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ABSTRACT

AWESOME GOD:

CONNECTING THROUGH MULTISENSORY STUDY AND *LECTIO DIVINA* OF SPIRITUAL NARRATIVES

by

Linda B. Dunn

A spiritual hunger is evident in people's lives today as many believe the current Christian worship and spiritual education to be irrelevant to their lives. People come to church looking for God but go away without feeling they have encountered him there. They long to embrace a way of life that draws them closer to God and brings them spiritual growth and peace. People desire to embrace God and feel embraced by him in an awe-filled, ongoing relationship.

This study began with a desire to explore ways to assist that embrace. I began with the assumption that a positive correlation exists between exposure to multisensory worship aids and the narratives of Christian masters and the deepening of one's desire to be spiritually formed. Research shows the value of both the narratives themselves and the value of multisensory teaching. After exposure to and use of these particulars, I felt myself drawn nearer to God with a deeper sense of spiritual awe.

This project used predictive field research design with a mixed quantitative and qualitative triangulation method, thus allowing an approach to the topic through multiple methods. Particular methodology included establishing a baseline, pretest and posttest surveys, discussions, and journal entries. The intervention setting was twofold, utilizing multisensory methods in both classroom and sanctuary environments.

The project results showed an increase in the felt level of awe in the participants' relationships with God. This increase confirms the positive relationship among worship aids, spiritual narratives, and multisensory teaching in relation to spiritual formation and maturity.

DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled

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CONNECTING THROUGH MULTI-SENSORY STUDY
AND LECTIO DIVINA OF SPIRITUAL NARRATIVES

presented by


Linda B. Dunn

has been accepted towards fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

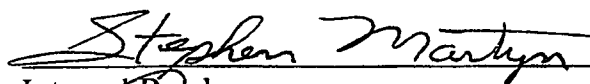
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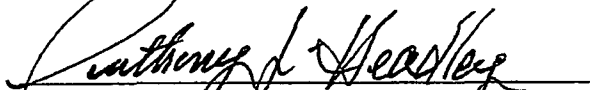
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AND *LECTIO DIVINA* OF SPIRITUAL NARRATIVES

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by

Linda B. Dunn

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Linda B. Dunn

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I praise God for his hand on my heart and his calling on my life. I thank him for this opportunity and pray that these efforts will bear fruit that bring him honor and glory.

CHAPTER 1

PROBLEM

Introduction

A spiritual hunger is evident in people's lives today. The ancient Jew or Christian accepted the existence of God (Fowler 12). The apostolic church expected the Holy Spirit to be not only present but wholly experienced, in both corporate worship and one's individual life (Collins). The spiritual masters of the early centuries following the resurrection of Christ ascribed to these same expectations. However, these expectations may no longer be the case. Worship and Christian formation are different in this postmodern world from those ancient days. Something vital has been lost, and people are searching anew for "models of whole and holy Christian life" with whom they may identify and from whom they may learn (Simsic 8).

Christian A. Schwarz introduced a survey-based program, *Natural Church Development*, which churches use to measure their strengths and weaknesses in eight key areas. As of 1 July 2009, 321 United Methodist churches in the South Carolina Annual Conference had taken the survey (Hill). In sixty-four churches, 20 percent, *passionate spirituality* ranked as their weakest characteristic. Rev. Larry Hays, an ordained member of the conference with twenty years of appointed service and a member of my Research Design Team, remarked that the low score on passionate spirituality accurately represented his experience in the congregations with whom he has served.

The weakening of passionate spirituality should not be surprising. Beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, a newfound emphasis on functionalism pushed aside

and overshadowed the emphasis on the awe-filled relationship God offers his people.

Thomas F. O'Dea writes about the topic:

Functionalism concerns itself with what religion does for and to society, seeing religious institutions as one set of institutions among others, and interesting itself in the contribution of religious institutions and religious ideas to the maintenance of the ongoing equilibrium of the social system. (30)"

In other words, social order is dependent teaching people the expected values and norms through functioning social structures that insist that individuals conform to said values and norms (Livesey 15). The church acted as one such structure, what Livesey terms a "socializing agency" (3) to teach and transmit the values and beliefs that society expected of its members. Religion and the church played a functional role in maintaining the social order.

Next came the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods, which, author and educator Father Adrian van Kaam points out, highlighted individualism, science, and technology while "intimacy with the Sacred was lost" (*Human Formation* 97). Western Judeo-Christian traditions developed around personal responsibility and works-righteousness (209), while deemphasizing passionate personal experience and relationship with the divine. This shift came at great cost to believers. Neal Sadler comments regarding the age of Enlightenment, "The triumph of reason left people empty.... People sought identity and connectedness" (47). They still do.

Many individuals today express dissatisfaction with current Christian worship and education structures and practices, citing that the content and experience are irrelevant to their lives. Marshall E. MacClellan states, "A life of utilitarian individualism has left us

empty and lonely” (4). Kathryn King of the Franciscan Sisters of Peace agrees with MacClellan:

I think the loss of credibility of a variety of institutions, including the church ... and the uncertainty of the time are drawing people into an inner well to find their stability, to find their core relationship with God and what God desires of them (qtd. in Berggren 14).

People desire to know God in a very real and deeply personal way and to ground themselves in an intimate relationship with him.

Authors Thelma Hall and Eugene Peterson comment on the phenomenon. Hall sees people not turning from God but exhibiting a growing desire to connect with the transcendent and find meaning in life (1). Peterson reports a great increase in the level of attention given to matters of spiritual theology, leadership, direction, and formation (17). Bradley C. Bohrer came to a similar conclusion in 2002: “With the birth of postmodern thought in the churches, the emphasis is shifting from the desire on the part of those who attend from simply learning about God to the deep desire for experiencing God’s love firsthand” (66). Their parents and grandparents may have asked the church for knowledge, but the new generation is hungry to experience God’s love. They desire closeness over knowledge.

Steven C. Trewartha in his 2003 dissertation expands this idea that people are tired of receiving only linear information and encouragement through rational thought, resulting in “information overload.” What they really want to see firsthand is that faith can be lived. They are looking for someone who has actually had an experience of God to teach them how they can have the same (43).

Robert Marquand contrasts the sterile 1980s with signs of renewed spiritual seeking in the late 1990s. People are searching for experiences that move them

intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually. They desire something that moves them, something that feels significant (1). John Coe observes that the searching and seeking of the 1990s continues in 2009:

Many well-intentioned believers sit in churches week after week, having been equipped, only to become “mature beginners,” knowing from the Word what they could become, yet having an underlying suspicion that they are not as mature as they should be. As a result, they wonder in their deep whether they will ever go on to full maturity.... [T]heological training and much preaching and teaching in the church ... have failed to provide the people of God with deep insight and meaningful application to the real struggle of the spiritual journey. (5-6)

People in this postmodern age long to know God intimately; they long to live a spiritual life that continually draws them closer to him.

Typical Protestant spiritual education today is largely comprised of academic exercises aimed at building moral character and encouraging moral behavior while largely ignoring formative narratives that offer encouragement and examples concerning how to live in a love relationship with God. Christian education focuses on the memorization of names, dates, and places within a forty-five minute session. Christian educators Thom and Joani Schultz observe that “[p]uzzles, scrambles, fill-in-the-blanks, and encoded messages do not promote thinking,” and lecture-oriented teaching alone is rarely effective (109, 265). The Christian community would do well to learn from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions, which strongly emphasize personal connection with the Holy Trinity and the examples of the saints to nourish Christian spiritual formation and living (Vrame 9).

However, the Protestant denominations divorced themselves from the Christian spiritual masters in the Reformation period. Author Jim Forest states in his book that Reformed Theology denounced the practice of devotion to any saint by a Protestant. This

stance was in response to the commercial traffic in the relics of saints prior to the Reformation and the perception by many that the Roman Catholic Church was giving more stress to saints than to Christ and the Bible. Abuses and distortions did exist, but attempts to purify church life were often in excess. The Reformers silenced the wisdom and witness of the saints for a large group of Christians.

Individuals are reaching towards mystery and affective religious experience to bring meaning to their lives (Poole 66, 69). “A shift toward the affective dimension is found across the spectrum—Protestant, Catholics, Jews, Buddhists, Sufis, evangelicals, New Agers, the unchurched, parents, and clergy (Marquand 1). In her dissertation, Janis Shook challenges, “This is an age that will require the Church to relate with holy imagination and creative spirit (16); the postmodern believer longs to experience the real and mystical presence of the Holy Spirit” (25). D. Matthew Poole further states that the church should be communicating in a way that is inspiring, engaging the heart as well as the mind (23).

The good news is that God deeply desires to connect with his people, to offer redemption and new life (Maxwell 19). The biblical witness records repeated examples of God in transforming relationship with his people (Sadler 51). Spiritual theology calls people to reflect upon and learn from these saintly people of God (Coe 12).

Christian history gives examples showing that an intimate spiritual connection with God is possible:

The Holy Spirit did not cease being active in the Church with the writings of the last page of the New Testament. Throughout the centuries the Spirit and the Word have so infused the lives of countless men and women that they themselves became living gospels. Good religious biography encourages readers to become more aware of God’s call to holiness and righteous living for their own lives. (Casey 104)

The believers of the past can speak to seekers still. Their stories wait for the telling.

The Christian spiritual masters (e.g., Teresa of Lisieux, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Mother Teresa) exemplify intimate and passionate love relationships with God, grounded in their dedication to Scripture, prayer, and worship, and reflected in their character. They modeled a life of loving God. Their writings are precious resources in spiritual formation. They speak with authority and authenticity to the desires that people feel and the struggles that people face and the peace that a relationship with God provides.

The testimonies they left behind in their writings are still available to mentor and influence Christians seeking a deeper love relationship with God. These individuals recognized the awesomeness of God and responded with awe-filled reverence that deepened and increased their intimacy with God.

Two specific events awakened my hunger for a deeper and ongoing personal spiritual formation. The first was participation in the Walk to Emmaus spiritual renewal event in October 1992. The Walk is three intense days of information, testimonies, and presentations blended with worship, reflection, and sharing opportunities in a variety of multisensory delivery styles. The experience was deeply impressive. The second event was a class in Western spiritual readings at Asbury Theological Seminary, which centered on various Christian spiritual masters and their writings. The Protestant tradition in which I was reared teaches very little, almost nothing, about the post-biblical saints. They were strangers to me, but their stories, filled with descriptions of intimate, personal experiences with God—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—were inspiring. Their experiences kindled my own desire to know firsthand such intimacy and joy in relationship with God.

Believers today want to experience and embrace God; they want to feel his presence. Scientific research even suggests, “[a]n intuition of transcendent reality may be hard-wired into the human mind” (O’Reilly). God programmed human brains to recognize his presence and generate from that recognition a sense of religious awe. After seven hundred years of informational theology, since the time of Aquinas, now is the time to discuss sensing God as Mystery once again. Embracing God begins with embracing the experience of awe (Muto, “Spiritual Direction”).

The relationship of human beings with God and the calling forth of holy living are primary foci in the preaching and teaching ministries of the institutional church. Therefore, the church rightly should continue to seek new opportunities and avenues that communicate God’s gift of reconciliation and transformation (Maxwell 22). In addition to a rediscovery of the voices of valuable Christian witnesses, the use of multisensory teaching methods deserves consideration. Unlike typical academic, lecture-style teaching, which utilizes only the sense of hearing, multisensory teaching communicates through stimulating multiple senses (i.e., the senses of hearing, seeing, touching, and sometimes even smell and taste; Blackwood). Rick Blackwood explains further:

Simply put, the multisensory teacher recognizes the senses as information receptors. In other words, the senses act as antennas, which receive information, and then transmit that information to the brain for processing, learning, and action. With that neurological fact in mind, the multisensory teacher aims his teaching at as many of those receptors as possible; knowing the more senses he stimulates in the teaching, the higher the levels of learning in the audience.

Research has shown increases in attention levels, understanding, and retention when teachers use multisensory communication as opposed to mono-sensory communication (Blackwood). Julie Sevig agrees with this idea:

Post-moderns prefer to encounter Christ by using all their senses. That's part of the appeal of classical liturgical or contemplative worship: the incense and candles, making the sign of the cross, the taste and smell of the bread and wine, touching icons and being anointed with oil.

Accordingly, encouraging and empowering rational, emotional, and heartfelt connections between God and people is of significant importance (Chandran 43). The spiritual narratives and reflections of the Christian saints about their experience of God can facilitate new depth and richness in Christian spiritual formation.

This research addresses such narratives in a multisensory teaching context as another opportunity, another method to open hearts and create space to be awestruck by God, as multisensory teaching methods actively engage bodies, minds, and spirits in responding to God. While I believe such narratives and multisensory teaching context are applicable for children and adults, this research is limited to adult participants.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the influence and impact of a short-term adult small group study on the level of awe in the participants' personal relationship with God, using worship aids and Christian spiritual narratives in a multisensory context.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this study.

Research Question #1

What level of awe characterized the participants' personal relationship with God prior to participation in the small group study?

Research Question #2

What changes occurred in the participants' level of awe after participating in the small group study?

Research Question #3

What were the benefits of narrative and multisensory teaching methods in affecting the level of awe experienced?

Definition of Terms

In this study, the following terms are operative.

Awe is a profound and potentially overwhelming mixed feeling of admiration, amazement, wonder, and/or awareness in the face of something majestic, sublime, or sacred that may be temporarily immobilizing and often elicits a display of reverence, worship, and/or admiration (Curriculum Support 3).

Multisensory teaching methods combine activities and environmental design to stimulate learning by appealing to more than one of the senses. This research focused on auditory (hearing and speaking), visual (seeing), olfactory (smelling), and kinesthetic (touching and moving) techniques.

Ministry Intervention

The weekly intervention classes met for six sessions. The first hour presented didactic content and the second hour experiential content. The group met in a classroom for didactic and in the sanctuary for experiential components. Devotions included prayers from St. Augustine. Worship aids presented were candles, a singing bowl, icons, prayer beads and ropes, physical gestures of genuflection and crossing oneself, incense, and *lectio divina*. Saints introduced were Brother Lawrence, Thérèse of Lisieux, Walter

Ciszek, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa, and Francis of Assisi. *Lectio divina* readings came from their works, to which participants journaled their responses on notebook paper.

Context

The target population for this research was adults seeking to connect more intimately with God. Self-selected adult members and nonmembers of two United Methodist churches in the Columbia District of the South Carolina Annual Conference participated. The course used minimal church vocabulary to increase the likelihood that individuals from varying backgrounds would be comfortable and able to understand the content.

Church A sits on the main street of town, bordered by two of the community's four schools. The church has a high percentage of active and retired educators as well as stay-at-home mothers, children and youth. The congregation is a blend of families with several generations and extended family in attendance, those attracted by friendship, and those who attend unattached.

Active units of United Methodist Women and United Methodist Men, each meet monthly for a meal, program, and fellowship. Annually each fall, the two groups meet jointly. An established Tuesday morning Bible study group, who typically follow a video, discussion, and workbook format with homework, meets weekly during the academic year. The most recent new activity is an informal praise and prayer service on one Wednesday night every other month.

Church B is located in a rural area, on a lake access road two miles from the main state road. The surrounding community houses long-term families, year-round lake

families, and seasonal or weekend families. The congregation membership and worship attendance reflects the surrounding community, with several generations of related and extended families, a few unrelated community families, retired lake couples, and regular nonresident attendees.

The membership is older in Church B, with a dozen shut-ins and as many active senior citizens aged 75 and older. The middle-aged and younger couples within the church are largely children and grandchildren of older members. The United Methodist Women's group meets monthly and participates in an educational reading program, but their numbers are small. The United Methodist Men's group is similar in size and, while they do meet monthly for fellowship and a meal, they have few activities or programs. A weekly Bible study group meets on Thursday mornings with a core group of eight older adults.

The self-selected sample were adults ages 18 and above from the worshipping congregations of the two churches. The Tuesday morning group and the Thursday morning group were established groups that agreed to participate in the study; the Thursday evening, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday afternoon groups began meeting with this project. The Tuesday morning group consists primarily of stay-at-home mothers and retired women; one man attends on his way home from his third-shift job. The Thursday morning group is entirely comprised of retirees. The Thursday evening and Sunday afternoon group is a mixed group who were interested enough to attend. The Saturday afternoon group was young married couples. An on-site babysitter made attendance stronger. Group membership closed after the introductory sessions.

Small group study is not a new idea in these two churches. The Tuesday morning group has been meeting weekly for over three years, taking the summer off when children are home from school. They typically follow a format of video, workbook, and group discussion with shared leadership among the group members. The Thursday morning group began meeting a year and a half prior to this project. They typically use a workbook and discussion format led by one central teacher.

The participants ranged in age from early-twenties to mid-eighties, each reporting at least ten years as a Christian and five years of church attendance. Education levels ranged from high school graduates to postgraduate degrees. Religious backgrounds were largely Methodist but also included other Protestant denominations and Catholicism. The results of this study will benefit adults of diverse ages, educational levels, and religious backgrounds.

Methodology

This study follows an experimental, exploratory, mixed-method format with quantitative and qualitative components. It included a six-week small group study. The groups met weekly for two hours. The first half of each session took place in a classroom; the second half in the sanctuary. We met for eight total group sessions, including an introductory session, six small group sessions, and a concluding session for posttest and focus group discussion.

The pretest and select questions on the posttest provided quantitative data (see Appendixes E and F). I manually entered the quantitative data on surveymonkey.com to assist with descriptive statistical analysis. Both nominal and ordinal scale analysis applied. I used inferential methods to analyze qualitative data. Journal entries by

participants, observations recorded by the instructor, open-ended questions on the posttest, and the focus group discussions provided qualitative data (see Appendix G).

Participants

The sampling frame included adults from two established United Methodist congregations. The two churches are similar in size, each with just over two hundred members and an average of approximately one hundred in their Sunday morning worship services. Both are located within thirty miles of a major city. All the participants in the total group were white and included nine males and twenty-three females. The total number of participants attending at least four sessions was twenty adults.

Instrumentation

The pretest and the posttest used in this study were researcher designed with the help of a Research Design Team. A bi-polar adjective rating scale modeled after Judith Lynne Zaichkowsky's Personal Involvement Inventory measured the level of awe (350; see Appendixes E and F). I chose the questions for the focus group session to reflect the guiding research questions and the content of the intervention.

Variables

The independent variable was the six-week study. The dependent variable was the change in the level of awe in the participants' personal relationships with God as measured by researcher-designed PII, modeled on Zaichkowsky's Inventory, when comparing pretest to posttest scores.

Data Collection

Participants completed both a pretest and posttest (see Appendixes E and F). Participant journal entries and focus group discussion provided qualitative data (see

Appendix G). Observations and discussion from sessions provided additional qualitative data.

Data Analysis

I entered manually the quantitative data on SurveyMonkey, an online provider that analyzed and compared the data. From these statistical results, I compiled the charts used in this paper. I analyzed the results using total-score and mean-score comparisons and organized the results in tables, presented in Chapter 4. Because the total group numbered less than one hundred, I used descriptive analysis for the qualitative data.

Pilot Test

A small group from a neighboring United Methodist church piloted the Personal Inventory Assessment survey. The Research Design Team participated in a pilot test of a small group session by direct experience (see Appendix A).

Generalizability

This research adds to the body of work already existing regarding Christian spiritual formation. The practice of ministry is encouraged to give attention to spiritual narratives from the Christian masters as a valuable component of spiritual formation and to consider multisensory learning needs and techniques in classroom and sanctuary settings. Therefore, this research is valuable to ministers, Christian educators, teachers, and general adults in their ongoing practice of Christian spiritual formation. The findings can inform the development of future curriculum for other small group studies, retreats, and seminars in spiritual formation for adults. Small groups can easily duplicate this study. The small group format is similar to other existing small group formats.

Ethical Considerations

Participants signed an informed consent form that included an assurance of confidentiality (see Appendix C). Participants wrote a four-digit number (the last four digits of their telephone number) to identify their individual journals. I stored the roster with identifying numbers in my personal file.

Focus group notes did not use any participants' names. I stored the original notes in my files, a laptop file, and on a flash drive. The laptop was stored in a zippered case in my home office and the flash drive in its storage case in a pocket of my purse. I did not use specific names of participants in any report.

Theological Foundation

Stories of awe-filled persons abound in the biblical narratives. In Numbers 24:1-4, Balaam, overcome by the Spirit of God, fell prostrate in awe before the Lord. In Isaiah 6:1-5, the prophet stood awestruck before the throne of God. In Mark 4:41, the disciples responded with awe when Jesus calmed the stormy sea. In two accounts, when the people saw Jesus heal a paralyzed man, they responded with awe and immediately offered praise to God (Matt 9: 7-9; Luke 7: 16).

Awe penetrates the veil of human understanding and allows God to reveal his mysterious presence, which invokes an overwhelming feeling of admiration, holy fear, reverence, respect, and wonder. To be awe-filled gives rise to worship and adoration as one encounters the divine, as respondents feel irresistibly drawn toward this “effusive love” that is both “the highest good and the origin of all goodness” (van Kaam, *Fundamental Formation* 161).

Scientist Albert Einstein once commented on his personal understanding of awe:

The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms. This knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religiousness.

People today desire to experience the emotion of which Einstein writes.

Dr. Bruce Tippit, pastor of First Baptist Church in Jonesboro, Arkansas, describes worship that contains awe:

There is an unmistakable awareness that God is present and in his presence we cannot stay or remain unmoved.... When that happens for any of us we will respond with deep awareness, worship, and spontaneous expression—"God is really here...." Once we have tasted it, we want more! We will never be satisfied with anything less.

Christians want to feel their hearts moved, their spirits touched, and their souls filled by an experience of God.

The psalmists write of this hunger. They sincerely express humanity's shared desire for intimate connection with God:

As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. Where can I go and meet with God? (Ps. 42:1-2, NIV)

One thing I ask of the Lord, this is what I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple. (Ps.27: 4)

O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you in a dry and weary land where there is not water. (Ps. 63:1)

These psalms speak the longings that so many people feel. The universality of these feelings allows the psalms to reach down through the ages and speak to individuals of the present day also seeking connection with God.

Scripture promises that those who seek God will find him; he will make himself known to them and fill them with joy. God uses his unlimited resources and the gifts of emotion and cognition that he gave humankind to increase their awareness of his presence. They may find themselves drawn to God through Scripture reading, meditation, music, nature, and a vast array of other methods. He delights in revealing himself and drawing people into relationship with him, and he rejoices when they accept. The parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15 offers assurance that God desires reconciliation and relationship with those who accept his invitation.

Writing about awe, Ralph Enlow states, “The Bible never records a direct personal encounter with God in which the individual was not visibly shaken by God’s awesomeness.” Anyone can experience curiosity, fascination, and attraction, as did the Israelites in the desert:

Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance to his tent. (Exod. 33:7-10)

When the people perceived the presence of God, awe and worship followed.

Awe stimulates recognition of the power of God, as seen after Solomon dedicates the new Temple to God in prayer. The people respond with worship: “When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and *worshipped* [*shachah*] and praised the LORD” (emphasis mine; 2 Chron. 7:3). Indeed, in the presence of God people feel surprise, astonishment, and wonder, as did Ezekiel, recorded in chapter 1:1, 25-28:

In the thirtieth year, in the fourth month on the fifth day, while I was among the exiles by the Kebar River, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God (windstorm, clouds, flashing lightning, brilliant light, glowing metal, supernatural creatures, an awesome expanse above the wheels sparkling like ice)... Then there came a voice from above the expanse over their heads as they stood with lowered wings. Above the expanse over their heads was what looked like a throne of sapphire, and high above on the throne was a figure like that of a man. I saw that from what appeared to be his waist up he looked like glowing metal, as if full of fire, and that from there down he looked like fire; and brilliant light surrounded him. Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. *When I saw it, I fell facedown*, and I heard the voice of one speaking. (emphasis mine; NKJV)

Ezekiel's visions of God produced humility and holy fear.

The psalmists voice their admiration, elevation, and reverence, "How *awesome [yare']* is the LORD Most High, the *great [gadol]* King over all the earth!" (emphasis mine; 47:2 NIV) Admiration leads to humbling contemplation and trembling submission:

This is what the Lord says: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.... Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being? Declares the Lord, "This is the one I esteem: he who is *humble* and *trembles* at my word." (emphasis mine; Isa. 66:2)

Holy fear and trembling is a much repeated response to the awesome and mighty God of the universe.

Scripture also gives witness to awe as an emotion when the Israelites declare, after the Egyptian army was destroyed while crossing the river, "Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, *awesome [yare']* in glory, working wonders?" (emphasis mine; Exod. 15:11) The Israelites were amazed at God's power over their enemies, over life and death itself. Likewise, Daniel expresses adoration and appreciation before the Lord, "I prayed to the Lord my God and confessed: O Lord,

the *great* [*gadol*] and *awesome* [*yare'*] God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands. (emphasis mine; Dan. 9:4)

To be in a relationship of covenant love with the Lord God warrants an intense response. God is pleased when people acknowledge and seek him, and he rewards their search: “The secret of the LORD is for those who *fear* [*yare'*] Him, and He will make them know His covenant” (Ps. 25:14, NKJ). It brings glory to God when those who seek him declare with conviction:

Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, Selah. To him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. You are *awesome* [*yare'*], O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God! (emphasis mine; Ps. 68:32-35, NIV)

In addition to the testimonies of biblical saints are the narratives of the post-biblical Christian spiritual masters. The early Christian community, the Church, recognized these men and women for lives that reflected and projected awe-filled adoration of the Christian Trinity. Today in the orthodox Christian faith these stories are revered. Stories from the Old and New Testaments, the early Church, and the Byzantine period are told and retold. Learning these stories and applying the wisdom they impart are “at the core of what it means to be Orthodox Christian” (Vrame 139).

However, Protestant reformer Martin Luther rejected the Roman Catholic and Orthodox attention to the saints because he believed “[s]inners do not need examples, they need forgiveness” (MacKenzie 7). Following in the footsteps of Erasmus, who worked to eradicate the cult of the saints and ceremonialism, Luther argued that worship and the life of faith should center exclusively on the presentation of the gospel in word and sacrament (7). Perhaps the time is come to recover these stories as these holy mentors

still have much to offer. Alongside the biblical stories, their stories offer inspiration and encouragement to those seeking to know God, to worship him in awe and intimacy, to unite with him.

Donald G. Bloesch comments that these exemplary Christians “bear witness to the passion and victory of Christ” and provide models of holiness for the Christian believer (52-53). Paul A. Whiteford concludes that attention to the lives of Christian saints, those individuals recognized as sanctified, holy, and exemplary, can have positive influence on the spirituality of the reader (41). These godly men and women immersed themselves in worship and adoration to God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. Their narratives invite an awe-filled response and deeper relationship with God. Interestingly, Whiteford notes that at the 1884 Southern California United Methodist Annual Conference “[r]eading from the lives of exemplary Christians” was included in a resolution listing “the best methods of promoting Christian perfection” (40).

John Wesley, who held Scripture in highest regard for salvation, believed that Christian biographies are examples worthy of study and attention in one’s journey forward in a life of Christian sanctification. Interestingly, Shook credits the strengthening of her beliefs not only through the stories of the early Church fathers but also through the spiritual biography of Wesley himself (1). God continues to speak in the present age.

This study uses the four approaches of Wesley’s quadrilateral in its design. Scripture, presented in the devotional component in the study, introduces a variety of characteristics illustrated by the various names attributed to God. Tradition, presented in the biographical and *lectio divina* components, introduces six Christian spiritual masters and selections of their writings. Experience, presented in both the didactic and

experiential components, invites the participants to respond to the material through sensory input. Reason, presented throughout but specifically in the journaling component, allows the participants to conceptualize and individualize the message(s) they receive from Scripture, tradition, and experience.

Overview

The following chapters detail the information introduced here in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 is a literature review covering the research in areas relative to the various components of the research study, theology, and instrumentation. Chapter 3 details the research design, and Chapter 4 reports the findings. Chapter 5 is a summary of the findings with the conclusions and suggested applications.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE

Introduction

People today long to embrace a way of life that draws them closer to God and brings them growth and peace in addition to the *dos* and *don'ts*, biblical facts and topical discussions that provide them with information about God but do not instruct them how to engage God in a transformative relationship. Rev. Miyoung Paik, an ordained United Methodist clergy colleague, discovered her congregation's hunger for and experience of God firsthand during her dissertation project, completed in October 2008 (Abstract). I hear this spiritual hunger regularly expressed in conversation with parishioners and study group members.

Spiritual seekers may have lost the ability but not the desire. Dr. Kenneth J. Collins of Asbury Theological Seminary states, "All homo sapiens are homo spiritualists" who seek a relationship with the transcendent. French philosopher and scientist Blaise Pascal agrees, citing that humanity has a deep yearning "like a God-shaped vacuum, a void that insists on being filled.... We crave God's intimate touch" (qtd. in Rothschild 23). People are hungry for authentic spiritual companionship, a felt, tangible sense of God that worship alone is not providing (Berggren 14). They desire to know more deeply who they are and how to be connected with God (Bakke 88). Teresa Rhodes McGee addresses this desire: "[T]he calling is to create a space where God can leap within us and dwell there for a long, long time" (27). The adults in Bible study classes at the churches I have served in my twelve years of ministry echo and affirm this calling. They do long for the presence of God in a personal way within their hearts and lives.

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the influence and impact of a short-term adult small group study on the level of awe in the participants' personal relationship with God, using worship aids and Christian spiritual narratives in a multisensory context. Awe precipitates awareness, not only of God but also of God's calling and invitation, which upon acceptance leads to relationship, and relationship invites ongoing spiritual formation, known to United Methodists as sanctification. As sanctification, also known as holiness of heart and life, is a priority of Christian living in Wesley's theological understanding, this study is worthy under established United Methodist ministry goals (Chandran 43).

This study is feasible and valuable because it is practical and repeatable. Participants can potentially benefit from each individual session as well as from the overall focus of the group study (Chandran 46). This study followed Jeffrey R. Maxwell's guidelines that the purpose of ministry is not only to increase knowledge but to empower transformation by providing opportunities for people to feel and respond to God's gift of revelation (22). This study sought both to increase knowledge within the discipline of Christian spiritual formation and to increase knowledge within myself as professional (Gliner 5).

For the Christian community, this study encourages communion with real persons of historical context as mentors in spiritual formation and faithful living. Within the discipline of ministry, it introduces new areas of study for small groups. For myself as a religious professional, this study has greatly increased my own knowledge and broadened my exposure to the community of saints and multisensory considerations.

Awe

Jerome Berryman describes what could be called an awe-filled moment as an “exhilarating “ah-ha” moment when one senses the overlap and the gap “between the ‘me’ and the ‘not me’ in our world” (8). Standing in the presence of the Creator of the universe, realizing this God is closer and more necessary than breath itself and as remote as the darkest point beyond the furthest star is a moment of awe and discovery (Forest 35). People come to realize how very little they know of the world and their existence, and how much more there is than what they can comprehend or command (van Kaam, *Formative Spirituality 2*: 213).

For purposes of this research, I relate the experience of religious awe to a personal apprehension of the transcendence of God that invites further Christian spiritual formation (i.e., *religious awe*). Rev. N. Graham Standish outlines Christian religious awe:

[O]ne of the most foundational and personal of the spiritual dispositions; at its simplest level, the gasping of the body, mind, spirit and soul in wonder and reverence at the mystery and greatness of God. It is a profoundly deep experience of God that leads us to ... attention to God’s presence, works and wonders. (28)

Simply put, awe occurs as people find themselves overwhelmed as they recognize their proximity to a “wholly other” divine, supernatural presence (Casey 26).

According to van Kaam, the most basic search in human life is seeking to surrender ourselves in awe before this supernatural presence, the transcendent mystery, and its revelations (*Formative Spirituality 2*:186). He further asserts that God assists in the search, using awe as the primary means of communication (157). God constantly strives to reveal himself.

Working through the experience of awe, God invites people to be present with him in his mystery and holiness (Shook 35). Awe is an invitation to spiritual relationship with God that results in formation and growth in accordance with God's person, nature, and character (Broyles 35). An experience of awe is deeper than knowledge; it is an experience of the heart. This experience can move even a closed or unreceptive mind to become open (Bilkert 18).

[W]hen spiritual awareness is strong... and you feel as though you are standing apart from yourself. ... [T]he eternal and the temporal come very close together and perhaps intersect,... and you know you are standing on Holy Ground. (Shook 53)

This spiritual awareness is a gift that is cultivated and developed.

Poole and Trewartha both site the human senses as one of the primary ways God reveals himself (Poole 18; Trewartha 26). This revelation elicits a response of awe. The most common word for awe in Hebrew is *yare'*, which occurs in various forms over four hundred times in the Old Testament. Translations of its feminine form, *yirah*, include respect, devotion, and honor. The root of *yirah* is related to the Hebrew word *ra'ah*, which means to see or apprehend. The emotion of fear focuses the senses on being alive. The emotions represented by *yirah* include some combination of thrill, awe and fear (Padowitz). Whether through vision, thought, or emotion, glimpses of God call for a response of awe.

In Genesis 28:17, Jacob "was *afraid* [*yare'*] and said, 'How *awesome* [*yare'*] is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven' (emphasis mine). J. Wesley says about this verse, "The more we see of God, the more we experience holy trembling before the Lord and his goodness." He also comments on the

prophet's words in Hosea 3:5, "How dreadful is this place!" which voices the prophet's deep surprise and respect for this residence of the Divine Majesty.

Concepts of awe are also expressed by the words *gadol*, used in Psalm 111:2: "Great [*gadol*] are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them." Other translations include exceedingly, far more, great, greatly, greatness, highest, marvelous, and mighty. All these words describe how one might perceive awe in an experience of God.

In Psalm 89:6-7 *yare'* and a second word, *arats*, communicate an attitude toward God: "For who in the skies above can compare with the LORD? Who is like the LORD among the heavenly beings? In the council of the holy ones God is greatly *feared* [*arats*]; he is more *awesome* [*yare'*] than all who surround him." The awesomeness of God elicits an intense response.

God commands a response, as shown in Malachi 2:5: "My covenant was with him, a covenant of life and peace, and I gave them to him; this called for *reverence* [*mora'*] and he revered me and stood *in awe of* [*yare'*] my name" (emphasis mine). *Mora'* carries the connotation of fear, terror, and deep respect. Psalm 105:2 tells that an intense response need not be negative but can also be joyous: "Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his *wonderful* [*pala*] acts" (emphasis mine). The idea behind *pala* is that God works in extraordinary, marvelous, difficult, wonderful, special, powerful, and wondrous ways.

Another interesting word is the Hebrew *shachah*. While *yare'* describes one's attitude of fear, awe, and respect toward God himself, *shachah* is the physical act of falling down before a superior to show honor and submission (Hersey). Psalm 95:6

entreats, “Oh come, let us worship [*shachah*] and bow down; Let us kneel before the LORD our Maker” (emphasis mine; KJV). The gesture of bowing, falling, or kneeling seems appropriate and, at the same time, woefully inadequate before the Lord of heaven and earth.

Aaron Keyes associates awe (*yare'*) felt around God with the worship offered to him (*shachah*). *Yare'* and *shachah* both express an attitude before God; people worship God by adoring, honoring, and bowing down before him in their hearts and minds in total surrender. He notes in his workshop that Moses and Aaron fell facedown when the glory of the Lord appeared to them. In addition, Abraham fell down as recorded in Genesis 17:3, Joshua fell down as recorded in Joshua 5:14, and David and the elders fell facedown as recorded in 1 Chronicles 21:16. Something overwhelming about God pulls those in his presence to their knees.

Psalm 95:1-6 entreats its readers to experience this attitude of worship:

Come, let us sing for joy to the Lord; let us shout aloud to the Rock of our salvation. Let us come before him with thanksgiving and extol him with music and song. For the Lord is the great God, the great King above all gods. In his hand are the depths of the earth, and the mountain peaks belong to him. The sea is his, for he made it, and his hands formed the dry land. Come, let us bow down in worship, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. (emphasis mine; NIV)

An awe-filled recognition of God as the Lord, the creator of all, the great God, King of all gods, the Rock of salvation, leads one to bow down in reverence and kneel in humility while offering songs of joy and thanksgiving. His awesomeness compels one to acknowledge the great divide between God and humankind, the overwhelming gap between mortal and divine.

In the New Testament, several Greek words express awe directed toward God. Because this study focused on God as One, I have not used examples from verses where awe is directed toward the person of Jesus. This choice limited the verses used as examples, but it was an important boundary to maintain.

The strongest verse I discovered was Luke 5:26: “Everyone was *amazed* [*ekstasis*] and gave *praise* [*doxazo*] to God. They were *filled with awe* [*phobos*] and said, ‘We have seen *remarkable* things today’ (emphasis mine). This verse has four indicators of the overwhelming intensity and deep emotional response to the amazing work of God. *Ekstasis* expresses the bewilderment and amazement that the people felt, which led them to assign glory and honor [*doxazo*] to God. The remarkable things they saw filled them with *phobos*, a sense of respect and reverence.

Hebrews 12:22-29 highlights two other Greek words — *eulabeia* (reverence) and *aidos* (awe):

You have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. See to it that you do not refuse him who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, “Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.” The words “once more” indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with *reverence* and *awe*, for “our God is a consuming fire.” (emphasis mine)

J. Wesley comments on the fitting nature of this response, that awareness of the gracious mercy of God compels one to worship him with tender reverence.

Dacher Keltner and Jonathan Haidt identify two central themes in awe: vastness and accommodation (297). Vastness refers to “anything that is experienced as being much larger than the self or the self’s ordinary level of experience or frame of reference” (303), things that seem immense, limitless, immeasurable. Accommodation is the process of making sense of the experience within one’s existing value and belief system or creating a new one, adjusting one’s perceptions to include the information provided by the new experience. Within the themes of vastness and accommodation, the Research Team and I identified several gradations.

Gradations of Awe

Gradations are a progression, in this instance, from mildest to strongest. The progression occurs not in a fixed pattern, but in fluid movement, with emotions from the different gradations interacting together during the development of true awe. Although the movement is fluid, the gradations combine for a cumulative effect.

The first gradation is the mildest. The second gradation increases slightly in intensity and affect. The third gradation deepens the emotional impact. The fourth gradation brings challenge. The fifth gradation creates resolution.

Surprise, astonishment, wonder. Surprise, shock, and astonishment are first reactions to something unexpected or inexplicable that has taken place or been observed (Boden 392; Fuller 40). Feelings of confusion, amazement, and wonder also accompany such an experience (Keltner and Haidt 299). The overwhelming turn of events leads to awe and marveling in this initial engagement (Proffitt 105).

Curiosity, fascination, attraction. This newfound wonder stimulates further investigation. One seeks to identify what, where, who, how, or why this experience

occurred (Proffitt 105). Curiosity leads one to seek the source and to reason the meaning of these “unexpected displays of life, beauty, or truth” (Deane-Drummond 20; Fuller 40). Fascinated and drawn forward, the experience leaves one awestruck (Merkle 167; Fuller 40).

Admiration, exaltation, reverence. As one realizes the divine source that is sharing itself, feelings of humility and elevation arise in its presence (Wettstein). The miniscule significance of humanity pales before the divine, leaving one deeply grateful for the privilege of the experience (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 952). Wonder turns to admiration, even worship, as attention shifts away from oneself, the recipient, and onto the divine, the source.

Contemplation, appreciation, submission. Equilibrium is disturbed, and the instability propels one to restore or reconstruct their internal stability network. Incorporating the implications of the experience, the newly discovered perceptions, into existing mental structures, evaluating and making appropriate adjustments in previously held attitudes and beliefs, constructs a new stability (Keltner and Haidt 304). In addition, as one contemplates and considers, they accept in awe-filled reverence that which they cannot explain but must simply allow as it exists (Proffitt 108). People submit themselves, their emotions and perceptions, to the One no one can ever fully comprehend or understand (Keltner and Haidt 303).

Transformation, adoration, intimacy. Submission produces “both trust and a sense of belonging” as one acknowledges the presence of God as wholly other than oneself (Fuller 40). Feelings of intimacy and harmony connect with the divine. From submission rises a sense of indebtedness, which then leads to an appreciation of what is

now known and enjoyed on such an intimate, personal level. From this place of awe-filled appreciation rises praise and adoration (Merkle 167).

Attributes of Awe

Awe is not simple to describe or define. It is complex and multifaceted. Considering its components helps in understanding the composite that is awe.

An emotion. Emotions are feelings or sensations that arouse, sustain, and direct activity (Plutchik, “Nature” 29). The emotion of awe awakens and broadens attentiveness to include more stimuli than ordinarily noticed (Fuller 39). When someone or something overwhelming and powerful is beyond one’s reach, awe is a response. Awe contains the emotions of fear and wonder, admiration, astonishment, respect, and more. Augustine equated awe and wonder with creation and natural wonders, which lead persons to reflect on the Creator (Deane-Drummond 18).

A response. Something extraordinary or beyond human comprehension elicits a response (Proffitt 105; Deane-Drummond 17). Intense and meaningful experiences that do not fit in one’s normal frame of reference or the way one thinks about the world will tend to stir feelings of amazement and wonderment (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 950). As awareness dawns of something “out there” that is indeed “wonderfully greater than I, something beyond me, and yet part of me,” a reaction occurs, for God designed humankind not only to seek him but also to recognize and respond to him (Shook 6).

A stimulus. Awe and wonder, because they seem to embody many of the same emotional qualities as joy, bring a captivating quality to one’s environment, encouraging increased openness and interest. It stimulates investigation and discovery, guaranteeing the person has continued engagement in the experience or environment (Fuller 30). Awe

initiates exploration and reflection, which lead to insight regarding new things about the world and the beliefs individuals hold. Celia Deane-Drummond expands this idea: “Wonder, like terror, is an experience that is capable of transforming us because it touches us at the core of our being” (20). Awe can trigger change in people, provoking them to reorient their lives, goals, and values in profound and powerful ways (Keltner and Haidt 297).

A process. Following an awe-filled experience, people begin the search for a cause (Deane-Drummond 20). This search broadens one’s established network of information, values, and beliefs in various ways, and calls for updates or new networks to include the knowledge or insight gained through the experience and the search (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 946). James Houston describes this process as a transformation that only takes place when “awe turns to wonder, admiration, reverence, surrender, and obedience toward God.” Awe is a process that leads from where one began to never-ending new places.

An imperative. Awe and wonder are relatively hardwired responses. Human beings have a fundamental, unrestricted, and relentless drive to know and make meaning (McBride 57). The human brain and nervous system naturally are always evaluating and responding to their immediate environment (Fuller 45). In the same way that humans are biologically prepared to respond to certain fear inducing stimuli, they are also prepared to respond to awe-inducing stimuli (Keltner and Haidt 306). According to van Kaam, humans are predisposed to awe because awe opens them to that which is transcendent (*Formative Spirituality 2*: 185). Heschel goes even further to call awe “*a categorical imperative*” because awe is the only fitting reply to what is wondrous (qtd. in Merkle

167). Without awe before the great mysteries of life, arrogance develops and the universe become a dark place where the pride-form dominates (Merkle 167; van Kaam. *Formative Spirituality: Vol. 2*: 181).

An event. An event is an experience, a moment of disclosure, received with astonishment and surprise, a moment of religious awareness that speaks of the appearance of the “more than” (Proffitt 103; McBride 37). It is also an experience when something larger-than-life overwhelms and moves one deeply (Collister 41). Powerful feelings of reverence and respect blended with emotions such as humility, wonder, and appreciation come together, evoking an awe response.

God’s revelations call upon a person’s senses of wonder and amazement to acknowledge a mystery that surpasses their powers of comprehension and understanding (Merkle 121). People cannot help but respond in awe when God touches their lives, for God is a presence worth responding to (Paintner and Wynkoop 44). These unexpected and occasional events are the markers of one’s personal spiritual history, the story of God interacting with humankind (Merkle 114).

A declaration. Rusty Freeman writes about the experience of wonder: “Wonder declares, without saying a word, ‘Given all the time in the universe, I could never have conceived of something so ingenious, so breathtaking, so delicately intricate, so overwhelmingly powerful; I am in the presence of something beyond me’” (11). Therefore, the church at large will want to provide as many opportunities as possible to connect persons with God and influence the living of their lives in intimate relationship with God (Casey 27).

Elicitors

Occasions that expose people to greatness outside themselves are likely to elicit awe as awe, according to van Kaam, leads to a highly sensitized and alert awareness of things beyond the material universe and outside the ordinary range of human perception (*Formative Spirituality 2*: 212). Information-rich stimuli in particular lure and call forth a personal and involved attention. This gives opportunity to add to one's informational and experiential reservoir (Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 946, 961).

Keltner and Haidt group the elicitors of awe into three categories:

1. Social elicitors:
 - Powerful leader
 - Statements of individuals
 - Encounter with God
 - Revelation/breaking in/saving deed of God

2. Physical elicitors
 - Creation
 - Natural beauty
 - Great works of art
 - Cathedral
 - Awe-inspiring music

3. Cognitive elicitors
 - Imagination
 - Grand theory
 - Epiphany (305)

This project presented materials from all three groups. The devotional studies on various names of God presented grand theory, and the biographies of the spiritual masters invited imagination. The praise music videos featured scenes of creation and natural beauty, the music lyrics praised the vastness of God, and the icons represented great works of art. In the *lectio divina* sessions, the group focused on narratives from selected male and female Christian spiritual masters about their encounters with God and meditated on the

revelation that God might speak through them. I intended each of these things to encourage an epiphany for each of the group participants.

Measurements of Awe

General definitions of awe abound, but empirical studies of the phenomena are almost nonexistent (Keltner and Haidt 302; Shiota, Keltner, and Mossman 945).

Opportunities for further research abound: “There is a clear need to map the markers of awe.... Research needs to concentrate on the similarities and differences between awe and gratitude, elevation, surprise, fear, and perhaps even love” (Keltner and Haidt 311). I found only one author who gave a working description of methodologies for measuring awe.

Robert Plutchik discusses four methods of measuring the emotion of awe:

1. Self-reports of subjective feelings by human adults
2. Rating observable behavior
3. Rating the product of one’s behavior
4. Physiological recordings of bodily changes (*Psychoevolutionary Synthesis* 199)

He identifies the self-report adjective checklist as “[o]ne of the most common, and deceptively simple, ways to measure emotional states in human adults” (199). The checklists contain a series of adjectives that the subject rates as reflections of his or her current state (200). These self-reported affect measures, considered reasonably stable, are useful in the study of emotion (218).

I found Plutchik’s list most helpful. The Personal Involvement Inventory, designed by Zaichkowsky, is such an instrument, a self-reported adjective scale (“Measuring the Involvement Construct”). For this project the Research Design Team and I designed fifteen adjective word pairs drawn from the gradations of awe and their

generalized opposites to be rated by the participants to describe their intimate relationship with God. The Research Design Team assisted with the development of these word pairs as research did not reveal an existing list.

During the study, I looked for and noted observable behaviors in the small group participants that would indicate the presence of awe. Some of the behaviors I looked for included facial gestures of surprise, weeping or tears, verbalizations of praise, and a posture of rapt attention. Journal entries that reflected elements of awe constituted a product of the behavior. I took no physiological recordings of bodily changes.

Theology

Theology is the study of God and God's relation to his creation. Spiritual formation is the development of faith in and relationship with God. This research is theological in nature, as its focus is Christian spiritual formation.

Scripture

A theology of awe begins in Scripture. The writers of the Old Testament and New Testament express awe. Various passages bear out the elements and gradations identified in this study:

1. surprise, astonishment, wonder;
2. curiosity, fascination, attraction;
3. admiration, exaltation, reverence;
4. contemplation, appreciation, submission;
5. transformation, adoration, intimacy (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1. Gradations by Characteristic and Scriptural Reference

Gradation	Characteristics	Scripture
Surprise	1. Occurs when one is taken unawares or affected with wonder	Gen. 28:16 Exod. 3:3
Astonishment	2. Occurs when one is struck with wonder by something startling or seemingly inexplicable	Isa. 6:5 Ezek. 1:28
Wonder	3. Occurs when one is puzzled, curious, or awe-filled	Exod. 15:11 Dan. 10:7 Hos. 3:5
Curiosity	1. The state of being attracted and delighted in something, having interest and the desire to know more about it	Gen. 28:17 Exod. 3:3
Fascination	2. The state of being intensely interested	Ps. 111:2
Attraction	3. A feeling of great liking for something wonderful and unusual	Ps. 105:2 Ps. 145:3 Dan. 10:8
Admiration	1. Pleasurable contemplation	Gen. 28: 18
Exaltation	2. The feeling aroused by something strange and surprising	Exod. 3: 6 Ps. 8:1
Reverence	3. The activity of worshipping	Ps. 47:2 Ps. 89: 6-7 Isa. 6: 5 Mal. 2:5 Heb. 12: 28
Contemplation	1. Thoughtful observation or study; meditation on spiritual matters, especially as a form of devotion	Gen. 28:19 Exod. 3:6
Appreciation	2. Recognition of the quality, value, significance, or magnitude	Isa. 6:8 Isa. 66:2 Dan. 9:4
Submission	3. The trait of being willing to yield to the will of another person or a superior force	Ps. 8:3 Ps. 95:6 Ps. 145:5 Josh. 5:14 1 Chron. 21:16 Ps. 95:6 Dan. 10:8
Transformation	1. A marked change, as in appearance or character, usually for the better	Ps. 8:9 Ps. 145:6
Adoration Intimacy	2. Profound love or regard	Dan. 10: 19
	3. Closeness, fellowship, friendship	Isa. 6:8

Not every passage contains all five gradations or all fifteen elements, but several passages contain at least three gradations in progressive order.

In Genesis 28:10-19, Jacob had a dream:

Jacob left Beersheba and set out for Haran. When he reached a certain place, he stopped for the night because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones there, he put it under his head and lay down to sleep. He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the LORD, and he said: "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. I am with you and will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." When Jacob awoke from his sleep, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and *I was not aware of it* [**1. surprise**]." He was *afraid* and said, "How *awesome* is this place [**2. fascination**]!" This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven." Early the next morning Jacob took the stone he had placed under his head and *set it up as a pillar and poured oil on top of it* [**3. reverence**]. He called that place Bethel, though the city used to be called Luz. [**4. appreciation**]. (emphasis mine)

Jacob experienced each of the four gradations of awe in this encounter.

In Exodus 3:1-6, Moses faced the burning bush:

Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the desert and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. So *Moses thought*, "I will go over and see this *strange* sight—why the bush does not burn up [**1. surprise, 2. curiosity**]." When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am." "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses *hid his face*, because he was *afraid* to look at God [**3. reverence, 4. submission**; emphasis mine].

Moses felt the progression from surprise to submission.

In Isaiah 6:1-8, Isaiah was commissioned:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord seated on a throne, high and exalted, and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphs, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the LORD Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke. "**Woe to me!**" I cried [**1. astonishment**]. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty" [**3. exaltation**]. Then one of the seraphs flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "**Here am I. Send me** [**4. submission; 5. transformation; emphasis mine**]!"

Through this experience, Isaiah became awestruck and submissive.

In Daniel 10:1-8, 17-19, Daniel had a vision of a man:

In the third year of Cyrus king of Persia, a revelation was given to Daniel (who was called Belteshazzar). Its message was true and it concerned a great war. The understanding of the message came to him in a vision. At that time I, Daniel, mourned for three weeks. I ate no choice food; no meat or wine touched my lips; and I used no lotions at all until the three weeks were over. On the twenty-fourth day of the first month, as I was standing on the bank of the great river, the Tigris, I looked up and there before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; the men with me did not see it, but such **terror overwhelmed them** that they fled and **hid** themselves [**1. surprise**]. So I was left alone, **gazing** at this great vision [**2. fascination**]; **I had no strength left**, my face turned **deathly pale** and I was **helpless** [**4. submission**]. ... How can I, your servant, talk with you, my lord? My strength is gone and I can hardly breathe." Again the one who looked like a man touched me and gave me strength. "Do not be afraid, O man highly esteemed," he said. "Peace! Be strong now; be strong." **When he spoke to me, I was strengthened** and said, "Speak, my lord, since you have given me strength [**5. transformation; emphasis mine**].

Daniel progressed from a negative experience of terror to a positive experience of transformation.

Psalm 8: 1-9 states that the Lord is worthy of adoration:

O LORD, our LORD, how majestic is your name in all the earth! *You have set your glory above the heavens* [3. admiration]. From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise because of your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger. *When I consider* [4. contemplation] your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You made him ruler over the works of your hands; you put everything under his feet: all flocks and herds, and the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas. O LORD, our LORD, *how majestic is your name* [5. adoration] in all the earth! [emphasis mine; ESV]

When humankind truly observes and contemplates the created order, adoration for the creator pours forth.

Psalm 145:1-6 declares that no one can fathom his greatness:

I will exalt you, my God the King; I will praise your name for ever and ever. Every day I will praise you and extol your name for ever and ever. Great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; his greatness *no one can fathom* [2. fascination]. One generation will commend your works to another; they will tell of your mighty acts. They will speak of the glorious splendor of your majesty, and *I will meditate* [4. contemplation] on your wonderful works. They will tell of the power of your awesome works, and *I will proclaim* [5. adoration] your great deeds. (emphasis mine; NIV)

Scripture gives witness to awe as a formative and transforming process.

Hymnody

Music is powerful, voicing what people believe in their minds and feel in their hearts. Praising and honoring God through the singing of hymns came from the ancient Greeks who sang in honor of their gods, leading figures, and heroes. By the sixth century, St. Benedict fit Latin texts to the Greek hymn structure but turned them into the plainchant hymns typical of monastic liturgy. Over time, the Church developed hymns to praise and reflect upon the majesty of God at mass and vespers. In the sixteenth century,

the reformers refitted the hymns in the vernacular so that common folk could both understand and sing them. They introduced metrical versions of the psalms with rhyme, rhythm, and verse structure.

In addition to psalms, other Scripture passages began showing up in hymnody as well. The next transformation came through Isaac Watts, whose hymnody expresses reverent adoration of God's power, wisdom, and majesty in creation (152). Watts penned words of reverent adoration about the awesome God of creation. For example, in *I Sing the Almighty Power of God*, Watts points out the almighty power and goodness of God displayed wherever one's eyes are turned. All creation glorifies its maker (Wood, "Theology").

Later, the Wesley brothers, John and Charles, insisted that hymns should stir religious emotion through both their words and music. In *Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above*, Charles Wesley calls heaven and earth to celebrate the eternal God who reigns above in matchless power and greatness. The song states, "Hallowed be thy name beneath, as in heaven on earth adored; praise the Lord in every breath; let all things praise the Lord." Sincere and convicting hymns sung with vigor and enthusiasm became the central feature of Methodist worship.

The brothers emphasized right doctrine and personal experience, hoping for all to experience a warming of their hearts and assurance of God's intimate presence. C. Wesley pens in *Ye Servants of God* for those who adore God in his glory and power to always tell of his wonderful name and thank him for his infinite love. Likewise, in *Maker, in Whom We Live* C. Wesley calls all the saints and all the hosts above to adore God's creating love and his redeeming power: "Let all the angel throng give thanks to

God on high, while earth repeats the joyful song and echoes to the sky.” The beauty of the words in the hymn intones the awe that inspired them and accents the depth of worship they express.

Several hymns from the United Methodist Hymnal speak of intensely of awe-filled reverence for God. *Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty* by Reginald Heber paints a vivid picture of all the saints and all God’s works engaged in singing joyfully before the Lord, praising his holy name because “only thou art holy; there is none beside thee, perfect in power, in love and purity.” Walter Chalmers Smith describes the awesome God of Christian worship in *Immortal, Invisible, God Only Wise*:

Immortal, invisible, God only wise,
In light inaccessible hid from our eyes,
Most blessed, most glorious, the Ancient of Days,
Almighty, victorious, thy great name we praise.

Unresting, unhasting, and silent as light,
Nor wanting, nor wasting, thou rulest in might;
Thy justice like mountains high soaring above
Thy clouds which are fountains of goodness and love.

To all, life thou givest, to both great and small;
In all life thou livest, the true life of all;
We blossom and flourish as leaves on the tree,
And wither and perish, but naught changeth thee.

Thou reignest in glory; thou dwellest in light;
Thine angels adore thee, all veiling their sight;
All laud we would render: O help us to see
‘Tis only the splendor of light hideth thee.

From opening verse to closing line, the writer propels the willing reader or singer into praise and worship.

In addition, Henry van Dyke’s expressive hymn, *Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee*, cries out to surround the Lord with a mighty chorus of gladness and divine joy, and

Thomas Olivers' paraphrase *The God of Abraham Praise*, which further magnifies the object of such worship:

The God of Abraham praise, who reigns enthroned above;
Ancient of Everlasting Days, and God of Love;
Jehovah, great I AM! by earth and heaven confessed;
I bow and bless the sacred name forever blest.

The great I AM has sworn; I on this oath depend.
I shall, on eagle wings upborne, to heaven ascend.
I shall behold God's face; I shall God's power adore,
And sing the wonders of God's grace forevermore.

The God who reigns on high the great archangels sing,
And "Holy, holy, holy!" cry "Almighty King!
Who was, and is, the same, and evermore shall be:
Jehovah, Lord, the great I AM, we worship thee!

Christian hymnody does indeed call the people to praise, revere, love, and adore the awesome God.

In addition to the traditional hymn style of Watts and the Wesley brothers, another type of Christian music developed. In the late 1960s, the Jesus movement brought a time of Christian revival for young people across the country. From this time came a desire to tell others about Jesus, but traditional styles of sharing and worshipping felt restrictive and outdated. The Jesus movement gave birth to contemporary Christian music (Lawson).

Praise and worship songs transform the very manner in which people worship (*RandomHistory.com*). They help people "give outward and audible expression to the Faith that is within us.... We worship God with the whole of our being: with our hearts no less than our heads, with our voices no less than our thoughts" (Wood, "Theology"). Hymns describe what God is like and help those who wish to worship him; they "lift the spirits, inspire the hearts, and instruct the minds of Christian men and women" (Burrows

6). This study series included seven contemporary Christian songs played on CD and four on video. The lyrics of the various songs allude to elements of awe and set a mood of adoration and expectation in the sessions.

Hymns, whether traditional or contemporary, communicate the Scripture, the gospel, the faith, and church tradition. They are theology, teaching what God is like. They are spiritually forming, enabling worship with reverence and holy awe. They are agents of transformation, enabling one to “come before God with a sense of awe and wonder and a consciousness of one’s own sin and need of His pardoning grace” (Burrows 11). Through the hymn, *O God, Thou Bottomless Abyss*, one encounters this communication firsthand.

“God’s otherness, His transcendence; countless, unfathomable, without beginning, unchangeable, unbounded, unspeakable; words like these mean nothing that our minds can hold; that is their only virtue; they bring us back to our own littleness, describing to God greatness that is unexhausted even by His acts of creating and saving our short lived world. (emphasis mine; 11)

Hymns have the power to communicate ideas and stir emotions.

The message of the hymns sparks multisensory imagination, as illustrated by the hymn *How Great Thou Art* (Hine).

O Lord my God! When I in awesome wonder
 consider all the worlds thy hands have made,
 I see the stars, I hear the rolling thunder,
 Thy power throughout the universe displayed.
 When through the woods and forest glades I wander,
 And hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees;
 When I look down from lofty mountain grandeur
 and hear the brook, and feel the gentle breeze;
 Then sings my soul, my Savior, God, to thee.
 How great thou art, How great thou art! (emphasis mine)

Seeing, hearing, looking, and feeling are, each one, a sensory suggestion. God reveals himself in many ways, drawing people into wondering, considering, and thinking about how great he is. He invites everyone to experience awe on many levels.

Other hymns include similar sensory allusions and invitations to awe:

This is my Father's world, and to my listening ears
 All nature sings, and round me rings the music of the spheres.
 This is my Father's world: I rest me in the thought
 Of rocks and trees, of skies and seas; his hands the wonders wrought.

This is my Father's world, the birds their carols raise,
 The morning light, the lily white, declare their maker's praise.
 This is my Father's world: he shines in all that's fair;
 In the rustling grass I hear him pass; he speaks to me everywhere.
 (Babcock)

Listening ears hear music in nature and eyes see lilies white as creation declaring the Maker's praise. God speaks and invites people to respond.

Willing hearts open in surrender when filled with awe:

Joyful, joyful, we adore thee, God of glory, Lord of love;
Hearts unfold like flowers before thee, opening to the sun above.
 Melt the clouds of sin and sadness; drive the dark of doubt away.
 Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!
 All thy works with joy surround thee,
 Earth and heaven reflect thy rays,
 Stars and angels sing around thee, center of unbroken praise.
 Field and forest; vale and mountain, flowery meadow, flashing sea,
 Changing bird and flowing fountain, call us to rejoice in thee.
 (emphasis mine; van Dyke)

God is visible in creation and calls the people to rejoice. Awe calls forth joy, and joy leads to praise.

Hymns illuminate and lead the way through ignorance:

Days of wonder, days of beauty, day of rapture filled with light
 Tell thy goodness, tell thy mercies, tell thy glorious might.
 We thy people, praise thee, praise thee, God of every nation!
 We thy people, praise thee, praise thee, Lord of Hosts eternal! (Page)

The people travel from darkness to light, worshipping and praising the glorious God of goodness and mercy.

The witness of nature leads to proclamation of God as its source, and hymns express an awe-filled awareness of his goodness:

Praise the source of faith and learning
that has sparked and stoked the mind
With a passion for discerning how the world has been designed.
Let the sense of wonder flowing from the wonders we survey
Keep our faith forever growing and renew our need to pray. (Troeger)

God intended that people use their senses and abilities to seek him, to recognize him, and to worship him.

John Wesley

The founder of Methodism, J. Wesley, was no stranger to religious awe. He learned about it from readings of the Eastern church theologians, who taught him to approach God as mystery and wonder (Wood, “Lost in Wonder”). He experienced profound awe firsthand during his experience of assurance at the famous Aldersgate Street meeting. Both his readings and his Aldersgate experience confirmed his astonished wonder at the God who reveals himself to humankind as the starting place for true Christian faith and practice. To be Christian is to be “lost in wonder, love, and praise” of God, as C. Wesley so eloquently wrote (*Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*).

J. Wesley wrote that the experience of religious awe is a combination of the mysterious objective act of God revealing himself and subjective perception of this divine revelation. Human conscience is able to perceive the power of God, and rejoice in fellowship with him (Jent). Wesley’s Aldersgate experience was not so much a time of conversion, but of heartfelt assurance in an experience of awe.

Spiritual Formation

Christian spiritual formation is the shaping of the human spirit in alignment with God's will and spirit. The relationship may begin in a chance encounter, but the encounter always contains an invitation to engage in an ongoing process toward spiritual maturity. Given the opportunity, people desire to meet God, to offer him praise and worship. They want to know him and live in relationship with him. Don E. Saliers offers an explanation:

Holy fear has its object and occasion in the holiness and glory of God.... It is an affective understanding and a regard to the God who remains other than we are,... who initiates a covenant, who seeks to restore the broken relationship with the creatures.... [T]hose who take God seriously must make room for ascribing to God the honor due the one described in the great prayers of the church: "Holy art Thou, Holy and strong! Holy, immortal One, have mercy upon us." (62)

Religious awe is an emotional and cognitive response to an individual's growing realization that they live and abide in the presence of God, the ultimate Mystery.

Father van Kaam, pioneer in formative spirituality, says the human experience of awe is central to any true religious experience (Muto, "Spiritual Direction"). Dr. Susan Muto, co-founder of Epiphany Academy of Spiritual Formation with van Kaam, adds that awe is a person's response to God's transcendence. Only God in his transcendence can draw people toward grace, toward liberation and redemption:

Of this grace the poet can only utter a sound, "ah!" This exclamation is like an intake of breath in the face of an amazing mystery that is beyond words. It is literally the "ah!" of "awe...." Without awe the potency for transcendence remains dormant. (*John 22*)

People find themselves joyfully *awe-filled* as God reveals himself in their lives.

According to van Kaam, people feel a "transcendent aspiration after a life form that truly fulfills our best aspirations" as God enlightens people's minds, will, memory,

anticipation, and imagination and establishes their influence in the empirical life form they develop (*Human Formation* 5).

In other words, something innate in people responds to the divine invitation because they desire and strive for a holy interior relationship with God. People relegate their will, abilities, personality, all that they are to God's forming power, which leads to the development of new life directives as they begin to apprehend holiness of heart and life (van Kaam, *Human Formation* 12). Collins discusses spiritual transformation as "a change of what we are disposed toward, a change of what we desire, of what we love." It is the process of increasing a person's awareness of the sacred dimension as they come to know God and allow his vision and values to form their attitudes and behaviors (Paintner and Wynkoop 21, 44).

The experience of awe awakens faith that is then nurtured by various subsequent interactions, usually within a faith tradition (Fowler 9-10). People feel within themselves a calling toward that which is like God, that which pleases God, that which unites them with God. They go from putting themselves and temporary matters first to loving God and eternal matters the most.

This journey of spiritual formation begins in what Bonnie Myotai Treace describes as a liminal experience, a time of transition when a person's present identity becomes open to new forms or identity and relationship beyond the limits of what they understood themselves or their lives to be. Theresa Williams, referring to her experience of intense periods of creativity, expresses liminality as "a moment when you are at a threshold, that moment just before you give yourself over completely to (the new experience)... [Y]ou have to loosen your feet from the earth and fly toward the beloved."

Liminal experiences are not impositions placed on individuals but God's invitations extended to them. The experiences evoke people, call them out, draw them forth to enter into life with God, and they are never the same (van Kaam, *Human Formation* 57).

Saliers writes that the "fear and trembling" people feel in response to a liminal experience motivates them to acknowledge their continuing sinfulness and God's ultimate holiness. This holy fear of the Lord should not be a single incident in the faith journey but a repetitive one, for as appreciation of the greatness of God increases, so will faith in him increase (63). The biblical witness offers many stories of individuals who, like Isaiah, experienced fear and trembling before the Lord that drew them into a humble and awe-filled relationship with God, deepening their faith and affecting the way they lived their lives. The church needs to explore all reasonable and responsible avenues to assist the people in their quest to experience God. Scriptural narratives, Christian biographies, spiritual narratives from the Christian masters, and even Christian fiction are potentially inspiring and encouraging companions on the journey.

Spiritual Narratives

The narrative, or story, is an important schema humans use to organize information, a fundamental source of meaning making: "Narratives impose meaning on behavior and experiences by identifying a relevant starting point, describing an interim event, and depicting an end state that differs from the initial state and is in some way explained by what happens in between" (Rossiter). Stories involve people in the actions and intentions of the characters and demand that they must fill in, from their own bank of knowledge and experience, that which is unspoken. This interaction helps people create

as well as discover meaning, and often they pose the questions they themselves need to answer.

Stories communicate. Peterson says good storytelling pulls people into a world that is “both truer and larger than the one we ordinarily occupy” (47). They touch people; they draw them into the drama and uncertainty of the context and characters until they are able to recognize something of themselves, others and God (MacClellan 75).

Stories are evocative. They teach; they convict; they give a vision for change and invite believers to apply what they hear in the story to their own lives (MacClellan 21, 56). Peterson recalls that in the early 1900s, renowned religious leader and preacher Henry Emerson Fosdick used stories to draw listeners into his message (30). Stories stimulate compassion and understanding. The particularity of the story—the specific situation, the small details, the vivid images of human experience—evokes an empathetic response more so than a factual statement does. Personal identification with the story provides the opportunity for both cognitive appreciation and affective response to the experience of another person (Rossiter).

Narratives draw people out, help them explore new possibilities and new situations that lead them to consider new responses. Mysteriously they find themselves in the characters of the stories and feel themselves participating, whether willing or unwilling, in the situations that arise (Peterson 41). They get caught up in the drama, identify with the people and their relationships, see the particulars of life they had overlooked, and realize that being human involves more than they had yet explored (40). They must then appraise the various responses and decide which response they will

express (van Kaam, *Human Formation* 141). The inviting nature of narrative makes stories a powerful tool for learning, development, and transformation (Rossiter).

Stories can lead people to rethink and change their beliefs, thought patterns, and actions (Sadler 142). Through story, people go beyond academic exercises of thinking, analyzing, memorizing, and solving to experiencing in their whole person what is communicated (Wangerin 68). C. Wesley solicited spiritual narratives from fellow Christians. He believed that the life of faith is by its very nature autobiographical and one can learn how God might work in one's life through the ways God has worked in the lives of others (Chilcote 7). When people see God remaining active and strong in the life of someone who is suffering yet faithful, this transaction captivates them. Those of the present age wish to face their trials with God's gifts of peace and righteousness, as did those who went before (Rothschild 99).

Scholars of religion are particularly interested because they recognize that sacred texts are typically composed of narratives (Wuthnow 349). Sadler points out that nearly 80 percent of the Old Testament and a significant part of the New Testament is narrative material (25, 43). As early as AD 347 the early Church father John Chrysostom used biblical stories as comparative illustrations for his audience (28). Deborah Steely agrees, citing that in the biblical persons, readers recognize their experiences, their feelings, their human struggle to be loyal friends, good parents, and faithful stewards. Their stories help them know they are not alone; God is a trustworthy guide and companion (10). Stephanie Ford reflects on the identification that occurs:

It is no wonder that centuries later we return to familiar Bible stories. We garner moral courage from the image of Daniel bravely facing a den of hungry lions. We sit expectantly with a teenage Mary in the glow of angelic light, listening with her to an amazing prophecy. We contemplate

the true meaning of joy in Paul, who ... extols the benefit of imprisonment so the gospel can spread. The narratives of their lives and testimonies of divine-human encounter strengthen us for a race in a very different time and place.... Likewise, we can draw strength from a cloud of witnesses who lived long after New Testament dust settled: women and men who encountered the living Christ in their own times.” (*Kindred Souls* 47-48)

I found this identification to be true, as I have been drawn to the stories of these faithful men and women from long ago. In their stories I find my story; in their stories I find hope.

Biblical narratives particularly, but not exclusively, are useful in spiritual formation journeys. Alan Jones states his observation:

God has been walking with people for generations, and Christians can learn a great deal from people who previously made the journey of faith.... Christians are able to reach back and learn from those believers who have gone before them. (70)

God uses stories from every time and place, from the dawn of creation to the very hours of today, to show people he is real, he is present, and he is powerful. The stories provide indirect access to moments in the lives of others that led them to reach for God—experiences that can inspire others to follow their leadings, imitate their practices, and seek their own deeper relationship with God (McGee 12). Identification with these people and their stories is a powerful tool God can use to challenge, encourage, and strengthen people as they stumble toward spiritual wholeness.

When characters of faith come to live in people’s imaginations as traveling companions on the spiritual journey, they have companions who have lived through various trials and temptations and offer guidance for daily living (Jensen 10). Spiritual stories show how God interacts with individuals and what he desires for his creation. They provide guidance and inspiration to reach for God as they did (McGee 12). Spiritual

biographies speak to each generation, challenging people to think again and think deeper about issues of faith and Christian living (Fleming 37).

Stories can be instruments of transformation, as well as information, as they lead people from the familiar to the unfamiliar. They provide a pathway for personal growth and change, for when one identifies with a character that has changed then one can envision the possibility of change for oneself. Stories that tell of spiritual transformation can motivate, guide, and encourage struggling adult believers.

The Christian masters and their stories can be “a significant instrument for changing beliefs, thought patterns, and actions” (Sadler 142). Such stories are especially important today as many individuals in secularized culture have no connection with these great saints of the faith and their stories: “People need a way to connect abstract principles with practice,... a way to make these truths take on a flesh-and-blood reality that will encourage hope in the attainability of spiritual growth in holiness of heart and life” (Whiteford 3). A multitude of stories exists from which to choose, many faithful people to discover. With each story the reader grows in appreciation and application of the truths uncovered.

Christian Education and Learning

A proper response to awe is to engage and explore that which produced it. Stepping into the mystery outside oneself to understand something greater than oneself is a first step in critical thinking (Collins). Critical thinking is a first step to internalization, which is a first step in transformation (Willis 107). Awe, therefore, is critical to pursuing individual knowledge about and relationship with God in his incomprehensible realness and mysterious presence, for awe is key to unlocking the door that leads to experience of

the holy. Indeed, Andrew Newburg, University of Pennsylvania hospital fellow in nuclear medicine believes “the religious impulse is rooted in the biology of the human brain.” He postulates that an intuition of God as reality may be hard-wired into humankind.

The brain is also an unparalleled God-given instrument for learning. The right side of the brain processes visual/spatial learning while the left side processes logical/sequential learning. The right brain takes in the whole, sees random patterns, makes decisions spontaneously, and expresses emotions. It focuses inward. The left-brain separates the whole into relative parts, sees sequences and structures, analyses data, and controls the expression of emotions. The left-brain focuses outward. According to Marlene D. LeFever, educators have taught to the left side and neglected the abilities of the right side (212). Sadler adds that left-brain attention to logic and reason alone are not always the best means of teaching (34). Teaching, including religious training, must connect to both sides of the brain for learning, change, and growth to occur (Maxwell 69).

Bernice McCarthy, a learning style researcher and specialist, encourages teaching patterns that will stimulate both right and left-brain functions. She summarizes her recommended methodology by saying that teachers should “give students a reason for what they will study, teach it, allow students to try it for themselves, encourage them to reflect and expand what they have been taught” (qtd. in LeFever 215). McCarthy’s Eight-Step Curriculum Pattern uses abilities from the whole brain:

- CONNECT: Creating an experience (right brain)
- EXAMINE: Reflecting and analyzing (left brain)
- IMAGE: Integrate reflective analysis into concepts (right)
- DEFINE: Develop concepts and skills (left)
- TRY: Practice. (left)
- EXTEND: Practice and add something of oneself (right)

- REFINE: Analyze application for usefulness. (left)
- INTEGRATE: Do it. (right) (219)

The small group intervention incorporated each of these steps. The small group participants came with the expectation of an experience of a spiritual nature. The sitting together at table, a focal center of candles, the opening videos, and the sanctuary setting created an atmosphere conducive to experience. The introduction of the various worship aids invited examination and imaging as participants reflected and analyzed the potential impact of the particular worship aid on their own spiritual relationship with God, as did the spiritual narratives as participants reflected and analyzed their identification with or inspiration from the specific narrative considered. *Lectio divina* allowed participants to define a new devotional skill and try it as a group. Journaling was a means of extending one's own insights and refining the insight for application in their own relationship with God and faith life. The prayer focus card was the tangible piece they took to integrate their insights into their daily spiritual journeys.

Another way to describe how individuals learn consists of components called learning preferences. LeFever names three: auditory, visual, and tactile/ kinesthetic (32). Those who learn by auditory methods retain best what they hear, speak, or sing; visual learners retain what they see; and, tactile/kinesthetic learners through touch and movement, by physically doing (99-107). The various learning styles relate to the human senses and the way human brains process the sensory input they receive.

On average, in a group of ten students, two will prefer auditory, four visual, and four tactile, with more girls in the auditory group and more boys in the tactile group. For those with no clear preference, their enthusiasm for the topic is determined by their

interest level in it. Overall, when teaching methods do not fit with students' learning styles, teaching is not as effective as desired (LeFever 100).

Incorporating two or more of these learning preferences in a teaching design identifies the design as *multisensory*. Trewartha states that the goal of teaching is to engage the emotions and prompt people toward desirable behavior (19). He expresses that multisensory communication is the most powerful methodology, giving the example that "most times of exponential learning ... have been accompanied by the hearing of music along with the stimulation of at least one other sense" (21). Poole agrees that multisensory methods can be important motivators because they arouse an affective response (5).

For auditory learners, the project used praise music on CDs, verbal devotions and discussion, and the reading aloud component of *lectio divina*. Visually, the class studied candles, icons, and videos. Prayer beads and journaling were tactile. Genuflection, crossing oneself, and movement in the sanctuary were kinesthetic. To these three I added incense as an olfactory component. The sessions aimed at engaging multiple senses.

Adult Learning and Change

Good teaching facilitates meaningful learning. It draws from the learner's personal involvement, or level of connection to, the subject to assist the individual receive and perceive new information. It uses conceptualization and imagination to create opportunity for attention and reflection for a change in cognition and behavior (Sadler 61; Maxwell 40). Teaching that is both effective and affective also uses sensory input to present various aspects of the materials being introduced, for scientists have learned that "the filter in the brain that transfers information to long term memory is very closely

linked with the brain's emotional center;... therefore, link your associations with as many senses as you can" (Poole 47). Rev. Mark Gungor, speaking on improving marital relationships explains, "If you take an event and connect it to an emotion, it burns in your brain and you remember it forever." Good Christian education is both content and connection.

Spiritual formation is adult learning and change of a most personal nature. It is relating individual hopes and dreams, lifestyle, and character to a transcendent God in response to an awe-filled awareness of his existence and personal presence that creates a desire to know him, please him, and be in relationship with him. The impetus to engage in this relationship and this process of change does not come through mere logic and reason: "People do not necessarily learn, change their ideas, or adopt new behaviors through a reasoned, conscious cognitive decision-making process. Many emotions and biases, most subconscious or unconscious, affect the decision-making process" (Sadler 34). God uses every available avenue—personal and impersonal, internal and external—to reveal himself to people and invite their response.

Teachers can mediate experiences of transcendence through multisensory avenues such as music, art, language, preaching, dancing, and poetry (Collins). They create opportunity for inductive learning that engages both left and right brain in the process of evaluating the many pieces for connections that make a meaningful whole. Teachers can strive to create favorable conditions and environments that foster the ongoing transformation and conversion of each person, a place and time in which holy awe can manifest (Vrame 175). Constructing opportunities for moments of awe and wonder creates possibilities for transformation:

out of their normal frame of mind and cause them to refocus on the things that we can only see with our hearts.... It's in these moments that people glimpse both God and themselves in new ways, in ways that propel them higher, deeper, farther into a dynamic, living relationship with Him. ("Willow Arts" 1)

Helping people interact with God in a deeper dynamic, living relationship is a worthy goal.

Teaching Methods

Numerous methods can mediate an opportunity to experience the transcendent. Engaging as many of the senses and learning styles and preferences as appropriate and fitting is important. Christians need ongoing opportunity for encouragement, learning, and empowerment to deepen their spiritual relationship with God and grow in their affective lifestyle. God can nurture people from Christian literature, films, tapes, lectures, personal sharing, and many other sources.

Journaling

Rooted in the Christian traditions of confession, meditation, praise, and lament, journaling helps the thinking mind and the feeling heart become integrated and tangible through paper and pen (Paintner and Wynkoop 104). Journaling helps individuals pay attention to God and their interactions with him (Peace 7): "There is great power in putting thoughts on a page. The very act of writing down an idea often sparks additional thoughts, insights, and concerns." (97) The exercise of journaling, which includes recording and reflecting, helps people flesh out the meaning of what they experience (Muto and van Kaam 80).

Spiritual directors Muto and van Kaam explain, "The sheer act of writing tends to both clarify and deepen our experience of what has transpired" in our professional,

devotional, or daily life (80). Author Anne Broyles has found that journaling about the events in life can help individuals see God at work in their lives. This insight comes from dialogue with God that helps clarify thoughts about the actions and events experienced in life (20). Richard Peace finds journaling “a wonderful tool to nurture our spiritual life as we work at forming a God-centered worldview, learn to think theologically about life, seek to understand ourselves better and fully offer ourselves to God” (75). God moves through the written word to speak to the writer’s heart.

Icons

In the Orthodox Christian tradition, one encounters icons, artistic renderings of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, one or more saints, Old Testament prophets or events in their lives and milestones in Church history (Vrame 13). Individuals in the icons are painted, not precisely as they appeared in their earthly lives, but according to their new, imagined, transfigured existence in the kingdom of God. Typically, the artists enlarge the eyes, raise the forehead, thin the nose, lessen the mouth, and center the ears to reflect a transformed and heightened awareness of the presence of God (159).

Not ordinary art, icons convey a special and specific message. The goal of the icon and that of written theology are the same—to lead others to the mystical experience of God. In the encounter of an icon-filled environment, one can become aware of joy, dread, awe; one can feel the mysterious presence of God (Vrame 90).

Icons are theology expressed in images and color, an invitation to prayer and reflection (Forest 14). They assist the viewer to go beyond what they see with their physical eyes to what is felt within their spiritual selves (13) and open their souls to God who is beyond words or cognitive consciousness (Paik 28). As aids in worship, icons

precipitate an experiential narrative between the one portrayed, who has experienced God, and the one viewing the portrayal, who is seeking a personal experience of God.

The specific people and their iconic representation serve as focal points for meditation: how they lived, how others can live like them, and what they offer for those who desire to be closer to God (Bickert). For the sensitized viewer, encounter with an icon can spark questions, tell stories, and stimulate curiosity about the person depicted, his or her personal story, and the significance of his or her Christian witness (Forest 83). The spirituality expressed in the icons intends to evoke an emotional response, thus becoming a means through which one communicates with God (93). Paik sees the arts as a means of grace, a way through which people encounter the presence of God (29).

Lectio Divina

Lectio divina is an ancient practice enjoying revival. The “roots of *lectio* can be found in the Jewish synagogue where the *haga*, or meditation on the Hebrew Scriptures, is practiced by rabbis and their disciples” (Paintner 1). The fathers of the Church adapted the practice. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, participated in “sacred reading,” as did Sts. Augustine, Basil, and Benedict. In early Church history, the *lectio* readings also included writings by the Church fathers or commentaries on Scripture (Hall 55), believing that through the Holy Spirit’s influence, sacred readings actively engage individuals for the purpose of spiritual development and maturation (Ortberg and Barton 274). The reading materials choices expanded over time: “Later, the writings of the desert mothers and fathers, as well as the manuscripts of saints, mystics, and founders and foundresses of religious congregations were also read” (Gavin 43). Diverse and various individuals spoke from the pages of time and experience.

Saint Benedict introduced the practice of *lectio divina*, spiritual reading, to the monastic communities in the sixth century. Guigo de Castro, a monk, created the outline of *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation) still used today for this prayer practice (Manney 7). St. John of the Cross paraphrased the four steps using Luke 11:9: “By seeking in READING, you will find in MEDITATION, by knocking in PRAYER, it will be opened in CONTEMPLATION” (Hall 28). Dom Marmion, a French Benedictine Monk, elaborated, “We read (*lectio*) under the eye of God (*meditatio*) until the heart is touched (*oratio*) and leaps to flame (*contemplatio*)” (qtd. in Hall 44). It is a type of interactive reading that helps one encounter God in Scripture.

Lectio divina moves individuals from informational “head-reading” to a place of formational interaction (Broyles 37) using the spiritual senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell to encounter God’s transcendence and God’s immanence (Funk 9). The purpose is to help cultivate the ability to listen deeply to the voice of God in the Word and then respond with appropriate thought, prayer, and conduct (Zirlott 167) as one experiences a deepening sense of intimate relationship with God (Gavin 46).

Lectio divina involves a person in a conversation with the Holy Spirit, speaking through the words and meaning of the text to address one’s needs and present circumstance (Klassen 28). It is a sensory process of reading, listening, sensing the words, breathing, being silent, and praying (28) involving the whole person: mind, heart, spirit, intellect, imagination, the will, and affections (Hall 28), and cultivating a readiness of receptivity to God (Paintner 3). This process is a personal encounter with God through a profound learning experience (McDonald and McDonald 15-16) that challenges

individuals “to let go of our agendas and make room for God to surprise us” (Paintner 16). The Holy Spirit engages people where they are and addresses what is going on in their lives at this moment (Pennington 27).

Reading the narratives of Christian spiritual masters opens individuals to be led to God by an experienced guide with the ability to communicate the faith by which they lived (Casey 15). Their writings present personal experiences that are relative to the common human condition, and they offer practical wisdom from their own faith journeys. Their stories tell how these saints learned from challenges, what questions came up along their journey, and what resolutions God provided (105). People can see for themselves possibilities for their lives in relationship with the Holy Spirit (Muto and van Kaam 80). By engaging both Scriptures and Christian spiritual narratives, “the church can reclaim a deep understanding of how God in fact, in real space and time, transforms the person, what gets in the way of this and how better to cooperate with His work” (Coe 32). The collective writings of these faithful persons provide an invaluable witness to both Christians and persons seeking faith today.

Various small group study resources incorporate the practice of *lectio divina*. John Ortberg and Ruth Barton introduce *lectio divina* as training exercise for those who desire to connect with God (274). Gerritt Scott Dawson, Adele Gonzalez, E. Glenn Hinson, Reuben P. Job, Marjorie J. Thompson, and Wendy M. Wright incorporate *lectio divina* as a basic practice of meditation, integrative reading, reflection, and prayer (86). Robin Pippin describes the practice as a way of opening up and letting the Bible speak “right where we live” (50).

Small Groups

Several sources recommended small group gatherings as the most desirable avenue for spiritual growth and formation (e.g., Willis; Long, Beyerlein, Kepier, Pell, Thiel, and Whallon; Galloway and Mills). Victor B. Willis names small groups of ten to twelve adults meeting for twelve weeks as the church's richest soil for cultivating spiritual growth (5). Muto, director and cofounder of the Epiphany Academy of Spiritual Formation in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and van Kaam encourage and use the small group setting to help connect learning about spiritual formation with daily experiences. The action of conversing with like-minded seekers about topics of prayer and action are what really matter (15).

Jimmy Long, Ann Beyerlein, Sara Kepier, Patty Pell, Nina Thiel, and Doug Whallon believe that small groups play a major role in discipleship (14), although Jones cautions that while fellowship is easily accomplished, spiritual growth is more difficult (69). Wesley's small group structure, called Christian conferencing, had major impact on the spiritual growth and practical lives of its participants. The groups focused on scriptural instruction and the practical means of application (Willis 40). The Walk to Emmaus structures its reunion groups on this model:

The Emmaus group reunion is a small accountability group of two to six persons who have usually participated in the three-day Walk to Emmaus and who want to continue their pursuit of a life lived wholly in the grace of God. These small follow-up groups help pilgrims translate the message conveyed on the Walk to Emmaus weekend into a daily walk with Christ. With the regular support of a few faithful friends, the gift of God's love in Jesus Christ becomes a lifestyle of Christian discipleship through the threefold discipline of piety, study, and action.... Members listen to one another, celebrate the grace of God in each person's life, and reinforce each one's core commitment to living in union with Christ in all facets of daily life. (Bryant)

The relationships established in small groups engage, encourage, and support individuals on the Christian spiritual walk.

The interaction in small groups helps people think. It engages the mind in deductive data gathering and inductive discussion (Willis 45). Dale Galloway and Kathi Mills found that people who attend small groups, along with regular worship, grow eight times faster than those who attend worship alone (10). An abundance of resources exists for small groups from youth to elder adults (e.g., *Companions in Christ*, *Experiencing God*, *Disciple Bible Study*, various Beth Moore series).

Small groups may have open or closed membership formats. In an open membership format, new people are welcome to join the group at each meeting. In a closed meeting format, once the group forms, new members cannot join. The membership of a closed group may decrease if a member stops attending, but it does not increase. For purposes of improving personal or spiritual growth, Jerry Hampton, a small group facilitator of thirty years and manager of a Web site devoted to small group dynamics, recommends the closed membership group. The small groups of this research project were closed membership; no new members joined after the introductory meeting.

The size of the small group matters, according to Tim Borchers of Minnesota State University in Morehead: "Too large of a group (more than twelve to fifteen members) inhibits the group members' ability to communicate with everyone else in the group." Hampton recommends between seven and sixteen people, with twelve being optimum.

In Hampton's experience, the best time of the year to start a group is in September or October, after school has started, or mid-January or February; the best days for a group

to meet are Sunday, Tuesday, or Thursday. The small groups of this research project began meeting in February and were limited to twelve members. Morning groups met on Tuesday (Church A), Thursday (Church B), and Saturday (Church B). Evening groups met on Thursday and Sunday (Church A).

Multisensory Teaching

God calls individuals not just through intellect or reason, but also through heart, soul, and emotional core. Poole maintains, “Worship depends upon our ... sensing presence, of hearing, seeing, touching, moving, smelling and tasting” (30). David Y. F. and Rainbow T. H. Ho support this claim, stating that many elements of spiritual experience are better transmitted in the visual, kinesthetic, or musical, rather than the linguistic modality (70).

According to education specialist LeFever, good teaching purposely appeals to the senses, especially the ability to learn by hearing, seeing, and moving (96). Teachers and individuals, agrees van Kaam, “should embrace formative reading and the imaginative works of others through literature, music, theater, or other arts.... They can draw us in and touch us more formatively than our mind alone” (*Human Formation* 142). The multisensory elements of this project are sound (auditory), visuals, touch (tactile), and movement (kinesthetic), including praise music and music video, candles, icons, a singing bowl, incense, prayer rope, prayer beads, genuflection, journaling, relocation from classroom to sanctuary and movement within the sanctuary.

Sound (auditory). In the Bible, music was often an element of significant events. Moses and the Israelites sang praises to God after the victorious passage across the Red Sea (Exod. 15:1). The Levites sang joyful songs as the Ark of the Covenant was

transported to the tent that David had prepared (1 Chron. 15:1-16). The people sang when God delivered them from captivity (Ps. 126:1-3). When the foundation of the temple was laid, the priests sang (Ezra 3:1-3) Angels sang at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:13-14).

Music speaks to individual inner beings and helps them center quietly before God. Saul experienced spiritual relief when David played his harp (1 Sam. 16:23). The apostle Paul encouraged the believers to sing hymns and spiritual music before God (Eph. 5:19). Both Wesleys employed hymns to influence the spirituality of the Methodist people: “Sacred song shapes the people of God.... The hymns themselves were a powerful tool in the Spirit’s work of revival” (Chilcote 8). I chose a diversity of music styles for this project, including praise music, choral music, and Gregorian chant.

Music speaks to the entire range of human experiences and emotions—joy, happiness, sorrow, and anger. It helps people express their inmost feelings as they mourn, celebrate, and seek God’s presence (Paik). God is present in sacred song, inspiring and transforming the writers, the singers, and the audience. Don E. and Emily Saliers write that perhaps “music is a means of communication between the human and the divine” (170). In this project I used modern praise music on CD, praise music on DVD, and a singing bowl.

Singing bowls are a type of bell, specifically classified as a standing bell (Bickert). Hope Unites UCC uses an ancient Tibetan Singing Bowl as a way to clear their minds from the *noise* brought into worship on Sunday. The sound of the singing bowl vibrates through the whole body. One not only hears it but also feels it (“Understanding Worship”). The sound of the singing bowl purifies spaces, heals the body, and calms and centers a person for meditation (Macalintal).

Visuals. Anton C. Vrame states, “We live in a visual world. We should live in a visual church” (ix). Scripture records the golden candlestick of the Temple and the lamps of fire before the throne of God in Revelation 4:5. To the Jewish people, the candle’s flame represents the eternal flame of God (Slate). In ancient times, candles were part of religious ceremonies and processions (Dendy 78):

The candle is a very powerful symbol in human consciousness. There is something about that tiny point of light, flickering, existing and resisting a world that is dark and empty, which speaks to the deepest part of the human soul. (Slate)

The historian Jerome wrote that throughout all the churches of the East at the reading of the Gospel, even in daylight hours, candles shine not to banish darkness, but as a sign of joy.

Paintings, sculpture, icons, tapestries, and other visuals can be doorways to deeper experience and appreciation of God (Shook 26). Thomas Merton remarked that icons played a most significant role in his spiritual development (Forest xiii). God employed visuals in his revelations to his people (e.g., the pillar of fire in Exod. 13:21; the writing on the wall in Dan. 5:5; the dove at Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:10). Visuals unite ideas, words, and images to help express the mystery and sacredness of God (McCullough 16).

Incense, one of the oldest religious tools, appears in many religious ceremonies and spiritual purification rites as a sacrificial offering to God (Bickert). In the Old Testament, the Lord instructed Moses to build a golden altar for the burning of incense (cf. Exod. 30:1-10) and incense was included in the thanksgiving offerings of oil, rain, fruits, wine (cf. Num. 7:13-17; Saunders). Psalm 141 links incense with prayer and offering: “Let my prayer come like incense before you; the lifting up of my hands, like the evening sacrifice” (ESV). The Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches still use

incense, the smoke being a visual image of prayers as they rise to heaven (“Incense”). I chose a mild incense and restricted its use to a single session, in deference to the possibility of a participant being allergic.

Touch (tactile). The exercise of writing or journaling occupies the writers’ hands and helps focus them on the observations and experiences they record (Canham 155). According to Broyles, “There is something in the physical act of writing that releases creativity and self-understanding” (14). As one records and reflects on God’s engagement in one’s personal experience, journaling invites further thought, prayer, and action. It is a deceptively simple means of grace and transformation that enables one to move toward wholeness, integration, and a deepening relationship with God (Canham 155).

Prayer beads help individuals quiet down for contemplative and meditative prayer. As one touches his or her fingers to each successive bead, the concentration keeps the mind from wandering while the rhythm of the prayers leads one more readily and swiftly into the presence of God. The repetition of prayers enables the mind to rest while the heart becomes quiet and still:

Since the earliest days of the Church, we have used tangible objects such as these, to help in prayer, to speak to God, to listen to God, to contemplate God. Our consciousness strays. The objects help draw our attention back to prayer. Prayer draws our attention back to God. (*Still Stone*)

Even one’s fingertips can assist in the search for intimate connection with God. In this project I introduced prayer beads in several forms (e.g., Roman Catholic rosary, Anglican prayer beads, and Russian Orthodox prayer bracelet).

Movement (kinesthetic). Movement, or kinesthetic teaching, engages the whole body and increases the level of involvement. This higher level of engagement helps

people learn and remember better (Trewartha 111). Body prayers such as raising one's arms or lying prostrate at the altar release feelings without the use of words (Shook 28). The physical gesture of genuflection, crossing oneself while calling on the names of the Holy Trinity, connects individuals "with the community of love that exists within God, . . . In word and act, we remind ourselves we are in the presence of God" (Forest 43). Genuflection is akin to bowing, kneeling, and the kissing of the cross. Movement in the small group sessions also included approaching the altar to light candles, writing in journals, and relocating from the classroom to sanctuary and from chairs near the altar to pews.

Research Design Review

The goal of this research small group intervention was to change existing preferences and attitudes through knowledge and experimentation (Chandran 73). This research used a two-factor experimental approach (i.e., Christian narratives in a multisensory design series) within a single group meeting in four small group sections with no control group. Descriptive and exploratory research did not apply, as descriptive was too narrow and exploratory research identifies existing preferences and attitudes of people toward one or more subjects. This research used a mixed design with quantitative and qualitative questions on the pre- and posttest and qualitative classroom discussion and journaling. Literature reviews included all three designs: quantitative, qualitative, and mixed (Jones; Burns; Gliner). The format of the intervention parallels the small group design by Dawson, Gonzalez, Hinson, Job, Thompson, and Wright and by Thompson and Bryant.

Establishing the Small Group

A convenience sampling in one form or another is the most common method found in theses and dissertations (Gliner 339). I chose to invite self-selecting participants from adults attending two United Methodist congregations where I serve as pastor. The two congregations adequately represent the larger population for whom this study is relevant, namely adult Christians desiring a more intimate relationship with God.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred five ways during this study:

1. Session participants answered the pretest questionnaire at the introductory sessions. The pretest included demographic, qualitative, and quantitative data (see Appendix E).
2. The group completed and turned in posttest surveys at the end of the final session. The posttest included qualitative and quantitative data (see Appendix F).
3. Observations and discussion from sessions provided qualitative data.
4. Participant journal entries provided qualitative data.
5. Information recorded in note form during the focus group discussion two weeks after the final session provided further qualitative data (see Appendix G).

Measurements

I chose to use surveys because they allowed me to easily gather the desired information regarding content, experience, and reactions. Surveys in this project measured pretest and posttest attitudes, gathered quantitative information, and allowed for qualitative responses. Researchers in similar religious context studies used survey

instruments to gather data consistently (e.g., Bilkert; Jones; Lindell; Parks; Whiteford; Willis).

The surveys used in this research contained both open-ended and close-ended questions. Qualitative questions asked for individual reflections or observations and additional information about the classroom and sanctuary experiences, the worship aids, and the content of the sessions. Quantitative questions asked participants such things as how they felt about multisensory worship aids, how they responded to the spiritual narratives, and how they would describe their relationship with God on a given scale.

The pre- and posttest surveys in this study asked multiple-choice, categorical, and Likert-scale questions. Likert-scale surveys were common in the studies reviewed for this research (MacClellan; Maxwell; Trewartha). I used a six-point Likert scale on the Personal Involvement Inventory, thereby preventing responders from choosing neutral answers.

Other studies using similar instruments informed the development of the Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) for this study. The PII, designed by Zaichkowsky, measures the level of personal connection to the stimulus object, thus indicating a person's motivational leanings toward the object. Daniel M. Bilkert used the PII in his doctoral project (70). The PII uses a context-free scale with as low as ten items for acceptable results (Zaichkowsky *Lectio divina* 342). The instrument successfully meets standards for internal reliability, reliability over time, content validity, criterion-related validity, and construct validity (Zaichkowsky Abstract).

Researchers Ho and Ho advise inclusion of qualitative, open-ended, experience-near techniques, personal journals, clinical observations, and narrative content in

measuring degrees of spirituality (71). Participants gave permission for me to quote from their journal entries (see Appendix H). My personal observations, narratives from group discussion and the focus group conversation, and input from the Research Design Team's review of data provided further evaluation of this study.

Ethical Considerations

Research author Robert B. Burns explains that before deciding whether to participate, potential participants need written descriptions of the research purpose, procedures, risks, discomforts, and benefits so they may give *informed consent*. Burns also recommends that informed consent should not include any elements of force or deceit, nor any promise of payment for favorable results (18). Jeffrey Gliner, a fellow research author, recommends that it include provisions to provide participants with a copy of the research conclusions and opportunity for discussion regarding the findings (36).

Pre- and posttest surveys were anonymous. Participants used a four-digit numerical tag to identify their journals. I kept an assignment list of names and numbers, both printed and electronic. The printed copy I stored in a research file; the electronic copy on a memory disk. Handwritten notes taken during the focus discussion did not refer to any participant by name.

Validity

The principle of validity addresses the extent to which research findings are well founded and if they correspond accurately to real-life situations. Multiple types of validity help qualify data. Each type focuses on a different aspect of the relationship between the intervention and the outcome.

Content validity. Research provided expert information from primary and secondary sources, which informed the paperwork, content, and design of the study. The Research Design Team reviewed the research questions, testing methods, and project details at our first meeting on 26 May 2009. The team determined that this research did appropriately address, test, and measure the target information (Fink 111). The content correlates to that of other currently available studies (i.e., Thompson and Bryant; Dunnam).

Face validity. The Research Design Team perceived that this research asked needed questions and used appropriate language (Fink 111). At our first meeting on 26 May 2009, the team reviewed the pre- and post-survey questions to ensure their correlation. The location and times of the study were similar to other small group studies at the two churches involved. Face validity of this study compared strongly to other studies in design and format (e.g., Bilkert; Jones; Lindell; Parks; Whiteford; Willis).

Internal validity. Triangulation, the use of two or more methods of data collection, is a common technique to improve internal validity (Burns 419). This research design included the use of a Research Design Team, primary source research, pre- and posttest surveys, journaling, and focus group discussions to measure how accurately the intervention actually caused the measured results.

Strengthening internal validity. Using two or more methods of data collection also improves internal validity (Burns 419). Pre- and posttest surveys with quantitative and qualitative questions, written journal reflections, and group discussion provided data. To maximize the internal validity of this study, participants agreed not to participate in other similar studies or devotional activities during the course of this small group study.

Threats to internal validity. Participants agreed in the covenant participation form that they would not be involved in a complementary small group or individual reading for the duration of the project. This restriction sought to ensure that the affect reported was the result of this intervention experience. The covenant participation form also included a commitment to attend all classes and complete the study in its entirety as dropout rates, or experimental mortality, may negatively affect the posttest scores (Gliner 86). However, attrition did occur in this study. Thirty-four persons attended the introductory or initial sessions. Twenty adults completed the study. Not all of the five groups had dropouts.

External validity. This experimental field study used a convenience sampling of available volunteers, which provides higher external value than laboratory research because the laboratory is an artificial environment (Gliner 160). In addition, the strong correlation between the theoretical population, the accessible population, and the actual sample increases the external validity of this study (159).

The external validity of research depends upon the degree to which this research setting is normal and typical for the type of activity (Burns 403). The classroom of Church A and the fellowship hall of Church B are the typical places adult small group studies meet in these two churches. Conducted under typical Christian education conditions, in a church classroom setting, on a typical day, at a typical time, and for an acceptable length of time, this study is ecologically valid.

Three of the groups met at times established for previous studies (Tuesday a.m., Thursday a.m., and Thursday p.m.), and two groups met at times they chose from available options (Saturday and Sunday afternoon). Typical Tuesday morning group

studies are eleven weeks in length, while Thursday morning and Thursday evening group studies are typically six to eleven weeks in length.

The Saturday and Sunday groups had no prior experience with small group studies at their respective churches, A or B. This six-week study, even with the introductory session and focus group discussion, was shorter than typical previous studies in these locations. The Tuesday morning group (Church A) has recently used eleven- to thirteen-week video and workbook studies. They are fond of Beth Moore series. The Thursday morning group (Church B) has used studies of nine to twelve weeks with a central leader, workbook of open-ended questions, and group discussion. The Thursday evening group (Church A) discussed a chapter book by C. S. Lewis, one chapter per week until finished. That particular study lasted six months.

Variables

Intervening variables noted in this study included the location of the intervention in both a small town church and a rural church, and the multisensory teaching environment, which included classroom and sanctuary. As Bilkert describes in his paper, “every effort was made to maintain similarity in the physical environments, delivery of didactic, and leadership in experiential activities” (69). Participants were of both genders, diverse ages, and a single race. Differences existed in length of time as Christians, length of time in church attendance, religious and denominational backgrounds, and prior experience with small group study.

The six-week study was the independent variable. The sessions followed a pattern that was comfortable for participants. The study introduced a variety of multisensory experiences and worship aides hoping to influence the dependent variable.

The dependent variables were awe itself in the participants' personal relationships with God, the individual responsiveness to multisensory teaching methods, and the impact of narratives from Christian spiritual masters. Intervening variables included reading or comprehension difficulties and consistency in attendance. Nuisance variables included ill health, distracting noises, and equipment malfunctions.

Summary

This project grows from the realization that people hunger to experience God in a deeper, more intimate way and the desire to offer some practical means of strengthening people's relationships with God. Research shows that conventional academic methods of Christian education and spiritual formation are not meeting this need. People also need an experiential way to experience God.

Research shows awe to be a basic component in spiritual awakening and maturity, a primary focus: "When confronted with God's awesome presence the inevitable human response is to quiver and cower. In fact, the Bible never records a direct personal encounter with God in which the individual was not visibly shaken by God's awesomeness" (Enlow). Indeed, individuals feel surprise, astonishment, and wonder, as seen in Ezekiel 1:28: "Like the appearance of a rainbow in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. When I saw it, I fell facedown" (NIV). Awe is a central characteristic of an authentic experience of God's presence.

Curiosity, fascination, and attraction also occur: "Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and *worshiped* [*shachah*], each at the entrance to his tent" (emphasis mine; Exod. 33:10). One feels

admiration, elevation, and reverence: “How *awesome* [*yare*] is the LORD Most High, the *great* [*gadol*] King over all the earth!” (emphasis mine; Ps. 47:2). Experiencing God brings forth a powerful response.

Awe leads to contemplation, accommodation, and submission: “‘Has not my hand made all these things, and so they came into being?’ declares the LORD. ‘This is the one I esteem: he who is *humble* and contrite in spirit, and *trembles* at my word’” (emphasis mine; Isa. 66:2). Lastly, people visit God with appreciation, adoration, and intimacy: “I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed: ‘O LORD, the *great* [*gadol*] and *awesome* [*yare*] God, who keeps his covenant of love with all who love him and obey his commands’” (emphasis mine; Dan. 9:4). God communicates his desire for a mutual relationship.

Scripture gives witness to awe as an emotion in Exodus 15:11: “Who among the gods is like you, O Lord? Who is like you—majestic in holiness, *awesome* [*yare*] in glory, working wonders?” (emphasis mine). Psalm 98:1 illustrates awe as a response: “Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done *marvelous* [*pala*] things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him” (emphasis mine). In these two passages, awe is similar to joy.

Awe stimulates recognition of the power of God. The people worship God after Solomon dedicates the new Temple: “When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the Lord on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and *worshiped* [*shachah*] and praised the Lord” (emphasis mine; 2 Chron. 7:3). It leads one on a process of inquiry and incorporation, shown in Nehemiah 1:5: “I beseech You, O Lord God of heaven, the great and *awesome* [*yare*] God, who

preserves the covenant and lovingkindness for those who love Him and keep His commandments” (emphasis mine). In these two passages, awe has an invitational nature.

People respond in awe when God reveals God’s self through powerful events, such as Elisha reacting to Elijah’s ascension in 2 Kings 2 and Moses reacting to the burning bush. The people’s response glorifies God: “You are *awesome* [yare’], O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!” (emphasis mine; Ps 68:35). God’s revelations lead to praise.

Jones, in his dissertation, states that text-driven or curriculum-centered experience will not affect change in people’s faith or behavior (69). Schultz and Schultz write about this subject. Passive learning partnered with interactive learning affords maximum understanding, application, and transformation (133). This research project utilized interactive narrative learning and multisensory teaching alongside passive learning in the project methodology.

Scripture shows that one of the primary ways God reveals himself is through the five senses (Trewartha 26). The physical senses remain crucial to the recovery of awe, delight, truthfulness, and hope (Poole 30). One can see, hear, touch, and feel the presence of God. Trewartha reports a general high level of receptivity to multisensory learning and preaching (111), and the small group sessions of this intervention intentionally highlighted multisensory elements for their connection to spiritual growth and the expression of awe.

Story elicits emotion. It expresses awe in poetry, memory, and description. Typical Protestant curriculum largely ignores narratives from the post-biblical Christian community, yet their stories speak to modern experience and cultivate a willingness and

readiness to reach for God (McGee 12). Whiteford begins his dissertation with the following observation: “With the increasingly secularized culture of our day, many people have no Christian memory at all. Additionally, many Christians neglect the practice of reading quality Christian literature” (3). The Christian spiritual masters are respected Christian guides who can help individuals see the interaction of God with God’s people (Mercer 234). Jones asserts, “God has been walking with people for generations, and Christians can learn a great deal from people who previously made the journey of faith” (70). This project presented narrative selections from six Christian spiritual masters in the hope of raising awareness of and interest in the witness they offer for spiritual growth.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Problem and Purpose

A spiritual hunger is evident in people's lives today as many find the current Christian worship and education to be irrelevant to their spiritual journey. People come to church looking for God, but go away feeling they have not encountered him there. They long to embrace a way of life that draws them closer to God and brings them spiritual growth and peace. People desire to embrace God and establish an intimate and satisfying relationship with him.

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the influence and impact of a short-term adult small group study on the level of awe in the participants' personal relationship with God, using worship aids and Christian spiritual narratives in a multisensory context.

Research Questions and/or Hypotheses

This study utilized three research questions.

Research Question #1

What level of awe characterized the participants' personal relationship with God prior to participation in the small group study?

During the introductory meeting prior to the first study session, the adults who volunteered for the small group study completed a quantitative pretest survey. It included a Personal Involvement Inventory to assess their perceived level of awe in their relationship with God using positive-negative word pairs reported on a six-point scale (see Appendix E).

Research Question #2

What changes occurred in the participants' level of awe after participating in the small group study?

Two weeks after the final study session, the participants completed the posttest, which also included the Personal Involvement Inventory.

Research Question #3

What were the benefits of narrative and multisensory teaching methods in affecting the level of awe experienced?

Two weeks following the last session of the study, the group gathered to complete the posttest survey and hold an informal focus group discussion (see Appendixes F and G). The posttest survey included quantitative and qualitative questions regarding the narrative and multisensory elements of the sessions (see Appendix F). During the focus group discussion, participants answered questions verbally regarding the narrative teaching method, the multisensory elements of the study, and the overall effect and affect of the experience (see Appendix G). I recorded their responses in handwritten notes and transcribed the notes into a computer document.

Design of the Intervention

The project began with an article in the church newsletters (March 2010) and bulletin inserts describing the project purpose and inviting adults 18 and older to participate in the small group study (see Appendix B). Next, flyers invited adults from the Sunday school classes, the United Methodist Women's groups, and the United Methodist Men's groups of both churches to participate. I distributed flyers to the established Tuesday morning study group at Church A and the Thursday morning study group at

Church B and invited the groups to participate as research study small groups. I invited other participants during worship announcements, by church e-mail, in one-on-one conversations, and through letters in the mail. Following all these forms of invitation, self-selected adults from the two congregations participated in parallel six-week small group studies.

Before the six-week sessions began, the groups met individually for introductory sessions. I welcomed the participants and offered an opening prayer. Introductions were only necessary at the Thursday night group, as the other groups were either preexisting or so small that introductions were unnecessary. After I offered a brief synopsis of my interest in multisensory teaching, the impact of the Christian spiritual masters on my spiritual journey, and my area of study within the Doctor of Ministry program, I described the format of the sessions we would be sharing (didactic and experiential). Next, I distributed the Informed Consent and Group Covenant Agreements (see Appendixes C and D). After they signed and returned these forms, I administered the pretest, which included a demographic section, an index of familiarity with worship aids, and Personal Involvement Inventory to assess the level of awe (see Appendix E). After the pretest was completed and returned, I conducted the brief sample session.

I explained the group would be sharing devotions that focus on descriptive biblical names for God to explore his character and nature more deeply and set the mood for our time together. This part of the study came from a devotional book that focuses on getting to know God through his names (Spangler). For this introductory session, I chose *Yahweh*, which translates into English *I am who I am*. We explored several Scripture passages together and discussed the concept of a God so great that we cannot fully

describe or know him. We shared comments on the devotion and then closed with St. Augustine's prayer, "Father, source of our awakening" (Baldoni 65-66), explaining that St. Augustine is one of the Christian spiritual masters. Then we heard the praise song *What Do I Know About Holy?* by Addison Road, which voices deep humility and feelings of being overwhelmed by the thought of knowing this awesome God. In this introductory session, I did not introduce any worship aid, nor did we move to the sanctuary for *lectio divina*. I gave a general description that the subsequent sessions would also include centering videos, introductions and responses to worship aids, and special devotional time in the sanctuary with writings from Christian masters (see Appendix I).

The subsequent sessions introduced various worship aids that appeal to our senses: candles, *lectio divina*, the singing bowl, icons and liturgical colors, genuflection and crossing oneself, prayer beads and ropes, and incense. The Christian masters included Brother Lawrence, Thérèse of Lisieux, Walter Ciszek, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa, and Francis of Assisi. I purposely chose both male and female masters, as well as those who represent various times in post-biblical history, with Walter Ciszek and Mother Teresa being the most recent.

The six narratives selected offered unique perspectives and considerations to the group members. Brother Lawrence's "Fourth Letter," which includes the invitation to lift up one's heart to God and the affirmation that he loves to hear from his children, was a good narrative to start the study. It is a very encouraging and affirming piece, reminding readers that everyone can connect with God. Thérèse of Lisieux's piece, "No Greater Love" (Beevers 147), follows Brother's Lawrence's reading well, as Thérèse reminds her readers that God has been with each individual since childhood and loves his people

deeply. Ciszek's "Thy Will Be Done" (Ciszek 56-57) prompts one to realize each person is a child of God, living constantly in his presence. Teresa of Avila's "I Am Yours" (Broughton 64) is a love poem that moves one to acknowledge God's goodness and to seek his will in life. Mother Teresa echoes this sentiment in "Speak to Us, O Lord," (Vardey 36) both adoring God and listening for his guidance. Francis of Assisi's beautiful "Canticle of the Sun" served as the closing *lectio divina*, chosen to close the meditations on a high note of praise to God.

The sanctuary time, the experiential component, also followed a pattern each week. Participants gathered before the altar area, where votive candles adorned the altar in front of the cross in a semi-circle along with clipboards prepared for each person with notebook paper, pen, index cards, and the *lectio divina* narrative for the session. Once everyone took a seat, I invited each person to come forward and light a votive candle to acknowledge that God was present with us and our desire to be present with God. After lighting the candle, each person took a clipboard and returned to his or her seat. At their seats, they wrote their identifying numbers on the notebook paper.

The first week in the sanctuary, I gave a brief history of *lectio divina* and explained the process of three audible readings, followed by a brief time for reflection, volunteer sharing, journaling, and the writing of a mantra card. Volunteer sharing followed a pattern. In the first sharing, individuals spoke aloud the feeling the narrative evoked and in the second sharing, a brief insight. Next, we journaled on notebook paper and summarized a prayer thought on the index card as a prayer focus for the coming week.

The first and second sharing took place as a group, seated near the altar. For the journaling and prayer focus writing, participants were encouraged to leave their group seating and move to an individual place in the sanctuary. After ten minutes I called them back together, collected the clipboards, ink pens, narrative handout, and notebook journal pages while they retained their index cards. We dismissed with prayer in a circle, holding hands.

In the second classroom session, I introduced the singing bowl as a worship aid and, from that session forward, used it in the sanctuary as a gathering tool. Instead of speaking, I would sound the singing bowl at the end of journaling and prayer focus time for the group to gather at the altar area for dismissal. The singing bowl complemented the atmosphere of quiet, unspoken worship.

Two weeks following the last session, participants gathered to take the posttest (see Appendix F) and share together about the experience in an informal discussion. At this session, I returned their handouts and journal pages to them, having photocopied the journal pages, for which I requested permission to use in the final paper (see Appendix H). I attached permission slips to the photocopies; individuals returned their signed slips and attached photocopies for me at this session.

From the research on awe, I devised the word pairs relating to the characteristics of awe. The Research Design Team assisted with the development of these word pairs as research did not reveal an existing list. The team and I chose words from various definitions of awe found in research, grouped them into five sets of three synonymous word pairs, making fifteen word pairs on the inventory. The questions used to guide the focus group conversations were also researcher designed (see Appendix G).

During the introductory session, the participants of each small group took the pretest (see Appendix E). In each classroom session, participants responded in writing to the material presented and in each sanctuary session, they journaled in response to the *lectio divina* narrative. Throughout the classroom and sanctuary sessions, I recorded observations and comments from the groups. Two weeks after the last classroom session, the groups met to take the posttest (see Appendix F) and participate in a focus group discussion (see Appendix G).

Pre-Group Preparation

An introduction to the small group study via the church newsletter, bulletin, classroom brochures, Sunday morning worship announcements, personal conversations, and posting on the church bulletin boards gave the details of the study. Publicity included the requirement that participants be 18 years of age or older and that they would be asked to complete the anonymous pretest and posttest (see Appendixes E and F), attend an introductory meeting and six small group sessions, and participate in a post-group discussion two weeks following the conclusion of the sessions (see Appendix G). I reviewed, and participants signed, a group covenant agreement (see Appendix D.)

Population and Participants

Self-selected adults from two United Methodist congregations in the South Carolina Annual Conference constituted the sample population. Three existing small groups in these churches agreed to participate and two other groups formed for the study. The participants each reported at least ten years as a Christian and five years of church attendance. Religious backgrounds were largely Methodist but also included other Protestant denominations and Roman Catholicism.

Design of the Study

This research was an experimental field study using a convenience sampling of available volunteers. It began with the assumption that a positive correlation exists between learning in a multisensory setting and the study of narratives from Christian masters to encourage deepening one's spiritual formation. As seen, research shows the value of both the multisensory teaching style and the narratives. Therefore, the experiential intervention used incorporated multisensory elements. A deeper sense of awe has been my own experience with exposure to these particulars, leading me to desire, pursue, and appreciate a more intimate relationship with God.

This experiential field research incorporated a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods using a single pre- and posttest design, which allowed a multiple method approach to the topic. The pre- and posttest design provided both quantitative and qualitative data with a focus group and other items providing additional qualitative data. The design included an introductory session before the study and a focus group session two weeks after study sessions.

The small group pretest and the posttest used in this study were researcher designed, and I devised a bipolar adjective scale, using Zaichkowsky's Personal Involvement Inventory as a model, to measure the level of awe using word pairs drawn from resources (Bilkert 350; see Appendixes E and F). The Research Design Team assisted with the development of these word pairs as research did not reveal an existing list. The team and I chose words from various definitions of awe found in research, grouped them into five sets of three synonymous word pairs, making fifteen word pairs on the inventory

Instrumentation

Awe is a subjective emotion, not easily measured or defined. The personal involvement inventory fit well with the design of a subjective measuring instrument, allowing me to draw from multiple components of the definition in an attempt to cover all the components in the query adequately. Twenty word pairs constituted an average maximum inventory, with ten word pairs constituting the lowest required inventory. I chose to use fifteen word pairs, five sets of three words from each of the five gradations of awe identified in Chapter 2. The Research Design Team participated in a brainstorming session for the Personal Involvement Inventory revision from ten word pairs to fifteen words pairs, three per gradation. After assigning the fifteen word pairs into three gradations, the team decided to place them on the PII in mixed order (see Table 4.4, p. 104, and Appendix E). The word pairs are a mixture of five negative to positive presentations and ten positive to negative presentations to force responders to read each word pair carefully before marking their answers.

The Personal Involvement Inventory allowed participants to rate the felt level of awe in their spiritual relationship in fifteen word pairs, each with a six-point scale between negative and positive descriptors. An even-numbered scale requires respondents who might choose a neutral midpoint to choose in a negative or positive direction. Strongly positive received +3 points, mildly positive +2, and weakly positive +1. Strongly negative received -3 points, mildly negative -2, and weakly negative -1. Comparing the inventory results from pretest responses and posttest responses provided a measure of the change in respondent's felt level of awe after participating in the small group study.

The researcher-designed qualitative posttest contained questions that directly corresponded to the pretest questions with the addition of several qualitative questions (see Appendixes E and F). It allowed participants to respond favorably or not favorably to the individual components of the study and to indicate the neutral, negative, or positive impact of the study content. The survey included space for qualitative elaboration through additional comments. The posttest included a retaking of the Personal Involvement Inventory, as discussed above. Members of the Research Design Team reviewed each instrument used in this research. The team assisted in pretest and posttest survey revisions through discussion, clarification, and suggestions over three team meetings.

The focus group session occurred two weeks after the last study group session, allowing time for reflection and assessment by each participant. The questions invited a conversational qualitative response to the study content and experience (see Appendix G).

Pilot Test

Members of the Research Design Team reviewed each instrument used in this research. The team assisted in pretest and posttest survey revisions through discussion, clarification, and suggestions over three team meetings. They participated in a brainstorming session for the personal involvement inventory revision from ten word pairs to fifteen words pairs.

Individuals at a neighboring United Methodist church participated in a pilot test of the Personal Involvement Inventory. The group consisted of six adults, three male and three female, ranging in age from fifty-six to sixty-nine. They felt the directions were

clear and the survey was not difficult to complete, although one individual did not like the particular words used in the pairings. Upon reflection, I did make changes in several of the word pairs, using words more commonly understood.

The Research Design Team participated in a pilot test of a small group session by direct experience. The group gathered in a classroom for the didactic component. It included a devotional on *El Olam*, a name for God. The group next listened to a reading of Psalm 100:4-5, to the Caedmon's Call song *God of Wonder* on CD, and the offering of a prayer. Last in the didactic section, I introduced and demonstrated the singing bowl as an auditory worship aide.

For the experiential component, the group moved to the sanctuary and gathered in chairs placed in a circular pattern opening toward the altar area. We centered ourselves by individually coming forward to light a votive candle as an expression of God's presence with us and our attentiveness to God. Participants listened to a reading of a brief biographical sketch of Thomas Merton and then received a one-page handout with a narrative by Thomas Merton, on which we meditated as a group using the *lectio divina* style. After each reading was a brief period of silence. The ringing of the singing bowl signaled the ending of that period of silence and the commencement of the next reading. Group members quietly left their seats after the third reading for a solitary spot in the sanctuary to respond by journaling on a page of notebook paper to the reading. After ten minutes, the ringing bowl signaled them to return to their seats before the altar. Participants then wrote on an index card a mantra, or focus thought, for the coming week in response to the narrative. I gathered the notebook pages, and team members retained their index cards.

The Research Team members gave input into the format, content, and experience of the session. Their comments included appreciation for the didactic session, positive feedback for the sanctuary experience, positive identification with the reading, and a suggestion that the ringing bowl should ring longer for maximum effect. When questioned regarding the length of the reading, participants thought the length of the reading was appropriate and, therefore, not an issue.

Variables

Several intervening variables related to this study. First, participants were of both genders, diverse ages, and all were Caucasian. All groups included at least one male but the majority of participants were female. Ages ranged from 18 to 89.

Second, the majority indicated they had been Christians twenty or more years. The youngest age group (18-29) indicated the time at eleven to twenty years. The majority reported church attendance at twenty or more years.

Third, religious and denominational backgrounds were diverse, but the majority came from mainline denominations, including United Methodist, Lutheran, Baptist, Episcopal, and Nazarene, and several from Roman Catholicism. One individual reported a history with the Unitarian Universalist church. No one reported having a background with the Orthodox tradition. Two-thirds reported prior experience with small group study.

The dependent variable was the level of awe in the participants' personal relationships with God and the impact of narratives from Christian spiritual masters.

The independent variable was the six-week study in a multisensory teaching environment that included classroom and sanctuary. The didactic component of the

sessions, in the classroom seated around a large table with a visual focal point (candles and worship aid of the session), included a centering activity, opening devotions, audio music, presentation of worship aid, and journal response. The experiential component, in the sanctuary seated first in a semi-circle facing the altar and later throughout the sanctuary in pews, included walking to the altar to light personal candles, using individual clipboards with handouts, responding to *lectio divina* prompts, moving from chairs to pews, a journal response time, a prayer card time, and returning to the chairs. I made intentional effort to keep sessions equal in delivery, content, and presentation.

The teaching design was multisensory. Worship aids appealed to various senses to affect the participants. Candles and icons are visual aids. Incense is visual and olfactory (smoke and smell). Music on CDs is auditory. Music videos are auditory and visual. Prayer ropes and beads are visual and kinesthetic. Genuflection and making the sign of the cross are kinesthetic. *Lectio divina* involves auditory (listening), oral, and kinesthetic (writing). The classroom was academic in presentation and the sanctuary experiential.

More specifically, the independent variable in this study is the impact of an experimental intervention of multisensory format with formational and informational components at both individual and group levels on the level of awe in participants' relationship with God. The multisensory teaching methods included visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and olfactory worship aids, visual and verbal content of classes, the classroom environment and design, and the sanctuary experience. The narratives presented were passages from post-biblical Christian figures of significant regard: Brother Lawrence ("Fourth Letter"), Therese of Lisieux ("No Greater Love," Beever's 147), Walter Ciszek ("Thy Will Be Done," Ciszek 56-57), Teresa of Avila ("I Am

Yours,” Broughton 64), Mother Teresa (“Speak to Us, O Lord,” Vardey 36), and Saint Francis of Assisi (“Canticle to the Sun”).

Reliability and Validity

This study was both appropriate for the hypothesis and feasible within available resources (Wiersma and Jurs 93). Participants came from two well-established Methodist churches with histories of small group studies, similar to the generalized target audience for this project. Gliner reports that several authors suggest a minimum of thirty participants per study group (157). After attrition, this study included twenty participants but with such diversity that I believe they met the criteria for reliability in this setting for this topic.

The self-selection of participants ensures freedom from bias and allows fair comparison within the group and among the groups (Wiersma and Jurs 93). The avoidance of technical language respected the education and experience levels of the participants with the subject matter. Presenting handouts as well as verbal instruction increased participation among the group members, which respected different levels of reading skills and learning styles.

Participants agreed in the covenant participation form that they would not be involved in a complementary small group or individual reading for the duration of the project. This restriction sought to ensure that the effects reported were the result of this intervention experience.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred five ways during this study. First, session participants completed the pretest questionnaire at the introductory sessions. The pretest included

demographic, qualitative, and quantitative data (see Appendix E). Second, the group completed and turned in posttest surveys at the end of the final session. The posttest included qualitative and quantitative data (see Appendix F).

Third, information recorded in note form during the focus group discussion two weeks after the final session provided quantitative data (see Appendix G). The focus group session occurred two weeks after the last study group session, allowing time for reflection and assessment by each participant. During the focus group discussion, participants verbally answered questions regarding the narrative teaching method, the multisensory elements of the study, and the overall effect and affect of the experience. The questions invited a conversational qualitative response to the study content and experience (see Appendix G). I recorded their responses in handwritten notes and transcribed the notes into a computer document. Content analysis revealed patterns and themes from these discussions reported in Chapter 4.

Fourth, participant journal entries provided qualitative data. Entries varied from being brief in length (a sentence or two) to being lengthy (a page or longer). For some participants it was easier to write their feelings than for other participants, but overall the journal entries reflected engagement and thoughtfulness. Finally, complementary informal observations and discussion from sessions provided quantitative data. Journaling occurred after the didactic presentation in the classroom and after the experiential *lectio divina* in the sanctuary.

Data Analysis

The quantitative information I entered manually on surveymonkey.com for analysis, including the demographic questions, the pre- and posttest responses regarding

the worship aids, and the Personal Involvement Inventory measuring the level of awe in their relationship with God. Because the total group numbered less than one hundred, I used descriptive analysis for the qualitative data. I compiled, assessed, and summarized the qualitative data collected from the qualitative questions on posttest, session discussions, observations, journal entries, and the focus group discussion.

Summary of Project

The weekly intervention sections met for six sessions. The first hour concerned didactic content and the second hour experiential content. Devotions included prayers from St. Augustine. Worship aids presented were candles, a singing bowl, icons, prayer beads and ropes, physical gestures of genuflection and crossing oneself, incense, and *lectio divina*. Saints introduced were Brother Lawrence, Therese of Lisieux, Walter Ciszek, Teresa of Avila, Mother Teresa, and Francis of Assisi. *Lectio divina* readings came from their work.

The six narratives selected offered unique perspectives and considerations to the group members. Brother Lawrence's "Fourth Letter," which includes the invitation to lift up hearts to God and the affirmation that God loves to hear from his people, was a good narrative to start the study. It is a very encouraging and affirming piece, reminding its readers that everyone can connect with God. Thèrèse of Lisieux's piece, "No Greater Love" (Beever's 147), follows "Fourth Letter" well, as she writes that God has been with his people since childhood and loves each one deeply. Ciszek's "Thy Will Be Done" (Ciszek 56-57) prompts readers to realize they are the children of God, living constantly in his presence. Teresa of Avila's "I Am Yours" (Broughton 64) is a love poem that moves one to acknowledge God's goodness and to seek his will for life. Mother Teresa

echoes this sentiment in “Speak to Us, O Lord” (Vardey 36), both adoring God and listening for his guidance. Francis of Assisi’s beautiful “Canticle of the Sun” served as the closing *lectio divina*, chosen to close the study offering praise to God.

Description of Intervention Sessions Environment

The classroom design for the didactic portion is important for maximizing its multisensory focus. The groups sat at a large table with a focal center of candles and other visuals pertaining to the session. The room had adequate lighting and a comfortable temperature. At Church A, we used an elementary classroom and, at Church B, the fellowship area. Both settings had folding chairs and flat tables. Both televisions were moderate in screen size and on a rolling cart with a DVD player on shelf beneath (see Figure 3.1).

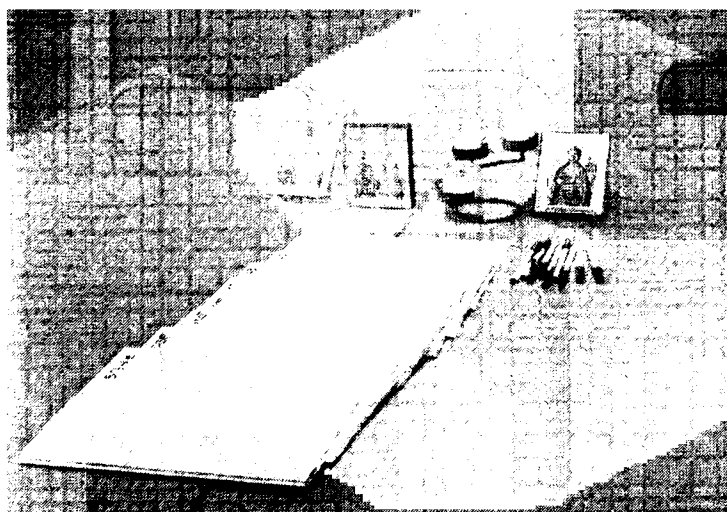


Figure 3.1. Photo from classroom session.

Likewise, the sanctuary arrangements set the stage for the experiential portion. At Church A, we walked to the sanctuary via a connecting hallway on the same floor level;

at Church B, we accessed the sanctuary via ten upward steps. At Church A, I arranged the chair for the participants before their arrival in sanctuary; at Church B, we used the front pews of the center section facing the altar area. Unlit tea candles, equal to the number of participants, and a lighter stood on the altar table along with participant clipboards holding notebook paper, pens, and index cards. Lighting was adequate and the temperature comfortable. The pews in both churches are hardwood with no padding (see Figure 3.2).

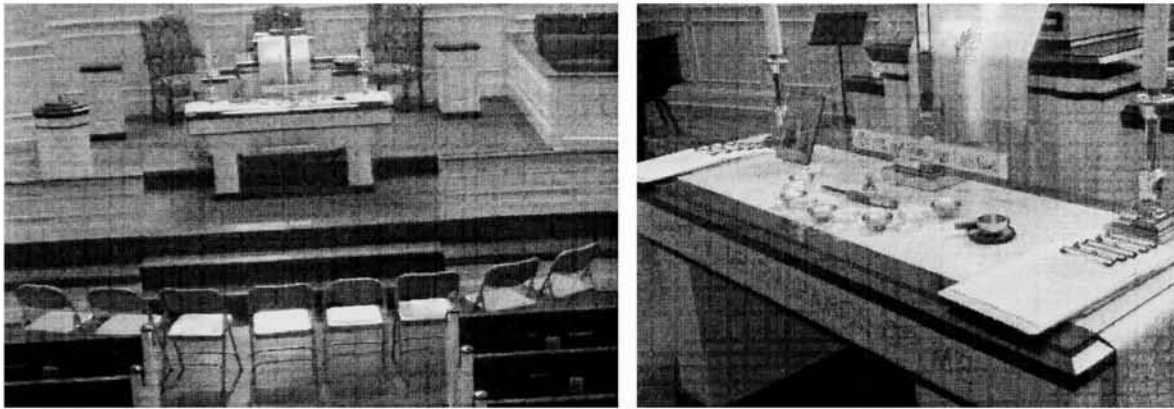


Figure 3.2. Photos from sanctuary session.

Ethical Procedures

The research included a number of ethical considerations, following the Nuremberg code of 1947. The primary rule is that participants must voluntarily consent to participate with no acts of coercion or shaming involved, and the project contains no danger to persons or property (Gliner 32). The Belmont Report of 1978 details further that research will be conducted in a manner respectful of all persons, including appropriate consideration for individuals of diminished capacity. Maintaining a proper balance between potential benefits and risks with ample opportunity for beneficial

outcomes is important, and research will not include anything that exploits an individual or group of persons (33). This research study respected these considerations. Qualifying adults (age 18+) could participate at no cost and were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Each participant was provided with a description of the research study, its purpose, the risks, and potential benefits and asked to sign an informed consent form at the introductory meeting. This form also clarified that I did not offer monetary payment for participation (35).

The covenant agreement (see Appendix D) detailed that pretest and posttest surveys would be anonymous, I would personally input the data for surveymonkey.com analysis, the data would be stored in my private files and, at the conclusion of my Doctor of Ministry program, the data would be destroyed. It also included my procedure for gaining permission to use individual journal entries in the final paper: any passage I desired to use would be highlighted on the notebook paper along with a permission slip distributed with the return of the pages (see Appendix H). The participants signed the permission slips by name and number and returned them to me. I stored the permission slips with the roster in my private file.

Participants signed a group covenant agreement pledging confidentiality regarding pretest and posttest survey content prior to the first session (see Appendix D). I included no names or identifying information in notes from session discussions, the group focus meeting, and in the final paper. I distributed copies of the final paper to the participants for their review and met with participants individually to discuss any responses or concerns before submitting the paper for defense.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Problem and Purpose

As research shows, a spiritual hunger is evident in people's lives today. Chapter 4 looks at how people in two United Methodist churches identified with this hunger and potential ways to nurture their faith. The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the influence and impact of a short-term adult small group study on the level of awe in the participants' personal relationship with God, using worship aids and Christian spiritual narratives in a multisensory context.

Participants

Twenty self-selected adults from the two United Methodist congregations participated in this study in five separate small groups (see Table 4.2.). Eighteen attend church weekly; two attend twice a month. Participation in Sunday school and small group studies were not as high. Ten attend Sunday school weekly, eight reported they do not attend Sunday school at all, and two only occasionally. Fourteen are involved with a small group for intentional study and six are not.

The study was limited to persons 18 years of age and older to ensure adult moral reasoning capabilities (MacClellan 73). The total number of persons attending at least the introductory session was thirty-four. Twenty-seven participants attended at least four small group sessions with twenty participants completing both the pretest and posttest. Total participants ranged in age from three adults in the 18-29 group to one adult in the 80-89 group, with multiple participants in the mid-range categories. Educational levels ranged from high school graduates to participants with postgraduate degrees.

Table 4.1. Participant Ages (N = 20)

Category	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60-69	70-79
Totals	3	5	4	2	5	1
%	15	25	20	10	25	5

The most diverse small group was the Thursday p.m. group, with two participants in the 18-29 range, one in the 40-49 range, two in the 50-59 range, and one in the 70-79 range. The other four groups were more homogenous with the Saturday and Sunday groups being in the youngest two ranges (18-29 and 30-39), the Tuesday a.m. group being mostly middle-aged (40-49) and the Thursday a.m. group being mostly older adults (60-79). I was pleased that the subject matter attracted such a broad range of ages. The age range of participants shows people are never too young or too old to desire a stronger connection with God.

All the participants were white, with the total group including five males and fifteen females. Four of the five groups had one male participant; the Thursday morning group had two males. The topic matter interested both genders as four groups included input from both genders.

Pretest information from twenty participants who attended at least four sessions provided demographic data (see Table 4.1.). Information from twenty participants who took both the pre- and posttests provided quantitative data. Journal entries and session conversations from thirty-four participants who attended at least one session provided qualitative data.

The average age of persons within a ten-mile radius of Church A is 37 and Church B, 41. The average age of participants from Church A was 35 and from Church

B, 60. Educational levels for the two areas were closely matched, with the largest percentage in both areas being high school graduates (31.75 percent—Church A; 32.37 percent—Church B; *iMarkOnline*).

Table 4.2. Participant Educational Levels (N = 20)

Some High School	High School Graduate	College Classes	College Graduate	Graduate Degree	Postgraduate Degree
0	2	5	5	5	3

The educational levels of all twenty participants who took the pretest and posttest ranged from high school graduate to postgraduate degree, with a larger percentage having achieved college graduate and above. The Tuesday group was the most educated, with four persons completing a graduate or postgraduate degree, while the Thursday a.m. group was the least educated, with three of the group completing high school and taking some college classes. The Research Design Team discussed this data and members from the two churches thought these educational levels adequately represented the individual congregations. Reading skills and vocabulary did not appear to be an issue during this project.

The final twenty participant ages ranged from 19 to 79 with a mean age of 35 and a median age of 50 (see Table 4.1.). In the whole group, fifteen were female and five were male. Twenty (of the initial thirty-four) attended four or more of the six study sessions and completed both the pretest and posttest questionnaires.

Seventeen identified themselves as having been Christian for twenty years or longer and three identified themselves as having been a Christian eleven to twenty years.

Two of the participants with less than twenty years as Christians are in the 18-29 age range, so eleven years as a Christian still represents a significant amount of time in their life span thus far. No one in the study had been a Christian less than ten years.

Four indicated their relationship with God is casual; they meet with God occasionally. Twelve reported they consider God a good friend; they talk together fairly often. Four reported they consider themselves intimate partners with God, deeply committed to each other. No one in the study group identified their relationship with God as distant and disconnected.

Familiarity with the worship aids varied greatly from item to item. The majority of participants had not experienced genuflection, icons, *lectio divina*, or prayer beads prior to this study. Participants were familiar with journaling, praise music, and music videos (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. Familiarity with Worship Aids

Worship Aid	Never Heard Of It		Heard of It but Never Tried		Tried Once or Twice		Have Used in Past		Use Regularly	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
	20	74.1	3	11.1	2	7.4	2	7.4	0	
Journaling	1	5	4	20	7	35	6	30	2	10
Icons	8	40	5	25	3	15	1	5	3	15
Incense	4	20	7	35	5	25	4	20	0	
Prayer beads	2	10	14	70	1	5	3	15	0	0
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	18	90	1	5	0	0	1	5	0	0
Praise music	0	0	0	0	2	10	9	45	9	45
Music videos	1	5	5	25	3	15	10	50	1	5
Genuflection	15	75	2	10	2	10	1	5	0	0

Research Questions #1

What level of awe characterized the participants' personal relationship with God prior to participation in the small group study?

On the pretest, the PII identified the participants' level of awe. Participants chose a point on the vertical scale between the positive and the negative bipolar adjectives to characterize the level of awe in their relationship with God.

Total scores ranged from 105 to 176, with a mean score of 141. A comparison was made of scores in each of the five gradations: (1) surprise, astonishment, wonder; (2) curiosity, fascination, attraction; (3) admiration, exaltation, reverence; (4) contemplation, appreciation, submission; and, (5) transformation, adoration, intimacy. Three gradations scored below the mean, one scored the mean, and one scored above the mean.

The top two scores were +176 (Gradation 2) and +132 (Gradation 1); the lowest two scores were +105 (Gradation 4) and +124 (Gradation 5). The median score was +141 (Gradation 3; see Tables 4.4. and 4.5.). With 27.12 points per gradation, a 5-point (5 percent) increase indicates that participants feel *average* in the mean level of awe, with Gradation 3 being the mean.

Gradations 1 through 3 (132, 176, and 141) received higher scores than Gradations 4 and 5 (105 and 124 respectively), indicating that they felt more secure in the lower gradations of awe than in the higher gradations of awe. The pretest total points recorded are 678, 79 points (1.14 per cent) above the mean (see Tables 4.4. and 4.5).

Table 4.4. Pretest Personal Involvement Inventory (PII)

Positive Element	Strongly +3		Mildly +2		Weakly +1		Weakly -1		Mildly -2		Strongly -3		Negative Element	Totals
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
GRAD. 1														
Surprise	8	40	7	35	5	25	0	0	0	0	0	0	Boredom	
Astonishment	9	45	5	25	5	25	0	0	0	0	1	5	Dullness	
Wonder	12	60	6	30	0		0	0	2	10	0	0	Anxiety	
Total score Formula	87 (29x3)		40 (20x2)		10 (5x2)		0		-2 (2x-2)		-3 (1x-3)			+ 132
GRAD. 2														
Curiosity	12	60	8	40	0		0	0	0	0	0	0	Indifference	
Fascination	12	60	7	35	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	Disinterest	
Attraction	12	60	5	25	2	10	0	0	1	5	0	0	Repulsion	
Total score Formula	108 (36x3)		80 (20x2)		3 (3x1)		0		-1 (1x-1)		0			+ 176
GRAD. 3														
Admiration	14	70	3	15	2	10	0	0	1	5	0	0	Contempt	
Exaltation	5	25	7	35	4	20	1	5	2	10	1	5	Apathy	
Reverence	19	75	3	15	2	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	Disrespect	
Total score Formula	117 (39x3)		26 (13x2)		8 (8x1)		-1 (1x-1)		-6 (3x-2)		-3 (1x-3)			+ 141
GRAD. 4														
Contemplation	4	20	13	65	2	10	0	0	1	5	0	0	Emptiness	
Appreciation	12	60	5	25	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	Uncertainty	
Submission	1	5	9	45	5	25	4	20	1	5	0	0	Resistance	
Total score Formula	51 (17x3)		54 (27x2)		8 (8x1)		-4 (4x-1)		-4 (2x-2)		0			+ 105
GRAD. 5														
Transformation	2	10.5	10	52.5	7	36.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	Disharmony	
Adoration	13	65	5	25	1	5	1	5	0	0	0	0	Fear	
Intimacy	7	35	10	50	2	10	1	5	0	0	0	0	Isolation	
Total score Formula	66 (22x3)		50 (25x2)		10 (10x1)		-2 (2x-1)		0		0			+ 124

Table 4.5. Summary of Scores by Gradations

Gradation	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
Score	+ 132	+ 176	+ 141	+105	+124

The pretest scores indicated the level of awe in participants' relationship with God identified most with the milder three gradations and most strongly with Gradation 2: curiosity, fascination, attraction.

Research Question #2

What changes occurred in the participants' level of awe after participating in the small group study?

On the posttest, the Personal Involvement Inventory identified the participants' level of awe. As in the pretest, participants chose a point on the vertical scale between the positive and the negative bipolar adjectives to characterize the level of awe in their relationship with God. Scores ranged from 134 to 172 with a mean score of 148.

Three gradations scored below the mean and two gradations scored above. The three highest scores were +172 (Gradation 2), +148 (Gradation 3), and +147 (Gradation 1). The two lowest scores were +134 (Gradation 4) and +138 (Gradation 5; see Table 4.7). Table 4.6 compares scores for each choice within gradations.

Table 4.6. Posttest Personal Involvement Inventory

Positive Element	Strongly +3		Mildly +2		Weakly +1		Weakly -1		Mildly -2		Strongly -3		Negative Element	Totals
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
GRAD. 1														
Surprise	7	35	10	50	3	5	0		0		0		Boredom	
Astonishment	13	65	4	20	2	10	1	5	0		0		Dullness	
Wonder	15	75	5	25	0		0		0		0		Anxiety	
Total score Formula	105 (35x3)		38 (19x2)		5 (5x1)		-1 (-1x-1)		0		0			+ 147
GRAD. 2														
Curiosity	13	65	6	30	1	5	0		0		0		Indifference	
Fascination	17	85	3	15	0		0		0		0		Disinterest	
Attraction	18	75	4	20	1	5	0		0		0		Repulsion	
Total score Formula	144 (48x3)		26 (13x2)		2 (2x1)		0		0		0			+ 172
GRAD. 3														
Admiration ¹⁷	17	85	2	10	1	5	0		0		0		Contempt	
Exaltation	7	35	11	55	0		1	5	0		1	5	Apathy	
Reverence	15	75	3	15	2	10	0		0		0		Disrespect	
Total score Formula	117 (39x3)		32 (16x2)		3 (3x1)		-1 (1x-1)		0		-3 (1x-3)			+ 148
GRAD. 4														
Contemplation	8	40	9	45	3	15	0		0		0		Emptiness	
Appreciation	17	85	1	5	1	5	1	5	0		0		Uncertainty	
Submission	7	35	9	45	2	10	2	10	0		0		Resistance	
Total score Formula	93 (32x3)		38 (19x2)		6 (6x1)		-3 (3x-1)		0		0			+ 134
GRAD. 5														
Transformation	7	35	10	50	3	15	0		0		0		Disharmony	
Adoration	14	70	3	15	2	10	1	5	0		0		Fear	
Intimacy	12	60	4	20	3	15	0		1	5	0		Isolation	
Total score Formula	99 (33x3)		34 (17x2)		8 (18x1)		-1 (1x-1)		-2 (1x-2)					+ 138

Table 4.7. Comparison of PII Scores by Gradations

Paired Adjectives	Pretest Score	Posttest Score	Change
GRADATION 1			
Surprise/Boredom	+ 43	+ 44	1
Astonishment/Dullness	+ 39	+ 45	6
Wonder/Anxiety	+ 44	+ 55	11
TOTAL	(+ 116)	(+ 144)	(+ 28)
GRADATION 2			
Curiosity/Indifference	+ 52	+ 52	0
Fascination/Disinterest	+ 51	+ 57	6
Attraction/Repulsion	+ 46	+ 54	8
TOTAL	(+149)	(+ 163)	(+14)
GRADATION 3			
Admiration/Contempt	+ 48	+ 56	8
Exaltation/Apathy	+ 25	+ 39	14
Reverence/Disrespect	+ 53	+ 53	0
TOTAL	(+126)	(+148)	(+22)
Paired adjectives	Pretest score	Posttest score	Change
GRADATION 4			
Contemplation/Emptiness	+ 38	+ 45	7
Appreciation/Uncertainty	+ 47	+ 53	6
Submission/Resistance	+ 20	+ 39	19
TOTAL	(+105)	(+137)	(+32)
GRADATION 5			
Transformation/Disharmony	+ 33	+ 42	9
Adoration/Fear	+ 49	+ 49	0
Intimacy/Isolation	+ 42	+ 45	3
TOTAL	(+124)	(+136)	+12)
TOTAL SCORES	+ 630	+ 728	98

Table 4.8. Posttest Personal Involvement Inventory Summary

Gradation	One	Two	Three	Four	Five
Score	+ 147	+ 172	+ 148	+ 134	+ 138

Gradation 4 showed the highest score of change (+32). Gradation 1 (+ 28) and Gradation 3 (+22) received the next two highest scores of change. Gradation 2 (+14) received the next to lowest score of change, and Gradation 5 received the lowest (+12).

The age group 18-29 recorded the highest score of change (+23). The age group 60-69 recorded the second highest score (+20) and the 50-59 group the third highest score (+18). Ages 30-39 recorded the fourth highest score (+15). Group 40-49 recorded the lowest score of change (+1), and 70-79 the second lowest score (+3; see Table 4.9).

Table 4.9. Participant Change by Age Groups

Age	Pretest	Posttest	Change
18-29	+ 63	+ 86	+ 23
30-39	+162	+177	+ 15
40-49	+151	+152	+ 1
50-59	+ 66	+ 84	+ 18
60-69	+181	+201	+ 20
70-79	+ 36	+ 39	+ 3

Table 4.10 compares the change by gender. The average score of change for the men was +3.2 and for the women +4.3. I suspected the women would register a higher level of change, and they did (see Table 4.10.).

Table 4.10. Participant Change by Gender

Gender	Pretest	Posttest	Change
Male (5)	+158	+174	+ 16
Female (15)	+501	+565	+ 64

Posttest data confirms that a positive change in the participants' level of awe occurred. Female participants recorded a higher degree of change than the male participants did. All age groups reported change.

Research Question #3

What were the benefits of narrative and multisensory teaching methods in affecting the level of awe experienced? Participants had opportunity to indicate their affective response to the various elements in the multisensory learning experience on the posttest survey.

Positive responses (eighty-one) to the worship aids outnumbered negative responses (ten). *Lectio divina* and praise music received the highest individual number of positive responses, with journaling close behind. Incense and icons received the highest individual numbers of negative responses. Icons received the highest number of neutral responses (five); *lectio divina* received no neutral responses. Two participants recorded the response of *changed* to five of the worship aids, with one responding *changed* to icons (see Table 4.11).

Table 4.11. How Worship Aids Affected Participants*

Element	Neutral (Nothing Changed)		Negative (Did Not Like It)		Positive (Liked It)		Changed (Never Felt This Way Before)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Incense	4	20	4	20	10	50	2	10
Icons	5	25	3	15	11	55	1	5
Music videos	4	20	1	5	13	65	2	10
Journaling	3	15	0		15	75	2	10
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	0		2	10	16	80	2	10
Praise music	2	10	0		16	80	2	10
Scores	18		10		81		11	

The posttest also asked participants to identify their favorite part of the experience. Not all participants answered this question with a single answer, as the number of responses totals twenty-two. Journal entries provided further insights (see Table 4.12).

Regarding *lectio divina*, one participant said after the first experience, “This was a good way to take a deeper look at a passage and really think about its message.” One individual wrote in her journal, “Reading this letter has made me realize that God just wants a relationship with me.” On one occasion, two participants wept in response to the reading of the narrative. This response was not uniform, however, for one individual wrote, “Instead of getting more out of it, I felt as if it dragged on. I think it was because of the repetition.” Some individuals might have a better experience with shorter readings, and some might not find *lectio divina* fitting to their meditation preference at all, but the majority of participants benefited from the chosen readings.

Three participants expressed appreciation in their journals about the meditative time in the sanctuary following the cycle of readings. One wrote, “The quietness of the sanctuary allowed a chance to listen to God.” Another wrote that she had never felt free to come to the sanctuary for private prayer, and the opportunity was special. The third individual echoed, “It is not often that I have the opportunity to meditate in a completely quiet sanctuary with no distractions. This is a nice experience.” Perhaps churches might offer quiet times of sanctuary prayer.

Regarding praise music, a participant wrote, “My heart really responds to worship songs like that. That is when I feel most connected to God.” A second individual felt that the song helped her relate to the “vastness of God’s creation and God’s power” and to feel closer and more submissive to God. Another wrote that praise music allows her to “relax and get into the presence of God.” Two participants wrote that they found the praise music upbeat, an exciting way to prepare the heart and mind for worship. One individual commented during a session that she planned to purchase and play Christian praise music during devotional time at home.

Several older participants in the Thursday morning group experienced difficulty understanding the words of the praise music. In the last session, we viewed a praise music DVD that included the words on screen. Five participants commented in their journals that they liked having the words on screen better than either listening to CDs or viewing DVDs that did not include words. The words helped them understand the song better, focus on the message more, and feel that they were participating because they could sing along. Several participants did actually sing along with the DVDs during sessions. Again, this response was not uniform. Two participants preferred the music

DVDs without words. One person said if he knew the words then he preferred to enjoy the scenery of the DVD, and others said they found themselves “reading the words and missing the message.” Offering a variety of scripted and non-scripted praise songs on DVDs might be the better option.

In a first session journal entry, one participant wrote, “Can take or leave the modern music. Not terribly impressed by it.” In a second session journal entry, he entered a similar comment, “[T]he song I liked but I like the older songs best.” At the last session, the participant wrote, “The songs were all very good. Better with words.” These journal entries evidenced a noticeable change in perspective from early sessions to later sessions.

Participants varied more in their responses to journaling than to either *lectio divina* or praise music. While all participants did provide journal entries and three said it was their favorite part of the study, four individuals said it was their least favorite part. These persons cited that they did not know what to write, they found expressing their thoughts and feelings difficult, believed their entries got too wordy, and did not think they could write well. In a different twist, one participant stated that journaling was both their favorite part and their least favorite part because it made them look at themselves.

Icons and incense were the most foreign of the worship aids introduced. We studied two Trinitarian images and one angel icon. One person admitted they had never heard of icons, and only one person had ever heard them explained. Two persons found them undesirable as worship aids, finding them too much like idols, while the majority found them interesting and inspiring. A participant wrote, “The icons invite us to share with others and open up conversation about God and stories in the Bible. It is an amazing

visual that tells a story.” The groups also discussed the stained glass windows in the respective sanctuaries as icons.

Others agreed that icons could be beneficial in spiritual formation. Several wrote that believers, children especially, need visuals to engage them in learning. Icons could remind people to praise God and stay connected to what is spiritually important. Icons create sacred space as one reflects on them; they help keep Christians centered and grounded, reminders that God is ever present, invitations to stop and think about how great God is and how great his love is. During the focus group discussion, one individual said, “When I see religious pictures, I now think more about the meanings.” One participant observed in a journal entry, “Seeing and learning go hand in hand. The modern church needs to bring these back.” During the break time of this particular session, one individual went immediately to a stained glass window in the sanctuary and examined it for color and iconic emphasis (halos and facial details).

Several individuals had experienced the use of incense in worship, but the majority had not. One person equated it with aromatherapy and suggested that the purpose is to take one to a place where one’s inner being is more aware. We discussed the biblical and modern uses of incense, to which one individual wrote, “I like the incense now that I can associate what or how it relates to God.” A participant wrote, “*All* of our senses are connected and how we *need* for all of our senses to be *aware* during worship. Worship should be a total mind, body and soul experience [original emphasis].” Another added, “If a person was blind or deaf they could not see or hear in worship, then smell would be important.” Several individuals did not like the particular fragrance of incense used.

Worship aids, taken as a whole, received the highest number of responses (six). Praise music received four. Journaling, *lectio divina*, and small group fellowship received three each. Discussion, the mantra card, and music videos received a single response each. Genuflection, signing the cross, prayer beads, and the singing bowl, each discussed in sessions and subsequent journal entries, received no mention as favorite worship aids in response to this question (see Table 4.12).

Table 4.12. Participants' Favorite Parts of the Experience

Responses	n	%
Worship Aids	6	37.5
Praise Music	4	25.0
Small Group Fellowship	3	18.8
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	3	18.8
Journaling	3	18.8
Music Videos	1	6.3
Mantra Card	1	6.3
Discussion	1	6.3

From their journal meditations, participants wrote their mantra on a card to summarize a focal point for recall during the week to come. One participant said in session that she liked these mantra cards because they were personal “discoveries” and not just words from a devotional book. One person volunteered that she shared the mantra idea with her Sunday school class, three keep them where they can see them everyday: one at home, one at work by her computer, and another at work on her desk. At the time of the focus group, one individual said she was still using all six she had prepared.

We discussed genuflection and signing the cross in a single session on physical gestures of worship. A participant wrote about this in her journal.

I loved learning about genuflection and the signing of the cross. Until you think about it, you don't realize how many things we do to show our love and respect to God by gestures. I would like to use/see more during worship services.

Another saw them as outward indications and self-reminders of our willingness to honor God, a way to show humility before God. Two commented that this physical act of kneeling might "prepare us mentally to open our hearts to God" and "establish a connection with God" from the time we enter the sanctuary.

Several had witnessed persons of other denominations use the signing of the cross. A participant wrote that she was enlightened to know why people crossed themselves, and another liked the phrase "placing the cross on oneself" as a shield of faith. One participant commented, "It is nice to know that things like *crossing oneself* are not *faux pas* in our [Protestant] church. I think I thought some things were *not* appropriate for us as non-Catholics. I do think we need more education on things like this [emphasis original]." This is another example of formative practices lost since the Reformation.

The groups discussed both Catholic and Anglican prayer beads (rosaries) as well as Orthodox prayer ropes. Two participants thought the prayer beads would help them slow down and spend more time with God. Four individuals believed the beads would help them center and focus as they prayed. One commented, "Sometimes in the business of life, it's difficult to focus on God, prayer, or worship. Objects of worship—like the beads—would help center our focus. I would think it would be very helpful actually to use such aids." None of the group had ever heard of the Anglican rosary. One participant

was so excited about discovering the Anglican rosary that she purchased one and brought it to the next session.

Two individuals did not think that the prayer beads or ropes would be useful in their prayer lives. One felt he would “worry” with each bead and get distracted in prayer. The other found them interesting but thought they were “too foreign” for their regular use.

The singing bowl was new to all but one participant. One wrote, “What a unique tool for worship! I can totally understand how it helps center one’s attention. It was difficult to think of or focus on anything else.” Another wrote, “It seems as if I would be able to sit and listen to that sound and dive deep into my meditations.” A third wrote that she believed the bowl would be effective because she tried but could not think of anything else when the bowl was ringing. For several, the pitch of the bowl was too high, making an uncomfortable tone.

A posttest question asked participants how they related to the Christian narratives. Although one participant wrote that he could not always understand or connect to the narratives, all participants reported finding the Christian narratives at least “a little” interesting. Equal numbers (35 per cent) either found them a little interesting or found themselves drawn somewhat closer to God through them. Six participants (30 percent) found themselves profoundly touched by them; one even reported that the narratives were their favorite part of the study (see Table 4.13).

Table 4.13. Participants' Response to the Christian Narratives

Didn't relate to me or my life		Found them a little interesting		Drew me somewhat closer to God		Profoundly touched by them	
n	%	n	%	N	%	n	%
0		7	35	7	35	6	30

Participants cited that they enjoyed learning of the great examples of faith, especially those who suffered tragedies and yet stayed strong in their faith. They reported they found it encouraging to read about those who dedicated their life and life's purpose to God and to know that everyone struggle at times. One person expressed thankfulness to God for those who serve as examples who can show how deep a relationship with God can be, and another said that hearing the stories of others who love God challenges her to deepen her relationship and love of God.

Summary of Major Findings

The findings from the pretest and posttest comparisons, journal entries, focus group discussions, and informal observations indicate the following benefits:

1. Deepening their spiritual relationship with God appeals to persons in a wide range of ages.
2. Multisensory teaching methods are beneficial in spiritual formation.
3. Participants benefited from learning about the worship aids.
4. Christian spiritual narratives are useful in spiritual formation.
5. Participants benefited from the *lectio divina* method.
6. Participants benefited from small group study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Leonard Sweet states that a spiritual hunger is evident in people's lives today as many believe the current Christian worship and spiritual education to be irrelevant to their lives (Blank). People come to church looking for God but go away without feeling they have encountered him there. They long to embrace a way of life that draws them closer to God and brings them spiritual growth and peace. The postmodern generation is riding a wave of "spiritual awakening," evidenced by their hunger for an experience with God:

The wave is this: People want to *know* God. They want less to know about religion than to *know God*. People want to experience the "Beyond" in the "Within." Post-moderns want something more than new products; they want new experiences, especially new experiences of the divine. (Blank)

People desire to embrace God and feel embraced by him in an awe-filled, ongoing relationship.

This study began with a desire to explore ways to assist that embrace. I began with the assumption that a positive correlation exists between exposure to multisensory worship aids and the narratives of Christian masters and a hunger to deepen one's desire to be spiritually formed. The project results confirm both the existence of a spiritual hunger and the positive impact of multisensory worship aids and the spiritual narratives. As data from the pretest-posttest comparisons indicated, the level of awe participants felt in their relationship with God did increase. Participants recorded an overall increase of 98 points in the five gradations of descriptive words categorizing their relationship with God.

The qualitative data also supports the positive impact of multisensory worship aids and spiritual narratives on the level of awe in individual relationships with God. Overall, participants responded favorably to the elements of the study. They found the worship aids interesting and the spiritual narratives inspiring.

When asked on the posttest if they would take a second similar class, one responded “absolutely yes,” sixteen responded “yes,” and two participants responded “maybe.” The reasons that they gave included they would like to learn more about (1) their Christian brothers and sisters, (2) different ways to worship and draw closer to God, (3) other religious practices, and (4) the reasons they do the things they do in church. One participant wrote, “Anything to deepen my relationship with God is worth exploring.” Participants stated they found the class interesting.

When asked if they would recommend a class such as this one to someone else, seventeen responded, “Yes,” and three responded, “It would depend on the person.” One individual added, “Everyone would learn something from this.” A second wrote, “Even as a Christian I still feel I grew closer to God and learned new ways to love and serve Him more. It is a great class for anyone.” Another wrote, “It is a good way to learn new aspects and tools of our religion so they can understand how to get closer to God.” As one participant wrote, “We all can learn more.” The study was formative and valuable in many ways.

Major Findings

The major findings related to six areas: (1) relationship with God, (2) benefit of multisensory methods, (3) worship aids, (4) spiritual narratives, (5) *lectio divina*, and (6) small group study.

Personal Relationship with God

Deepening their personal spiritual relationship with God appeals to persons across a wide range of ages.

Evidence from this research study. This research study included persons over the age of 18 to ensure reasonable adult maturity. Each of the four small groups had a variety of ages involved. The age range of participants was a span of sixty years, from 19 to 79. Table 4.6., p 106, reports that positive change occurred in each age group in the study, a range of +1 to +23 points. As one participant wrote, “We are always learning.” This subject matter has broad applications.

Personal observation. In this small group study series, as well as others I have led, the participant ages have varied from young to older adult. The diversity of ages represented in adult Sunday school classes also provides evidence, as does the wealth of published materials for adults of all ages and stages in life, that this subject is relevant across the life span. In my seminary experience, I observed students in their twenties, coming directly from high school and college, and students in their thirties, forties, and fifties, coming to seminary after numerous years in secular careers. Several students were in their retirement years, taking classes for personal enrichment. At Epiphany Academy for Spiritual Formation, founded by van Kaam and Muto, the same diversity in ages exists in the students studying to understand spiritual formation so they may become spiritual directors and guides. On a typical Walk to Emmaus weekend, one finds adults from age eighteen to elderly participating and responding in spiritual renewal.

In this study, the most diverse small group was the Thursday p.m. group, with three participants in the 18-29 range, one in the 70-79 range, and the remaining four

members in the 40-59 range. The other four groups were more homogenous with the Saturday and Sunday groups being in the youngest two ranges (18-29 and 30-39), the Tuesday a.m. group being mostly middle-aged (40-49) and the Thursday a.m. group being mostly older adults (60-79). One is never too young or too old to desire a stronger connection with God.

Literature support. James Fowler writes of maturing spiritual formation across the span of life. He defines the stages by way of maturity and experience, not by age. Steely speaks to educational concerns in teaching adults of all ages. She points out that adults in general, no specific age or stage, relate stories of faith to their own faith experiences. Muto and van Kaam teach that spiritual formation begins in childhood and continues into adulthood.

The Christian writers whose narratives appeared in the *lectio divina* sessions of this study bear witness to the wide span of ages interested in spiritual formation. Thérèse of Lisieux was a spiritual child, becoming a Carmelite nun at the age of fifteen, her spiritual journey continuing until her death at age twenty-four. Teresa of Avila entered the convent at age twenty, experienced a twenty-year struggle with her faith, and wrote of her spiritual conversion at age forty. Walter J. Cizek left the gangs of Pennsylvania to become a missionary at age twenty-four, his spiritual journey lasting until his death at age eighty. Brother Lawrence entered the monastery at the age of twenty-six, continuing to deepen his relationship with God until his death at age seventy-seven.

Biblical/theological foundation. The biblical witness includes stories about believers of diverse ages. In the Old Testament, Samuel was young when the Lord called him and he responded. As an adult, he became a leader and judge of the Israelites. He

died of old age, and all Israel mourned him (Blank). Another example is Solomon. In his youth, he wrote the Song of Solomon, later in adulthood the book of Proverbs and the book of Ecclesiastes when he was old.

The book of Daniel tells of Daniel and his friends who were faithful through great trials:

As for these four youths, God gave them learning and skill in all literature and wisdom, and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. At the end of the time, when the king had commanded that they should be brought in, the chief of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. And the king spoke with them, and among all of them none was found like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. (Dan. 1:17-19. ESV)

Even as teenagers they were resolved to be steadfast in their faith.

The Gospels describe Mary, the teenage girl chosen by God to be the mother of the incarnate Jesus because of her sincere and willing faith. When Mary and Joseph present the infant Jesus in the Temple, Anna and Simeon, two elderly persons, praying in the temple daily, waiting patiently for the redeemer promised by God. Followers of Jesus include Mark, most likely a teenager, and Peter, a married adult. Saul/Paul is devout from his youth, accepts a relationship with Jesus as an adult, and gives the remainder of his long life to missionary works. Paul introduces Timothy, a young man of faith who becomes a preacher of the gospel, travels with Paul, and later leads a church.

Impact on practice of ministry. This research study underscores the importance of small group opportunities and the availability of spiritually formative resources appropriate to all ages and stages of faith. Small groups work within the congregational programs and for off-site retreats. The United Methodist Church offers small group studies and retreats for multi-generational groupings as well as groupings by age or life-

stage categories. Pastors, church staff, and committee chairs have opportunity to promote such offerings and encourage participation.

Benefit of Multisensory Methods

Multisensory methods invite all senses to participate in the learning process. God uses all the senses to communicate his presence and invitation to relationship. A variety of multisensory methods lends themselves to spiritual formation.

Evidence from this research study. Table 4.6, (p. 106) shows that participants' level of awe in their relationship with God increased + 98 points overall from pretest to posttest. As one participant wrote, "Be it by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, stimulation to open our minds and hearts through our senses opens a world of possibilities to celebrate our inner feelings for our Lord." Another called it a good learning environment, compared the experience to 3-D technologies that engage visual, auditory and touch to create an atmosphere where "you become part of it and forget everything around you."

Personal observation. The impact of multisensory teaching in my own life led me to pursue this teaching method for the study, particularly as experienced on the Walk to Emmaus weekend. Hearing personal spiritual narratives, preparing posters and skits, standing, and singing, lighting candles for each speaker, holding the hand cross, and receiving communion are all sensory elements of the Emmaus experience. In my home, I use various biblical figurines, framed Scripture verses, candles, and recorded music to surround myself with a spiritually formative environment.

First United Methodist Church in Clover, South Carolina, where I served as interim associate pastor, intentionally decorated their education and fellowship building space with biblical and spiritually formative particulars. Banners depicting the main

feasts of the Christian calendar year adorn the fellowship hall. Murals in the children's wing illustrate the biblical story from Genesis to Revelation. The lower hall of the adult education wing contains portraits and figurines from the Old Testament stories and the upper hall from the New Testament period. Figurines in the vestibule and stained glass windows in the sanctuary add another layer of immersion. The church embraces the Godly Play curriculum for preschool and elementary children, a multisensory program with manipulatives, storytelling, music, and colorful craft activities to help teach the lesson.

The receptivity of the individuals in the study to the various worship aids affirmed their positive value. The group members shared curiosity and a willingness to engage the different objects. Their discussion comments and journal entries express their appreciation for these options.

Literature support. Blackwood writes that the more the senses are stimulated in teaching, the more learning takes place. Poole and Trewartha agree that multisensory teaching increases learning as it arouses affective responses (Poole 5; Trewartha 111). LeFever and van Kaam point out that multisensory teaching involves not just the mind in learning, but also the emotions and imagination (LeFever 212; van Kaam *Human Formation* 5). Sevig observes that postmodern people want to experience their spirituality in multisensory ways.

Biblical/theological foundation. Creation itself is multisensory. The sun is bright and its rays warm. The birds sing and display their colorful plumage. The ocean appears endless and waves splash against skin. Freshly-baked bread smells appealing and tastes delicious. God engages all the senses as individuals live and move in his creation.

The Bible describes multisensory ways to worship. Deborah and Barak offer a song:

When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves—praise the LORD! “Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I, even I, will *sing* to the LORD; I will praise the LORD, the God of Israel, in song. (emphasis mine; Jud. 5:1-3, NIV)

The LORD calls us to *dance*: The LORD appeared to us in the past, saying: “I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness. I will build you up again, and you, Virgin Israel, will be rebuilt. Again you will take up your *timbrels* and go out to *dance* with the joyful.” (emphasis mine; Jer. 31:3-5)

People play musical instruments:

Also at your times of rejoicing—your appointed festivals and New Moon feasts—you are to *sound the trumpets* over your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, and they will be a memorial for you before your God. I am the LORD your God. (emphasis mine; Num. 10:10-11)

Fragrant incense burned on the altar to honor God:

Aaron must burn *fragrant incense* on the altar every morning when he tends the lamps. He must burn incense again when he lights the lamps at twilight so incense will burn regularly before the LORD for the generations to come. (emphasis mine; Exod. 30:7-8)

Singing, dancing, playing musical instruments, and burning incense contributed to worship.

Various postures of prayer demonstrate kinesthetic, or bodily, options. One prayer posture is to pray prostrate:

Then the fire of the LORD fell and burned up the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and the soil, and also licked up the water in the trench. When all the people saw this, *they fell prostrate* and cried, “The LORD—he is God! The LORD—he is God!” (emphasis mine; 1 Kings 18:38-39)

Another prayer posture is kneeling with hands outstretched: “When Solomon had finished all these prayers and supplications to the LORD, he rose from before the altar of

the LORD, where he had been *kneeling with his hands spread out toward heaven,*” (emphasis mine; 1 Kings 8:54). Physical gestures and movement accompany praise and worship before the Lord.

Impact on practice of ministry. Spiritual formation occurs in a context; multisensory content improves the influence of the context. The options in small groups, classrooms, hallways, vestibules, and sanctuaries are numerous as shaping influences on persons of all ages. Opportunities exist to impact worship and small group gatherings. Churches could offer workshops on multisensory teaching methods and encourage intentional spiritual design in the decorative choices for walls, hallways, and table space throughout the church campus.

Participants gave feedback in journals, table discussions, and on posttests that illustrated how they benefited from this experience. One applied her learning to worship and remarked, “I pay more attention to details of worship now.” Another applied her experience to her personal relationship and remarked, “I have a better understanding of some of the tools I can use to draw closer to him.” Parallel with these two remarks were two others, where one individual stated she had made a new commitment to “learn more about ways of worship” and the other “to make home rituals a part of my life.” A cluster of responses talked about how “involving the senses makes worship participatory” and that “changing things up occasionally with variety” would be nice. One simply wrote, “I never thought of using *all* the senses in worship. I think it would be really neat” [original emphasis]. Involving all the senses enhances both relationship and worship.

On the posttest questionnaire, participants offered ways to incorporate multisensory elements in our church: manipulatives in classroom: visuals in hallway,

music videos for call to worship, summer video program, changeable altar designs. They recognized hand bells and banners as multisensory elements and suggested using the singing bowl to indicate beginning of worship or end of “greet your neighbor” time. During discussions, individuals suggested incorporating multisensory elements in special services. One suggestion was using incense to burn written personal sins, worries, or regrets on Ash Wednesday or Good Friday. Another individual suggested she would benefit from designing her own beads.

Worship Aids

Worship aids assist individuals in their worship and devotional life. This study introduced seven aids. Participants found the worship aids beneficial.

Evidence from this research study. As seen in Table 4.8 (p. 108), participants responded to the worship aids with varying degrees of impact. However, participants recorded overwhelmingly that they liked the aids, and at least one person recorded that she had “never felt this way before” to each of the aids. A particular journal entry gave details:

This class has given me new ways to praise God and to feel that God is near. It is not enough for me now just to say a prayer—I now think more of who God is and how I can spend each hour thinking of God and how to worship God. My relationship with God has deepened.

Another participant wrote, “I really appreciate the traditional worship aides. They are useful to help you set yourself away from the world and go inside your soul.” A third simply wrote on the posttest that she loved them.

Personal observation. My interaction with each of the worship aids used in this study, at different times in my journey, added new experiences along my spiritual path, strengthening and encouraging my expressions of faith and worship. In a clergy

formation group, the leader introduced us to the singing bowl and incense as aids to focus and prayer. I found them soothing and helpful. A seminar on means of prayer exposed me to prayer beads, along with prayer rocks and other manipulatives. My intercessory prayers particularly took on new depth. Contemporary worship at First United Methodist Church of Clover gave me new appreciation for praise music, which boosted my enthusiasm and readiness for worship. Music videos and videos of inspirational content, such as the ones used concerning the Trappist monks and Gregorian chant, speak to me on many levels: visual, auditory, emotional, and imaginative. They draw me in and allow me to experience new perspectives.

I first encountered icons through a friend whose daughter was converting to the Greek Orthodox tradition. As the daughter explained different aspects of Orthodox practice to her mother, the mother relayed the information to our small group Bible study. It was fascinating to learn of these ancient spiritual practices. Later I attended a Russian Orthodox church in Pittsburgh for a Sunday morning service. After a week of very long and intensive classes, I knew I was on auditory overload. I sought a church where I could worship and be spiritually fed without saying or singing or understanding a word around me. I just wanted to be filled in silent adoration and connection with God. The sanctuary was beautiful, filled with ancient ornate visuals that created for me and within me an atmosphere of awe and reverence. It was the highlight of my two weeks in Pittsburgh.

Watching the participants as we investigated these worship aids, I saw facial expressions of appreciation and heard exclamations of pleasant discovery. Participants carefully appraised and considered each of the aids during the specific session when we discussed them. Table conversation and journal entries reflect the participants' varying

degrees of identification with the objects. On the posttest, one participant wrote, "I feel like I have a stronger devotional time with God," while another explained, "I really learned a lot during the past 6 weeks. I do feel a stronger connection to God and I acknowledge His presence more often." Yet a third added, "I truly enjoyed learning about and experiencing the different practices. Some I will continue to use in my personal life." The participants found the worship aids rewarding.

Literature support. Sevig observes that postmoderns prefer to experience God through all their senses, using worship aids such as incense and candles, making the sign of the cross, enjoying the taste and smell of the bread and wine, touching icons, and anointing with oil.

Visuals, such as candles and icons, unite ideas, words, and images to help express the mystery and sacredness of God (McCullough 16). Paul Bosch and Hoyt Hickman recognizes how candles *communicate* a sense of sacredness. Forest views icons as "theology expressed in images and color" that invite a sharing between the viewer and the one portrayed (14).

The body participates in spiritual reflection and learning (Trewartha). The physical act of journaling invites thought, prayer, and action (Canham). Physical gestures of genuflection and crossing oneself connect the motion of the body with the desire of the heart in honoring God (Turner). They assist individuals by reminding them they are in the presence of God (Forest). Body prayers such as raising one's arms or lying prostrate at the altar release feelings without the use of words (Shook 28).

Physical aids to prayer, whether ropes or beads, help one focus and center (*Still Stone*; Charpentier; Pearson). Pleasant-smelling incense becomes a reminder of the sweet

presence of God (Preston). The singing bowl, similar to a bell, calls the hearer to attention (Macalintal). At first exposure, people may first respond to the novelty of the physical aid but with time and intentionality, the response change from one of novelty to that of connection.

Poole suggests that the church should be communicating in a way that is inspiring, engaging the heart as well as the mind (23). He maintains, “Worship depends upon our ... sensing presence, of hearing, seeing, touching, moving, smelling and tasting” (30). Ho and Ho support this claim, stating that many elements of spiritual experience transmit better in the visual, kinesthetic, or musical, rather than the linguistic, modality (70).

Biblical/theological foundation. God equipped people with senses, giving them multiple ways to recognize, receive, and worship him. He programmed brains to recognize and perceive his presence with a sense of religious awe. He employed visuals in his revelations to his people (e.g., the pillar of fire in Exod. 13:21, the writing on the wall in Dan. 5:5, the dove at Jesus’ baptism in Mark 1:10). He linked the sense of smell to worship through incense (e.g., the Lord instructed Moses to build a golden altar for the burning of incense in Exod. 30:1-10).

In the Bible, music was often an element of significant events. Moses and the Israelites sang praises to God after the victorious passage across the Red Sea (Exod. 15:1). The Levites sang joyful songs as the Ark of the Covenant was transported to the tent that David had prepared (1 Chron. 15:1-16). The people sang when God delivered them from captivity (Ps. 126:1-3). When the foundation of the temple was laid, the priests sang (Ezra 3:1-3). Angels sang at the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:13-14). Saul

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experienced spiritual relief when David played his harp (1 Sam. 16:23). The apostle Paul encouraged the believers to sing hymns and spiritual music before God (Eph. 5:19).

Impact on practice of ministry. Incorporating worship aids into the spiritual formation offerings of the church has many applications. One might introduce worship aids in a contemporary worship service. One can build Sunday school lessons, group programs, workshops, and retreats around one or more worship aids. Churches might add resources to their libraries. Continuing education events for pastors and Christian counselors can introduce worship aids and their benefits. Worship aids can be beneficial in one-on-one spiritual direction. Clergy might find them useful in maintaining their own spiritual relationship with God.

Spiritual Narratives

Faith stories inspire confidence in God's presence and power. Stories of personal experience with God bring comfort and hope to believers. Christian spiritual narratives contribute to spiritual formation.

Evidence from this research study. One-third of the participants reported that the narratives drew them closer to God and one-third reported feeling *changed* in a positive way by the reading of and reflecting on the Christian spiritual narratives (see Table 4.10, .p 109). The remaining third found them interesting. Not a single participant reported that they could not relate to the readings. When asked what new commitment they had made, one participant wrote that she had made a commitment to "listen and learn from what people write about their experience with God." Six participants (30 percent) found themselves profoundly touched by them; one even reported that the narratives were her favorite part of the study.

Personal observation. In secular education, beginning in elementary school, at least once each year students read and report on the biography of some famous person who contributed significantly to the subject at hand. I believe the goal is to provide exemplary models, highlight possibilities for moral and productive lives, and inspire individuals to reach their potential. I found the biographies immensely interesting and read many beyond the assigned number. The stories helped history, science, and the arts come alive in my imagination. In the “Readings in Western Spirituality” course at Asbury Seminary, Collins rekindled this connection for me. Reading excerpts from significant Christian masters fueled a desire to know these persons better, to share their experiences, and to emulate their deep intimacy with God. The historical *cloud of witnesses* is more real to me now than before and my spiritual journey has been blessed by their presence.

Literature support. Christian educators Schultz and Schultz observe, “Puzzles, scrambles, fill-in-the-blanks, and encoded messages do not promote thinking” (109), and lecture-oriented teaching alone is rarely effective (265). The Christian community would do well to learn from the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Christian traditions, which strongly emphasize personal connection with the Holy Trinity and the examples of the saints to nourish Christian spiritual formation and living (Vrame 9). Trewartha expands this idea that people are tired of receiving only linear information and encouragement through rational thought. They really want to see firsthand that faith can be lived. They are looking for someone who has actually had an experience of God to teach them how they can have the same (43).

Reading the narratives of Christian spiritual masters opens individuals to be led to God by an experienced guide with the ability to communicate the faith by which they

lived (Casey 15). By engaging both Scriptures and Christian spiritual narratives, “the church can reclaim a deep understanding of how God in fact, in real space and time, transforms the person, what gets in the way of this and how better to cooperate with His work” (Coe 32). Fellow researcher Whiteford used narratives in his doctoral project. C. Wesley solicited spiritual narratives from fellow Christians. He believed that the life of faith is by its very nature autobiographical, and one can learn how God might work in one’s life through the ways God has worked in the lives of others (Chilcote 7).

Biblical/theological foundation. A recurring theme in the Bible is for believers to remember the mighty acts of God and describe them to others. Psalm 145:4 agrees, saying, “Generation after generation stands in awe of your work; each one tells stories of your mighty acts.” Psalm 78: 1-7 underscores the theme:

Listen, dear friends, to God’s truth, bend your ears to what I tell you. I’m chewing on the morsel of a proverb; I’ll let you in on the sweet old truths, Stories we heard from our fathers, counsel we learned at our mother’s knee. We’re not keeping this to ourselves, *we’re passing it along to the next generation—God’s fame and fortune, the marvelous things he has done.* He planted a witness in Jacob, set his Word firmly in Israel, then commanded our parents to teach it to their children so the next generation would know, and all the generations to come—*Know the truth and tell the stories so their children can trust in God.* (emphasis mine, MSG)

This theme occurs also in Deuteronomy 4:9: “Don’t forget anything of what you’ve seen. Don’t let your heart wander off. Stay vigilant as long as you live. *Teach what you’ve seen and heard* to your children and grandchildren” (emphasis mine). Passing down the stories is fundamental in cultivating faith for the present day and the future.

God knows that stories communicate, inspire, and help individuals find themselves. Stephanie Ford recalls that the biblical stories strengthen individuals for their

race of faith (*Kindred Souls* 47). Jesus was a master storyteller, as seen in Matthew

13:10-13:

The disciples came up and asked, “Why do you tell stories?” He replied, “You’ve been given insight into God’s kingdom. You know how it works. Not everybody has this gift, this insight; it hasn’t been given to them. Whenever someone has a ready heart for this, the insights and understandings flow freely. But if there is no readiness, any trace of receptivity soon disappears. *That’s why I tell stories: to create readiness, to nudge the people toward receptive insight.* (emphasis mine)

God uses stories from every time and place, from the dawn of creation to the very hours of today, to show people he is real, present, and powerful. The stories provide indirect access to moments in the lives of others that led them to reach for God—experiences that can inspire others to follow their leadings, imitate their practices, and seek their own deeper relationship with God (McGee 12).

Impact on practice of ministry. Helping people hear and connect to Christian narratives is significant for ministry. Newsletters could include brief articles or readings from the saints. The month of November could have an All Saints emphasis with different bulletin inserts or readings each week. Quotes from the saints lend themselves as sermon illustrations. The United Methodist Women’s program has an ongoing reading program, which could include fictionalized biblical narratives, biographies of the church saints, and selections from their historic writings.

Lectio Divina

Biblical truths are sometimes difficult to discern. Individuals need help hearing the message in a reading or passage. *Lectio divina* provides a structure to help individuals hear and discern what is personal and particular to them. Participants benefited from the *lectio divina* method.

Evidence from this research study. Several recorded in their journals how they benefited from the quiet time in the sanctuary to meditate and pray. Some found it easier than others to write about their feelings, but overall the journal entries reflected engagement and thoughtfulness. One participant wrote, “This class has changed my view of certain things, like writing down feelings and just listening [for God to speak].” When asked what new commitments they had made, one reported, “[T]hru this class I now look deeper into what I read.” On the posttest, three individuals reported that they spend more time thinking and reflecting than before.

Personal observation. For several years, Socastee United Methodist Church, located in Socastee, South Carolina, hosted a Saturday event for women titled, “Rejoice!” On one of these Saturdays, I attended a workshop on prayer. The presenter led us through *lectio divina* with several passages of Scripture, teaching us to listen for and meditate on the message from God in the passage for us. It was a wonderful experience for me, and I was quite excited about this very personal devotional approach.

Literature support. *Lectio divina* is a type of interactive reading to help a person have an encounter with God. Cynthia I. Zirlott states that *lectio divina* helps persons cultivate the ability to listen deeply to the voice of God in the Word and then respond with appropriate thought, prayer, and conduct (167). It comes from St. Jerome and other church fathers who adapted the rabbinic practice of meditating on Scripture. Guigo de Castro, a monk, created the outline of *lectio* (reading), *meditatio* (meditation), *oratio* (prayer), and *contemplatio* (contemplation) still used today for this prayer practice (Manney 7). St. John of the Cross paraphrased the four steps using Luke 11:9: “By

seeking in READING, you will find in MEDITATION, by knocking in PRAYER, it will be opened in CONTEMPLATION” (Hall 28).

Lectio divina moves individuals from informational “head-reading” to a place of formational interaction (Broyles 37), using the spiritual senses of sight, sound, taste, touch, and smell to encounter God’s transcendence and God’s immanence (Funk 9).

Lectio divina involves the person in a conversation with the Holy Spirit, speaking through the words and meaning of the text to address one’s present needs and circumstance (Klassen 28). It is a meditative practice of reading, reflection, and prayer (Dawson 86). Several small group resources incorporate *lectio divina* as a basic practice for meditation, a way to interact with Scripture and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to individuals in an intimate, personal, and practical way (Ortberg and Barton; Dawson; Pippin).

Biblical/theological foundation. The church fathers adopted the practice of *lectio divina*. St. Jerome, who translated the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, participated in “sacred reading,” as did Sts. Augustine, Basil, and Benedict. In early Church history, the *lectio* readings also included writings by the Church fathers or commentaries on Scripture (Hall 55). Eventually the communities also read the writings of the desert mothers and fathers, as well as manuscripts of saints, mystics, and founders and foundresses of religious congregations (Gavin 43).

When one encounters God, God’s power and presence demand that the individual stop and consider who God is. Scripture calls persons to meditate on God’s revelations that they may understand not only who he is but also what he desires of us. God instructs Joshua to reflect and meditate as Joshua assumes leadership of the Israelites:

Make sure you carry out The Revelation that Moses commanded you, every bit of it. Don’t get off track, either left or right, so as to make sure

you get to where you're going. And don't for a minute let this Book of The Revelation be out of mind. *Ponder and meditate* on it day and night, making sure you practice everything written in it. Then you'll get where you're going; then you'll succeed. Haven't I commanded you? Strength! Courage! Don't be timid; don't get discouraged. God, your God, is with you every step you take.... This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall *meditate on it day and night*, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success." (emphasis mine; Josh. 1:1-3, 8, NASB)

In 1 Chronicles 16:9-11 appears similar advice: "Sing unto him, sing psalms unto him, talk ye of all his wondrous works. Glory ye in his holy name: let the heart of them rejoice that seek the LORD. *Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually*" (emphasis mine; KJV). God decrees that believers should constantly reflect on who he is and seek his direction in their lives.

God promises to reward the search, to meet people at the point of their understanding, as seen in Psalm 119:26-28: "I have told of my ways, and *You have answered me*; Teach me Your statutes. *Make me understand the way of Your precepts*, so I will meditate on Your wonders. My soul weeps because of grief; strengthen me according to Your word" (emphasis mine; NASB). God answers people when they call out to him.

Each step taken informs the next, as the Psalmist confirms in 119: 98-100: "Your commands are always with me and *make me wiser* than my enemies. *I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes*. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts" (emphasis mine; NIV). Meditation provides the building blocks to make God's people wiser and more faithful.

Impact on practice of ministry. *Lectio divina* is useful in private devotions, sermon preparation, spiritual direction, and small groups. One could preach using *lectio*

style, inviting and teaching the congregation as the Spirit delivers its personal message to each listener.

Small Group Study

Group study allows for discussion of differing insights and perspectives in a context of intimacy. Small groups build trust as participants share reflections on common experiences. Participants benefited from small group study.

Evidence from this research study. One participant wrote on the posttest, “Small groups are a great way to study/worship.” One elaborated on the posttest, “I learned a lot and I was intrigued by the history. I really don’t know as much as I thought and I am eager to learn more. I really enjoy small groups.” A second wrote, “I appreciate the support in developing intentionality and I enjoy the group interaction,” and another wrote, “I stay in touch with scripture more when I’m in a group study.” Two participants cited small group involvement and fellowship as their favorite part of the study.

During the focus group discussions, two individuals said the study had made them more aware of the ways they interact with God, while two others said it renewed their commitment to spend time with God. One said it had increased her desire to deepen her relationship with God, and another that it made her more intentional. One participant said she felt “a progression of closeness” over the course of the study.

Personal observation. For delivery of information, a large group suffices, but for spiritual formation and emotional connection, the small group is essential. People connect on a deeper level as they get to know one another and share their stories, their questions, their searchings, and their desires. The religious community makes use of small groups now: youth groups, men’s and women’s fellowship and mission groups, classes, and

workshops. The Walk to Emmaus format includes grouping participants in table groups of eight to ten persons and advocates ongoing spiritual support groups of no more than twelve persons. The South Carolina Conference of the United Methodist Church encourages clergy formation groups of no more than twelve participants for mutual spiritual growth and encouragement. I have found small groups to be personable and of positive value in my faith journey.

Literature support. Willis and Long, Beyerlein, Kepier, Pell, Thiel and Whallon; and Galloway and Mills recommend small group gatherings as the most desirable avenue for spiritual growth and formation. Galloway and Mills found that people who attend small groups, along with regular worship, grow eight times faster than those who attend worship alone (10).

Biblical/theological foundation. Since biblical days, believers have gathered to study and discuss, question and debate, explore and explain. Small group interaction is one way people learn. Rabbis gathered to study in Jesus' day. Disciples studied under their teachers. Jesus met with a group of learned men at the Temple when he was twelve; as an adult he traveled with an inner circle of twelve.

Foundational to the structure of Methodism was the small group system, shown in Wesley's class meetings. Christian conferencing greatly affected the spiritual growth and commitment to holy living of its participants. Groups shared scriptural instruction and discussed how to apply what they learned (Willis 40). People in the class meetings explored Christian beliefs and held one another accountable to faithful discipleship. The relationships established in small groups engage, encourage, and support individuals on their Christian spiritual walk.

Impact on practice of ministry. Small group fellowship and learning benefits ministry settings. Prayer groups, study groups, service groups, and covenant support groups each have their place. Diversity in focus, format, and membership welcome and include all ability levels and learning styles.

Implications of the Findings

Christian spiritual formation is of interest to the entire adult age range, eighteen and older. Opportunities for learning and sharing should be available on a regular basis in the church ministry. One-time events as well as ongoing classes or groups are fitting.

The age range of participants, from 19 to 89, indicates a broad interest in this field of study, and the lack of exposure to ancient Christian spiritual tools underscores a need for specifically Christian guidance and information in this area. Thus, the insights gleaned from the intervention study will be beneficial to the development of future spiritual formative classes and events for this population, as well as the greater religious community and those who write and select curriculum.

Small group studies are valuable in Christian spiritual formation. Groups may include one-day events, short-term groups, and long-term groups on a variety of subjects. One could present this study in a single-day or three-day format as well; Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, offers such retreats, as do other retreat centers (e.g., Epworth by the Sea, GA [United Methodist]; Bon Clarcken, NC [Baptist]; Lutheridge, NC [Lutheran]).

Multisensory components influence spiritual formation positively and are appropriate for individual use, classroom use, worship, and as adornment in church vestibules, hallways, classrooms, and meeting rooms. Worship aids impact spiritual

formation. Introducing them can occur in worship settings, small groups, one-on-one spiritual counseling or direction sessions, newsletter articles, and a variety of other ways.

Church libraries should include resources on historical Christian saints and their writings. *Lectio divina* is a powerful tool for meditation and application of Scripture and Christian narratives. Laity and clergy benefit from learning this approach. Future research possibilities exist on the impact of multisensory worship aids and Christian narratives on youth, new believers, and nonbelievers. Opportunities are open for publications regarding the Christian saints for Protestants, new Christians, children, youth, devotional materials, specific areas of interest such as saints addressing comfort, encouragement, and prayer.

Limitations of the Study

The study group did not include any new or non-Christians. New Christians, in their high enthusiasm, may record higher PII scores initially. Assessing the effect of the study on non-Christians would be most interesting. Holding a Protestant class in an Orthodox sanctuary might deepen the impact of the worship aids and spiritual narratives.

An option that might have strengthened the impact of the study would have been to meet in a home setting so participants could relate what they were learning with a more personal environment. However, home sessions would have rendered the study atypical for these particular churches. Setting up intentional worship space in private homes may have increased the effect of the worship aids.

Unfortunately, dropouts did occur. Of the thirty-three original participants, five dropped out by session three, and one attended only sessions four and six. I did not record or submit the pretest scores of the five who dropped out before the fourth session, and

they took no posttest. The individual who attended only sessions four and six did not take a pretest or posttest.

Individual attitudes and perceptions about the content, experience, and expectations affected receptivity. One participant stated in his journal each of the first two sessions that he preferred the older hymns to “this modern music [contemporary praise and worship DVDs].” However, by the sixth session this same participant wrote how much he was enjoying the praise music videos. A different participant indicated he does not care for history and found the biographies dull. Several indicated they did not feel able to express themselves well in discussion or journal writings. One of the dropouts left because she did not feel able to participate fully.

One participant felt the devotional scriptures did not tie well to the other components of the class. She felt a disconnect between the devotional focus at the beginning and the worship aid introduction that followed. Upon reflection, I did feel this was a weakness in my study design.

Recommendations

Further research may have been useful in several areas. A class might explore the scriptural foundation and church history of anointing oil, used in healing services. Spiritual narratives by younger individuals might relate better to younger adults. A complete study could center on various prayer postures and prayer aids.

Postscript

This project began with the hypothesis that a multisensory study series including *lectio divina* of Christian narratives would increase the level of awe in participants’ relationship with God. When I started this research and project planning, I was

encouraged by my own personal experience in this area and excited to explore the possibilities with others. Through the process, I found many valuable resources that supported the significance of this study, and the small group study confirmed my expectation of positive reception and renewed sense of awe as we journeyed into new territory with God. The qualitative and quantitative results of the project confirmed the hypothesis. From this time forward, I will continue to look for multisensory resources to help me in my own spiritual formation and to offer to others in my ministry settings.

APPENDIX A

PILOT TESTS

Individuals in a neighboring United Methodist church participated in a pilot of the Personal Involvement Inventory designed to measure awe. The group consisted of six adults, three male and three female, ranging in age from fifty-six to sixty-nine. It took less than twenty minutes to complete the PII. They thought the directions were clear and the survey was not difficult to complete, although one individual did not like the particular words used in the pairings. Upon reflection, I did make changes in several of the word pairs, using words more commonly understood.

The Research Design Team participated in a pilot test that included both a classroom and sanctuary session with didactic and experiential content. The group members responded to a worship aid in the classroom and a spiritual narrative in the sanctuary. The pilot session included all the elements designed into the sessions for the research small group.

The Research Team members then gave input into the format, content, and experience of the session. Their comments included appreciation for the didactic session, positive feedback for the sanctuary experience, positive identification with the reading, and a suggestion that the ringing bowl should ring longer for maximum effect. When questioned regarding the length of the reading, participants thought the length of the reading was appropriate and, therefore, not an issue.

APPENDIX B**NEWSLETTER ARTICLE AND BULLETIN INSERT****An Invitation**

John Wesley's Three Rules provide guidelines for holiness of heart and life: (1) by doing no harm and avoiding evil of every kind, (2) by doing good of every possible sort, and, as far as possible, to all, and (3) by attending upon all the ordinances of God. A modern statement of the third rule caught my attention: "Stay in love with God." This is the essence and aim of Christian spiritual formation in simple and straightforward language. Staying in love with God is what we as Christians want to do.

Simply put, my Doctor of Ministry research addresses how we fall in love with God and what might help us stay in love with God. My project, a small group study, will meet for 7 classes and an informal session (#8) one month following the 7th class. We will look at Scripture, music, worship practices, and the spiritual masters to see how they may or may not affect our relationship with God.

I am asking you each to consider being part of the study. I do need a minimum of 36 participants to validate my results. You may also invite friends who might be interested. Classes will meet Sunday afternoons 3:00–5:00 p.m. (GUMC), Tuesday mornings 10 a.m.–11:30 a.m. (GUMC), Thursday mornings 10 a.m.–11:30 a.m. (GUMC) and Saturday evenings 5–6:30 p.m. (RUMC). Babysitting will be provided.

Please contact me to register for the study or with any questions. My number is 803-687-7096 and my e-mail address is ldunn58@live.com.

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

March 21, 2010

Dear Friend,

I am a Doctor of Ministry participant at Asbury Theological Seminary conducting research on the impact of Christian spiritual narratives studied in a multisensory environment on an individual's relationship with God. I invite you to participate in an eight-session small group study that is my research project.

The project involves a pretest, a posttest, journaling, and a group discussion. The sessions will introduce narratives from Christian masters and worship aides, which include incense. Incense will be used only briefly and in only one session, in case of allergies.

I assure you that your survey responses and journal entries will be kept confidential. The surveys will be identified by a code. The class roster with code will be kept in my private file. All surveys will be collated to give a blended view rather than identify any one person. I will ask your permission for anything I wish to use in the final paper.

With so many people seeking a deeper and more personal relationship with God, I believe the findings from this project will help me design beneficial small group studies for churches I serve and others who are interested. Once the research is completed in approximately four months, I will destroy the individual surveys and keep the anonymous data electronically for an indefinite period of time, at least until my dissertation is written and approved.

Please know that you can refuse to respond to any or all the questions on the survey. I realize that your participation is voluntary and I appreciate your willingness to consider being part of the study. Feel free to call or write me at any time if you need more information. My number is 803-687-7096 and my e-mail is ldunn58@live.com.

If you are willing to assist me in this study, please sign and date the letter below to indicate your voluntary participation. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Linda B. Dunn

I volunteer to participate in the study as described and so indicate by my signature below.

Your signature: _____ Date: _____

Please print your name: _____

APPENDIX D

GROUP COVENANT AGREEMENT

Small Group Covenant (Ground Rules)

1. Attendance: I agree to be at each session unless a genuine emergency arises.
2. Participation: I will enter enthusiastically into group discussion and sharing.
3. Confidence: I will not share with anyone outside the group the stories of those in the group.
4. Honesty: I will be forthright and truthful in what is said. If I do not feel I can share something, I will say, "I pass," for that question.
5. Openness: I will be appropriately candid with others.
6. Respect: I will not judge others, give advice, or criticize.
7. Care: I will be appropriately open to the needs of others.

Signed: _____

Date: _____ **Group:** _____

Source: Peace

APPENDIX E

SMALL GROUP PRETEST SURVEY

Please give the last four digits of your telephone number: _____

Please answer by circling the appropriate number or word in each group.

Age: 18-29 30-39 40-49 50-59 60-69 70-79 80-89 90+

Race: White Black Native American Hispanic Other

Gender: Male Female

Level of education

some high school high school graduate some college classes

college graduate graduate degree postgraduate degree

How long you have been a Christian:

Less than a year 1-5 years 6-10 yrs 11-20 yrs 20+ yrs

Church denominational background (circle all that apply)

Methodist Catholic Orthodox Other None

Length of time attending (any) church:

Less than one year 1-5 years 6-9 yrs 11-20 yrs 20+ yrs

Length of time attending this specific church

Less than one year 1-5 years 6-9 yrs 11-20 yrs 20+ yrs

Frequency of worship service attendance:

Weekly twice monthly monthly occasionally holidays

Attend Sunday school:

Weekly monthly occasionally do not attend

Other small group study participation:

Yes No

(not Sunday school, UMW, UMM, or UMYF but intentional study groups)

Small Group Pretest Survey, cont.

1. How familiar are you with the following practices?

- a. never heard of it
- b. heard of it, but never tried it
- c. tried it once or twice
- d. have done in the past
- e. use it regularly

Focused meditation	a	b	c	d	e
Journaling	a	b	c	d	e
Icons	a	b	c	d	e
Incense	a	b	c	d	e
<i>Lectio Divina</i>	a	b	c	d	e
Praise music	a	b	c	d	e
Music Videos	a	b	c	d	e

2. How would you describe your relationship with God: (circle one)

Distant and disconnected; we don't know each other very well.

Casual Acquaintances; we meet occasionally.

Good Friends; we talk together fairly often.

Intimate Partnership; we are deeply committed to each other.

3. Describe "awe"?

Small Group Pretest Survey, cont.

Personal Involvement Inventory

Directions: Circle the point on the scale that best completes this sentence:

In my personal relationship with God, I generally feel:

(Strongly - mildly - weakly – weakly – mildly - strongly)

+3 +2 +1 -1 -2 -3

Surprise	=		=		=		=		=	Boredom
Submission	=		=		=		=		=	Resistance
Apathy	=		=		=		=		=	Exaltation
Fascination	=		=		=		=		=	Disinterest
Transformation	=		=		=		=		=	Disharmony
Dullness	=		=		=		=		=	Astonishment
Intimacy	=		=		=		=		=	Isolation
Reverence	=		=		=		=		=	Disrespect
Repulsion	=		=		=		=		=	Attraction
Contemplation	=		=		=		=		=	Emptiness
Curiosity	=		=		=		=		=	Indifference
Contempt	=		=		=		=		=	Admiration
Wonder	=		=		=		=		=	Anxiety
Uncertainty	=		=		=		=		=	Appreciation
Adoration	=		=		=		=		=	Fear

What additional words would you use to describe how you feel when you think of your relationship with God:

APPENDIX F

SMALL GROUP POSTTEST SURVEY

1. How has your experience of God changed as a result of this class? (circle one)

- a. Nothing changed for me.
- b. I feel a little more connected to God.
- c. I feel a stronger connection
- d. I never felt this way before.

Additional Comments (optional):

2. Describe awe:**3. How were you affected by the following practices? (circle one in each row)**

Neutral: okay but nothing really spoke to me

Negative: they weren't for me

Positive: helped me feel more connected with God

Changed: never felt this way before

Focused meditation:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
Journaling:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
Icons:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
Incense:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
<i>Lectio Divina</i> :	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
Praise music:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed
Music videos:	Neutral	Negative	Positive	Changed

Additional Comments (optional):

Small Group Posttest Survey, cont.

3. How did you relate to the Christian narratives? (circle one)

- a. They didn't relate to me or my life.
- b. I found them a little interesting.
- c. They drew me somewhat closer to God.
- d. I was profoundly touched by them.

Additional Comments (optional):

- 4. Did you make any new commitments as a result of being part of a small group? If yes, what new commitment(s)?**
- 5. What was your favorite part of the experience?**
- 6. What was your least favorite?**
- 7. Would you enroll in a second series of this class? Why or why not?**
- 8. Would you recommend the class to someone else? Why or why not?**

Small Group Posttest Survey, cont.**Personal Involvement Inventory**

Directions: Circle the point on the scale that best completes this sentence:

In my personal relationship with God, I generally feel:

(Strongly - mildly - weakly – weakly – mildly - strongly)
 +3 +2 +1 -1 -2 -3

Surprise	=	=	=	=	=	=	Boredom
Submission	=	=	=	=	=	=	Resistance
Apathy	=	=	=	=	=	=	Exaltation
Fascination	=	=	=	=	=	=	Disinterest
Transformation	=	=	=	=	=	=	Disharmony
Dullness	=	=	=	=	=	=	Astonishment
Intimacy	=	=	=	=	=	=	Isolation
Reverence	=	=	=	=	=	=	Disrespect
Repulsion	=	=	=	=	=	=	Attraction
Contemplation	=	=	=	=	=	=	Emptiness
Curiosity	=	=	=	=	=	=	Indifference
Contempt	=	=	=	=	=	=	Admiration
Wonder	=	=	=	=	=	=	Anxiety
Uncertainty	=	=	=	=	=	=	Appreciation
Adoration	=	=	=	=	=	=	Fear

What additional words would you use to describe how you feel when you think of your relationship with God:

APPENDIX G

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Discuss the following questions:

1. What stands out strongest in your memory of this experience?
 - a. What did you most enjoy?
 - b. What did you least enjoy?
2. How has your personal relationship with God changed?
 - a. Can you give examples?
3. How has your devotional practice changed?
 - a. Examples?
4. Can you give an example of an experience with awe?
5. How has the experience of worship changed as a result?
6. How might these practices be applied in our worship life?
 - a. In our Christian education?
7. Did you feelings toward one or more of the worship aides change over subsequent sessions? If so, how?
8. Have you done further reading of Christian narratives?
9. How is it with your soul?

APPENDIX H

PERMISSION SLIP FOR JOURNAL ENTRY USE

I hereby give permission to Linda B. Dunn to use the attached journal entry in her dissertation research paper.

Journal number: _____ Date of entry: _____

Signed: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX I
SESSION OUTLINES

- I. Introductory Session
 - A. Greeting
 - B. Introductions
 - 1. Presenter
 - 2. Doctor of Ministry degree
 - a. Focus on informing practical ministry issues
 - b. Courses in theology, spiritual formation, research
 - C. Overview of Course
 - 1. Wesleyan design—Scripture, tradition, reason, experience
 - 2. Format— classroom didactic, sanctuary experiential
 - D. Question and answer period
 - E. Paperwork completion:
 - 1. Informed consent
 - 2. Group covenant form
 - 3. Pretest
 - F. Devotions—*Yahweh*
 - 1. Discussion
 - 2. Prayer—*Father, Source of Our Awakening* (Boldoni 65-66)
 - G. Dismissal

II. Session 1

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Centering—*Trappist* DVD: Ch. 1 (0-2:37), Ch 7.
4. Devotions—*Elohim* (Spangler 15-18)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*Thank You, Lord* (Baldoni 76)
5. Song: Indescribable, Chris Tomlin
6. Worship aid—Candles (Slate; Bosch; Dendy 78; Hickman 8)
7. Worship aid—Lectio divina (Paintner 1, 3; Manney 7; Hall 28; Klassen 28)
8. Journal Response

Break

B. Sanctuary session:

1. Centering—Candle lighting
2. Biography—Brother Lawrence (Elmer 49-50)
3. Instructions for lectio divina
4. Lectio divina— Brother Lawrence: Fourth Letter (Lawrence 71-72)
5. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
6. Dismissal

III. Session 2

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Discussion of previous session
4. Centering—*Now is the Time to Worship* (iWorship Vol.1)
5. Devotions—*El Olam* (Spangler 51-53)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*You Made Us For Yourself* (Baldoni 40)
6. Song—Cannot Say Enough (MercyMe)
7. Worship Aid—Singing Bowl (Macalintal)
8. Journal Response

Break

B. Sanctuary session

1. Centering—candle lighting
2. Biography—Thérèse of Lisieux (Beevers; Ford, Thérèse)
3. Lectio Divina— “No Greater Love.” (Beevers 147)
4. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
5. Dismissal

IV. Session 3

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Discussion of previous session
4. Centering—*Open the Eyes of My Heart (iWorship Calls to Worship)*
5. Devotions—*El Chay* (Spangler 228-231)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*Enter My Soul* (Baldoni 56-57)
6. Song—I Am (Mark Schultz)
7. Worship aid—Icons (Vrame 13, 159; Forest 13,14; Paik 28)
8. Journal response

Break

B. Sanctuary session

1. Centering—candle lighting
2. Biography—Walter Cizek (Rutler)
3. *Lectio Divina*—“Thy Will Be Done” (Cizek 56-57)
4. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
5. Dismissal

V. Session 4

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Discussion of previous session
4. Centering—*God of Wonders*. (iWorship Vol. 1)
5. Devotions—*El Shadday* (Spangler 40-42)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*Give Me Strength to Seek You* (Boldoni 15)
6. Song—El Shaddai (Grant)
7. Worship aid—Genuflection (Turner)
8. Worship aid—Making the sign of the cross (Lang)
9. Journal response

Break

B. Sanctuary session

1. Centering—candle lighting
2. Biography—Teresa of Avila (Broughton 13-30)
3. *Lectio Divina*—"I Am Yours." (Broughton 64)
4. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
5. Dismissal

VI. Session 5

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Discussion of previous session
4. Centering—*Gregorian Chant* (DVD clip)
5. Devotions—*Adonay* (Spangler 88-90)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*Give Me Light* (Baldoni 10-11)
6. Song—Give You Glory (Camp)
7. Worship aid—Prayer ropes & beads (Still Stone; Charpentier; Pearson)
8. Journal response

Break

B. Sanctuary session

1. Centering—candle lighting
2. Biography—Mother Teresa (“Mother Teresa”)
3. *Lectio Divina*— “Speak to us, O Lord” (Vardey 36)
4. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
5. Dismissal

VII. Session 6

A. Classroom session

1. Greeting & prayer
2. Passing the peace
3. Discussion of previous session
4. Centering—*You are God Alone* (Caedmon's Call)
5. Devotions—*Qedosh Yisrael* (Spangler 133-136)
 - a. Discussion
 - b. Prayer—*Give Me Life* (Baldoni 32)
6. Song—*You Alone are Holy* (Kenoly)
7. Worship Aid—Incense ("Incense"; Preston)
8. Journal response

Break

B. Sanctuary session

1. Centering—candle lighting
2. Biography—Francis of Assisi (Sivananda)
3. *Lectio divina*— "The Canticle of the Sun." (Talbot and Rabey 74)
4. Journaling
 - a. using singing bowl to signal attention to index card
 - b. using singing bowl to return to group seats
5. Dismissal

APPENDIX J

PERMISSIONS GRANTED

I

Linda Dunn <ldunn58@live.com> 12/4/2009 10:55:16 AM

Hello,

I am seeking permission to show portions of the DVD iWorship@home #1 (UPC 0 00768 27391 7) in a small group setting. I am leading a small group study for my Doctor of Ministry project and wish to use selections from the DVD as Centering Time for the group.

Please advise. Thank you,

Rev. Linda Dunn
120 Beulah Church Road
Gilbert SC 29054

From: copyright2@IntegInc.com
Sent: Mon. 12/07/09 5:48 PM
To: ldunn58@live.com
Hi Rev. Linda,

This is ok to do without receiving a license agreement from us, provided that no recorded copies are made of this product. Let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you,

Music Administration
Integrity Music
1000 Cody Road
Mobile, AL 36695
Website: www.integritymusic.com

II

Linda Dunn <ldunn58@live.com> 12/4/2009 10:55:16 AM

Hello,

I am seeking permission to show portions of the DVD Trappist (UPC 7 27985 01285 8) in a small group setting. I am leading a small group study for my Doctor of Ministry project and wish to use selections from the DVD as Centering Time for the group.

Please advise. Thank you,

Rev. Linda Dunn
120 Beulah Church Road
Gilbert SC 29054

Trappist for small group setting

From: Karen Rutt (Karen@visionvideo.com)
Sent: Tue, 12/08/09 11:49 AM
To: ldunn58@live.com

Dear Rev. Dunn:

It is fine for you to show portions of Trappist in your small group setting. Thank you for your diligence in checking with us.

Have a blessed Christmas season.

Sincerely,
Karen Rutt
Executive Assistant
Vision Video

III

Windows Live Hotmail Print Message

<http://co101w.co101.mail.live.com/mail/PrintShell.aspx?type=messa..>

RE: permission

From: **Caroline Thomas** (caroline@rpinet.com)
 Sent: Wed 4/21/10 12:12 PM
 To: Linda Dunn (ldunn58@live.com)

Hi Linda.

You may use it. If you put it in a written form, please give full copyright credits to Resource Publications, including the year.

Regards

Caroline Thomas
 Ministry Consultant
 Resource Publications
 408-286-8505
 Caroline@rpinet.com

-----Original Message-----

From: Linda Dunn [mailto:ldunn58@live.com]
Sent: Tuesday, April 20, 2010 6:26 PM
To: info@rpinet.com
Subject: permission

To Whom It May Concern:

I am a Doctor of Ministry student at Asbury Theological Seminary in the area of Spiritual Formation. My project involves meditation in a multi-sensory setting. I would like permission to use this clip from your website <http://www.rpinet.com/ml/2506012.html> in a session explaining physical gestures of worship.

Thank you,
 Linda B. Dunn

Genuflection

by Paul Turner

A genuflection is the action begun from a standing position in which a worshiper moves his or her right foot back a step, drops the right knee briefly to the floor, and then stands upright again. Most people naturally bow their head while performing this action; some make the sign of the cross. Some hold onto a nearby pew for physical support. The purpose of genuflection is for the worshiper to honor Jesus Christ present in the Eucharist.

IV

SBMC, Inc.
d/b/a/ Silva Screen Music America
555 8th Avenue, Suite 2104, New York, NY 10018
T: 212 564 8855 F: 212 564 8865

January 5, 2010

Rev. Linda B. Dunn
120 Beulah Church Road
Gilbert, SC 29054

Dear Rev. Dunn:

Thank you for your interest in our recordings.

With reference to your letter dated January 1, 2010, we are pleased to grant you permission to use clips from *Hortus Musicus: Gregorian Chant* (DVD) on a gratis basis.

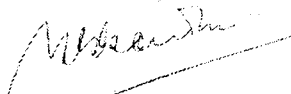
As per our requirements, the clips from the DVD are to be used only for educational purposes and not for commercial use. If there are any advertisements or announcements, please give a courtesy credit to Silva Screen Records.

The credit will be as follows:

Artist: **Hortus Musicus** from the DVD *Gregorian Chant* SIL-DV-7005
Courtesy Silva Screen Records www.silvascreenmusic.com

We hope you have a successful engagement.

Best wishes,



Yusuf Gandhi

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