose responses that indicate the Holy Spirit is actively at work in their life. Most believe the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to help them discern right from wrong (44.4%). Others believe that the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to empower them to act according to God's purpose (33.3%). One cohort member believes the primary work of the Holy Spirit is to bind us to the family of God (11.1%). Interestingly, none of the cohort members believed the Holy Spirit's primary role is to endow believers with spiritual gifts or to help Christians come to faith and understand God's Word. No

cohort member indicated a total lack of awareness concerning the Holy Spirit's work, although one cohort member chose not to answer the question.

The end line data show that one-third of cohort members (33.3%) still believe that the Holy Spirit primarily acts as their conscience, helping them to determine right from wrong. This score is comparable to the baseline score at the start of the project (44.4%). One cohort member (11.1%) stated that the primary role of the Holy Spirit is to endow spiritual gifts, a response not chosen on the baseline questionnaire. Most cohort members (55.6%) identified the primary role of the Holy Spirit as one of empowering them to act according to God's purpose, which represents a 22.2% increase over the course of the research project. These scores reinforce the belief that the Holy Spirit acts directly in the life of cohort members.

Table 23 presents data which reveal contradictory beliefs about the activity of the Holy Spirit among the participants. Most baseline respondents believe that the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the congregation (88.9%), but less than half believe the Holy Spirit to be active in their own life (44.4%). How can it be that the Holy Spirit is active in the Body of Christ, but not in the individual members of that Body? Do cohort members think the Holy Spirit is active in someone else, but not in them? Yet two-thirds (66.7%) of cohort members believe that the Holy Spirit is calling both them and the congregation to serve in new ways. These data suggest that if the Holy Spirit is active in cohort members' lives, they may not be recognizing or responding to that invitation, or that cohort members are seeking more interaction with or clearer guidance from the Holy Spirit. Perhaps cohort members are simply unable to connect meaningfully with the Holy Spirit or are unaware of the Holy Spirit working in and around them. Perhaps cohort

members are just being humble. One cohort member professed no idea as to how or where the Holy Spirit may be working.

Responses to the end line questionnaire were clear and unequivocal. Cohort members believe the Holy Spirit is active in their life and in the life of the congregation (100.0% respectively). The end line response is a dramatic increase in the belief that the Holy Spirit acts in individual Christian lives. The belief that the Holy Spirit is active in the life of the congregation also increased, but that increase is smaller by comparison.

There was also an increase in the belief that the Holy Spirit invites both individuals and the congregation to serve in new ways. Six cohort members (66.7%) originally discerned an invitation by the Holy Spirit. Ultimately, eight cohort members (88.9%) discerned an invitation by the Holy Spirit. These responses suggest a growing awareness of the Holy Spirit's activity and impact on their personal and corporate lives.

Table 21. Understanding of the Holy Spirit (N=9)

Statements	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
No understanding	1	11.1	0	0.00
Some understanding	5	55.6	5	55.6
Good understanding	3	33.3	4	44.4
Total	9	100.0	9	100.0
Means (μ)	1.22		3.67	

Table 22. Primary Role of the Holy Spirit (N=9)

Role	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
Acts like my conscience	4	50.0	3	33.3
Empowers me to act	3	37.5	5	55.6
Makes me part of God's family	1	12.5	0	0.00
Endows me with spiritual gifts	0	0.00	1	11.1
Helps me come to faith	0	0.00	0	0.00
A complete mystery	0	0.00	0	0.00
Total	8	100.0	9	100.0
Missing	1			
Total	9			

Table 23. The Holy Spirit is Active (N=9)

Statements	Baseline Frequency	Baseline Percent	End line Frequency	End line Percent
The Holy Spirit is active in my life	4	44.4	9	100.0
The Holy Spirit is active in the congregation	8	88.9	9	100.0
The Holy Spirit is inviting me to serve in new ways	6	66.7	8	88.9
The Holy Spirit is inviting the congregation to serve in new ways	6	66.7	8	88.9
The Holy Spirit may be working, but I do not know how or where	1	11.1	0	0.00

Ken confessed that the Holy Spirit "kinda mystified me." His view is commonly

shared by most of the cohort members. Luke never considered the Holy Spirit before this

project. "You realize [now] that something's happening when before we hadn't stopped to even think that that was what was going on."

Diana centered on the transforming power of the Spirit. She held up two of the phrases from the opening prayer (session five) that held deep meaning for her: "May your Holy Spirit transform me and make me more like you" and "I pray that your Spirit encourages my faith, my relationships, and my service to you." Diana continues to seek the Spirit's support in transforming her life.

Linda reflected on how the Holy Spirit helps grow her spiritual capacity and set priorities in her life and work. She expressed the desire to be filled by the Holy Spirit and to be of service to others using the image of a cup being filled.

> What are my priorities? What am I doing? What am I accomplishing, and is it…is it filling my cup or emptying my cup? And if things are emptying my cup, I'm going to set those things aside or find ways that somebody else, who maybe they fill their cup, you know, so that I can focus on the work that fills my cup; because only if my cup is full can I be of use to anybody else.

Linda concludes, "If I fill my cup with things that I am passionate about, that's what feels good to me. That makes me feel whole…it makes me feel good about my sort of place in the world."

The preliminary profile offered by the baseline questionnaire indicated that cohort members did not consistently breathe with God. Data that support this include cohort members' steady involvement with the congregation but their uncertainty of the church's call and purpose in the world and their lack of a missional view of the church's role. Many exercised spiritual practices erratically, often distracted or dissuaded from pursuing them, and failing to connect with God when exercising spiritual practices. Cohort members acknowledged spiritual gifts that tangibly provide service to others but rejected the visionary, evangelistic, and other spiritual gifts which border on the miraculous or

other-worldly. Lastly, there was great diversity of opinion about who the Holy Spirit is and how the Spirit participates in human life.

In the next section I present the coding of the qualitative data. The data definitively show a progression as cohort members first learn about breathing with God and then begin to practice breathing with God. In the final section, I present the changes in cohort members' thoughts and behaviors brought about by participation in this research project as indicated by the quantitative data.

Coding the Data

I conducted an interview with each cohort member after the final session of the research project. The interview questions invited cohort members to reflect on their initial feelings and expectations about the research project, the main topics of each session, and their feelings at the conclusion of the project (appendix C). Cohort members also submitted written answers to reflection questions between sessions (appendix D).

I used Charmaz's process of coding qualitative data for interviews and reflection questions, beginning with word-by-word, line-by-line, and incident-by-incident coding to produce *in vivo* codes. *Focused coding* clustered the *in vivo* codes into similar concepts and noted the frequency. *Axial codes* grouped the focused codes into categories, relating them to the lenses of this thesis. The final step, *theoretical coding*, identified the relationship and possible directions of influence between the axial codes.[10] I present the axial codes in table 24. See appendix H for focused codes from cohort member interviews and appendix I for focused codes from cohort member reflections questions.

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[10] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory,* 109-161.

Table 24. Axial Codes from Focused Codes

Axial Codes	Frequency	Focused Codes from Personal Interviews (PI) Reflection Questions (RQ)	
Desiring to Breathe with God	80	Approaching the Process	PI
Inspiring	68	Confronting Personal Struggles	PI
	56	Experiencing God/God's Word	PI
	35	Facing the group	PI
	31	Managing Feelings	PI
	21	Managing Feelings	RQ
	15	Experiencing God	RQ
	10	Trusting God	RQ
	8	Handling Adversity	RQ
	3	Responding to God's Invitation	RQ
	11	Outgoing	RQ
	6	Retiring	RQ
	5	Sensing	RQ
	5	Intuiting	RQ
	5	Thinking	RQ
	4	Feeling	RQ
	20	Judging	RQ
	4	Perceiving	RQ
	4	Procrastinating	RQ
Gaining Momentum for God	224	Gaining Momentum	PI
Aspiring	144	Affirming one another	PI
	59	Identifying Spiritual Gifts	PI
	22	Engaging Spiritual Practices (SP)	PI
	18	Exercising SP/communal	RQ
	15	Exercising SP/individual	RQ
	11	Encouraging SP	RQ
	4	Reflecting on Spiritual Practices	RQ
Becoming God's Missional Partners	67	Understanding the Holy Spirit	PI
Conspiring	67	Welcoming	PI
	20	Serving	RQ
	15	Leading	RQ
	4	Believing	RQ
	3	Showing mercy	RQ
	3	Feeling the Spirit's Absence	RQ

The focused codes in table 24 are distilled into three axial codes: Desiring to Breathe with God, Gaining Momentum for God, and Becoming God's Missional Partners. These codes outline a process by which humankind moves from a confused reality before God to a unified mission with Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. These codes also follow the movement from inspiration through aspiration to conspiration with the triune God.

The first phase, *Desiring to Breathe with God*, begins when we realize that we are unable to breathe with God and when we choose to align ourselves with God. In this phase we are gathered and empowered by God's Spirit and taught the ways of Jesus Christ according to God's Word. We see aspects of this movement in the axial codes (see table 24) and the focused codes (see appendix H and appendix I). Cohort members initially expressed feelings of anxiety, fear, and frustration. Mixed with these emotions were feelings of excitement, curiosity, and delight at discovering God's purpose for their lives. Cohort members expressed uncertainty about the group process at the outset but grew to appreciate the interaction with and feedback from their peers.

During this first phase cohort members learned and adopted new language about God, God's Word, and the Holy Spirit. Confidence among cohort members increased as they grew more comfortable using scriptural words and ideas to describe experiences with the Holy Spirit. Cohort members also discovered more about themselves through their study of personality preferences and about how God equipped them for ministry with spiritual gifts. The combination of these properties fostered an environment in which cohort members agreed to reach out in new ways and try new things.

Gaining Momentum is the second phase. Increased confidence led cohort members to test new spiritual practices and explore new ministries. The affirmation received from the group bolstered cohort members' confidence and encouraged them to continue seeking new ways to serve. The momentum propelled the entire cohort to envision new approaches to individual and congregational ministries. Cohort members also held conversations with church members not associated with the research project. Cohort members' enthusiasm caused non-participants to inquire about the research project and to show interest in joining future sessions.

The momentum phase may be expressed in an equation: Challenge + Affirmation => Greater Capacity for missional ministry. Simply participating in the research project proved to be a huge challenge for some cohort members. The affirmation received from other cohort members emboldened them to expand their ministries. Many cohort members discovered that past personal challenges could be recast in ways that inspired others and validated the cohort members' experience. Cohort members who accepted the challenge and received affirmation yielded a greater capacity and showed a greater proclivity for missional ministry.

The most unanticipated affirmation occurred during the session on spiritual gifts. I asked cohort members to indicate their five top-scoring spiritual gifts on a piece of paper and then seal that paper in an envelope. I then asked the entire cohort to identify the spiritual gifts they saw in one another. The cohort easily identified at least three of the five top-scoring spiritual gifts for each cohort member. This proved to be a watershed moment for many cohort members. Many seemed surprised that others would recognize spiritual gifts in them that they had only just discovered in themselves. Cohort members

also admitted they found it easier to recognize someone else's spiritual gifts than to recognize their own spiritual gifts. Such affirmation from the group was a powerful experience for cohort members.

Every cohort member reported an increased awareness of personal gifts and a greater willingness to use them as a result of the research project. Many cohort members described the experience of having their cups filled and of breathing more deeply with God. Cohort members deemed their spiritual capacity enhanced sufficiently to empower further ministry. The challenge for cohort members of discovering who God made them to be and how God gifted them to serve and combined with the affirmation of their colleagues yielded an enhanced spiritual capacity to serve as partners in God's mission to the world.

Becoming God's Missional Partners is the final and possibly the most difficult move to make. Cohort members, equipped with new knowledge and tools, must now find outlets to use their gifts. Making the move from theory to praxis is challenging. Maintaining the momentum is demanding. Continuing to discern the Holy Spirit's voice amid the world's noise is challenging. Knowing how and when to prioritize your efforts is taxing. Synthesizing the learning with the momentum is what makes this move to becoming God's missional partners possible. This process is illustrated in figure 2.

The scattered circles represent humanity. When there is a desire to breathe with God, the Holy Spirit draws people into a period of discernment and education, represented by the turbine which also provides momentum for ministry. The triune God invigorates, instructs, commissions, and begins to unite humanity's efforts around God's purpose. United in effort does not mean uniformity of action, however. The multiple

arrows stemming from the single source signify humanity's many and varied ministries on behalf of God's reign. The curving line represents the Holy Spirit drawing humanity through the process of discernment, teaching, and becoming God's missional partners.

Desiring to Breathe   Gaining   Becoming God's
with God   Momentum   Missional Partners
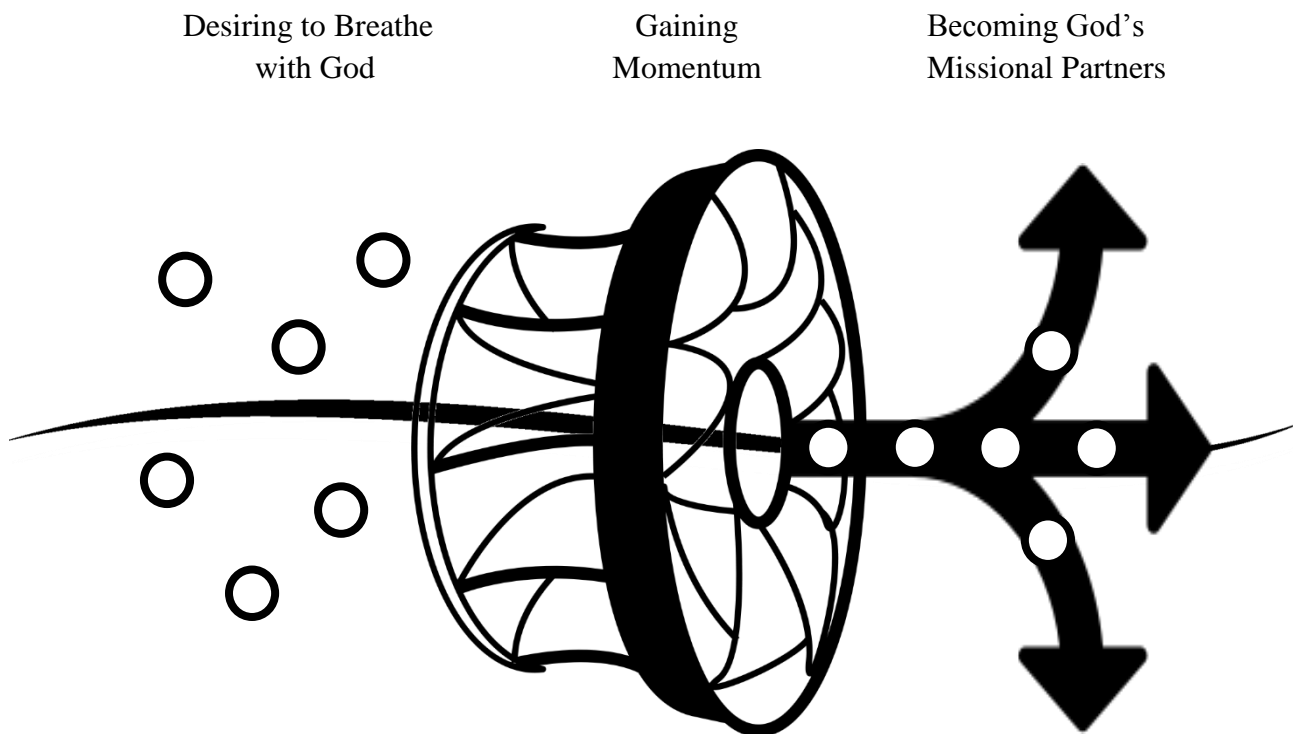
Figure 2. The Dynamics of Learning to Breathe with God

Cohort members faithfully and successfully worked through the dynamics of learning to breathe with God. They gained momentum by accepting the challenge of this research project and receiving affirmation from their peers, which encouraged the growth of their spiritual capacity for ministry. What they do now to grow as missional partners with God is beyond the scope of this thesis. Cohort members did suggest that they are seeking to combine missional thinking with practical applications in their context.

Welcome, as a spiritual practice, is at the heart of cohort members' thinking about missional praxis. Each cohort member spoke of being welcomed into the congregation. Each believed that the Alliance Church embodies the forgiveness and acceptance offered

by God to humanity. Cohort members believe it is now part of their personal ministries to be open to their neighbors, to honor differences, and to create a welcoming environment. It would be interesting to see if the cohort members can make the move from belief to practice and create that welcoming environment.

Answering the Research Question

I designed this project to gauge the effect of guided interventions on the lives of cohort members. I hoped to increase an individual's ability to name the agency of the triune God, to understand personality preferences as gifts from the Creator God, to identify and to use spiritual gifts in individual and congregational ministries, and to envision God's "preferred and promised future"[11] for the individual, the congregation, and the community. The research question is: How might action research interventions with a congregational cohort encourage greater participation with the triune God?

The data indicate that positive change did result from the research project interventions. Cohort members increased their knowledge about personality preferences and the work of the Holy Spirit. Cohort members also experienced increased confidence when learning about and applying spiritual practices and spiritual gifts. The final end line question asked cohort members to indicate any personal change resulting from their participation in the research project. The question used a Likert scale which included the responses of Strongly Disagree, Disagree, No Change, Agree, and Strongly Agree on a scale of one through five. No cohort members indicated that they strongly disagreed or

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[11] Keifert and Rooms, *Forming the Missional Church*, 7.

disagreed with any statement. Table 25 shows the change cohort members attributed to

their participation in the research project.

Table 25. Personal Change Resulting from Participation in Project (N=9)

Statements	No Change	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean (μ)
I have a deeper commitment to my congregation	2	5	2	4.00
I am inspired to be a leader with and for my congregation	0	7	2	4.22
I am knowledgeable about the congregation's ministries	1	5	3	4.22
I am clear about my role in the congregation	0	7	2	4.22
I desire to become a greater part of what God is doing	0	5	4	4.44
I am committed to regular spiritual practices	3	4	2	3.89
I draw greater benefit from my spiritual practices	1	4	4	4.33
I am affirmed as a child of God	2	4	3	4.11
I appreciate more fully how God made me	2	4	3	4.11
I can readily identify my spiritual gifts	0	6	3	4.33
I am willing to use my spiritual gifts	0	6	3	4.33
I am familiar with the person of the Holy Spirit	0	7	2	4.22

Table 25. Personal Change Resulting from Participation in Project (N=9)
(continued)

Statements	No Change	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean (μ)
I better understand the work of the Holy Spirit	0	7	2	4.22
I can describe an encounter with the Holy Spirit in my life	1	5	3	4.22
I can breathe with God more wholly	0	4	5	4.56

Table 25 conveys a generally positive change resulting from this research project. Some cohort members signified no change in certain categories, but no cohort member signified any negative change resulting from the research project interventions. Most cohort members (77.8%) feel more deeply committed to the congregation, and all cohort members (100.0%) are inspired to be leaders within the congregation because of their participation in this research project. This is corroborated by the increase in cohort members' involvement with the congregation (see table 11 on page 115).

Cohort members are knowledgeable about the congregation's ministries (88.9%) and all cohort members (100.0%) are clear about their role within the congregation as a result of their participation in this research project. This is substantiated by the data in table 12 (page 118) and table 13 (page 119). All cohort members (100.0%) desire to be a greater part of what God is doing in and through the congregation because of their participation in this research project.

Two-thirds of cohort members (66.7%) remain committed to regular spiritual practices. A majority of cohort members (88.9%) claim greater benefit from spiritual practices as a result of their participation in this research project. Most cohort members

(77.8%) feel more affirmed as a child of God as a result of their participation in this research project. An equal number of cohort members appreciate more fully how God created them.

All cohort members (100.0%) possess greater confidence in identifying and using their spiritual gifts as a result of their participation in this research project. This is corroborated by the data in table 19 (page 140) and table 20 (page 142). All cohort members (100.0%) are more familiar with the person of the Holy Spirit and better understand the work of the Holy Spirit as a result of their participation in this research project. The data in tables 21 and 22 (pages 148-149) reinforce this claim. Most cohort members (88.9%) can describe an encounter with the Holy Spirit in their life. The entire cohort (100.0%) agrees that they can breathe more wholly with God because of their participation in this research project. Every cohort member asserted that the research project delivered a positive change in their life.

Ken has a new appreciation of himself. "I actually believe that I have a place in the church…I have a reason for being here and it was a wonderful experience." Jane now believes that her opinion matters. She says the project helped her to "affirm who I am," and that it "put a spark behind me to help get things done." Diana calls the project a "wonderful six months" and a "learning, growth period" for her. She hopes others will benefit from this project and thinks "everybody should be getting out of their comfort zone and growing, expanding…it's good for you."

Joe feels that during the project he was "more closely in tune with the Holy Spirit and with my relationship with God than probably ever." Victoria feels "very confident breathing with God individually." She also sees members of the cohort "wanting to go

beyond that and share that" with others. Rachel feels an increased sense of calm about her role in the church. She says life was beginning to feel overwhelming, but the project came at a good time and allowed her to admit, "You are who you are, you're doing great, keep focusing on those things and just…listen to what the Spirit is telling you to do, and trust that."

Linda found the project to be "impactful" because it "changed the way I look at life and my role in it." She is far more aware of where she needs to focus her time and attention. She believes that "there has to be the intake and then there has to be the exhale…What is God teaching you and how are you spitting that back out? What gifts are you using to make an impact to what you're bringing in? And that cycle to me, is really rather astonishing!"

Shirley feels there is new momentum which is "propelling" the congregation out into the community. She is excited to see where it will lead, especially how it will influence youth. Luke believes the cohort members learned a lot about themselves and worked well together. He is now "connecting the dots" to figure out where God might be calling him to act. I am pleased with the results of the research project. I believe it encouraged and empowered cohort members to increase their spiritual capacity for ministry by synthesizing their personality preferences and their spiritual gifts. I believe all of them breathe with God in new and exciting ways.

Summary

I shared the results of the research project in chapter five. The data show that with intentional and directed interventions Christians may begin to breathe with God in a way that brings them into greater partnership with what the triune God is actively doing in the

world. The quantitative data provided a snapshot of cohort members' thinking at the beginning and end of the research project. The quantitative data clearly show a change in *what* cohort members are thinking about ministry. Coding the qualitative data helped to explain *why* cohort members' thinking changed and provided clues as to *how* cohort members will behave in the future. There is a dynamic movement beginning among cohort members. They are inspired by God and aspiring to learn and grow in Christ-like ways so that they may conspire with the Holy Spirit for the realization of God's reign. I integrate the results of the research project with the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses I presented in chapters two and three in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6

REFLECTING ON THE EXPERIENCE

I shared the results of my research project in chapter five. I indicated my belief that with intentional and directed interventions Christians may begin to breathe with God in a way that brings them into greater partnership with what the triune God is actively doing in the world. In this chapter I provide a summary of the study's findings, discuss the importance of these findings, integrate the results of the research project with the theoretical, biblical, and theological lenses from chapters two and three, present the limits of generalizing such findings, and offer some questions for future research.

Summarizing the Findings

Cohort members are on the cusp of a new trajectory for their lives. Transformation is beginning. The data suggest that cohort members are thinking about themselves and their ministries in new ways. Such reflections will, hopefully, lead to new practices and a natural breathing with God. The change is small at present, but any movement toward God is meaningful. This research project was a step in a lifelong journey of discipleship for the cohort members, providing new tools and encouragement for their continuing voyage of discovery.

The biggest gain for the cohort members related to their self-image. Many cohort members, especially the older ones, had a poor self-image at the start of the research project. Ken struggled with this more than anyone. He admitted to feeling anxious at the

start of the project because of his struggles with faith. He thought he had little to offer the church. At the end of the project, and because of the insights gained during the project, Ken revealed, "I actually believe that I have a place in the church."

Identifying oneself as a child of God, created by God's design and for God's purpose, is the foundation for discipleship. Believing in our hearts and minds that God loves and cares for us, and accepting that God can use us, even with our limited human means, stimulates the desire to breathe more closely with God. Some cohort members had to accept their worth in God's eyes before they could engage their personality preferences and spiritual gifts. Other cohort members found their self-worth affirmed once they discerned their personality preferences and spiritual gifts.

The sessions that dealt with particularized subjects–personality preferences and spiritual gifts–had the most meaningful impact on cohort members. Many recognized that their self-identified preferences and gifts were wrong. Most cohort members discovered new personality preferences and spiritual gifts. This led cohort members to reevaluate their self-image, spiritual practices, ministries, and work habits. Having accurate information and a clearer picture of themselves fostered a greater willingness among cohort members to engage with the triune God.

The linking of personality preferences and spiritual gifts helped cohort members remove the division between their church ministries and their secular work. The habits cohort members exhibited at work (based on personality preferences) became habits they utilized in their ministries at church. For example, Luke applied the organizational skills he used every day at work to make the church's Mission Committee more efficient. Likewise, the spiritual gifts identified by cohort members became things they could apply

in their daily work. For example, Linda's spiritual gift of visioning & managing leadership helped her to better understand her coworkers and to match their personalities with specific tasks, which created a more effective team. This blending of sacred and secular worlds will assist cohort members in breathing with God in every aspect of life.

The Holy Spirit also helped cohort members breathe with God more wholly. Cohort members' understanding of the Holy Spirit was low at the beginning of the research project. Cohort members increased their knowledge of the Holy Spirit through study of scripture. There is still a need, however, for cohort members to fully seek and trust the Holy Spirit's leading. The relationship between cohort members and the Holy Spirit is tentative at present, but I believe it will grow stronger as cohort members continue breathing with God.

This research project offers initial steps in the lifelong adventure of Christian discipleship. With hearts and minds open to what God is doing, with the model of Jesus before them, and with the help of the Holy Spirit, cohort members will continue to take steps in faith and to breathe with God. The answer to my research question is that intentional, guided sessions positively inspired cohort members to breathe with their Creator-God in new ways, encouraged them to aspire to more Christ-like living, and urged them to conspire with the Holy Spirit for the reclamation of the world.

Integration with the Lenses

Lenses facilitate our understanding. The theoretical lenses for this study were *respiration* and *personality preferences*. The biblical lenses were Genesis 11:1-9 (Tower of Babel), Psalms 42-43 (the Deer Pants), Acts 2 (Pentecost), and Romans 12:1-8 (The Body of Christ). The theological lenses were *spiritual capacity* and *discipleship*. These

lenses provided glimpses into the process of breathing with God. These lenses offered clues as to how we might be inspired by God so that we might aspire to be Christ-like in our living and conspire with the Holy Spirit for the realization of God's reign.

<div align="center">Respiration</div>

The metaphor of respiration resonated with the cohort members. Respiration, breathing, is something everyone does. Everyone knows how it feels to breathe deeply and how it feels to be short of breath. Cohort members quickly grasped the metaphor and used the language of breathing with God throughout the research project.

Part of the discussion on respiration explored Catherine LaCugna's depiction of God's dynamic movement. LaCugna's notion of "a personal self-sharing by which God is forever bending toward God's 'other,'"[1] a chiastic movement of emanation and return, is presented in figure 3.
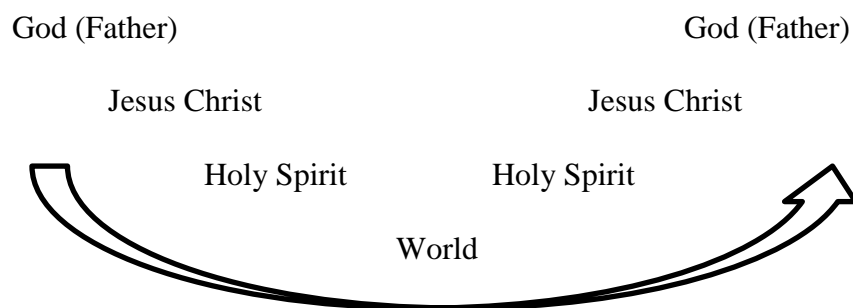

Figure 3. LaCugna's Chiastic Movement of Emanation and Return

The idea that God moves outward in the "concrete existence in Jesus Christ and as Spirit" in order that all things might be "brought back into union with God and returned

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[1] LaCugna, *God for Us*, 223.

to God"[2] proved to be an "Aha!" moment for the cohort members. This was the point when the concept of breathing with God really struck home. As God breathes out the Holy Spirit toward us, we breathe in God's Spirit. As we breathe out God's reign, God breathes creation back into community with the triune God.

I remember the surprised faces of cohort members and the room erupting with animated conversation as cohort members tried to express their understanding of this revelation about God's interaction with us. Cohort members shed any previously held notions of a Creator-God who stands apart from creation, and instead embraced the symbiotic relationship of the triune God who lives and breathes with and for creation. The idea that "God is in this with us" made a profound impact on the cohort. It intensified their willingness to participate in what God is doing in the world, and it assured them of the ultimate success of their efforts (with God we cannot fail). The inspiring work of God fueled cohort members' passion for ministry.

<p align="center">Personality Preferences</p>

The study of personality preferences made the research project meaningful for cohort members. Self-reflection was a new experience for some cohort members, and it proved hugely impactful in terms of self-worth. For others the study of personality preference was an affirmation of how God formed them. Self-worth and affirmation gave cohort members confidence to undertake the work of discerning and using their spiritual gifts. The pairing of personality preferences and spiritual gifts confirmed for all cohort members that God created them with and for a purpose.

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[2] LaCugna, *God for Us*, 222-223.

The diversity of personality preferences and spiritual gifts baffled the cohort members at first. Soon it dawned on them that no one person can be all things to all people. A diversity of personalities and gifts ensures that a diversity of needs is met. This realization led to an immediate combining of forces as cohort members sought counsel from other members who held differing personality preferences and spiritual gifts. A recognition of God's intentionally unique design for each person validated cohort members' efforts and inspired them to learn more, go deeper, and reach further.

Genesis 11:1-9

The Tower of Babel describes humanity breathing and working together in common purpose, but not breathing and working with God for God's purpose. This chaotic reality resonated with cohort members. Most cohort members easily recalled an experience of not breathing with God, while only a few cohort members identified an experience when they breathed with God. Some cohort members identified with the confused languages of Babel, feeling that the church and the world too often convey different messages. Some cohort members spoke of the emptiness that comes from not breathing with God. The scattering at Babel was a powerful image for cohort members.

Psalms 42 and 43

Psalms 42 and 43 portray the anguish of a man who once breathed in communion with God but who lost that connection and now desperately wants to breathe with God again. Cohort members empathized with the desperation and deep yearning of the psalmist to find God again. Cohort members shared the psalmist's desire to breathe with God. All believed that God stood ready to connect with humanity, but many believed that some flaw or misstep on their part prohibited such a connection. The grace that flowed by

knowing that God is constantly breathing toward humanity opened an avenue for reconciliation. While most cohort members believed breathing with God was possible, few knew how to achieve it.

Acts 2

Acts 2 demonstrates that, with the power of the Holy Spirit, humanity can begin to breathe with God and for God's purpose. Cohort members wanted to know: How can we connect with the Holy Spirit? How do we begin to breathe with the Holy Spirit to achieve God's purpose? One cohort member expressed alarm that we would miss out on God's "great and glorious day" (Acts 2:20) if we do not learn how to breathe with the Holy Spirit. One cohort member, discussing the miracle of speaking in other languages (Acts 2:4), wondered if the Holy Spirit still works on such a grand scale. One cohort member questioned if the Holy Spirit is still poured out on all people and the ability to prophesy still given.

This was the most perplexing passage for the cohort members. I perceived a strong desire by cohort members to connect with God which contrasted sharply with their poor understanding of the Holy Spirit's agency. Cohort members viewed Pentecost as a hopeful sign that humanity may begin to breathe with God again. Conspiring with the Holy Spirit, however, remained an elusive theory with no easily identified, practical applications in cohort members' individual ministries.

Romans 12:1-8

Romans 12 depicts a model for congregational ministry. Paul uses the image of the human body to describe how one member performing his or her appointed task is essential for the proper functioning of the whole organism. This imagery made sense to

cohort members and reinforced that each person has a part to play as all the moving parts work together. Cohort members started to identify their place in the congregation's ministries. One cohort member mentioned the "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1) as the giving of ourselves through our spiritual gifts. Another cohort member said she was proud of her spiritual gifts because God gave them to her, and she would no longer try to be someone different because this is how God made her. One cohort member picked up on the transforming aspect of working with God. She called this "freeing."

Cohort members found comfort in the idea that we all breathe with God in different ways, just as different parts of the body function in different ways. We may not be the lungs or the diaphragm, directly engaged in respiration, but we still play a supporting role in respiration, like the blood carrying oxygen or the cells fueling movement. Cohort members relaxed when they realized that they did not have to bear the entire burden of respiration by themselves.

<div align="center">Spiritual Capacity</div>

I defined spiritual capacity as the ability or power to partner with God, experience God, understand what God is doing in and through us, and to exercise our spiritual gifts. Cohort members reflected on how God might be inviting them to participate in God's greater mission. Cohort members also shared how they experience God and how God is revealed to them. Cohort members discussed how God might be calling them to use their spiritual gifts in new ways.

I used the image of a fuel tank to define spiritual capacity as the amount of God's Spirit that we can comprehend and "hold" within us. This concept sparked the cohort members' imagination. How do we fill our spiritual tanks? Does the size of our spiritual

tank increase or decrease over time? What does it feel like when our spiritual tank is empty or full? For what purpose are we filling our spiritual tank?

These wonderings led to a conversation about spiritual practices. Spiritual practices are actions or rituals that refocus our hearts and minds on God and God's greater purpose. Spiritual practices help people draw closer to God, understand God's purpose, and breathe more freely with God. The cohort discussed different kinds of spiritual practices. I encouraged cohort members to continue trying new spiritual practices and reflecting on the resulting effects on their spiritual capacity.

Spiritual practices continued to be challenging for cohort members for a variety of reasons, but all understood the need to nurture their spiritual capacity. We discussed that Christian discipleship requires participation with the triune God who actively indwells and who works with and through us. The acceptance of the triune God's invitation to discipleship necessitates the exercise of spiritual practices to remain in communion with the Holy Spirit who is the primary mover and motivator.

Most cohort members recognized the value of spiritual practices in increasing their spiritual capacity. They recognized, too, that spiritual capacity is intended for something other than personal gain. Spiritual capacity profits us nothing unless it is used for the common good. The fuel in our spiritual tank is useless until it is spent in the service of others.

Discipleship

I defined Christian discipleship for the cohort members as discovering how to breathe with God by connecting with God who is the source of our breath (inspiration), learning and practicing Christ-like living (aspiration), and working with the Holy Spirit

for the reclamation of the world (conspiration). We considered discipleship as a process of following, learning, and sending. We become followers when we surrender our will to God's will, accept Christ's invitation to follow him, and submit to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Dietrich Bonhoeffer called this a step of "obedience."[3] The second step, learning, requires development of the values Jesus promoted, like love, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, grace. Disciples who value the people and the habits that Jesus values and who integrate Christ-like practices into daily thinking and acting are exhibiting what Ben Cooper called "incorporated servanthood."[4] The third step, sending, compels disciples to go out by the power of the Holy Spirit to share God's truth, love, and purpose with and for the world. David Augsburger called this sending "dissident discipleship"[5] because what Christ values and teaches runs counter to what the world values and teaches. Christian discipleship is countercultural.

Each cohort member is *following* Jesus. Each received baptism, made a profession of faith, and joined the congregation. Cohort members are collectively in the *learning* phase of discipleship. Spiritual formation continues in their lives as they learn to breathe with God and discern how to use their personality preferences and spiritual gifts to further God's plan. Cohort members are eager to be part of the *sending* phase, but they remain anxious about how to proceed. I discussed with the cohort how this is not a linear or a sequential movement. There may be times when disciples move from following to learning to sending. There may also be times when disciples move back and forth

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[3] Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 57.

[4] Cooper, *Incorporated Servanthood*, 242.

[5] Augsburger, *Dissident Discipleship*, 189.

between learning and following, perhaps to reconnect with God after some rupture in the relationship, or between sending and learning, perhaps to learn a new and needed skill which will further the success of the sending.

The three axial codes of *Desiring to Breathe with God, Gaining Momentum for God,* and *Becoming God's Missional Partners* (table 24) reflect the following-learning-sending movement in cohort members' lives. These codes also echo the *inspire-aspire-conspire* movement discussed in chapter one. Cohort members readily named times when they could not breathe with God, but they declared their intention to breathe freely with God and for God's purpose in the future. Cohort members are followers of Jesus. They are gaining momentum for God through use of spiritual practices and the synergy of personality preferences and spiritual gifts. The goal is to become God's missional partners actively working to fulfill God's reign.

The Importance of the Study

Breathing with God is a life-long process. Breathing with God is demanding and intentional work. Breathing with God yields tremendous transformation in a person's life, in a congregation, and in a community. The six sessions of this study offer individuals and congregations the chance to reveal their God-created selves and to review their ministries reflecting on the triune God's mission with and for the world. The concept of breathing with God gives individuals and congregations permission to explore and expand their ministries in concert with God who is still living and breathing among, with, and for God's creation.

The greatest impact of this study is in empowering others for ministry. The importance of affirming one another in our ministries cannot be overstated. This study

fostered confidence among participants, which encouraged them to dream new dreams and try new things. This study created excitement among participants that revitalized their ministries. The momentum generated by this study promises to have long-lasting effects on the congregation and community. This study provided education and new tools for ministry which I already see cohort members putting into practice.

Another important aspect of this study is the deepening of relationships with one another. Cohort members now know one another more intimately. They cultivated new friendships. Surprising prayer alliances formed. Amazing partnerships developed. Cohort members shared their struggles and received affirmation for their gifts. Through the process, cohort members learned how better to work together, which will only strengthen the congregation's ministry in the community.

Cohort members strengthened their connection to God through this study. The pursuit of spiritual practices increased spiritual capacity. This increased spiritual capacity led to a greater desire to work for God's promised future. Cohort members became more comfortable breathing with God and God's purpose as they accepted how and why God made them. The study reinforced their trust in God's ultimate plan for creation and of their place in that plan. This study helped cohort members begin to breathe with the triune God. The importance of this study lies in empowering disciples of Jesus to accept their role in the *missio Dei* and to seek new ways to realize God's reign.

Looking to the Future

The scope of this research project is limited. The nine cohort members embraced the project and their enthusiastic and faithful participation yielded rich data for this thesis. Such a small sample does not represent the larger congregation or community. It would

be poor scholarship to draw definite conclusions about the success of this research on a grand scale. I am heartened, however, by the results of this research project, and I believe that it can be successfully replicated in other settings.

I would continue to host seminars and hold interviews to refine the project if time and funding allowed. Dreaming bigger, I would enjoy expanding the project, creating a publishable curriculum, leading seminars for congregations and other groups, and possibly writing a book! That is not feasible at present, as I need to rededicate myself to my family and my ministry with the congregation.

I am also interested in doing some follow-up work with the cohort members. Where are cohort members in their journey six months or a year or three years from now? Are they still breathing with God successfully? Do they need fresh ideas for fruitful spiritual practices? Are they integrating personality preferences and spiritual gifts in ways that foster Christian discipleship? What setbacks or roadblocks did they encounter? What new insights do they have for me? I have not yet fully considered what ongoing support might be given to participants after this project.

I plan to host multiple "Breathing with God" seminars for my congregation over the next few years. The experience and information gained through this learning process should improve our individual and corporate ability to offer effective ministry to the community. A colleague in ministry asked if I would offer this course for his congregation. This course would work particularly well as a congregational Lenten study. There may be opportunity to offer this course as a weekend seminar for congregations in my denominational judicatory or as a training event with counselors at our denominational camp. There is expressed interest from both entities. I am delighted to

think this research project will continue to have practical applications for individuals and congregations. I am eager to explore other venues for communicating how others may learn to breathe with God.

My wife suggested I consider using this seminar to foster communication with couples, as it includes practical applications for building healthy relationships. This information could be adapted for use as a marriage enrichment program or to help couples understand and support personality preferences, spiritual practices, and spiritual gifts with one another. Discussions might be tailored to suit the dynamics of relationships and new questions provided for couples to use for further conversations at home.

Students, specifically confirmation students, might benefit from this learning process. The formative teenage years were, in my experience, fraught with unanswered questions and doubts. How might a deeper knowledge of spiritual practices, personality preferences, and spiritual gifts coalesce to help young adults discover their purpose in life? How might affirming and applying a young adult's gifts and skills keep them better connected with the worship and work of the congregation? What impact would such knowledge make on their self-image? How might such knowledge influence their personal decisions and career choices? Would the knowledge that each of us is a child of God lead to a decrease in bullying, depression, or suicide among young adults? Might such knowledge assist young adults in finding their place within the congregation and their purpose in the greater community? I believe there are exciting possibilities for new applications of this research study.

Breathing with God

Rabbi Lawrence Kushner writes about the holiest part of the ancient Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, a room so sacred that only the high priest could enter, and then only once a year on *Yom Kippur*. What made this space so sacred was the presence of God, who lived in the Holy of Holies. In this space, God dwelt among God's people.

Once inside this sacred space, the high priest had just one task, something he had prepared to do for months. He had only to say the ineffable four-letter name of God: *Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey*. Kushner says the reason God's name is inexpressible is because the name of God is the sound of breathing. The high priest would go into the holiest of rooms in the Temple and simply breathe.[6]

Breathing with God should be an instinctive practice for us, but it is not. Even though God created us to be in communion with our Creator, we continually find ways to stop the natural exchange between God and humankind. Still, God continues to breathe toward and for us despite our reluctance or resistance to receive God.

Breathing with God is vital to the life of the Christian. Disconnected from the source of our life-breath, we cannot survive or thrive. So, like the high priest of ancient Israel, we must practice breathing. The high priest's breath-prayer must become our own: *Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey*. God's very name must be on our lips and in our hearts with every breath.

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[6] Lawrence Kushner, *God Was in This Place and I, i Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning* (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1993), 98.

Breathing with God is a lifetime's pursuit, but it is practiced in acts of daily living. Breathing with God is accomplished only with the help of God's Spirit, but it realizes God's reign here and now. One breath at a time. My prayer is that each of us will become so intimate with the triune God that every thought, every action, every breath whispers, "*Yod-Hey-Vav-Hey*."

EPILOGUE

The Hebrew word *shalom* is typically translated as "peace," meaning the absence of conflict or war. But *shalom* means more than that. *Shalom* connotes totality, health, wholeness, harmony, success, completeness, and the richness of living in a wholesome social environment.[1] Such wholeness is achieved only with the help of the Holy Spirit. To love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength, and to love our neighbor as ourselves (Mark 12:30-31), requires God's *shalom*—wholeness—to achieve. Wholeness is an integration of the physical and the spiritual. This research project, with the Holy Spirit's collaboration, sought to promote such wholeness.

Wholeness, physical and spiritual, can be difficult to achieve. I am plagued with a bad back, the result of a horseback riding accident. Cohort member Shirley is part of the wellness team that supports my ongoing physical health. She taught me, as part of my treatment, to breathe deeply from the diaphragm. This way provides the necessary amount of oxygen, corrects poor posture, strengthens the body's core, and keeps the entire body aligned. Physical wholeness begins when the body breathes properly.

The same is true when our spiritual nature breathes with the triune God. True wholeness becomes possible when the heart, and soul, and mind, and strength work together. The purpose of this research project was to assimilate the spiritual and physical aspects of life to promote wholeness, *shalom*. Such wholeness fosters a desire to give back. In the Christian context, we call this discipleship.

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[1] William H. Gentz, editor, *The Dictionary of Bible and Religion* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1986), 964.

This research project proved richly rewarding both personally and professionally for me. I discovered a renewed sense of purpose and excitement for my work as a disciple of Jesus and as a pastor. This project rejuvenated my own spiritual practices which increased my spiritual capacity for the work of ministry. This project reaffirmed my call to ministry, specifically to ministry in my current context. There is much good work the congregation and I can yet do together as we partner with God on behalf of our neighbors. I enjoyed the teaching aspect of this research project immensely, using my own spiritual gifts of teaching the faith and visioning & managing leadership.

Professionally, I observed spiritual growth in my congregants. I witnessed transformational moments as cohort members made links between their personality preferences and spiritual gifts. I am blessed to see this research project bearing fruit as cohort members participate more in the congregation's ministries. Perhaps the greatest miracle happened as cohort members embraced, some for the first time, how and who God created them to be, and achieving a new measure of wholeness. As we breathe with God properly and more freely, we strengthen the Body of Christ and improve the effectiveness of our ministry to the community.

My own discipleship is stronger for this experience. I am beginning to breathe with God in ways that will support my spiritual health and improve my effectiveness as a pastor. I believe that cohort members will continue to use their personality preferences and spiritual gifts in ways that enhance the ministries of our congregation and our community. This is the start of something new and exciting for us. May we continue to inhale God's Spirit and exhale God's reign.

APPENDIX A

BASELINE AND END LINE QUESTIONNAIRES WITH IMPLIED CONSENT

Thank you for participating in this survey which will provide data for Douglas Dent's doctoral thesis "Breathing with God: Inhaling God's Spirit, Exhaling God's Reign." Please note that completion of this survey constitutes implied consent for your answers to be used anonymously in the final thesis.

PART A: BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section gathers statistical information about you and your involvement in the faith community.

1. What is your birth year? (Please enter a 4-digit number) ___ ___ ___ ___

2. Please identify your gender: _____

3. What is the highest level of education you completed? (Check one)
   a. Elementary
   b. Some High School
   c. High School or GED
   d. Associate degree
   e. Bachelor's Degree
   f. Master's Degree
   g. Doctorate
   h. Trade School Training
   i. Other (please specify)

4. Before you joined this congregation, with what denomination (s) did you associate? (Check all that apply)
   a. Assemblies of God
   b. Baptist
   c. Congregational/UCC
   d. Disciples of Christ
   e. Episcopal Church
   f. Free Church
   g. Lutheran (ELCA)
   h. Lutheran (Missouri Synod)
   p.
   i. Lutheran (WELS)
   j. Lutheran (other)
   k. Non-denominational church
   l. Presbyterian
   m. Roman Catholic Church
   n. None
   o. Other (please specify):

5. How long is your association with this congregation? (Check one)
   a. Less than 2 years
   b. 2-5 years

        c. 6-15 years
        d. 16-25 years
        e. 26-35 years
        f. Over 35 years

6. What influenced your decision to become a member of this congregation?
    (Check all that apply)
        a. Denominational loyalty
        b. Family ties
        c. Hospitality of congregation/Warmth of welcome
        d. Ministries/Mission of the congregation
        e. Quality of worship/preaching
        f. Theological beliefs of the congregation
        g. Youth programs
        h. Other (please specify):

7. Describe your past and present involvement with the congregation.
    (Check all that apply)
        a. Bible Study
        b. Committee member
        c. Deacon or Elder (currently serving)
        d. Deacon or Elder (not currently serving)
        e. Kid's Club or Vacation Bible School
        f. Mission Participant
        g. Musician (Bells-Choir-Praise Team-Instrumentalist)
        h. Sunday School Teacher
        i. Volunteer – Kitchen (congregational meals, funerals)
        j. Volunteer – Office (reception, newsletter, congregational mailings)
        k. Volunteer – Property (grounds keepings, maintenance)
        l. Youth Worker or chaperone (Jr/Sr High youth group, confirmation)
        m. I am not presently involved
        n. Other (please specify):

PART B: THE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

This section asks about your understanding of the church and your role in its work.

8. Use the range below to indicate your understanding of the Church's role.
    (Sliding scale)

God appointed the Church to   God invites the Church to partner
work on God's behalf in the world.   with what God is doing in the world.
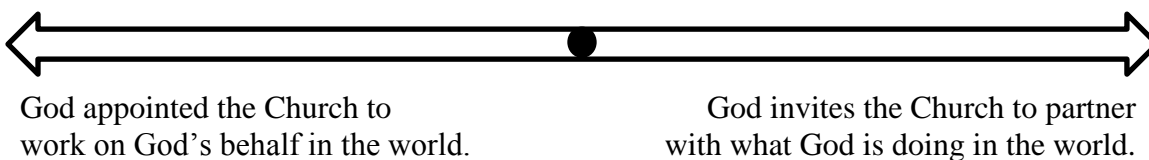
9. Which statement best describes your understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries? (Check one)
   a. I have little understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries.
   b. I have some understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries.
   c. I have a solid understanding of the congregation's mission and ministries.

10. Which statement best describes your role in the church? (Check one)
    a. I have no role to play in the church.
    b. I may have a role to play in the church, but I am unsure what that role is.
    c. I think ministry is best accomplished by professionals (i.e., clergy, mission workers)
    d. I am confident of my role within the church.

PART C: SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

This section asks about your spiritual practices. A spiritual practice is any regular activity performed to promote spiritual development.

11. How often do you engage in these spiritual practices?

Often	Occasionally	Seldom	Never
daily/weekly	a few times per month	a few times per year	

   a. Bible Study
   b. Community Service
   c. Devotional Reading
   d. Journaling
   e. Meditation
   f. Prayer
   g. Reading Scripture
   h. Worship
   i. Other (please specify):

12. What is your <u>primary</u> motivation for participating in spiritual practices? (Check one)
    a. Discern God's will for me
    b. Find inner peace
    c. Pray for myself and others
    d. Promote mental health
    e. Other (please specify):

13. What is your primary motivation for <u>not</u> participating in spiritual practices? (Check one)
    a. I don't know enough about spiritual practices
    b. I don't have the time to do spiritual practices
    c. I'm not able to maintain a spiritual practice for any length of time'
    d. I haven't found a spiritual practice that works for me
    e. I don't see the value in spiritual practices
    f. Other (please specify):

PART D: SELF-PERCEPTION

This section asks you to consider how you interact with the world. (Check One)

14. I am an:
    a. Extravert – an outgoing, expressive person who enjoys the constant company of others
    b. Introvert – a more reserved person who prefers times of solitude

15. I acquire information through my:
    a. Intuition – using conceptual data that is theoretical in nature
    b. Senses – using physical data (facts) which can be verified

16. I process information primarily through:
    a. Feeling – in a subjective and relational manner
    b. Thinking – in an objective and analytical manner

17. I act on information by:
    a. Judging – making plans and scheduling things
    b. Perceiving – winging it and seeing how things play out

PART E: SPIRITUAL GIFTS

This section measures your understanding of spiritual gifts.

18. Choose the statement that best represents your current thinking about spiritual gifts. (Check one)
    a. I really don't know much about spiritual gifts
    b. I don't believe I have any spiritual gifts
    c. I may have a spiritual gift, but I am unaware what it is
    d. I believe I have at least one spiritual gift, but I am unsure how to apply it
    e. I know my spiritual gift(s) and feel confident using them

19. Indicate the spiritual gift(s) you think you may possess. (Check all that apply)
    a. Apostleship
    b. Discernment
    c. Encouragement
    d. Evangelism
    e. Faith
    f. Generosity
    g. Healings
    h. Helping
    i. Interpretation of Tongues
    j. Knowing
    k. Mercy
    l. Miracles
    m. Nurturing Leadership
    n. Proclamation
    o. Servanthood
    p. Shepherding
    q. Speaking in Tongues
    r. Teaching the Faith
    s. Visionary & Managing Leadership
    t. Wisdom
    u. None of these applies to me

PART F. THE HOLY SPIRIT

This section assesses your understanding of the Holy Spirit.

20. How would you rate your current understanding of what/who the Holy Spirit is?
    (Check one)
    a. I have no understanding of the Holy Spirit
    b. I have some understanding of the Holy Spirit
    c. I have a good understanding of the Holy Spirit

21. What do you consider to be the <u>primary</u> role of the Holy Spirit? (Check one)
    a. The Holy Spirit helps me come to faith and understand scripture
    b. The Holy Spirit acts like my conscience, helping me know right from wrong
    c. The Holy Spirit makes me part of the family of God
    d. The Holy Spirit endows me with spiritual gifts
    e. The Holy Spirit helps me understand and empowers me to act according to
        God's purpose
    f. The Holy Spirit is a complete mystery to me: I am not sure what the Spirit
        does

22. To which of the statements below would you agree? (Check all that apply)
    a. The Holy Spirit in active in my life
    b. The Holy Spirit is active in the life of this congregation
    c. The Holy Spirit is inviting me to serve in new ways
    d. The Holy Spirit is inviting the congregation to reach out in new ways
    e. The Holy Spirit may be working, but I do not know how or where

Thank you for participating in this survey! Your answers will assist Pastor Doug Dent as he works with our congregation as part of his doctoral work through Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN).

--- Additional end line survey question ---

PART G: GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

This section measures the amount of growth in your awareness and practices.

23. Rate the amount of personal change you experience in the following areas based on your participation in this project:

    Strongly Disagree – Disagree – No Change – Agree – Strongly Agree

    a. I have a deeper commitment to the local church
    b. I am inspired to be a leader with and for the congregation
    c. I am knowledgeable about my congregation's ministries
    d. I am clear about my role in the congregation
    e. I desire to become a greater part of what God is doing in my congregation and community
    f. I am committed to regular spiritual practices
    g. I draw greater benefit from my spiritual practices
    h. I am affirmed as a child of God
    i. I appreciate more fully how God made me
    j. I can readily identify my spiritual gifts
    k. I am willing to use my spiritual gift(s)
    l. I am familiar with the person of the Holy Spirit
    m. I better understand the work of the Holy Spirit
    n. I can describe an encounter with the Holy Spirit in my life
    o. I can breathe with God more wholly

APPENDIX B

SYNOPSES OF COHORT SESSIONS

Session 1: Breathing with God

       Introduction to the theme of "breathing with God," an overview of Craig Van Gelder's six assertions regarding the *missio Dei*,[1] the practice of Dwelling in the Word (a component of each subsequent session), and guidelines for cohort meetings.

Session 2: Spiritual Capacity & Spiritual Practices

       Explored the concept of spiritual capacity and provided examples of spiritual practices with which cohort members might experiment.

Session 3: Personality Types

       Examined the theory of individual and corporate personality. Cohort members also studied the eight "preferences" and the sixteen personality types identified by Isabel Myers-Briggs. Cohort members shared their personal four-letter personality preference and discussed how God made them.

Session 4: Spiritual Gifts

       Explored the source and purpose of spiritual gifts and reviewed the spiritual gifts listed in Romans 12:6-8, 1 Corinthians 12:7-11, and Ephesians 4:11-13.

Session 5: The Holy Spirit

       Examined the person of the Holy Spirit in scripture and considered examples of the Holy Spirit's work in and through creation.

Session 6: *Missio Dei*

       Revisited the *missio Dei* concept and reflected on how God might be inviting us (as individuals and as a congregation) to participate in God's mission with/for the world. The design of the discussion encouraged cohort members to "breathe with God" by seeking out and accepting God's invitation to utilize their whole self (personality preferences, spiritual gifts) to advance God's plan and purpose.

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[1] Van Gelder, "Method in Light of Scriptures and in Relation to Hermeneutics," 51-52.

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

For face-to-face interviews near the end of the research project.
Questions will be shared with the participants and discussed with the researcher.

1. Describe your initial hopes or expectations for this research project.
    a. What did you hope to learn or gain from participating in this project?
    b. Were your hopes or expectations satisfied? Why or why not?
    c. What questions remain unanswered?

2. Explain how your view of the church's work in the world changed during this study.
    a. Where do you see God at work in the world?
    b. How do you see yourself being in greater partnership with what God is doing?
    c. How do you see this congregation being in greater partnership with what God is doing?

3. Describe what you discovered about yourself through this process.
    a. How do you understand yourself to be a child of God?
    b. What spiritual gifts do you believe you possess?
    c. How might you apply these gifts in your own life and ministry?
    d. How might you apply these gifts in the work of this congregation?

4. Explain your understanding of God's call.
    a. Where is God calling you?
    b. Where is God calling this congregation?
    c. How might your involvement in the ministry of this congregation change?

APPENDIX D

PROTOCOL FOR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Reflection questions for participants to reflect and write about between Sessions.
These written reflections will be submitted to the researcher.

Session 1: Breathing with God
Share about a time when you breathed (or did not breathe) in harmony with God.
How did it feel?
What was the outcome?
What did you learn?

Session 2: Spiritual Practices
What spiritual practice works best for you?
How did you discover this practice?
What about this practice helps you breathe easier with God?

Session 3: Personality Types
Describe yourself in terms of your work habits and social tendencies.
What experiences or individuals influenced the person you are today?

Session 4: Spiritual Gifts
Every person is given at least one gift for ministry by the Spirit.
What is one of your spiritual gifts?
How did you discover this gift?
How do you use this gift?

Session 5: The Holy Spirit
How would you describe the Holy Spirit?
Tell about a time when you felt the Holy Spirit working in or through you.

Session 6: *Missio Dei*
There was no reflection question after Session 6 because I conducted individual
interviews which included questions about God's call and mission.

APPENDIX E

INVITATION LETTER

November 1, 2017

(Name)
(Address)

Dear (Name):

This letter is an invitation to participate in a research project I am conducting as part of my doctoral thesis in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary (St. Paul, MN).

The working title for my thesis is "Breathing with God: Inhaling God's Spirit, Exhaling God's Reign." It is my belief that when we learn how to breathe with God, aligning our will with God's purpose, our lives are enhanced, and our communities are enriched.

Since this kind of breathing with God is not automatic for most human beings, I propose to lead a small cohort (10 members) through a process of learning and discovery, increasing our knowledge of how spiritual practices, personality types, and spiritual gifts can help us to breathe more freely with God.

The research project is scheduled to run for six months (November 2017 – April 2018). Participants will commit to attending six learning and discussion sessions (one each month for approximately ninety minutes), and to complete surveys and submit short reflections (one each month). In addition, I will conduct a short interview (20-30 minutes) with each participant at the end of the project.

The Institutional Review Board at Luther Seminary evaluated and approved this research project.

Enclosed is a pamphlet providing more details about the project. Should you have any questions regarding this study or would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision about participation, please contact me at (telephone #) or by e-mail (address).

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you would like to be part of this project, please review, sign, and return the enclosed consent form in the envelope provided. If you choose not to participate, please let me know so that I may invite someone else.

I hope that the results of this study will be of benefit to you, our congregation, and our community. Thank you in advance for your assistance with this project.

Douglas Dent

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

"Breathing with God: Inhaling God's Spirit, Exhaling God's Reign"

The Invitation
You are invited to be in a research project exploring how an increased understanding of God's mission, spiritual practices, personality types, spiritual gifts, and the work of the Holy Spirit may help individuals and their congregations breathe more freely with God and God's purpose for the church and the world.

You were selected as a possible participant because you are a member of the Alliance Church. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the project.

The Researcher
Douglas Dent will conduct this small group project as part of his doctoral thesis research in Congregational Mission and Leadership at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, MN.
Dr. Alvin Luedke and Dr. Daniel Anderson will serve as thesis advisors for this project.

General Information
The purpose of this project is to provide instruction and resources that will help individuals, and thereby their congregations, to align themselves more completely with God and God's purpose for the enrichment of their lives and communities. The project is expected to run from November 2017 – May 2018.

Conditions of the Project
If you agree to be in this project, I would ask you to do the following:
- Meet six times for group instruction (once each month for ninety minutes)
- Contribute to group discussions
- Complete two general surveys (one at the beginning and one at the end of the project)
- Complete one personality inventory
- Complete one spiritual gifts inventory
- Provide brief, written reflections on questions provided by the researcher
- Participate in one face-to-face interview with the researcher

Risks and Benefits of Participating in the Project
There are no inherent risks to you for participation in this project.
You will not be materially compensated for your participation in this project.

The indirect benefits to you for participation in this project may include:
- Increased knowledge of yourself, spiritual gifts, personality traits, spiritual practices
- Openness to the prompting of the Holy Spirit
- Preparation to become more deeply involved in the work of the local church on behalf of the larger community

Confidentiality
The records of this project will be kept confidential. In my thesis, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. All data will be kept in a locked file in my church office. Only my advisors, Drs. Luedke and Anderson, a transcriptionist, a recording technician and I will have access to the data and recordings. If the research is terminated for any reason, all data and recordings will be destroyed. While I will make every effort to ensure confidentiality, anonymity cannot be guaranteed.

Tape recordings and/or videotapes of sessions and interviews will be made and transcribed for documentation purpose and to ensure accurateness of quotations. The services of a sound technician may be employed to assist with recording sessions. All raw data will be destroyed by May 31, 2022 or three years following award of the doctoral degree (expected in 2019).

Voluntary Nature of the Project
Participation in this project is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether to participate or not will in no way affect your current or future relations with Luther Seminary, the Alliance Church, or with the researcher, Douglas Dent. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions
The researcher conducting this project is Douglas Dent. Dr. Alvin Luedke, and Dr. Dan Anderson are the academic advisors. If you have questions (now or later), you may contact one of us at: (contact information provided)

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent
I have read the above information or have had it read to me. I have received answers to questions asked. I consent to participate in the project.

Signature _____ Date_____

Signature of investigator _____ Date_____

I consent to be audiotaped and videotaped:

Signature _____ Date_____

I consent to the use of my direct quotations in the published thesis document.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX G

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT FOR TRANSCRIPTIONIST

OR AUDIO-VIDEO TECHNICIAN

"Breathing with God: Inhaling God's Spirit, Exhaling God's Reign"

I, (name), agree to (transcribe data or record group sessions) for this research project.

I agree that I will:

1. Keep all research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the information in any form or format (e.g., disks, recordings, transcripts) with anyone other than Douglas Dent, Alvin Luedke, or Daniel Anderson, the researchers on this research project;

2. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, recordings, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession. This includes:
    - Keeping all transcript documents, video recordings, and digitalized interviews in computer password-protected files;
    - Closing any transcription programs and documents or video files when temporarily away from the computer;
    - Keeping any printed transcripts in a secure location such as a locked file cabinet;
    - Permanently deleting any e-mail communication containing the data;

3. Give all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, recordings, transcripts) to the primary investigator when I have completed the research tasks;

4. Erase or destroy all research information in any form or format that is not returnable to the primary investigator (e.g., information stored on my computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

_____
Signature of transcriber or video technician   Date

_____
Signature of principal investigator   Date

APPENDIX H

FOCUSED CODES FROM INTERVIEWS

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Initial Feelings (31)	8	Feeling anxious/hesitant
	8	Exciting
	6	Feeling curious
	3	Feeling happy/honored to be included
	3	Overwhelming
	2	Challenging
	2	Frightening/frustrating
	2	Intimidating subjects
Group Experience (35)	9	Benefitting from group experience
	8	Discovering shared experiences
	8	Understanding one another better
	4	Affirming of one another
	4	Building Community
	2	Intimidating to be in a group (at first)
Expectations for Project (80)	35	Learning new things about self/others
	9	Coming empty – no expectations
	9	Discerning God's call
	8	Deepening relationship with God
	7	Serving in new ways
	4	Growing in faith
	4	Learning more about Holy Spirit
	4	Using spiritual gifts
View of God/God's Word (56)	23	Naming God as part of the process
	13	Sensing God's call
	7	Staying grounded in God's Word critical
	5	Applying God's Word to my life
	4	Seeing God as parent
	4	Sharing a God moment
Spiritual Practices (22)	9	Modeling practices of Jesus
	4	Participating in life of church
	5	Praying more
	3	Tending to self to better serve others
	1	Listening for Holy Spirit

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Personal Struggles (68)	39	Identifying specific stressors
	11	Accepting self as I am (or not)
	4	Communicating my faith
	8	Feeling disconnected/separated from God
	3	Feeling disheartened by Church
	3	Focusing inward
Gaining Momentum (224)	43	Discipleship (personal)
	40	Expanding our ministry
	29	Being present in the community
	27	Prioritizing activities
	21	Evangelizing
	20	Discipleship (corporate)
	19	Encouraging others
	13	Building healthy relationships
	13	Working Together
	9	Caring for others
	8	Fighting for the underdog
	7	Energizing
	5	Impacting others
The Holy Spirit (26)	14	Trying to understand
	6	Acting as conscience
	4	Transforming
	2	Sending
Gracious Welcome (67)	16	Creating a welcoming environment
	13	Caring for others
	10	Sensing 'openness'
	8	Feeling welcomed and positive
	6	Forgiving Congregation
	5	Accepting others
	5	Honoring differences
	4	Loving a neighbor
Spiritual Gifts (59)	21	Recognizing others' gifts
	14	Appreciating spiritual gifts
	11	Using spiritual gifts
	7	Creating synergy
	6	Gift-giving is from God
Affirmation (144)	70	Evaluating self/others/church in new ways
	40	Feeling affirmed/confident
	17	Renewed relationship with God
	11	Sensing God's call
	6	Fitting in well

APPENDIX I

FOCUSED CODES FROM REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Question 1: Breathing with God		
Experiencing God (15)	6	Feeling God's presence in nature
	5	Creating memories
	2	Hearing God's voice
	2	Sensing God in a dream
Initial Feelings (21)	6	Feeling anxious/scared/panicked
	3	Feeling peaceful/calm
	2	Feeling angry at God/pushing God away
	2	Feeling overwhelmed/untethered
	2	Feeling blessed/wonderfully alive
	2	Feeling challenged/called to this work
	1	Feeling grateful
	1	Feeling empty w/o God
	1	Feeling Love for God
	1	Feeling incredibly exhausted
Trusting God (10)	4	Knowing God has a plan
	2	Learning to be flexible/go with God's plan
	1	Acting on autopilot
	1	Putting self in God's hands
	1	Believing God is in my corner
	1	Trusting that God hears me
Facing Adversity (8)	7	Experiencing death or loss
	1	Coping with depressing
Responding to God's Invitation (3)	1	Sharing my story to give others hope
	1	Sharing God's love with others
	1	Doing God's work is comforting
Question 2: Spiritual Capacity & Spiritual Practices		
Spiritual Practices/communal (18)	11	Serving on mission trips
	3	Worshipping together
	3	Serving others
	1	Community service

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Spiritual Practices/individual (15)	5	Praying
	5	Communing with God in nature
	2	Practicing celebration/being thankful
	2	Reading/daily devotions
	1	Holding my grandchildren
Practice Makes Possible (11)	3	Reconnecting with God
	3	Refocusing self/thoughts
	2	Feeling comforted/uplifted/calm
	1	Feeling stimulated
	1	Feeling cleansed and simplified
	1	Valuing the familiar cadence of worship
Effects of Spiritual Practices (4)	1	Making spiritual practices a family activity
	1	Encouraging my kids to pray
	1	Hoping to expand my spiritual practices
	1	Feeling frustrated at not giving 100%
Question 3: Personality Preferences		
Introvert (6)	3	Preferring to be alone
	1	Guarding self
	1	Preferring small groups
	1	Working behind the scenes
Extrovert (11)	3	Feeding off energy of others/team worker
	2	Getting to know people
	2	Helping others fit it/inviting to activities
	2	Finding ways to connect/talking to people
	1	Having a good time in social situations
	1	Getting along with others
Sensing (5)	2	Learning everything about a subject
	1	Listening
	1	Taking best practices from others
	1	Getting feedback from others
iNtuitive (5)	1	Being open to new experiences
	1	Acting mindfully
	1	Bring interpersonal effectiveness
	1	Incorporating others into my routine
	1	Alling team to learn through missteps
Thinking (5)	2	Building collaboration/ creating alignment
	2	Being a resource for others
	1	Moving initiatives forward

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Feeling (4)	1	Feeling passionate about social justice
	1	Practicing compassion
	1	Feeling anxious inside/acting calm outside
	1	Staying positive
Judging (20)	6	Acting like a perfectionist/driven/OCD
	3	Working tirelessly/diligently
	3	Being dependable/getting job done
	3	Upholding standards/strong output/details
	1	Stressing out when behind
	1	Taking pride in my work
	1	Parsing "perfect" from "good enough"
	1	Over-managing responsibilities
	1	Learning independence/self-reliance
Perceiving (4)	2	Being flexible/adaptable
	1	Becoming patient
	1	Overcoming distrust
Procrastinating (4)	4	Procrastinating

Question 4: Spiritual Gifts

Service (20)	7	Helping others/physical tasks
	6	Volunteering/serving others
	3	Listening/supporting others
	1	Mission trips
	1	Wanting others to succeed
	1	Making/seeing a difference is important
Leadership (15)	5	Leading others by example
	4	Providing perspective/giving advice
	2	Mentoring others
	2	Observing tendencies/incorporating ideas
	1	Offering space to grow
	1	Giving encouragement
Faith (4)	1	Praying
	1	Talking about faith
	1	Having faith
	1	Feeling thankful
Mercy (3)	2	Showing mercy
	1	Caring about other's feelings/needs

Focused Codes (level 2)	Frequency	Focused Codes (level 1)
Question 5: The Holy Spirit		
Work of Holy Spirit (28)	7	Providing purpose/guidance/wisdom
	5	Offering peace/calm
	4	Acting as inner voice/conscience
	3	Redirecting/resetting priorities
	3	Breathing hope
	2	Healing
	1	Understanding feelings
	1	Enabling us to trust God's plan
	1	Filling with God's goodness
	1	Saving
Person of the Holy Spirit (13)	5	Energizing part of God/power of God
	3	Indwelling part of God
	2	Invigorating/strength of God
	2	Being the air we breathe
	1	Believing HS is good/all-knowing
Absence of Holy Spirit (4)	4	Noticing absence/God feeling distant

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