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Lowering the Anxiety Level of the Participants of The First Baptist Church, Morganton, NC

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LOWERING THE ANXIETY LEVEL OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE FIRST
BAPTIST CHURCH, MORGANTON, NC BY PROVIDING A BASELINE
AWARENESS OF THEIR ANXIETY LEVEL AND INTRODUCING TOOLS TO
BRING THEIR BASELINE DOWN

A PROJECT

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

TYLER P. ROACH

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APPROVAL FORM

LOWERING THE ANXIETY LEVEL OF THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE FIRST
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To my parents, who taught me in word and deed to be my best: I never had to wonder if you loved me or supported me. I never had to wonder whether you were proud of me. You gave me the true gift of space to work out who God was and is creating me to be. Thank you for not giving me an option about education or an option to be lazy when there is so much to be done in our world. Thank you, Tiffany, for looking up to me. I appreciate the opportunity to be your big brother. Curtis, I’m glad you are part of our family and am thankful for you. Chloe, I pray that you will continue to share that smile of love and acceptance to a world that needs your happiness.

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ABSTRACT

This project was developed for the purpose of lowering the anxiety level of the participants of the First Baptist Church, Morganton, NC. It will be accomplished by providing a baseline awareness of their anxiety level and introducing tools to bring their baseline down.

The tools used were Bible stories, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Family Systems Theory, and centering prayer. The tools were presented in the form of a Friday night and Saturday morning retreat.

Data was collected in three different ways. The Beck Anxiety Inventory was used during the retreat to track baseline anxiety. An essay questionnaire was given a month after the retreat to gain progress and engagement. Finally, six months out from the retreat, a survey using a Likert scale of 1-10 was submitted by the participants.

The conclusion was favorable and with some adjustments could be used, at least in part, with other groups.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

My project is very personal. I was 25 years old before I realized my level of anxiety was higher than it should be. Through my own self-discovery, I have been able to find that my God was very small. The God I had learned about as a child was limiting my ability to “be still and know that God is God.” My journey “through the still waters” showed me a connection between anxiety and gaps in my Theological understanding. Also, it’s not so much about what God can and cannot do, but rather that God is with us, helping us do what needs to be done. By discovering my own anxiety, I have been able to see it in my family of origin, my church family, and my friends.

Part of my journey was attending Campbell University School of Divinity. There, I was able to take a class in Family Systems Theory. This class allowed me to start looking at my life differently. I was able to begin predicting how I would react to different situations, and I was then able to have more control of my thoughts and actions. Now, almost ten years later, I am better able to trust in God as my creator because I am better able to evaluate why certain things evoke certain emotions within me. The beginning of my emotional discovery process was quite a roller coaster of experiences. I am very grateful to have made many discoveries and now be on the maintenance side of proper emotional discovery. Having taken this cleansing journey helps me walk with others while they are on their journey. Family Systems helps us find where we are in the system God created. Some of us over-function, handicapping others in their self-discovery. Some of us under-function because we have severely under-valued our impact

in this world. Sadly, these two examples of unhealthy relationships are learned behaviors that were taught to us at some point in our lives.

Defining Anxiety

The conversation around anxiety is very broad and crosses over many professional disciplines; for clarity, therefore, in this section, I will define what anxiety means for this paper.

The world of psychology speaks of anxiety as a group of disorders that cause social interaction to be inhibited. A few examples include Panic Disorder, Phobias, Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and Post-traumatic Stress Disorder. All of these anxiety disorders have an official diagnostic code in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, also known as the *DSM-5*. The *DSM-5* is used by therapists and psychologists to produce diagnoses for patients. These diagnoses coincide with a code used for insurance coverage. I refer to this type of anxiety as clinical anxiety, that which has pushed someone's stress level to a state of being over-whelmed, thus requiring professional attention. Clinical anxiety is outside my scope, and I will not address treatment for it in this paper.

Our society uses the words "stressed" and "anxious" interchangeably, creating confusion between different professional fields. I define this type of stress or anxiousness as situational anxiety, that which comes and goes with the seasons of life. In this project I am testing the effects of my retreat on situational anxiety, also defined as stress.

My project is focused on helping people find and work through negative situational anxiety. The social sciences use the word "stress," but from this point in the

project, I will be using the word “anxiety.” The odd thing about anxiety is that it builds up. There is an understanding in our society that people have positive and negative anxiety. This is true to a certain extent; one needs to remember, however, that anxiety builds in one’s life whether it is positive or negative. ¹

Please see the chart below for an illustration of how stress or anxiety builds in one’s life. All situations add anxiety whether they are positive or negative events. Each event adds to one’s anxiety level, measured with a number that we learn to live with. This is referred to as our resting level of anxiety.

Event	Life Change Score
Married	500
Widowed	771
Divorced	593
Separated	516
Pregnancy	284
Birth of child	337
Illness or injury	416
Death of loved one	469
Started school or job	191
Graduated from school or training	191
Retired from work	361
Changed residence	140

¹ Ann M. Kring, *Abnormal Psychology*, 11th ed. (Hoboken, NJ: J. Wiley, 2010) 119-54.

Took a vacation	74
-----------------	----

Figure 1 Resting Level of Anxiety

2

People can experience anxiety, such as the nervousness felt before a presentation. This type of anxiety is positive in that it helps make us more productive people. This project is focused on the negative anxiety that debilitates people, such as a loss of a loved one. Positive anxiety could be defined as anxiety that enhances one's life and the lives of those around them. Negative anxiety is that which drains all parties involved. To be clear, this project is focused on lowering negative anxiety in the lives of the participants. The most important thing about anxiety, however, is to be aware of one's level. One's resting level of anxiety is the so-called positive and so-called negative anxiety added together, possibly causing an overload. This retreat was set up to help the participants become aware of their resting level of anxiety. Knowing their level helped them know whether they needed to add anxiety to push towards the finish of a project, or helped them to know whether they need to pull back a bit from life because they are becoming overwhelmed.

Ministry Setting

The First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC (FBCM) is over a century old. Although it is established, it is open to progressing and becoming what is needed for its community. Like most established churches, its population varies in age; however, most of its members are older. One would also find that most of the volunteer base is made up of retired or second-career people.

² Marshall Barron Clinard and Robert Frank Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behavior*, 11th ed. (Fort Worth: Harcourt College Publishing, 2001), 548.

The 2016 census states that Morganton has a population of 16,665. Morganton is in the middle of Burke County, which has a population of 89,293. The gender ratio is very close to 50/50 male and female. It is 74.89% Caucasian, 9.46% African American, 1.06% Asian, 0.24% American Native, and 12.44% other nationalities. The Hispanic population is wrapped up in the “other nationalities” category. They are unfortunately afraid to report their location so they avoid paperwork. One would find FBCM has a representation of all these people groups except the Hispanic population.

FBCM has an average worship attendance of 300-400 people. Our youth program generally has 20-30 in attendance. The youth program does not, however, reflect only church members. Around half of the youth group membership is composed of youth from churches that do not have youth programs. I point out this dynamic to reinforce that the bulk of the church body consists of people in the empty nest stage of life.

FBCM is a representation of the upper-class of Burke County and Morganton. To its credit, FBCM does a good job of inviting “everyone in the streets to the banquet.” This detail is important because the financial anxiety that might be felt by economic down-turn would not be felt as strongly for the church as a whole compared to the population of the larger Morganton community.

Our current building was built with money that came largely from the furniture industry. In many ways, we are still riding the financial coattails of that time gone by. Although there have been several furniture companies to relocate to our county, furniture is not a key financial player anymore. This point is important to recognize because it indicates to a potential issue in times of economic crisis. The potential issue is a greater gap between people for economic reasons. State institutions provide most of the job

opportunities within Morganton and many of our church members are either current or retired state employees; for the most part, their careers are stable.

Money is often a divide between people and can cause much anxiety; hence, I have spent time explaining the financial situation of FBCM and the greater community. It also offers the church an opportunity to help mend some anxious situations by addressing community issues that could bring people together.

CHAPTER 2

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

My ministry has led me to recognize anxiety in the life of Christians and how it prevents them from being all God has created them to be. I led a group of people from The First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC (FBCM), in a spirituality retreat. The focus of the retreat was to make the participants aware of their resting anxiety and to give them tools to maintain or lower that level. Participants were asked to visualize their lives as a whole system that is continually balancing itself. We explored biblical stories to see that we are not alone in this world. We experienced self-discovery to unlock our full potential of being the creation God made us to be. The retreat guided participants through a process of self-care. The following tools described in the next section were used to give participants confidence to be life-long discoverers of who God has created them to be and to bring self-awareness to improve their resting level of anxiety.

Definition of Tools Used in The Retreat

Family Systems Theory

Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation* was the main resource for information about Family Systems Theory. A family systems approach is a useful way to teach about the process of becoming less anxious. The Family Systems "approach deemphasizes the notion that our conflicts and anxieties are due primarily to the makeup of our personalities, and suggests, instead, that our individual problems have more to do

with our relational networks, the makeup of *others* ' personalities, where we stand within the relational systems, and how we function within that position.”³

After World War II, the world of psychoanalysis was growing as psychologists such as Freud, Jung, Adler, and Rank were presenting a great deal of research about psychoanalysis. Psychoanalysis is a form of therapy that focuses on what might have happened to a person in his or her past that would cause that person to act a particular way, mostly negative, in the present. In the late 1940's B. F. Skinner presented a groundbreaking theory that was not well accepted by his colleagues. Skinner's new, unorthodox theory focused on the fact “that behavior patterns were fixed by the reinforcements that occurred after the behavior, rather than elicited by what was in a person's head before.”⁴ Skinner's new theory was able to give people a way to invest in their success and not just wade through the waters of confusion about what had already happened to them. Modern day psychology is broad enough to consider the benefit of all the theories when helping people find resolution to their difficulties. For example, Jung was the psychologist that created the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator that was used as a self-awareness tool for this project's retreat.

Systems thinking gives us a new way of handling the myriad of complex information needed to function and be understood. “It focuses less on content and more on the process that governs the data; less on the cause-and-effect connections that link

³Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 13.

⁴ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 13.

bits of information and more on the principles of organization that give data meaning.”⁵

Systems thinking is a departure from linear thinking and introduces the idea that conflict and anxiety have overlapping factors and loose boundaries. Below is an explanation and diagram to help understand the difference in linear thinking verses systems thinking.

Figure 1-2 shows linear causation where one thing leads to another and all are required to make E, the effect. Figure 1-3 shows E as the effect coming from multiple paths working independently. Figure 2, systems thinking, shows that all of the causes are affected by one another. There is more than one effect. We are not searching for an answer as much as we are trying to find how everything works together. Everything in systems thinking has an effect on another part and is dependent on the other parts. To begin to understand systems thinking and understand the diagrams, one needs to work backwards. Start with E as the affected subject and work backwards to see what progression of circumstances led to E. Equations in systems are often complex and difficult to map out without starting at the effect and working to find the cause.

1. All causes work together to see effect: (A) new baby at home (B) school work (C) work project (D) fatigue = (E) headache
2. All causes work independently to see effect: (A) mold or (B) smoke or (C) skunk or (D) humidity or = (E) runny nose
3. All causes contribute in a cycle of affecting one another: (A) depression (B) headache (C) lonely (D) job loss (E) lack of faith . The solution is whole health.

⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 15.

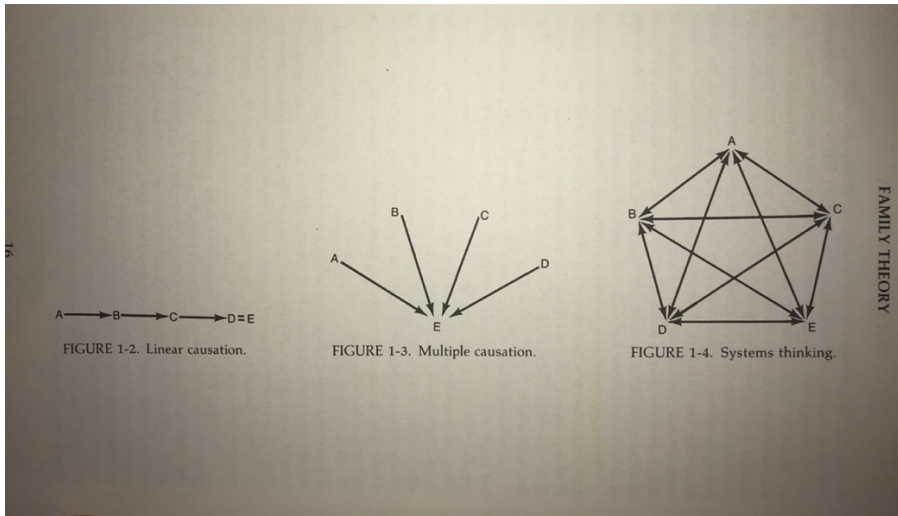


Figure 2 Thinking in Systems

6

The five basic concepts of Family Systems Theory are the *identified patient*, *homeostasis*, *differentiation of self*, *the extended family field*, and *emotional triangles*.

“The concept of the identified patient, is that the family member with the obvious symptom is to be seen not as the ‘sick one’ but as the one in whom the family’s stress or pathology has surfaced.”⁷ The pathology could surface as any type of negative behavior that could be as minor as bed wetting or as major as drug or substance abuse. By looking at one’s family as a system and not an individual identified patient, there is a higher rate of successful treatment. “Trying to ‘cure’ a person in isolation from his or her family, says family theory, is as misdirected, and ultimately ineffective, as transplanting a healthy organ into a body whose imbalanced chemistry will destroy the new one as it did the old.”⁸ When the one patient becomes identified, it gives the system the false impression that the search for a cure is over; it has, however, just begun. Each part of the

⁶ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 16.

⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 19.

⁸ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 20.

system contributed to the outcome, even if it manifested itself in one part of the system. When the focus is turned solely “on one of its members, the family, personal or congregational, can deny the very issues that contributed to making one of its members symptomatic, even if it ultimately harms the entire family.”⁹ This part of systems thinking is extremely important when analyzing how we project stress on to another family member. Sometimes the identified patient is hard to point out because s/he is not showing negative symptoms. The patient could be the over-functioning mother who is living her life through her children or the child who is extremely over-stressed because his/her family has conditioned him/her to be no less than perfect by dumping all of their resources into the child’s success.

As imperfect humans, we are unknowingly willing to throw our burdens to someone else instead of handling them ourselves. Homeostasis is “the tendency of any set of relationships to strive perpetually, in self-corrective ways, to preserve the organizing principles of its existence.”¹⁰ More simply stated, change is not welcomed. We use coping skills taught to us by the system we reside in to maintain normalcy. Every family is different. Each family has established its own picture of what homeostasis looks like. We see high levels of anxiety when change occurs within a family system. Some examples are when someone is added to a family, when someone is lost from a family, or when the whole family moves to a new place. In some cases, a family might even be made better after being forced to re-evaluate what elements keep it in balance or homeostasis. Homeostasis can also be a trapping paradox if we are careless. In an effort

⁹ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 20-21.

¹⁰ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 23.

to keep stability, systems will cater to a trouble-making complainer but ignore or ostracize a new creative thinker. Which one of these people cares more for the organization, and which one cares more for him/herself? Friedman suggests that homeostasis is a balance between a serial electric system and a parallel electrical system, which this leads to the next concept. A serial electric system can have interruptions in the flow of current. In family systems, this interruption would represent the newly- married member of the family trying to alter a Christmas tradition. If done correctly, s/he will create a break in the normal serial circuit but mend it back with a new connection that allows the current of positive energy to flow, although in a different direction. A parallel electrical system can be interrupted without losing the flow of positive energy. A newly-married member of the family might find him/herself lost in this circuit because everything s/he does to fit in would be lost in the massive amounts of energy that render her/his actions measureless. The balance Friedman talks about in a system can often call for a break in the system. A break is a healthy interruption that causes a new look at how the system functions. These interruptions can allow new energy and life into the system. Hopefully the new addition to the family will be allowed to share his/her traditions to make a whole new tradition for the newly-formed family system.

The differentiation of self is the next concept. Differentiation is how a self-balancing system is able to adapt its understanding of homeostasis to maintain maximum performance and balance. Self-differentiation is the “capacity for some awareness of one’s own position in the relationship system, how it is affected by balancing forces, and how changes in each individual’s functioning can in turn influence that homeostasis.”¹¹

¹¹ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

One way to test an individual's role in a system is to ask him/her to describe his/her role in the system and listen to see whether h/she uses "I" or "we" as h/she is stating his/her description. "Differentiation means the capacity to be an 'I' while remaining connected."¹² Are the individuals in the system differentiated enough to be able to share an idea that is counter to the others in the system and is that system differentiated enough to respect and hear what each person needs to share?

The extended family field is exactly what it sounds like, namely parents and siblings plus grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. An important task in looking at the extended family is considering elements in one's system that seem to have stayed with the system. As I studied my extended family, I made an observation that my wife and I are both oldest children, and my parents married as oldest children, and both of my sets of grandparents married similar sibling positions. My mother's parents were both oldest children in their families of origin and my father's parents were both second from the last siblings in their families. There are particular characteristics about particular sibling positions that generally follow people into adulthood. These characteristics generally keep people of similar sibling positions from marrying one another. This deviation from the norm was enough for me to dig deeper to see what characteristics my grandparents had that caused them to deviate from the norm. This was particularly interesting as I compared them to Laura and myself being first children. The things we recognize about our extended family can help us know where we may need to differentiate from our family's homeostasis to break systemic issues that we see are unhealthy. ¹³

¹² Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 27.

¹³ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 31-35.

Emotional triangles are formed by any three persons or issues. “The basic law of emotional triangles is that when any two parts of a system become uncomfortable with one another, they will ‘triangle in’ or focus upon a third person, or issue, as a way of stabilizing their own relationship with one another.”¹⁴

The following are the seven laws of an emotional triangle.

1. The relationship of any two members of an emotional triangle is kept in balance by the way a third party relates to each of them or to their relationship.
2. If one is the third party in an emotional triangle it is generally not possible to bring change (for more than a week) to the relationship of the other two parts by trying to change their relationship directly.
3. Attempts to change the relationship of the other two sides of an emotional triangle not only are generally ineffective, but also, homeostatic forces often convert these efforts to their opposite intent.
4. To the extent a third party to an emotional triangle tries unsuccessfully to change the relationship of the other two, the more likely it is that the third party will wind up with the stress for the other two.
5. The various triangles in an emotional system interlock so that efforts to bring change to any one of them is often resisted by homeostatic forces in the others or in the system itself.
6. One side of an emotional triangle tends to be more conflictual than the others.
7. We can only change a relationship to which we belong.¹⁵

Genograms

Genograms are an efficient way to look at one’s system. Each genogram is unique to the individual and will have a legend to help in its understanding. A genogram is a life-long project and can be a gift to one’s ancestors. Below are two examples from *Generation to Generation*. In the examples, we see that females are represented with circles and males are represented with squares. If someone has died in the system, one sees an “X” in his/her symbol. Genograms are only useful if they are maintained and

¹⁴ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 35.

¹⁵ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 36-39.

accurate. In example 2, one sees a break-up symbol. This symbol, if observed closely, could reveal a particular pattern to be aware of in one's system. Was there a break-up after childbirth in more than one generation? This is something to study and put work into as a way of doing one's part to help prevent this from happening in future generations.

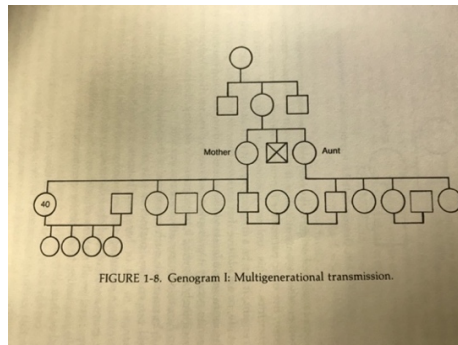


Figure 3 Example 1 of a Genogram

16

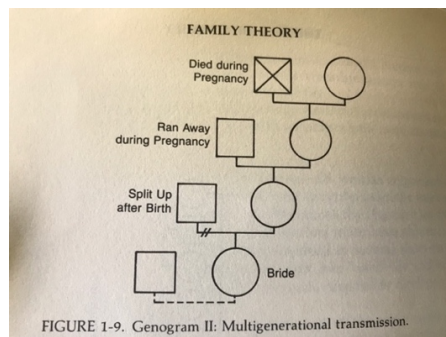


Figure 4 Example 2 of a Genogram

17

¹⁶ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 33.

¹⁷ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*, 34.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

The next tool used was the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI). The MBTI is one of many personality tests available to the public. It was not until after 1920 that the study of individual personality was becoming part of psychological practice. Gordon Willard Allport “reviewed some 50 definitions or descriptions of personality and neatly summarized their underlying commonality by defining personality as the dynamic organization, within the individual, of those psychophysical forces that determine his or her unique adjustment to his or her environment.”¹⁸ Allport broke very fertile ground in his quest to take Freud’s work of defining universal laws of human behavior and finding ways to individualize human behavior. Allport “put forth a very compelling challenge: namely, that psychology would achieve its true purpose only when it could deal with the issue of individuality.”¹⁹

In 1938 Henry Murray published *Explorations in Personality*. This publication was not focused as much on defining personality as he was working to emphasize “the unique integration of various characteristics within individuals.”²⁰ Thoughts like those of Allport and Murray were pushing boundaries of psychological evaluation and definition.

About this same time a mother-daughter team was beginning research of their own. Isabel Myers and Katherine Cook Briggs developed an instrument for personality definition called the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. Isabel and Katherine used

¹⁸ James Neal Butcher, *Clinical Personality Assessment: Practical Approaches*, Second Edition. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). 7.

¹⁹ James Neal Butcher, *Clinical Personality Assessment*, 7.

²⁰ Henry A. Murray, *Explorations in Personality: Psychological Clinic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

Psychological Types, by C. G. Jung, as the framework for their inventory. “They decided his ideas were so powerful that they could help people make better life choices and use individual differences in constructive ways.”²¹ They spent two decades “type watching.” The foundation website also states, “development and applications of psychological type are founded on the idea that understanding your type can help you (a) appreciate your own strengths, gifts, and potential developmental needs, and (b) help you understand and appreciate how other people may differ from you.”²²

I used this tool in the retreat to help the participants identify and give language to who they are and who God is creating them to be. Self-discovery is something God calls us to do on a daily basis and the MBTI is one tool that can be used.

Centering Prayer

The final tool used was centering prayers. I wanted to introduce the participants to a tool to help them collect their thoughts and center themselves. I found a wonderful resource for centering prayers and other contemplative resources at contemplativeoutreach.org. I received their permission to add their resource as an appendix and you will find it in appendix E.

Ministry Question and Project Goals

This project addressed the anxiety that many of our church members are feeling. Fortunately, anxiety can be addressed acutely even though it can manifest itself chronically in many different ways. My process of discovery helped the participants

²¹ “The Myers & Briggs Foundation,” The Myers and Briggs Foundation, accessed September 27, 2019, <http://www.myersbriggs.org/>.

²² “The Myers & Briggs Foundation,”

recognize their anxiety and how it manifests itself in their individual situations. God calls us to be our best selves, but we cannot be our best selves in the midst of anxious or troubling situations.

The goal of this project was to lower the anxiety level of the participants. I did so by leading them to find their resting level of anxiety and become more aware of self, relationships with family and friends, and with God. By applying the things learned in the retreat, the participants were able to create more sacred space where God meets humanity, so as to create intentional conversation with God their creator and their neighbors. During this process, I wanted the participants to have the realization that God is with us all the time, and it is up to us to see God in our surroundings. Doing so helped participants begin to live their lives with less anxiety.

Detailed Project Description

We began Friday evening at 6:00. I am on staff and all the participants were church members, so we all had a good understanding of who each person was; however, we still had a brief time of sharing before we began. A group confidentiality statement was agreed upon by everyone. Clear boundaries helped the participants feel comfortable to share and added to the experience for everyone involved. Already knowing each other helped the participants be more vulnerable and allowed good use of our time together.

I then explained the Beck Anxiety Inventory and asked the participants to take it. This initial test gave a baseline of their level of anxiety. The goal was to lower the inventory number by the conclusion of the retreat. This segment of the retreat established a clear starting point so everyone involved could have a beneficial experience.

I opened with the following thoughts from my project proposal. In the beginning, humanity was in perfect communion with God and then humans chose to move away. Note that humanity chose to leave God's presence, and God did not choose to leave humanity.

Terence Fretheim, a commentator, said this: The Creator of the universe and all creatures chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events. The writer presents no naïve theology, but a deeply profound understanding of how God chooses to enter into the life of the world and relate to the creatures. Even more, this God comes to the man and the woman subsequent to their sin; God does not leave them or walk elsewhere.

Before the experience of the tree of good and evil, humanity had no concept of being without God.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a theologian in Germany during the Holocaust, reiterates God's faithfulness in Genesis 3:21 by saying, "He accepts men as those who are fallen. He does not compromise them in their nakedness before each other, but he himself covers them. God's activity keeps pace with man."

We then split into four groups. Two groups were assigned Genesis 4, the Cain passage, and two groups were assigned 1 Kings 19:11-18, the Elijah passage. I asked them to read the stories and discuss in their groups. Then I opened up the group discussion by offering these questions: What character(s)/concepts could you find yourself relating to? How come? How was God able to bring restoration to the situation? If the main characters were here, in person, what would you ask them? For the Luke passage, I asked what clarification would one ask of Jesus? What in the passage is frustrating or difficult for life application?

After a break, we came back together and discussed Luke 12:22-34. We closed our time on Friday with the following centering prayer:

God of all Creation, we are ever so grateful for your being here with us, for engaging our hearts and minds to become more of what you have created us to be. In this time of centering prayer, help us focus on your stillness. May your peacefulness become our peacefulness. Now, if you feel your thoughts wandering during our prayer, the word “stillness” will be our focus word to bring us back to the center.

As you are sitting with eyes closed, your stillness will reveal the parts of your body that aren't still. A tapping toe, a fidgeting finger, a twitching of any sort. Try to speak stillness to that which isn't still. As you are becoming physically still, your mind may be racing. Don't try to sort it all out in this moment; if something is important, you will be able to recall it later to sort through it. Take the next few moments to pull your thoughts out of your head with your hand and stuff them in your other hand. When you feel your thoughts slowing down, take your hand and throw those thoughts to God. What feelings, images, or reflections need God's stillness? Sometimes God's stillness can be uncomfortable and overwhelming because our world has conditioned us to be busy and distracted. Allow God's stillness to become your stillness.

God of peace, thank you for bringing stillness to our lives. Help us as we go to move about as you would have us move. Focus on the things that make us better people. We ask these things in Your name, having created us, in Jesus' name, having redeemed us, and in the Spirit's name, having reminded us tonight that you are with us. Amen.

Saturday morning we came back together at 9:00. In our first session, we discussed the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator(MBTI). They all brought their scores with them. We went over what each score represented and how those letters used for scoring might help us give words to describe certain characteristics we see in ourselves. We concluded by discussing how particular parts of our personalities might react in anxious ways when exposed to certain stressors.

After a break, I introduced the group to systems thinking by reading one of Edwin Friedman's fables, “A Nervous Condition.” We discussed the fable, after which I

presented the five basic concepts of family systems theory, which are; The Identified Patient, Homeostasis, Self-differentiation, Extended Family Field, and Emotional Triangles. This section was the most lengthy and taught the most new information.

Before we closed with another centering prayer, I introduced the group to genograms and presented a few examples for them to have an idea of what one should look like. A genogram is an expanded family tree that offers space for personal details about relationships between family members. I shared with the group some of the discoveries I made while researching for my genogram in divinity school and encouraged them to begin their own genograms. I concluded this section by sharing how our genogram is our gift to our children and grandchildren.

The following was our closing centering prayer:

God of all Creation, we are ever so grateful for your being here with us, for engaging our hearts and minds to become more of what you have created us to be. In this time of centering prayer help us focus on things we need to let go of. May your peacefulness become our peacefulness. Now, if you feel your thoughts wandering during our prayer, come back to our sacred word, which is “let go.” When we hear “let go,” we should picture God reaching over to grab our load, whatever it is, from us.

As you are sitting with eyes closed, begin to sort through the things floating through your thoughts. Become aware of the thoughts that are making your toes tap, your fingers fidget, or causing something to twitch. As you are sorting through your thoughts, let go of the ones you have no control of. Imagine the hands of God reaching over to take those things. God’s is saying to you, “My child, I can hold it all while you sort through.” Feel free to physically remove those thoughts with your hands, shake them off your feet, or shed them with a tear. Your mind may be racing. Don’t try to sort it all out in this moment; remember, if something is important, it will come back up later, but for now, let go. When you feel your thoughts slowing down, in your own way, turn to God in thanksgiving. Thank you God for this sacred moment, a moment that I was able to let go. Sometimes letting go can be uncomfortable and overwhelming because our world has conditioned us to hold on. Let us hear anew what Jesus said in Matthew 11:28-30: Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle

and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.

God of peace, help us as we go to move about as you would have us move. Focus on the things that make us better people. We ask these things in Your name, having created us, in Jesus' name, having redeemed us, and in the Spirit's name, having reminded us this morning that you are with us. Amen.

In addition to the ten people in my participant group, I received 27 Beck Anxiety Inventories filled out by church members. This control group was used to gauge congregants who were not participating in the retreat group. I wanted to see how similar or different the sample group was from the rest of the congregation. I also wanted to see if age had to do with anxiety level. I had these participants share their age and not their names. I was trying to see if age had anything to do with the anxiety levels of our church members. I found that this control group was anxious in the same areas as the participant group and that age was not a factor in anxious symptoms.

Project Calendar

I held the retreat on February 22nd and 23rd of 2019. The experiment included ten adults from The First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC. The ages of the participants ranged from 60-85. I advertised in several different ways for participants eighteen years and older. I put announcements in our weekly church newsletter; I announced the project during our Sunday School hour with a flyer in all of the Sunday School notebooks the classes use to take roll and get announcements. I also reiterated the flyer with a visit to each adult class to answer any questions. The participants committed to participate on the 22nd from 6:00 pm till 8:30 pm and on the 23rd from 9:00 am till 12:00 pm. The participants were asked to complete four Beck Anxiety Inventories during the experiment and answer the final questionnaire a month after the experiment. Both the Beck Anxiety

Inventory (Appendix B-1) and questionnaire (Appendix B-3) will both be discussed at length in the analysis.

It may seem odd to some that I did not include youth or children in the participant group since I work mostly with those groups. There are several reasons for this decision. The main reason was that youth and children are still trying to figure out their place in the world and are therefore less self-aware than adults. This fact would have made it very difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the retreat. I also wanted to avoid the need for parental waivers and the possibility of my project being held up by the IRB. Even though I am not claiming to be a health care professional, there could have still been a boundary more easily crossed if dealing with youth and children.

CHAPTER 3

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

As we move through the Biblical and Theological Rationale, one will see the theme of restoration appearing throughout the biblical story. In the beginning, humanity was in perfect communion with God and then humans chose to distance themselves. Note that humanity moved away from God, but God pursued humanity. Humanity continued to move away from God over and over throughout the biblical narrative, but God has continued to welcome us back with open arms of forgiveness. During the process of working through anxious feelings, it is easy for one to cast blame on another person. Knowing this, I have tried to emphasize the ways each biblical character has chosen to move away from God so as to thwart any opportunity to use God as a scapegoat for the work we need to do individually. We often blame God for causing or allowing things in our lives that are not pleasant; however, this is a scapegoating coping mechanism that allows us to rationalize ourselves out of blame when we, in fact, are the cause of our unpleasantness. The faster we accept that God is on our side and does not act out of deceit, the quicker we can move on to accept our place.

Genesis 1 and 2 show us perfect communion with God. There was nothing that separated humanity from God. In Genesis 3, the first humans find themselves naked and no longer one with God. Cain is then found in his guilt and yet, God restores him. Elijah tries to run from God's communion and yet, God restores him. We will then move to the New Testament to further explore our responsibility of restoration in Luke 12 and 6. In conclusion, we will look at Martin Luther's life as a theologian and reformer to see how his anxious journey was restored.

Old Testament

Genesis 1 and 2 present humanity in full relationship with God and all is good. God and humanity could walk as one, naked, in the garden. There was not yet any separation between the two. Genesis 3 introduces the concept of nakedness, which is a foreign concept until now. Nakedness is the first detail used to show us humanity has now found itself vulnerable.

There was nothing separating God from humanity. Then we come to chapter 3 and observe an abrupt change. Humanity was suddenly very different. They were worried about being naked and vulnerable. They also felt something new that was not yet named, but they described it as we might describe “feeling distant.”

Genesis 3 points out a change in the relationship between God and humanity. There are two words to take note of in chapter 3; they are “serpent” and “naked.” Terence E. Fretheim points out the Hebraic similarities in these words. “The serpent is characterized as ‘more crafty’ than any of the others God formed; this is a play on the word for ‘naked’ in 2:25. The link suggests that human beings may be exposed at times to shrewd or crafty elements in the world, language often associated with temptation.”²³ The connection is being made to point out that the serpent could represent any arbitrary object or thought that separates humanity from God. Until this point, humanity knew nothing about separation from God. The only separation they knew of was eternal separation or death. Verse 4 quotes the serpent as saying “you will not die.”²⁴ The woman

²³Terence E. Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *General & Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus of The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol.1. ed. Leander E. Keck. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 359.

²⁴All scripture references will come from the NRSV unless otherwise stated.

obviously knows about the tree and about death because the prospect of both of them is concerning to her. To know God is to know good and evil; the tree is the tree of knowledge or “knowing.” Good and evil are a merism in apposition to knowledge, that is, the halves that make a whole. This passage is not about conscience, but rather about becoming “knowers.” “The serpent makes it sound as if God’s motivation is self-serving; the humans will become like God.”²⁵ In fact, it is the exact opposite; God was protecting humanity by not revealing evil because God knew we were not able to handle our reaction to evil. In the moment, the woman “focuses only on the potential the tree offers.”²⁶ The focus on the tree is representative of the selfishness that keeps us separated from God. An important factor to keep in mind is that while humanity was acting selfishly by separating from God, God never abandoned them.

The Creator of the universe and all creatures chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events. The writer presents no naïve theology, but a deeply profound understanding of how God chooses to enter into the life of the world and relate to the creatures. Even more, this God comes to the man and the woman subsequent to their sin; God does not leave them or walk elsewhere.²⁷

Even after humanity disappoints God, God is still there.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil creates the backdrop for the biblical scene in which humanity comes to understand what it means to be separated from God. Gerhard von Rad explains that the Hebrew word *yd'* means “to know.” There are several times where we hear from the biblical characters about “coming to know” or “coming to

²⁵ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIB* 1:361.

²⁶ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIB* 1:361.

²⁷ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIB* 1:362.

understand.” We see this in Genesis 3:5-7. “So far as knowledge of good and evil is concerned, one must remember that the Hebrew, *yd*’ never signifies purely intellectual knowing, but in a much wider sense an ‘experiencing,’ a ‘becoming acquainted with,’ even an ‘ability.’”²⁸ Von Rad credits Stoebe with this statement: “God had provided what was good for man (Genesis 2:18), and had given him complete security. But now man will go beyond this, to decide for himself.”²⁹ Before this experience at the tree, humanity knew no difference between being with God and not being with God. They had no knowledge or understanding that they could be away from God. In experiencing the fruit of this forbidden tree, they were exposed to another way of seeing things. Now it is required for humanity to make a choice, whereas before, there was no choice to make. Further, von Rad says, “That the narrative sees man’s fall, his actual separation from God, occurring again and again is this area (and not, for example, as a plunge into moral evil, into the subhuman!), i.e., in what we call Titanism, man’s hubris—this is truly one of its most significant affirmations.”³⁰ Here, again, we see that even though humanity has fallen, God will continue to meet them where they are. Von Rad quotes Dietrich Bonhoeffer from his work *Creation and Fall* to show that God, in Genesis 3:21, never lets humanity down. “. . . he accepts men as those who are fallen. He does not

²⁸ Gerhard von Rad, *The Old Testament Theology*, Vol. 2. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 89.

²⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *The Old Testament Theology* 2:89.

³⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *The Old Testament Theology* 2:89-90.

compromise them in their nakedness before each other, but he himself covers them. God's activity keeps pace with man."³¹

Genesis chapter 4, the story of Cain and Abel, continues the narrative of restoration. Brueggemann points out the vastness of the restorative nature of God. God takes away the one thing that Cain would fear the most, the possibility of someone avenging his brother's murder. "The haunted fear of Cain is a perfect match to the offense. The murderer fears being murdered."³² Fearfulness drains us of energy that can be used for good. "How much life is bottled up because reconciliation would mean the end of grasping and the act of emptying?"³³ The mark on Cain was twofold. Just as many of us have marks on our lives, Cain's mark proved he was the offender but offered protection nonetheless.

Also worth noting is the wording of verse 16. The NIV says, "So Cain went out from the LORD's presence and lived in the land of Nod, east of Eden," and the NRSV says, "Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden." In reading more carefully, we see that the presence of the LORD is referring to the physical nature of God as seen in the Garden of Eden. The most reassuring part of the relationship between God and humanity is God's promise never to leave or forsake us. Terence E. Fretheim says this: "To 'Settle' in 'Wandering,' an ironic comment, may refer to a division within the self, wherein spatial settledness accompanies a troubled spirit. That Cain founded a city suggests that rootlessness means more than

³¹ Gerhard von Rad, *The Old Testament Theology* 2:97.

³² Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 63.

³³ Walter Brueggemann, 63.

simple physical wandering. Those who live in cities can also be restless wanderers.”³⁴ So, in striving to rid ourselves of anxiety, we need to make sure that wherever we are physically, we are also present emotionally and mentally.

Clement of Alexandria gives another similar but different understanding of the name Nod. “Nod means ‘disturbance,’ Eden, ‘the good life.’ The good life from which the transgressor was expelled consisted in faith, knowledge, peace. Those wise in their own eyes . . . are happy to transfer to the disturbance of a tossing sea. They drop from the knowledge of the One who knows no birth to the realm of birth and death. Their opinions are constantly changing.”³⁵ Other definitions of Nod point toward the idea of wandering. One who wanders would do so because of some disturbance—directional, spiritual, social, or emotional. When one is disturbed s/he is forced to be aware of his/her environment; hence, in becoming more self-aware one is then able to bring oneself back to a relationship with the person or object from whom one was originally distanced.

W. Sibley Towner offers a perspective of God holding us as God’s own that I think fits well with my point.

Not only is Cain alienated from the ground, the very source of sustenance, but his penalty involves expulsion from his farm. He is sentenced to being a refugee, a landless fugitive. Such a person was and is today among the marginal persons of society, always vulnerable to oppression and misuse and even massacre. . . . Cain knows his vulnerability and cries out, “Anyone who meets me may kill me.”³⁶

³⁴ Terence E. Fretheim, *NIB* 1:375.

³⁵ Clement of Alexandria, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture* Vol. 1, Ed. Thomas C. Oden and Andrew Louth, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001), 110.

³⁶ W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis: Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 64.

In Cain's frustrated anxiety, he asked to be taken from his misery. He was, at this point, completely vulnerable with God and humanity.

It is then that the act of grace occurs. God puts the mark on Cain, the mark both of guilt and protection. It will ward off anyone who would take vengeance on Cain. Anyone who would snap the link between Eden of the past and the Eden of the future, or who would cut off human evolution before it can begin will be warned and deterred.³⁷

Word usage in Ecclesiastes 1:2 parallels that of Genesis 4. The word *hebel* is equivalent to the name Abel, Cain's bother. According to William P. Brown, its usage creates a theme throughout the book of Ecclesiastes and is used "no less than thirty-seven times."³⁸ Hebel is used to describe emptiness, meaninglessness, and even absurdity, and is translated "vanity." In 1:2-11, Qoheleth lists several paradoxical circumstances that point to discontent or vanity. Verse 8 says, "All things are wearisome; more than one can express; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, or the ear filled with hearing." We are being made aware of discontent or vanity, thus bringing back the discussion of self-awareness. That is what Qoheleth is trying to get us to understand in this first chapter. If the eye or ear does not have the balance of the whole body, there will be over-stimulation, resulting in anxiety. Milton P. Horne points out a wonderful progression in Ecclesiastes that also gives us a model for the process of moving to a non-anxious presence. He says, "The thrust of the message concerns how the search for meaning continues rather than what

³⁷ W. Sibley Towner, *Genesis: Westminster Bible Companion*, 64.

³⁸ William P. Brown, *Ecclesiastes: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 2000), 21.

that meaning is to be . . . providing ways of coping with meaningless circumstances that never seem to change.”³⁹

It is in our wandering and vanity that we find ourselves anxious. When one is anxious, one’s anxiety is a reaction to being separated or lost from something. God was not the one who chose to separate from humanity; it was humanity who made the decisions that led to separation. God chose and has chosen to restore and renew the relationship over and over again. In choosing to accept God’s restoration, we are able to bridge the gap that breeds our anxiety. The writer of Genesis does not explicitly use the word “anxious,” so I will be making a connection between being separated from God and what we understand as anxiety. It is important to reflect on this thought because we do ourselves a disservice when we believe that God is the reason for or cause of our separation or anxiety.

The anxiety of some is caused by their personal guilt but for others, it is caused by the actions of marginalization. The story of Cain helps us see the importance of the process of moving forward after being marginalized. We will always have scars, physically and emotionally, that remind us of where we have been. Hopefully in our process of healing we can allow God to work in the same way God worked with Cain, by using the marks of our negative experiences to also be the marks of our wholeness that moves us forward. Our current social culture of vanity often wants to cover up the marks or scars that actually help tell our story. Jesus’ scars on his hands, feet, and side helped tell his story. His scars were present even on his perfected heavenly body. Knowing this,

³⁹ Milton P. Horne, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2003), 376-377.

I hope we can begin to allow our scars to be acceptable and see them not as a wound, but a reminder of our process of healing.

The story of Elijah in 1 Kings 19:11-18 continues the theme of restoration from anxiety.

¹¹ He said, “Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.” Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; ¹² and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. ¹³ When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” ¹⁴ He answered, “I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.” ¹⁵ Then the Lord said to him, “Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram. ¹⁶ Also you shall anoint Jehu son of Nimshi as king over Israel; and you shall anoint Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah as prophet in your place. ¹⁷ Whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill. ¹⁸ Yet I will leave seven thousand in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth that has not kissed him.”

The writer of 1 Kings 19 uses unique language that recalls the story of Moses on the mountain as he receives the commandments. The writer was drawing attention to a renewing of the covenant. Choon-Leong Seow says, “The phrase ‘about to pass by’ probably meant to evoke the tradition of Moses standing at the ‘cleft of the rock’—perhaps this very cave where he encountered the Lord’s passing by.”⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Choon-Leong Seow, “The First and Second Books of Kings: Introduction, Commentary and Reflections,” in *1 & 2 Kings, 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Tobit, Judith of The New Interpreter’s Bible*. Vol. 3. ed. Leander E. Keck; Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 142.

In the beginning of chapter 19, Elijah is finished fighting. He has found himself at what he thinks is the end of his journey. “What follows is God’s refusal to accept this decision; God has more work for him to do.”⁴¹

1 Kings 19:15a says “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus.’” Mordechai Cogan infers that by first announcing the wind, fire, and earthquake, the writer of 1 Kings is wanting us to understand that “the intimation seems to be that this is the desired mode of discourse between the prophet and the divine presence.”⁴² God prefers to be understood within an intimate relationship instead of being seen as a dictator.

Richard Nelson offers that this story is about “Elijah’s attempt to relinquish his prophetic office and God’s insistence that he continue. Elijah and his mission are the focus, not God’s presence or absence.”⁴³ God’s calling is with Elijah in the wind, fire, and earthquake. The focus in Nelson’s perspective is the recommissioning of Elijah. The Lord offered the big show to bring Elijah out of the cave, but he was not budging. “Depressed persons cannot usually be talked out of their gloom. What does sometimes help is a sense of purpose, and that is exactly what God provides with a new commission.”⁴⁴ Nelson wants the reader not to “assume that, in contrast to the first three theophanic manifestations, God is really meant to be present in the enigmatic small voice. This is a

⁴¹ Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings: Westminster Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 109.

⁴² Mordechai Cogan, *The Anchor Bible. a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 453.

⁴³ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 123.

⁴⁴ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 127.

completely unwarranted assumption, however.”⁴⁵ I agree with Nelson in this statement. God’s presence should not be in question when understanding this story. Elijah’s example of running from and back to God is what gives this story the sense of calling it deserves.

We often find ourselves in the midst of so much noise that when it finally becomes silent, it is hard to hear anything. There was wind, fire, an earthquake, and then God was the silent voice that spoke loudest of all. I often hear adults complain about young people and their earbuds. The adults infer that the earbuds are a sign of selfishness and inability to connect. I then offer that on the other hand, these students may be looking to focus the noise that the world provides. The earbuds may be a way for them to block out the hurt, pain, and insensitive perspectives of the world. Wind, fire, and earthquakes have become the normative sounds for them, and they are searching for stillness. It is easy to find ourselves in an anxious and lonely state. The temptation for us was the same for Elijah: to run back in the cave, to hold the noise close and tight, or even add more noise.

As we move away from Elijah, may we remind ourselves of the imperative statement given to Elijah to “go.” “Go back to the conflict, go back to the trouble, go back to the risk.”⁴⁶ God has created us for a purpose, and God calls us to go. We may find that part of our purpose is to remain in the conflict for a while. If we are able to make ourselves fully present in the conflict, we can emerge on the other side developed and able to help move God’s story and our story forward. Ultimately, our focus is to join God

⁴⁵ Richard D. Nelson, *First and Second Kings*, 124.

⁴⁶ Walter A. Brueggemann, *1 & 2 Kings* (Macon Ga.: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2000), 237.

in carrying on God's story, but to do that, we need to settle each part before we move forward. We must fight the temptation to run back into the cave. The Lord is with us on our journey, just as the Lord was with Elijah. In our self-doubt and despair, we find ourselves anxious; then the Lord calls us to self-discovery and wholeness.

New Testament

The writer of Luke 12:22-31 offers many examples to examine. In one, anxiety, or the absence of peace, surfaces in humanity when there is a lack of something. The writer of Luke uses the concept of the Kingdom of God to describe all things needed to provide us with peace. The Kingdom of God provides what we need to mend the gaps of worry, doubt, guilt, and anything else that keeps us from fully understanding Emmanuel. The Gospel of Luke presents "the Kingdom of God" progressively. Richard Vinson gives an outline for this progression: "In order to enter the kingdom of God, people must divest themselves of their possessions, receiving the kingdom as God's gift."⁴⁷ To receive the Kingdom of God, we need peace and wholeness, but to have peace and wholeness, we first have to make room for them. "Blessed are you who are poor"(Luke 6:20). "The seeds choked by thorns are those who hear the word, but are choked by the cares of riches and pleasures of life" (8:14). "When you give a banquet, invite the poor"(14:13). Peace and wholeness can be lost with excess.

Materialism causes people to be anxious. Unfortunately, the comfort we find from our materialistic actions has made us dependent on more things and good feelings to fill a void that only peace and wholeness can bring. In fact, these possessions cause more anxiety because they are not sustainable.

⁴⁷ Richard Bolling Vinson, *Luke* (Macon, GA: Smyth & Helwys Pub., 2009), 12.

In order to enter the Kingdom of God, people must divest themselves of their possessions, receiving the Kingdom as God's gift. Luke's Jesus hammers at this throughout the Gospel:

- Blessed are you who are poor/ Woe to you who are rich (6:20, 24)
- The seeds choked by thorns are those who hear the word, but "are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life." (8:14)
- Take nothing for your journey (9:3)
- Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals (10:4)
- But give the inner things for alms (11:4)
- Parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-21)
- Sell your possessions, and give alms (12:33)
- When you give a banquet, invite the poor (14:13)
- None of you can be my disciples if you do not give up all your possessions (14:33)
- You cannot serve God and mammon (16:13)
- Parable of the rich man and Lazarus (16:19-31)
- How hard it is for the wealthy to enter the kingdom of God! (18:24-25)
- Zacchaeus repents, giving away most or all of his wealth (19:1-10)⁴⁸

Now we move to Luke 12:13-21. We find the theme of materialism and see the ways it can cause us to be anxious.

¹³ Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me." ¹⁴ But he said to him, "Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?" ¹⁵ And he said to them, "Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one's life does not consist in the abundance of possessions." ¹⁶ Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. ¹⁷ And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' ¹⁸ Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. ¹⁹ And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' ²⁰ But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' ²¹ So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Verses 17 and 18 are the crux of the materialism argument. The more material things we have, the more problems we create for ourselves. This drive for profit is a

⁴⁸ Richard Bolling Vinson, *Luke*, 12-13.

result of materialism and this materialism takes energy away from our relationship with God, resulting in anxiety. If Saul were thinking of the good of all, he would seek more yield and at the very least, sell it at a reasonable rate.

Vinson points out that in American society we find ways to sidestep this issue of materialism. We might say, “I don’t have money to buy lake houses or to invest in high-yield bonds. This is a dodge, because while we are not rich compared to the truly wealthy in our country, compared to much of the world we are.”⁴⁹ When trying to keep up with the wealthy, we continue using up resources while widening the gap even more between the wealthy and the poor. In working to bridge this gap we also work on alleviating cultural anxiety.

The focus on materialism works to explain how we create a gap between God and everything else. Our materialism pulls energy away from furthering God’s Kingdom and the further we are from God’s Kingdom, the more susceptible we are to anxiety. The gap we create by choosing material matters over Kingdom matters causes our anxiety.

We saw in the beginning that God takes care of creation, and we continue to see that in Luke 12:22-34:

²² He said to his disciples, “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. ²³ For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing. ²⁴ Consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them. Or how much more value are you than the birds! ²⁵ And can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your span of life?^[a] ²⁶ If then you are not able to do so small a thing as that, why do you worry about the rest? ²⁷ Consider the lilies, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;^[b] yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these. ²⁸ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which is alive today and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you—you of little faith! ²⁹ And do not keep striving

⁴⁹ Richard Bolling Vinson, *Luke*, 414.

for what you are to eat and what you are to drink, and do not keep worrying.³⁰ For it is the nations of the world that strive after all these things, and your Father knows that you need them.³¹ Instead, strive for his^[c]kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well.

³²“Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.³³ Sell your possessions, and give alms. Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.³⁴ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:22 reiterates this point also. “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear.” Alan Culpepper says this about materialism: “the rich are apt to be so preoccupied with their possessions that they fail to respond to God’s invitation.”⁵⁰ Verse 24 tells us to “consider the ravens: they neither sow nor reap, they have neither storehouse nor barn, and yet God feeds them.” Keeping up our possessions is taking much of our energy that could be spent helping those around us, keeping our emotional stability in check.

Fred Craddock shares this insight about verses 22-32: “Here the issue is preoccupation with material things. Everyone, of course, protests that he or she only wants enough, but no one knows how much is enough until one has too much. The fact is, says Jesus, that this anxiety reflects a lack of trust in God, a lack of interest in the kingdom, and a lack of generosity toward those in need.”⁵¹ Jesus ends this pericope by saying, “Make purses for yourselves that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Our outcome will reflect where we have put our work.

⁵⁰ Alan R. Culpepper, “The Gospel of Luke: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections,” in *Luke, John of The New Interpreter’s Bible*, ed. Leander E. Keck. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 144.

⁵¹Craddock, Fred Brenning, *Luke: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press), 2009, 163-164.

Culpepper, writing about Luke 6:20-26, gets to the crux of the issue at hand with this statement: “Families have given up rituals and ceremonies of blessings. Yet, nothing is more important to the development of children than to have their parents’ blessing. Without the sure knowledge of that blessing, children may spend their whole lives seeking approval or the substitutes of success.”⁵² This statement provides a way of looking at the entire family system when one is working through one’s anxiety. One generation passes anxiety or blessing to the next generation. The writer of Luke is directing us to see that only God can provide wholeness, and humanity has a limited capacity for God’s reality in their lives. “Then Jesus looked up at his disciples and said: Blessed...” Jesus teaches the disciples as a parent would a child, instructing them that their choices will bring about blessed results or not. This was a time of ceremony. It was not a synagogue ceremony. It was what I call a barnyard ceremony. When an elder and a child have spent time working in the yard or on the farm and they are cleaning up at the end of day, the elder might take that opportunity to share some wise thoughts with the child. After laboring all day, the child trusts the elder, and the elder feels responsible for the child. The theme of materialism also helps clarify this theme.

In Luke 6:37-42, we see a warning about relationships with others. Vinson points out that “. . . a student can do no better than he or she is taught; so if the teacher is poor, the student may in fact adopt all the bad habits of the teacher. What the teacher must do first, then, is learn to see his or her own deficiencies and correct them before passing them on, willy-nilly, to the student...holding out hope that in fact, both log and speck can

⁵² Alan R. Culpepper, *NIB* 9:145.

be cast out to the betterment of all concerned.”⁵³ When we lack self-awareness, we can lead those in our tutelage blindly. We must fight the temptation or balance the temptation to be needed with the realization of the limits of our expertise. We feel good when we think we have provided help, which creates an escape from the reality that we have actually caused a chain of events that will bring more anxiety in the future. In working to understand more about ourselves, we learn more about our capacity to do God’s work around us as well. Sometimes our anxiety causes us to engage in what we think is helpful behavior, but is in reality counter to our main objective. The Family Systems term for this is over-function. A personal example is when my daughter started school, I was anxious. I did not do well in school, and I had to be aware of my role in her schooling to make sure I did not over-function and push my anxiety on her. My wife was aware of the situation, and I was very open with Ella’s teachers so we could all be in good communication. Anxiety causes us to engage when we should withdraw. This thought process is similar to what we are taught as children: If you can’t say something nice don’t say anything at all. We then have to learn what is nice or not nice. In the context of anxiety, self-awareness helps us be able to recognize when we are speaking out of anxiety instead of balance.

In chapter 12, we are encouraged not to worry. Jesus is instructing the disciples not to spend their days procuring needed items, but, rather going about the business of spreading the good news. Vinson sums up this passage by saying, “our hearts—meaning our wills, affections, and dispositions—will rest wherever our ‘treasure’ is.”⁵⁴ We cause

⁵³ Richard Bolling Vinson, *Luke*, 194.

⁵⁴ Alan R. Culpepper, *NIB* 9:423.

much anxiety for ourselves when we are looking for something to cause anxiety. We are addicted to being stirred, and the only thing that can feed our stirring is more anxious fuel. Our bodies have become comfortable with living in a paradox or false understanding that God is related to how we feel. Sadly, we will not find peace and wholeness by continuing to seek God in this way. The quiet place of rest is where the peace of Christ can be found.

Historical Reflection

Church History includes many individuals who helped continue God's story of redemption through the ages. The stories of Augustine, Martin Luther, and Martin Luther King, Jr. are illustrative. As with the biblical characters, God pursued these church historical figures as well.

Augustine, a church father, had a long journey to faith. Much of his *Confessions* is just that, his confessing and working toward renewal of his past life. Augustine struggles a great deal with lust and the ramifications that lust brings. Speaking of humanity's choices, he says, "they are diverted from their true course and deprived of their original heavenly calm."⁵⁵ This phrase can be compared to Adam and Eve in the garden. When they chose to move away from God they chose to be "deprived of their original heavenly calm." When we choose to move away from God we are depriving ourselves of heavenly calm, and anxiety forms out of this deprivation.

Augustine was learning how to cope with the gap between God and humanity. He wrote a great deal about how humans are hard on one another. I hear a call in his writings for each person to have a more personal relationship with Christ instead of worrying so

⁵⁵ Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. G. Wills (New York: Penguin Books, 2008), 56.

much about the choices of those around them. He states, “This is because the appearance of what we do is often different from the intention with which we do it, and the circumstances at the time may not be clear.”⁵⁶ I hear Augustine encouraging us to work out our faith as we go, a call to encourage us to join with the other biblical characters in God’s story of renewal.

A portion of this project was to show that when we are distant from God we experience anxiety. When we do not have a clear understanding that God has redeemed us, we forget to feel worthy of being loved by God, who provides peace and comfort. Augustine adds a perspective that we often overlook, the perspective that God uses people to share the light or the good news. The good news is that we are redeemed, and we continue to be redeemed each day. Humanity spends too much time feeling unworthy and not enough time being redeemed. Augustine meets Bishop Ambrose in Milan. Augustine speaks of his search for God and says about Ambrose; “My heart warmed to him, not at first as a teacher of the truth, which I had quite despaired of finding in your Church, but simply as a man who showed me kindness.”⁵⁷ As we remember God’s call to kindness, we can hopefully share kindness with others. If our focus were on kindness, we could help those around us come back to a relationship with God and help them realize that God is always with us.

Augustine was fortunate enough to have time to integrate his life and faith journey. For us to live more peacefully, it is important for us to do the same. Yes, he exhaustively speaks of where he came from, which can in fact cause one more anxiety;

⁵⁶ Augustine, *Confessions*, 67.

⁵⁷ Augustine, *Confessions*, 107.

however, this self-reflective practice helped him develop the skill of looking for God. He was able to understand that God is among us, and it is up to us to keep our eyes open.

Martin Luther a well-known theologians, who came to be a reformer, experienced the effects of negative family dynamics, leading him to a life of anxious living. Luther's anxiety around salvation and damnation led him to the only place he knew to address problems of spirituality: the monastery. Like many of the biblical characters that struggled with his or her place in God's story, Luther could not comprehend why there was such a conflict between what his father wanted him to do and what he felt was needed for salvation. He also found it hard to believe and trust in a God who needed an account of all of his wrongdoings. Thankfully, Luther had a superior who felt he would benefit, counterintuitively, from a pastoral or teaching role, sensing that what Luther needed was real-life experience and investment. Luther's many frustrations with confession, justice, and lack of grace finally led him "to the conclusion that the 'justice of God' does not refer, as he had been taught, to the punishment of sinners. It means rather that the 'justice' or 'righteousness' of the righteous is not their own, but God's. The 'righteousness of God' is that which is given to those who live by faith."⁵⁸

Luther spent most of his early years searching for redemption. His life reminds us of our place in God's story as well. He was able to work out how God works to redeem us. In the midst of his searching, he was also able to thwart some of his anxiety, giving him the forward momentum to write about justification by faith, not works. Re-living Luther's struggle has given way to conversations that have helped shape our modern

⁵⁸ Justo L. Gonzalez, *The Reformation to the Present Day: The Story of Christianity*. Vol. 2 (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1985), 19.

conversation about grace and the role it plays in God's redeeming us to God's own.

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has a story, much like Elijah, that shows us how the anxiety of an entire people group can be pushed upon one person. Elijah was acting and speaking for the entirety of God's people, and Dr. King was one of the most prominent voices of the Civil Rights movement. Elijah was able to fulfill the journey God had in store for him; however, and most unfortunately, Dr. King was not able to finish. Elijah was able to complete the delivery of God's message after his suffering. Dr. King was not able to finish delivering God's message; however, God has used many of us to continue delivering the message of peace. Dr. King was not able to overcome racist adversity in his life-time; meaning that when he was assassinated his message was not complete. It was up to the rest of the world to continue working with a societal anxiety that causes people to judge others by the color of their skin. Racism shows us a different type of anxious moving away from God. Dr. King was forced to suffer the oppression of those who were choosing the path of hate, moving them away from God, thus causing them to project their anxiety on to Dr. King and the entire African American community in the United States of America. The oppression pushed upon Dr. King was a reaction to the oppressors' own anxiety. An anxiousness this deeply seated will take constant attention from us as we continue trying to help the oppressors realize their faults.

In a sermon titled *Shattered Dreams*, Dr. King said, "Shattered Dreams are a hallmark of our mortal life."⁵⁹ Such a prospect would leave many of us anxious, but not Dr. King. Fortunately for us, he did not stop his sermon there. He goes on to complete his

⁵⁹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 96.

thought with a story of a journey from New York to London:

I first flew from New York to London in the propeller-type aircraft that required nine and a half hours for a flight now made in six hours by jet. When returning from London to the States, I was told that the flying time would be twelve and a half hours. The distance was the same. Why an additional three hours? When the pilot entered the cabin to greet the passengers, I asked him to explain the difference in flight time. "You must understand something about the winds," he said. "When we leave New York, a strong tail wind is in our favor, but when we return, a strong head wind is against us."... At times in our lives the tail winds of joy, triumph, and fulfillment favor us, and at times the head winds of disappointment, sorrow, and tragedy beat unrelentingly against us. ... Our refusal to be stopped, our "courage to be," our determination to go on "in spite of," reveal the divine image within us.⁶⁰

Our choice to engage reveals the divine in us. God's call within us is to be a voice of peace for the world around us. As Dr. King closes this particular sermon, he reminds us that we have inherited Jesus' legacy when he said, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you." This observation also brings us to the crux of Family Systems Theory. We are stewards of that which is passed on to us. How will we choose to carry on Jesus' legacy?

I see a parallel here between Dr. King and Elijah. Dr. King felt the great wind that spilt races, felt the earthquake shake his faith, and was burned by the fire of life from flames that he did not create. Unfortunately, the sheer silence was heard by the rest of us still fighting the civil rights battle. Dr. King was not able to deliver his message like Elijah was, but thankfully, we are still able to carry the presence of God in the form of a hope given to us by Dr. King. Elijah was a bystander in a world of confusion, and so was Dr. King. Both were examples of the non-anxious presence needed to share God's hope with the world. Dr. King concludes his *Shattered Dreams* sermon with these words about

⁶⁰ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 102.

the role of God's presence in our lives:

God through Christ has taken the sting from death by freeing us from its dominion. Our earthly life is a prelude to a glorious new awakening, and death is an open door that leads us into life eternal. The Christian faith makes it possible for us nobly to accept that which cannot be changed, to meet disappointments and sorrow with an inner poise, and to absorb the most intense pain without abandoning our sense of hope, for we know, as Paul testified, in life or in death, in Spain or in Rome, "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."⁶¹

In conclusion, God is wanting to restore us to wholeness, and the closer we are to wholeness, the less anxious we will be. Genesis 1 and 2 showed us what it is like as we strive to move closer to perfect communion with God. Genesis 3 humbly reminded us of our humanity and God's divinity. Cain and Elijah have inspired us to continue calling on God even when we have run away in the past. God will restore us. God has restored us. We have poetically heard from the author of Luke, who has told us again that God is with us, restoring us. Augustine has shown us that in our journey of life, it is important to see God in the things around us, and Martin Luther has shown us that a life of calling is not immune from questions of God's presence and redemption. Finally, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. has reminded us that not all anxiety is caused by our leaving God's presence; sometimes we are subjected to the transferred anxiety of other people.

⁶¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., *Strength to Love*, 105.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL EVALUATION

Overview of Information Collected

I collected data in three ways. The first way was the Beck Anxiety Inventory (Beck Inventory), found in appendix B-1. This inventory helped everyone find his/her level of anxiety at the beginning of the retreat and after each section thereafter. The second was an essay questionnaire found in appendix B-3. I introduced this second questionnaire one month after the journals and sticky notes were not used during the retreat. The third evaluative instrument used was a questionnaire using a Likert scale of 1-10; it can be found in appendix B-4. The goal of this project was to help a group of ten people, eighteen years of age and older from the First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC, become aware of the anxiety in their lives and give them tools to lower or manage that anxiety. The tools consisted of biblical stories to help bring people closer to the source of peace, centering prayers, the Myers-Briggs Type Inventory, the five major concepts of the family systems concept, and genograms.

My sample group was given the Beck Inventory before we started the retreat and after each section of my presentation. This resulted in four evaluations. The Beck Inventory showed that all participants except one had a lower anxiety level from the first to the last. The participant that was the exception began with a 1 on the first evaluation and ended with a 2 on the last evaluation. The numbers and evaluation methods will be explained in the next paragraph.

It was important for the participants to find the level of anxiety they brought with them to the retreat. The Beck Inventory states that 0-21 indicates a very low anxiety

level, and the average anxiety level of the participants was 9.6. All of the participants were over the age of 60, and all but one of them were retired. In the midst of the project, the age of the participants was a constant point of discussion. The discussion about age continued in the answers to the essay questions as well. I was afraid this might be a factor in analysis; however, the participants showed anxiety in the same areas as the greater church body of all different ages. The participant group was all over the age of 60, while the congregational group of 27 represented an age range of 33 to 85. The congregation and participant group showed anxiety mostly in the same areas. I will discuss these areas as well as a graph on page 45. Several participants noted that if the questions had been asked differently, his/her score would have been higher. I will give my thoughts about this observation in the next section.

During the experiment, I asked the participants to use journals or sticky notes that were provided to share any thoughts that might pop up during the retreat. Neither the journals nor the sticky notes were used during the retreat, so I asked the participants to answer the second questionnaire a month after the retreat. Still needing more information, I constructed the third evaluation tool, a questionnaire evaluating all aspects of the retreat and the application of the information presented. This questionnaire was given six months after the retreat. The Beck Inventory provided needed information that helped draw the rest of the congregation in for comparison as well as providing some tangible evaluation. The second questionnaire provided valuable information that helped me see how each person was affected on a personal level. The third questionnaire provided a summary report of the overall retreat and application of the information that was presented.

Analysis

The ultimate goal of this project was to lower the anxiety of the participants and give them tools to lead a less anxious life. The numbers from the Beck Anxiety Inventory show this was accomplished. I found that I should have offered more information about the inventory before the participants answered the questions. Because I was trying not to sway any answers participants may have given, my instructions for completing the inventory were insufficient. I was made aware of this fact through the questions being asked while the participants were taking the inventory. As I was reflecting on the data, I found the participants may have responded with higher levels of anxiety if my explanation had been more sufficient; however, the insufficient explanation does not appear to have affected the function of the retreat. Also, I should have indicated more clearly that for the sake of our conversation, stress and anxiety were going to be synonymous.

This first section is an analysis of the Beck Inventories that were collected from the participants. The following analysis will reflect the results of the four inventories collected. A listing of the category and a number value out of a potential 63 points is given for each of the four inventories. If one chose three for each of the 21 lines on the inventory, then his/her score would be 63. This score would indicate extreme anxiety.

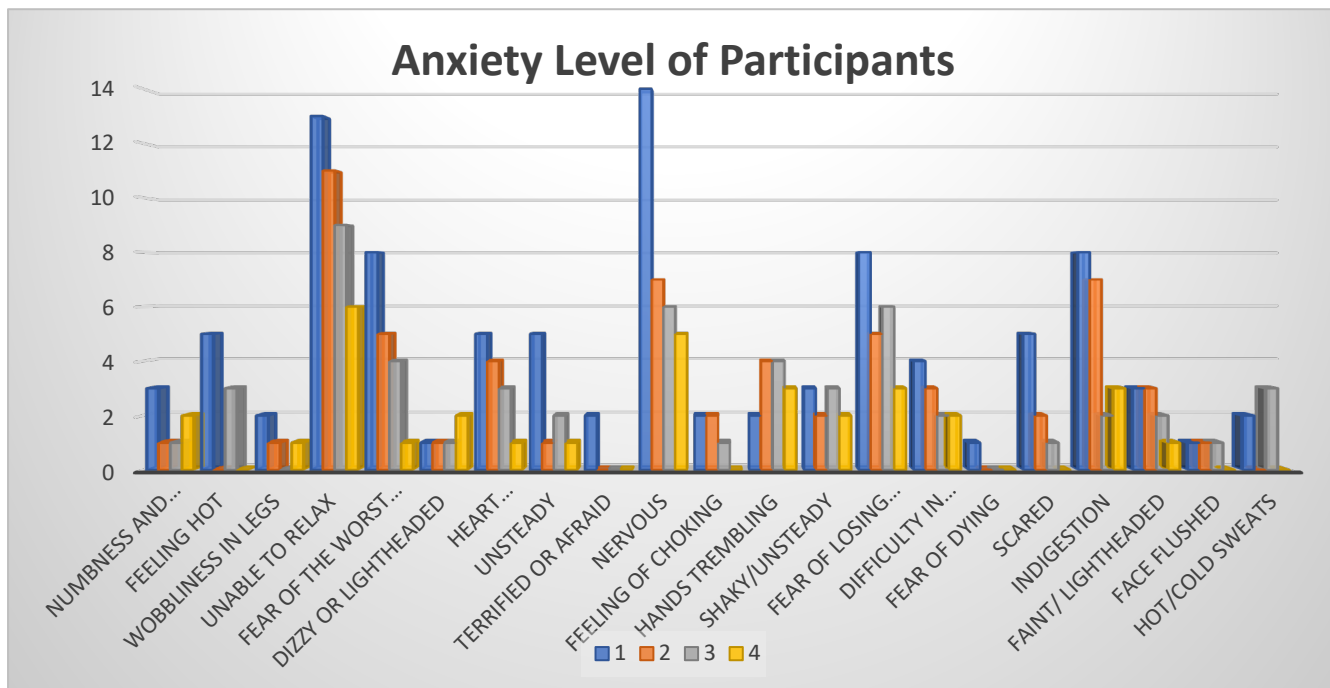


Figure 5 Anxiety Level of Participants

The next graphs show the pre- retreat and post- retreat results from the congregation at large of the First Baptist Church of Morganton, church members 33-85 years of age and older. I stated in the goal of the project that I was going to work with those eighteen years of age and older. In saying this, I was not stating eighteen as a specific age to work with; rather, it was to emphasize that I will be working with the adult population at the First Baptist Church, Morganton, NC. There were 27 inventories with 21 different areas in which one could show anxious symptoms. If 27 people chose 3 on a given anxious symptom such as “Feeling Hot,” then the blue bar in the graph below would show 81.

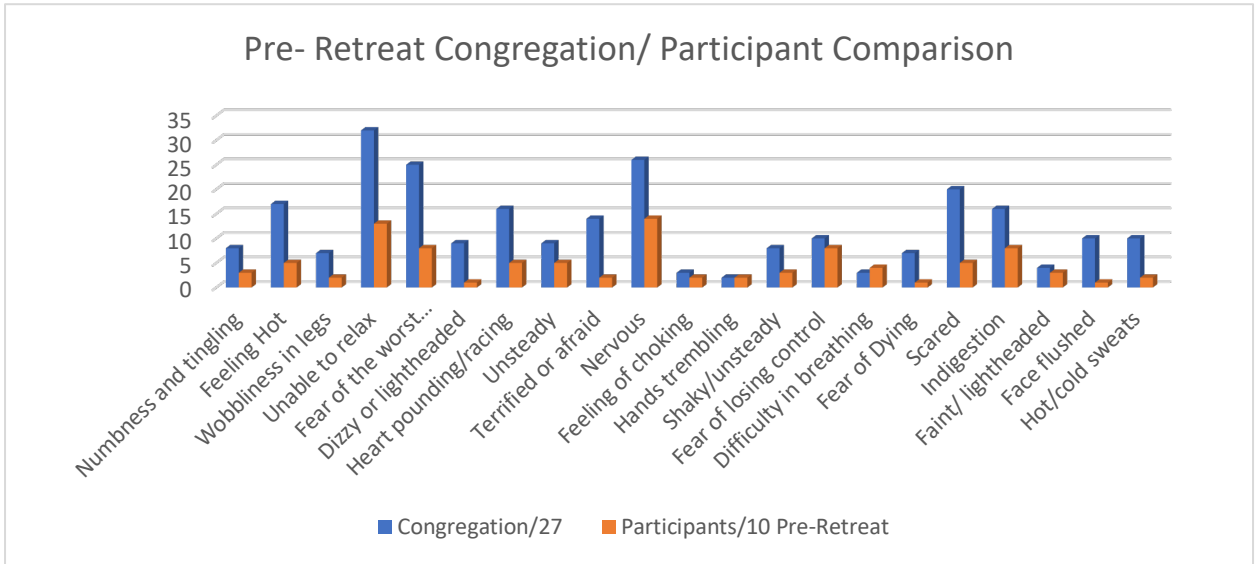


Figure 6 Pre-Retreat Congregation and Participants Comparison

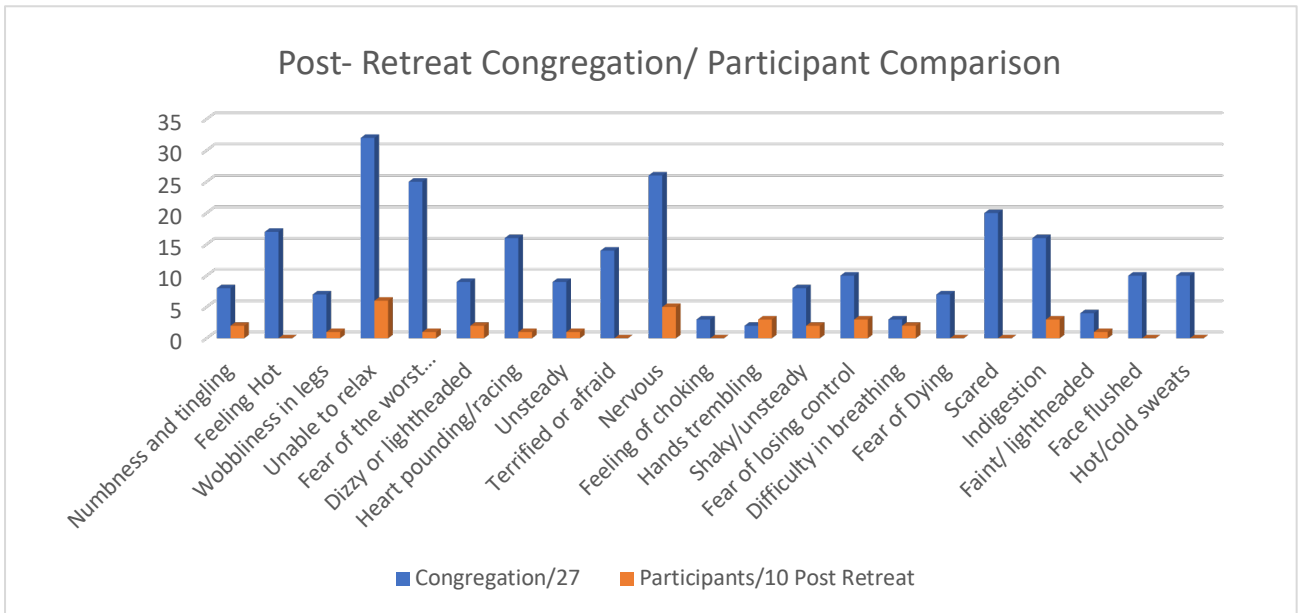


Figure 7 Post Retreat Congregation and Participant Comparison

I have chosen to focus on the categories that are 20% anxious and above for this comparison. This number of total inventory points is a score of 6 for the Participant group and 16 for the Congregation. The areas of 20% or higher for the participant group would have a score of 6 points or above, and they were “Unable to relax,” “Fear of the worst

happening,” “Nervous,” “Fear of losing control,” and “Indigestion.” The areas 20% or higher for the congregation would have a score of 16 or above, and were “Feeling hot,” “Unable to relax,” “Fear of the worst happening,” “Heart pounding,” “Nervous,” “Scared,” and “Indigestion.” Both groups had similar areas of elevated anxiety, “Unable to relax” being the top symptom for both. “Fear of the worst happening,” “Nervous,” and “Indigestion” were the other categories shared by the two groups. The retreat was effective in lowering the anxiety level in each of these categories in the participant group.

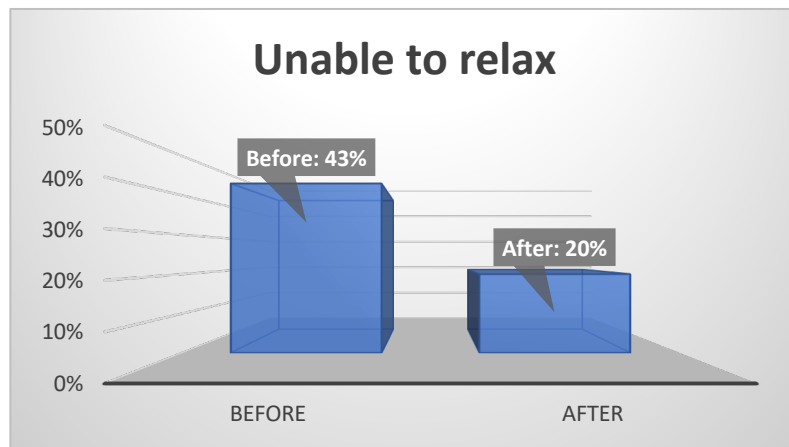


Figure 8 Unable to Relax

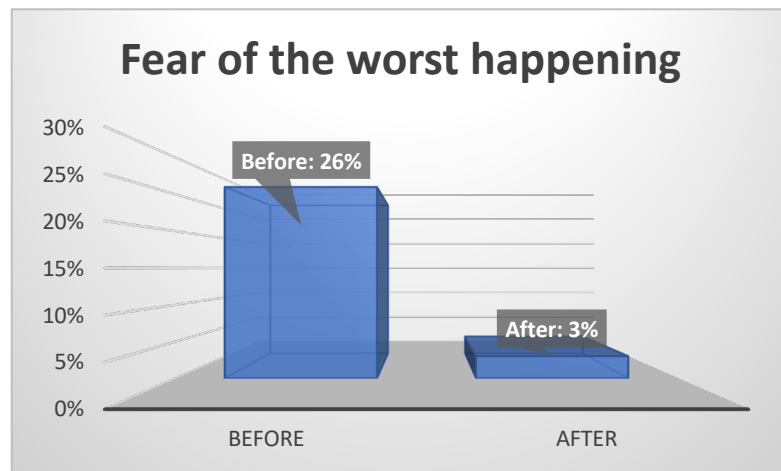


Figure 9 Fear of the Worst Happening

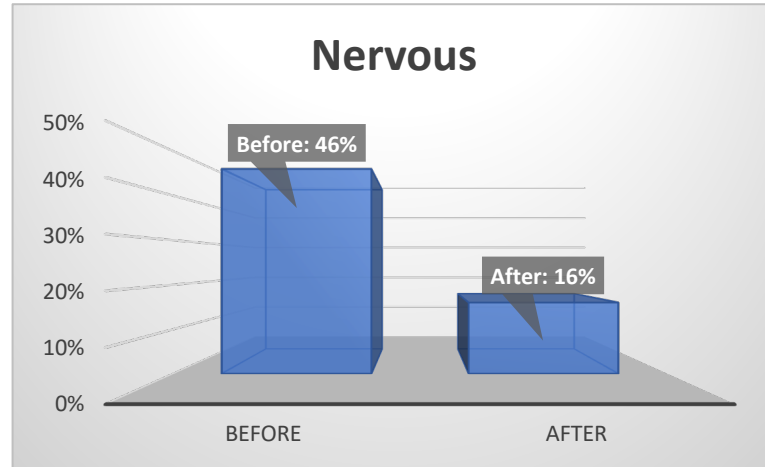


Figure 10 Nervous

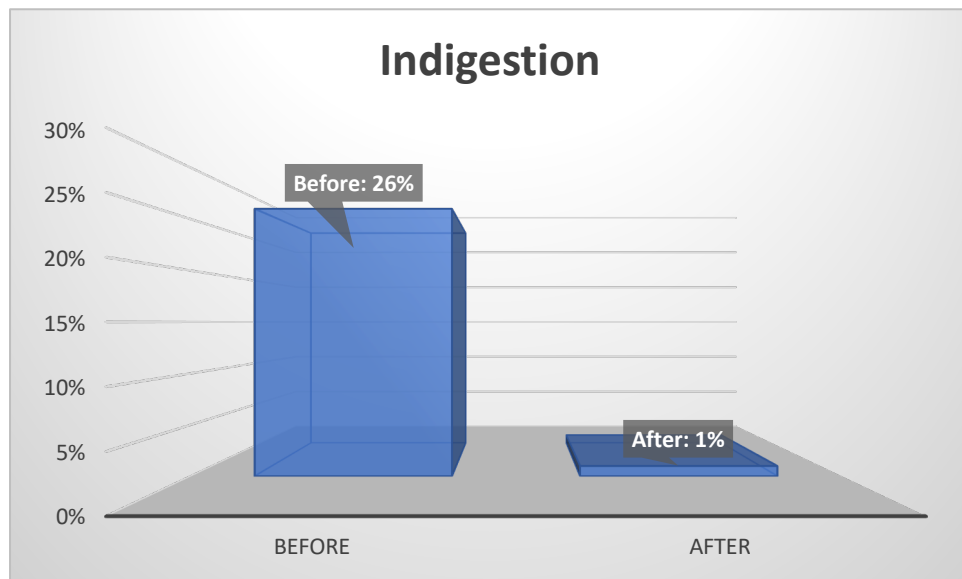


Figure 11 Indigestion

The Inventories showed that the congregation’s anxiety in these categories was elevated in the same categories as the participant group. Since the retreat was successful in lowering the levels of the participant group, it is highly likely the retreat would be able to help the congregation as well. I was concerned about the age of my participant group compared to the church at large until I saw that their areas of elevated anxiety were similar. For the sake of this experiment, I can only measure the categories for which the

participant group indicated anxiety. An example is “Fear of dying.” The participant group was not anxious about dying; however, the congregation showed a slight level of anxiety about dying. I feel that the retreat would help lower that level, but I do not have the data to prove this observation. I am able to say that the areas discussed above show by comparison that the participant group and the congregation were both anxious in those areas and those areas showed a decline throughout the experiment for the participant group. Finding this parallel helped me see that age was not a factor in the areas of similar anxiety at the First Baptist Church, Morganton, NC. In these particular areas age was not a factor in anxiety.

The congregation showed a higher level of anxiety than the participant group in the following categories: “Fear of dying,” “Scared,” “Face Flushed,” “Hot/cold sweats,” “Shaky/unsteady,” “Terrified or afraid,” “Heart pounding/racing,” “Feeling hot,” “Wobbliness in legs,” and “Dizzy or light headed.” I feel that the retreat would help in these areas, but I do not have the data to support this hypothesis.

There were two categories that were not affected by the retreat. They were “Dizzy or lightheaded” and “Hands trembling.” “Dizzy or lightheaded” went from 1 to 2 out of a possible 30, and “Hands trembling” went from 2 to 3 out of a possible 30. These participants noted on their inventories that these numbers reflect medical conditions; they were not due to anxiety.

In looking at the data I tried to find if any one part of the retreat was more favorable than another. The numbers do not show one particular part working better than another, but rather each part helped provide a gradual decline in the level of anxiety. The answers to the questionnaire show the same, that each element of the retreat had

something to offer to the process. I also noticed from the individual responses that one part of the retreat might have meant more to one person than another because each person brings his/her own story to the retreat. Each person's needs are different.

Another part of helping each participant lower his/her anxiety level was to raise his/her level of self-awareness. Analysis of self-awareness levels is hard to measure without input from the participants. After looking at the data collected during the retreat I found I needed more specific information to draw proper conclusions. I was expecting to get better information from the sticky notes and journals that were given to the participants at the start of the retreat. I explained to the participants that the journals and sticky notes provided on his/her tables were for their own reflection and my feedback. I also asked them to reveal any "ah ha" moments that resulted from the retreat. I felt like I explained this portion sufficiently, but, seeing that the sticky notes and journals were not used, I may not have. Having not received information from the sticky notes and journals, I created a questionnaire to further understand the effectiveness of the retreat. The questions were specific to the information I felt I needed to evaluate the process properly. The information asked on the questionnaire was what I hoped to get from the journals and sticky notes. The questionnaire was given to the participants one month after the retreat. Eight of the ten participants provided answers via the questionnaire. Gleaning from the comments during the retreat and the numbers on the inventories, I feel the answers received were representative of the group.

The first question asked was if the information presented helped the participant better his/her relationship with God. I specifically chose biblical stories to which the participants could relate on a personal level. I received feedback that his/her relationships

with God were helped because the information helped ask more about who they were, therefore helping them find a greater sense of purpose. They also shared that the biblical stories reminded them that God was steadfast in his promise to be with the biblical characters and thus God extends that promise to us as well. This was another element I wanted to bring forth in the experiment, to remind us that God is with us all the time. I received feedback that our discussion about our treasure reflecting our hearts was very helpful. One participant said, "I was reminded that although we tend to think of Jesus' words about our hearts being where our treasure is in a very positive way, but there is also a negative perspective of our treasure being of the world. To think that I'm storing up treasures on earth makes me want to be more aware of my actions and thoughts."

The second and third questions focused on the validity and ease of application of specific tools that were used in the retreat. I chose to use The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) as one of the tools to help with self-awareness. I have been able to use it in my life and wanted to share it with the participants. Participants expressed appreciation for this exercise, which helped them further understand their gifts and God's purposeful creation. One comment from the questionnaire stated, "The MBTI helped bring some reassurance of having been created for a purpose and to see how God was able to use what was created in my career." The Family Systems Theory can seem complicated too, so I opened with one of Edwin Friedman's Fables to spark discussion. I was pleased to receive feedback that Friedman's fable, "The Condition," added a better understanding of our world filled with anxiety and stressors and how to deal with them more effectively. I wanted to appeal to each person's empathetic nature to help him/her relate to the biblical characters, so we did an exercise of putting ourselves in the position

of the biblical characters. We did this exercise by asking if we were able to relate to any of them on a personal level. I received positive comments reinforcing that this exercise presented a process to use in biblical interpretation. Interpreting the biblical stories with empathy helps us feel a greater connection to God's story, making us more connected and less anxious. To further support this thought a participant said he/she plans to be more intentional in his/her relationship with God and be more aware of God's presence.

The fourth question asked if the retreat helped set a benchmark for a less anxious life. One measure of success for this retreat is that the participants were able to identify anxious benchmarks and triggers. I received the following response to the fourth question: "I cannot say the retreat lightened anxiety for me. I face a different source of anxiety than a younger person. At 86 my anxiety stems mostly from physical systems that are beginning to feel the stress of age...at my age, I am concerned about the things most older people are." This is confirmation that the retreat gave space to consider the things that make people anxious. This participant concluded with this awareness statement, "I think I did realize at the retreat that I 'borrow' worry, and that talking about it or thinking it through helps." I was very happy to see this response from another participant: "Yes, it caused me to be more alert to identifying stressors in my life and suggestions to better handle them. I went into the retreat with readings daily in the stage 1 hypertension area. With exercise, a medical decision to change prescriptions, and this course I am now experiencing closer to normal readings."

The fifth question asked the participants about my personal presentation skills. I asked, "was there something you would have liked to see happen that didn't, or something that happened that you felt was unnecessary?" I also asked if "I could have

presented in a different way to make the retreat more effective?” One participant said, “Thank you for the opportunity to have participated in this process. To be honest, initially, I was not impressed. As I have had time to reflect on the objective, the process involved and applied some of the concepts on an ongoing basis, I believe your model is worthy of support and implementation on a much broader scale.” Another participant said, “The retreat was a positive experience for me. I would like to have had it much sooner in life. The Christian perspective solidly impacted my life. Some workshops/retreats you leave with little that you can take and use. This is not one of those.” I was pleased to find that they were able to apply the information presented.

There were several logistical problems that were brought to my attention in the questionnaire answers. Several people responded on their questionnaires that they felt the amount of time for each section should be expanded. They said they would have liked more time on the Family Systems Concepts and more time theorizing about biblical character’s MBTI scores. This response reveals that the process worked but could possibly have been more effective with more time for group discussion. More group discussion might have gleaned more insights conversationally from the retreat.

I was also forced to move the retreat to the Youth Room at church instead of the Fellowship Hall as originally planned. Somehow, the Fellowship Hall was double booked and I chose to move forward with adapting to a different location. Logistically, the Youth Room is up one flight of stairs and has an industrial feel which may not have been as welcoming to the participants. When working to lower one’s anxiety, there needs to be a level of comfort in the environment. Knowing the age of the participants the stairs could

have been a source of anxiety as well. These are things I will consider for future presentations.

Several of the participants stated age as a factor in their lower anxiety level. This made me wonder if there was something to the fact that age kept coming up within our conversations around anxiety. I was not able to explore this theme with the participants during the retreat, but I was brought back to Friedman to gain some insight. The most simplistic level of systems thinking tells us that something consuming so much thought has to be significant. This line of thinking led me back to two of the five concepts of systems thinking that we referred to in the retreat, specifically, homeostasis and the identified patient. The aging members of my congregation are doing what they can to not upset homeostasis, and becoming the identified patient is a culturally acceptable way of achieving that goal. Instead of fully processing their age-related anxious feelings, it is easier to lump all of their concerns into one group of anxieties identified as age. This observation is obviously unconscious. Having made this observation, I will be listening for this theme to come up in further conversations with them and hopefully be able to help them sort through these feelings in a better way. Unfortunately, our culture does this lumping together of stressors for many different areas of life, age being one of them. Friedman said, “This unified concept of homeostasis helps explain the creation and the perpetuation of an identified physical patient. As with behavioral symptoms, physical illness also can serve to stabilize a family and thus impede rehabilitation of the sick member.”⁶² For example: A particularly anxious clergy person could make herself feel

⁶²Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 130.

good and useful by continually focusing on the aged in her congregation by creating an identified patient instead of dealing with her own anxiety in a healthy way. Friedman also said, “The less well-differentiated a family relationship system, the more probability exists that stress in any family member can produce dysfunction in any other family member.”⁶³ Understanding this is a way for me to do my part in understanding how I, as clergy staff, have a responsibility to maintain proper differentiation.

Furthermore, I have come to realize that this lack of clear understanding of anxiety is my fault. As I spoke about earlier in the description, I should have used the word “stressed” and not the word anxious. This would have also brought clarity to the understanding that later stages of life are less prone to anxiety, but not stress.

The third evaluative tool offered definitive information about how I, as the presenter, did and how the information was received and ultimately used. After reviewing the first two sets of results there were still gaps in the data. I had comments and statements from participants; however, I needed more consistent data in order to analyze it sufficiently. To gather this last piece of data I created a questionnaire for the ten participants to use that used a Likert scale of 1-10, 10 representing that they fully agree and 1 representing that they do not agree at all. In order to process this data more efficiently, I have broken it down into sections. For each question a chart is provided that shows the average number collected from the ten participants. After each chart I will explain my findings from that chart.

⁶³ Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation*., 135.

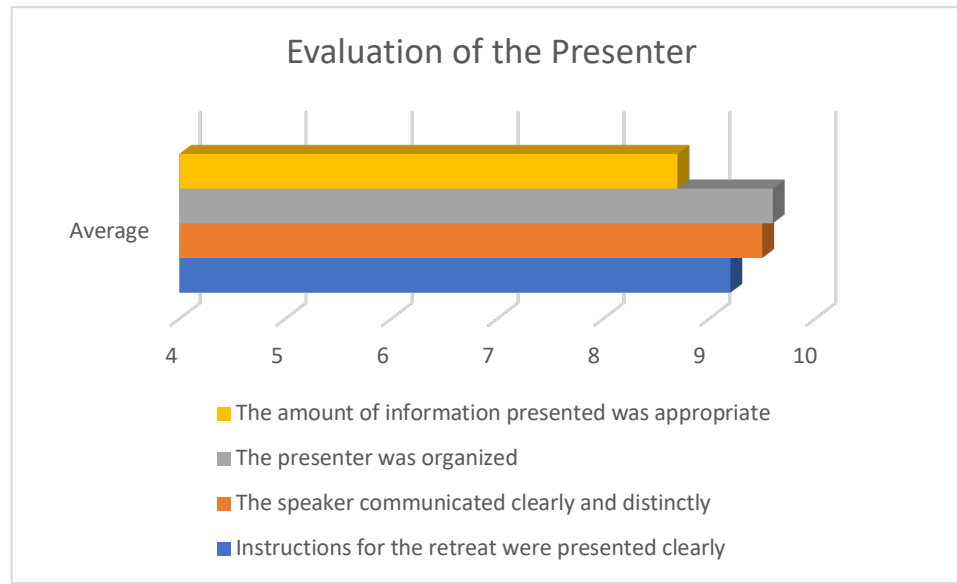


Figure 12 Evaluation of the Presenter

The numbers in this section fell where I thought they would except for one section. I was surprised to see the yellow section was as high as it was. My self-critique to this point has been that I presented too much information; I therefore expected that number to be lower. I have also seen how I should have asked this question differently. In asking was “the amount of information presented appropriate,” my self-critique of too much information was making me assume that I would not have presented too little. I should have clarified this discrepancy with another question. Either way, 8.7 out of 10 confirms that I have at least a little room to be concerned about the amount of information. I regret not asking the question, “Was there too little information presented? If so, what areas were deficient?” I was trying to appeal to a wide variety of people, so I offered five different tools that I have personally used to help me lower my anxiety or stress level. An interesting piece of information is that the participants who had no prior experience with these tools did not feel it was too much information. I feel that they would recall this conclusion because they did not know we were just scratching the

surface, whereas the participants having prior experience with these tools knew how much I was not able to present. I felt that the retreat was organized, so I was glad to find that the participants thought so as well. Future use of this retreat will benefit from a more focused approach on each subject, perhaps even a different retreat for each of these topics.

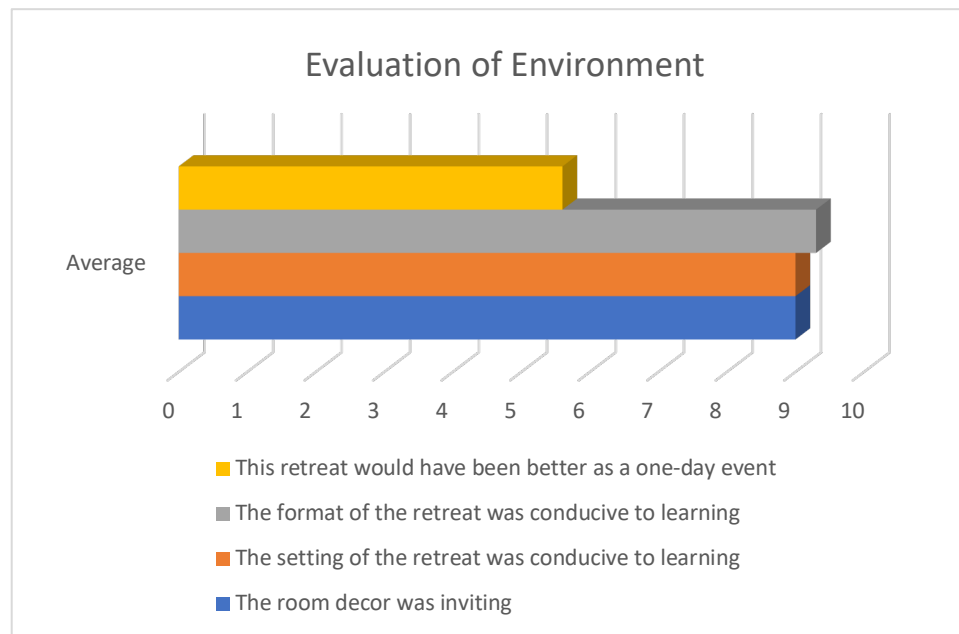


Figure 13 Evaluation of Environment

I was interested to get the results of this sections because I was thrown a curve ball the week before the retreat happened. I was informed that the Fellowship Hall at our church had been double- booked. I ended up moving the retreat to our Youth Room, which we call Kaleidoscope. The decor is very industrial. The ceiling is open with exposed beams. The lights look like something one would see in a warehouse. The floor is sealed, exposed concrete that reveals the imperfections of the previously constructed Sunday School rooms that were torn down. It was designed for youth and constructed to be durable. The biggest concern I had about using this room was the fact that we have no

elevator and the room is up one flight of stairs from the main entrance of the church. As soon as I learned I would need to make a change, I began calling the participants who had confirmed their participation to make sure the flight of stairs would not be an issue. The Kaleidoscope was my secondary choice because the technical equipment I needed was already in place and there is a kitchen in the room for coffee and snacks. The evaluation of room décor turned out to be a love it or hate it situation. Seven out of 10 people gave it a 10; 1 person gave it an 8, and one person gave it a 2. It appears that this evaluation was one steeped in personal opinion and one that could not have been foreseen. The information is good to know for future events in that room that are not youth centered events.

“Would this retreat have been better presented as a one-day event?” My self-critique has been leading me toward adjusting the overall time frame. Perhaps an overnight schedule at another location would have been better. Would a one-day retreat be more conducive? I also considered splitting the retreat up over a month of Wednesday nights. In the questionnaire I failed to take into consideration the best time of day participants could absorb the information. I was more concerned with each participant’s availability than I was with his/her engagement.

I was pleased to see that the time frame and décor did not change the participants’ ability to value the experience. The format and the setting of the retreat were both favorable with a 9 out of 10.

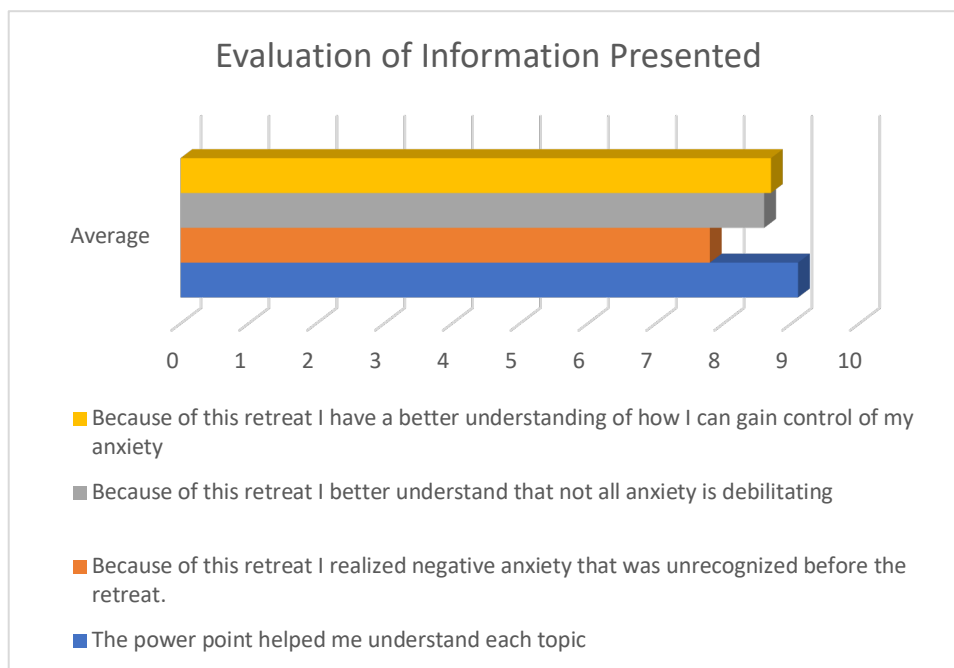


Figure 14 Evaluation of Information Presented

This section is a volatile one because of what the participants bring or do not bring with them to the retreat. I am not surprised to see a 7.8 for the orange question. They were asked if the retreat helped them realize negative anxiety that was unrecognized before the retreat. I heard from several of the participants before the retreat that they wanted to come participate but did not feel very anxious. This is the point at which I should have defined anxiety more carefully and made it synonymous with stress. They felt that at their advanced age they did not experience anxiety but each age group experiences stress. The goal of the retreat was to lower the anxiety of the participants and to give them tools to evaluate continually where his/her anxiety level is. Part of this self-evaluation is knowing that not all anxiety is debilitating, keeping in mind, however, that all anxiety builds up in our system. I should have spent more time on this area. An 8.6 out of 10 is a decent average, but, however the participants felt, I know I could have spent more time talking about the effects of stress and anxiety on our systems. Along these

same lines, there was an average of 8.7 out of 10 stating the participants have a better understanding of how to gain control of their anxiety. Because of the retreat 8.6 out of ten claim they are more aware of what constitutes debilitating anxiety and they claim they are able to gain control of their anxiety. I was not surprised to find that the PowerPoint was helpful.

The next two charts are directly correlated, so I will analyze them together.

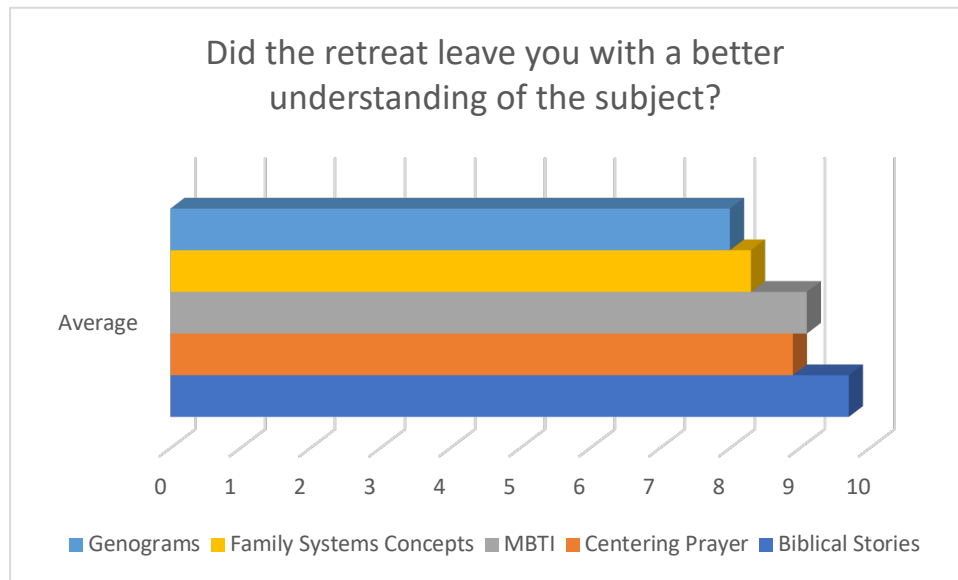


Figure 15 Did the retreat leave you with a better understanding of the subject?

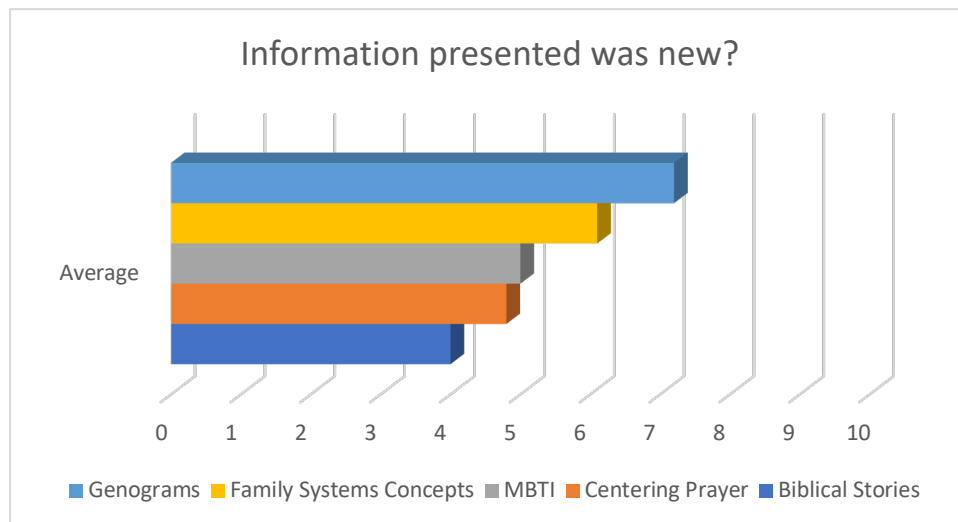


Figure 16 Information presented was new?

It makes sense that these charts would turn out in reverse order. The participants were most familiar with the biblical stories and least familiar with Genograms. They left the retreat with a better understanding of what they were already familiar with. They were able to build on what they brought with them. I was not surprised by either one of these charts. During the retreat, I spent the least amount of time on Genograms. My goal with Genograms was merely to introduce the concept for each participant's future consideration. Doing a genogram, however, is a huge undertaking and meant to be a life-long project. I am pleased to find that the lowest average was 8 out of 10, and that it was in the Genogram area.

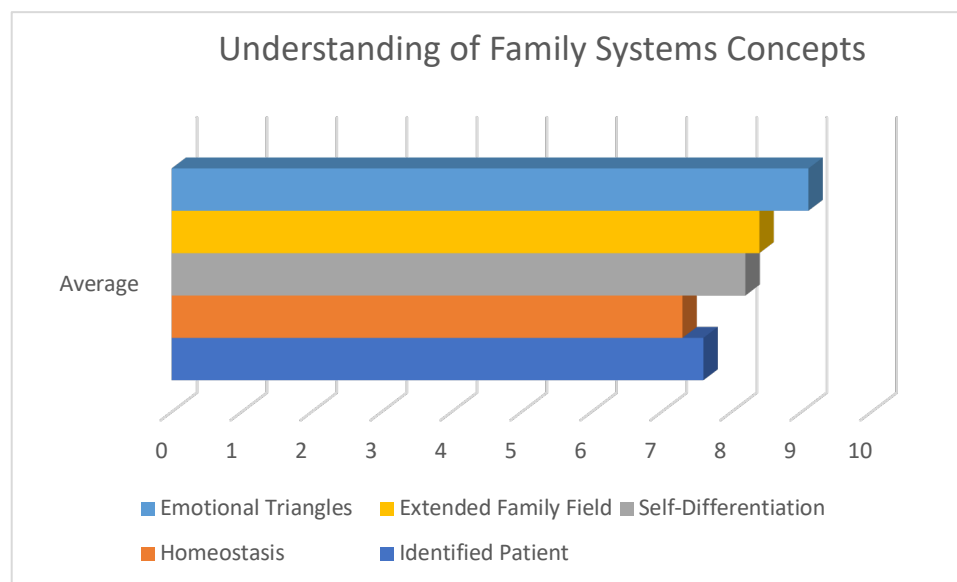


Figure 17 Understanding of Family Systems Concepts

Realistically, I could have done an entire retreat on one of these sections alone. The information I presented was meant to be an introduction and the averages showed a fair understanding of the Family Systems concepts. I was not surprised at the findings from the questionnaire. Homeostasis is the most complicated to explain in a 10-15 minute

introduction. Emotional Triangles are one of the easier concepts to comprehend because they are more tangible and easier to visualize. Self-differentiation is represented with the grey bar in the graph above. All of the concepts in this graph hinge on an understanding of Self-differentiation. Self-differentiation is one's understanding of where one's boundary begins and someone else's ends. The opposite of self-differentiated is enmeshed. Enmeshed is when two people are connected so tightly that they cannot function apart from one another. For this reason, I would have liked to have seen higher than 8.2 on Self-differentiation.

Another explanation for the participants understanding the biblical characters more is that we spent more time discussing the Bible stories than we did the other areas. The biblical stories were presented on Friday night and were the only information-oriented tool presented that day. Until I began to analyze the retreat as a whole I did not consider that most of the heavy and newly presented information parts of the retreat were all presented on Saturday morning. It appears I may have created a bias without realizing it until now. The understanding level of biblical stories showed a 9.7 out of 10 and showed a 4 out of 10 on the level of newness. Question 16 in the questionnaire is represented in blue below. It asked if since the retreat are you better able to connect to God's story by connecting to biblical characters, and the average was 8 out of 10, which was higher than the other subjects. The biblical characters, what question 14 shows as the most understood subject, was the first subject in the retreat and having given this subject the larger time allotment I placed it at an advantage.

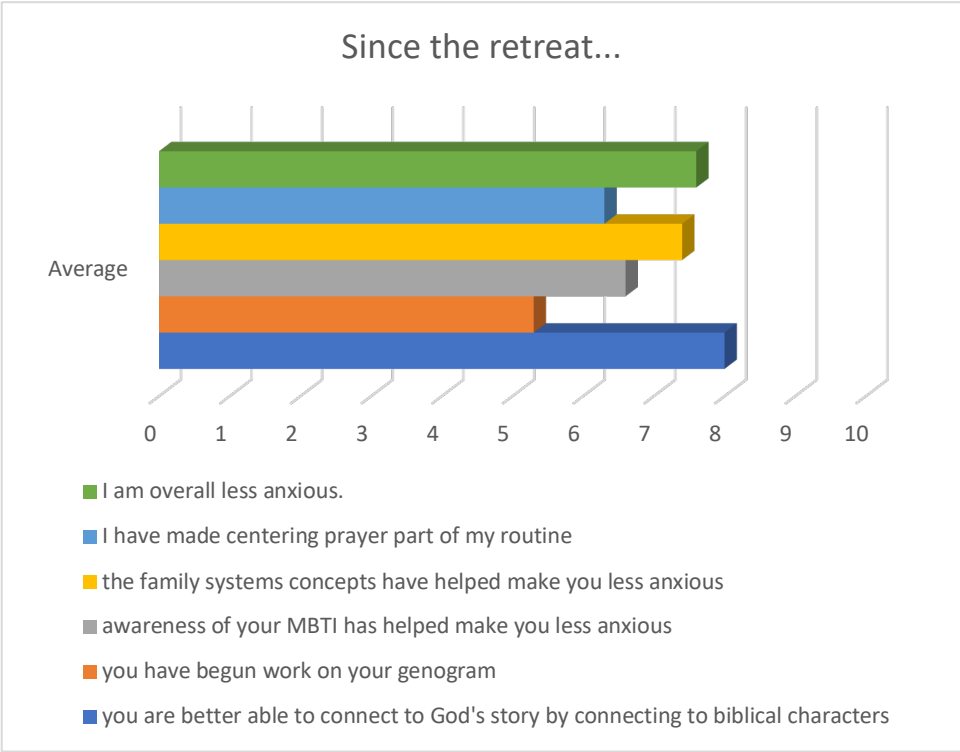


Figure 18 Since the Retreat

This section took a great deal of work to analyze because the responses were very individualized. By merely looking at the group averages in this section, the results seem to be inconclusive; however, on a group scale the raw data shows that individuals benefitted from different parts of the retreat. For this reason and the sake of being thorough, I have included the raw data from questions 16-20 alongside the averages. These questions asked which areas of the retreat had the most impact on each participant’s level of anxiety.

	Average	Score Range
Biblical Characters	8	6-10
Genograms	5.3	1-10
MBTI	6.6	1-10

Family Systems	7.4	4-10
Centering Prayer	6.3	2-10

Figure 19 Which areas had the most impact of the participants anxiety?

For each section there was a strong value and weak value. To me, this shows an inconclusive overall result while still showing that each section was valued by at least some of the participants. It would be nice to know which of these sections lowered anxiety the most; however, the value and usefulness seems to be dependent upon the participant's connection to that particular subject matter. For example: The participants showed the least connection to Genograms, and Genograms received the least amount of post-retreat engagement per the graph on page 60. Although I suspect this conclusion would be accurate for each group I would do this retreat with, I do not have the data to support hard and fast results to make this conclusion scientifically.

I expected the connection to the biblical characters to be the area most used after the retreat, because this area was the one that was most familiar before the retreat. I expected the work on genograms to be the lowest number to two reasons: we spent the least amount of time on them, and they take a lot of complicated effort to work on. I was hoping the group would have a had higher than 7.6 overall anxiety rating. I have to keep in mind, however, that the participants were not extremely anxious to begin with per their Beck inventories. Since the retreat the participants average of anxiousness is 7.6 out of 10. The raw data showed four 10's out of 10, two 8's out of 10, two 6's out of 10, one 5

out of 10 and one 3 out of 10. The lower scores are from the participants who did not claim to be overly anxious to begin with, so I feel that 7.6 is respectable.

The participants at the retreat included a retired pastor, a current minister, a few Sunday School teachers, several former deacons, and a few current deacons, all of whom have a pretty good understanding of the Bible. Knowing this group makeup, I am glad to see that even those who already knew a lot about the Bible were able to apply a deeper understanding of how to connect with the biblical characters.

When we began the section on the MBTI I asked how many participants were familiar with the subject. There were a few people who said they had taken the test years ago but had forgotten his/her score. There was also one person that said he/she had taken it but this was not of much interest to him/her. Some people were interested in the refresher, and one had not had any exposure before the retreat. The one participant that had his/her first-time introduction to the MBTI was fascinated with it, whereas some of the others, although attentive, felt they had already done all they could do with the MBTI.

I am not surprised at all to find that very few had begun work on their genogram. We spent very little time on genograms, so I am not sure I was able to convey how valuable a genogram can be. This instance is another example of how I tried to present too much information in the time frame allotted. Like centering prayer, genograms take time and diligence.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The retreat was not without fault but in the end proved to be successful. The Beck Inventory showed that the level of anxiety was lower for the participants at the end of the retreat than it was at the beginning. The feedback from the essays showed various ways that the retreat impacted the participants. Finally, the last survey showed that the material was presented in a way it could be understood and that by obtaining the material, the participants were able to live less anxious lives. I learned I was able to offer concepts of faith and practice that were useful for dealing with anxiety within The First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC. It was successful in offering better ways for individuals to relate to biblical characters, reminding them of their own involvement in God's story. The retreat also offered tools for self-discovery in which proper space was made available for personal growth within the experiment.

Upon reflection and review, there are some things I should have done differently. I should have explained the Beck Inventory in a different way. In an attempt not to influence the results of the inventories, I left my explanations very open-ended. In retrospect, I should have explained the Beck Inventory in greater detail. For example, one of the participants noted this on their inventory: "Not sure the scale really captures present anxiety- age, health." The Beck Inventory gives a list of 21 symptoms, and the one taking the inventory is to rate the occurrence of that symptom with a 0-3. If age or health were causing 1 of the 21 symptoms, then that could have been reflected in a few different ways. For example: "Fear of the worst," "Unable to relax," "Terrified of afraid," "Fear of losing control," "Fear of dying," "Scared," "Indigestion." I still believe the Beck

Inventory was the best option to use; however, I needed to be clearer in explaining its function and purpose. As I said earlier in the analysis, I feel that this explanation would have made the measurable level of anxiety higher.

I had a concern about the time frame of the retreat. In an attempt to have an adequate number of participants, I kept the time frame very minimal. It is deeply engrained, with good intention, in the DNA of churches to cater to parishioners. Churches are service organizations with the need for clear differentiation. With it, fear that a parishioner may leave or that people will complain about lower numbers of attendees could become an unreasonable concern. This concern causes churches to miss moments of effective ministry because they do not want congregants to think they are being pushy, but in actuality, they have to be pushed sometimes to become their best self. We need to be more confident in our call and not fear pushing a healthy differentiated boundary. It turns out that the response for this survey question was that 5.6 out of 10 were in favor of the time frame the way it was. I have learned that the only way to please schedules is to offer more than one time slot and communicate accurately the time frame that will be required.

The self-critique I have thought through the most is the amount of information I presented. I crammed too much information into the retreat. I either needed to offer a longer retreat or choose less information to present. Also, by not offering more time, I limited the opportunity for conversation. Although the questionnaire shows that 8.7 out of 10 felt the amount of information presented was appropriate, I also received several comments on the essays stating they felt like they would have benefited from more

discussion with the presenter and also each other. In order to have more time to do this, the retreat would have to be longer or the information less.

This project was personally significant to me because it reassured me that God is still at work in me. My academic endeavors have been far from stellar, so I was forced early on to rely on my social skills to help me through early education. Thankfully, I was introduced to Sociology and found value in its study. Further, I was introduced to Family Systems Theory in divinity school and was able to give voice to my relationship with the world. All of this reflection led me to see God differently. I have been able to bring all of this material together for self-healing and wholeness, and I have been able to present the culmination of this process in the form of a retreat to help bring others to wholeness as well. I am thankful for the opportunity to have worked hard on this project socially, spiritually, and academically. Having had such a good experience with all of this material, I became a little over-zealous in wanting to have it all in one retreat. It was easy to overlook the fact that these subject areas have affected my life over the past fifteen years, and I was presenting it in a twelve-hour span of time.

Theologically, this project was appropriate because we were reminded over and over that God is with us all the time. When stress enters into our lives, we get so busy dealing with it that we forget God is with us. God goes looking for Adam and Eve in the garden. God goes looking for Cain to offer him a new beginning. God is with Elijah through the storm. God tends to the flowers of the field and the animals of the forest. God is in the world around us and this retreat was able to remind us that the biblical characters struggled with perceiving God's presence as much as we struggle, too.

Historically, this project was appropriate because we were reminded through Augustine, Martin Luther, and Martin Luther King, Jr. that people throughout time have struggled with anxiety. The answer continues to be remembering that God is with us.

The First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC was the ministry setting for my project and I was able to bring awareness of how God is working in us individually, therefore working in us as a congregation. For the sake of using my small group of participants as a guide group for finding tools that could help the entire congregation, it was helpful to find that the congregation as a whole had the same areas of anxiety as the group of participants. I hope to use this information in future ministry at the First Baptist Morganton, NC by collaborating with the other staff ministers to see if there are ways, other than a retreat format, to offer some of the tools to the whole congregation. I am hopeful that the ten participants will be able to share with other church members the need to think more critically about biblical passages. This could help the whole congregation become more aware of how God is working in their lives.

I have highlighted positive and negative factors discovered during the project, and I want to reiterate several in closing. This project has reminded me again that I have purpose and a calling to share with others. I now know that the tools I used in my personal discovery are effective for others as well, however when presented all at once. I am also more confident in helping God's people work through the struggles that tend to push us further from God instead of closer to God. Ten people of the First Baptist Church of Morganton, NC are now less anxious than they were before this project, and they have the tools to help them maintain less-anxious lives. As a church staff, we have some direction as to how we might lead our parishioners. I have spoken with the other staff

ministers about adapting this project into a series for our Wednesday night programming. Learning what I have, I will be able to add in time for discussion and maybe present one subject at a time.

Through the entire doctorate process, writing papers, class discussion, and personal reflection, I have been able to discover that I do a great deal of work in my head, which can hinder ministry. Youth rarely ask why we might be doing a particular activity, but they are quick to let you know their reaction to the activity. I need to make explaining my rationale more of a professional practice. If I work things out and just expect folks to follow, then I am perpetuating over-function in the church and hindering proper self-differentiation in my parishioners.

I have also realized during this doctoral process that I need peers to engage with professionally. I found a great deal of encouragement and instruction from my peers in our class discussion. Some of this discovery was quite unpleasant. Although I became aware of some negative qualities, the process has turned out to be positive by helping me move forward. I have had a few embarrassing, tearful moments to contemplate. I have spent much time thinking through those moments, which led me to further self-discovery. I have seen first-hand that working on a church staff is lonely and that this loneliness mounts up gradually. It mounts up so slowly that it catches me off guard and overwhelms me. The prospect of being a lonely extrovert in a church full of people is truly baffling; however, I have learned that parishioners and peers are different in how open I can be with each one in conversation. I am disappointed to discover that I am not as self-sufficient as I thought I was. This degree process has pushed me and exposed areas of self-doubt and loneliness that have never been exposed before. Yes, I am confident and

competent, but it has been good to find my breaking point and to have had support in finding my limits.

APPENDIX A
CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION

**GARDNER-WEBB UNIVERSITY
CONSENT FORM FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPATION**

Study Title: Lowering The Resting Level of Anxiety of the First Baptist Church, Morganton, NC
Principal Investigator: Tyler P. Roach

I am a student at the Gardner-Webb University, in the School of Divinity. I am conducting a research study, which I invite you to take part in. This form has important information about the reason for doing this study, what we will ask you to do if you decide to be in this study, and the way we would like to use information about you if you choose to be in the study.

You are being asked to participate in a research study about anxiety and how it can negatively affect the lives of church members. The purpose of the study is to help the participants lower their resting level of anxiety.

If you choose to participate in this research I will be asking you to devote your physical presence on Friday evening February 22nd and on Saturday morning February 23rd. During the retreat I will ask that you participate to the best of your ability so as to test the methods that will be put before you to help lower negative anxiety. You will be asked to participate in group discussion as you are able. You will also be asked to take the Beck Anxiety Inventory several times during the experiment and also a month after the experiment is completed. I will need you to bring this consent form with you as well as your results from the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator from 16personalities.com with you when you arrive. The experimental retreat will take place in the First Baptist Church Fellowship Hall.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You do not have to answer any question you do not want to answer. If at any time and for any reason, you would prefer not to participate in this study, please feel free not to. If at any time you would like to stop participating, please tell me. You may withdraw from this study at any time. If you decide to withdraw from this study, I will ask you if the information already collected from you can be used

Confidentiality is very important to this process and I will take great care to make sure any information gathered during this experiment is protected. I may quote your remarks in presentations or articles resulting from this work. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity, unless you specifically request that you be identified by your true name. If at any time I think that you intend to harm yourself or others, I will approach you and also reserve the right and responsibility to notify the appropriate people with the information.

This retreat should be a time for you to relax and further define who God has created you to be, however, if you find that your anxiety becomes more than we can work out during the retreat then I will help you get the help you need for continuing care.

I have read this form and the research study has been explained to me. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Name (printed)

Participant's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
BECK ANXIETY INVENTORY
 (for participants and church members)

Beck Anxiety Inventory

Below is a list of common symptoms of anxiety. Please carefully read each item in the list. Indicate how much you have been bothered by that symptom during the past month, including today, by circling the number in the corresponding space in the column next to each symptom.

	Not At All	Mildly but it didn't bother me much.	Moderately - it wasn't pleasant at times	Severely – it bothered me a lot
Numbness or tingling	0	1	2	3
Feeling hot	0	1	2	3
Wobbliness in legs	0	1	2	3
Unable to relax	0	1	2	3
Fear of worst happening	0	1	2	3
Dizzy or lightheaded	0	1	2	3
Heart pounding/racing	0	1	2	3
Unsteady	0	1	2	3
Terrified or afraid	0	1	2	3
Nervous	0	1	2	3
Feeling of choking	0	1	2	3
Hands trembling	0	1	2	3
Shaky / unsteady	0	1	2	3
Fear of losing control	0	1	2	3
Difficulty in breathing	0	1	2	3
Fear of dying	0	1	2	3
Scared	0	1	2	3
Indigestion	0	1	2	3
Faint / lightheaded	0	1	2	3
Face flushed	0	1	2	3
Hot/cold sweats	0	1	2	3
Column Sum				

Scoring - Sum each column. Then sum the column totals to achieve a grand score. Write that score here _____.

Interpretation

A grand sum between **0 – 21** indicates very low anxiety. That is usually a good thing. However, it is possible that you might be unrealistic in either your assessment which would be denial or that you have learned to “mask” the symptoms commonly associated with anxiety. Too little “anxiety” could indicate that you are detached from yourself, others, or your environment.

A grand sum between **22 – 35** indicates moderate anxiety. Your body is trying to tell you something. Look for patterns as to when and why you experience the symptoms described above. For example, if it occurs prior to public speaking and your job requires a lot of presentations you may want to find ways to calm yourself before speaking or let others do some of the presentations. You may have some conflict issues that need to be resolved. Clearly, it is not “panic” time but you want to find ways to manage the stress you feel.

A grand sum that **exceeds 36** is a potential cause for concern. Again, look for patterns or times when you tend to feel the symptoms you have circled. Persistent and high anxiety is not a sign of personal weakness or failure. It is, however, something that needs to be proactively treated or there could be significant impacts to you mentally and physically. You may want to consult a counselor if the feelings persist.

APPENDIX C
EVALUATION ESSAY QUESTIONS

Final Evaluation for Participants

1. Did the information that was presented help your relationship with God? If so, which parts?
2. How have you been able to implement any of the concept from the retreat? Example: Bible Stories/View of God, Family Systems concepts, MBTI
3. Have any of the concepts we learned led you to search out other ways to deepen your relationship with God and Self?
4. Do you feel like the retreat set a benchmark for a less anxious life?
5. Having processed the experience, is there something you would have liked to see happen that didn't, or something that happened that was unnecessary? Could I have presented in a different way to make it more effective?

APPENDIX D
FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire for Participants

Please answer the following with a number 1-10. If you fully agree with the statement please answer 10 and if you absolutely disagree with the statement please answer 1.

Evaluation of Presenter

1. Instructions for the retreat were presented clearly.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
2. The speaker communicated clearly and distinctly.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
3. The presenter was organized.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
4. The amount of information presented was appropriate to the amount of time.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Evaluation of Environment (If your response is below 5 please explain what could be improved)

5. The room décor was inviting. _____

6. The setting of the retreat was conducive to learning. _____

7. The format of the retreat was conducive to learning. _____

8. This retreat would have been better as a one-day event. _____

Evaluation of Information Presented

9. The power point helped me understand each topic.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
10. Because of this retreat I realized negative anxiety that was unrecognized before the retreat.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
11. Because of this retreat I better understanding that not all anxiety is debilitating.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
12. Because of this retreat I have a better understanding of how I can gain control of my anxiety.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
13. The retreat focused on what as the source of anxiety? _____

14. Please mark 1-10 with 10 representing full understanding and 1-10 with 1 being a totally new subject matter. Additionally, please rank them in order of relevance to the left.

- a. Biblical stories
Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 New Subject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- b. Centering prayer
Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 New Subject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c. Myers-Briggs Type Indicator
Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 New Subject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- d. Family systems concepts
Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 New Subject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- e. Genograms
Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 New Subject 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

15. Please check 1-10 with 10 representing full understanding of the family systems concept and rank them in order of relevance to the left.

- a. Identified Patient Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- b. Homeostasis Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- c. Self-Differentiation Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- d. Extended Family Field Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
- e. Emotional Triangles Understood 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

16. Since the retreat you are better able to connect to God's story by connecting to biblical characters.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

17. Since the retreat you have begun work on your genogram.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

18. Since the retreat awareness of your MBTI has helped make you less anxious.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

19. Since the retreat the family systems concepts have helped make you less anxious.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

20. Since the retreat I have made centering prayer part of my routine.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

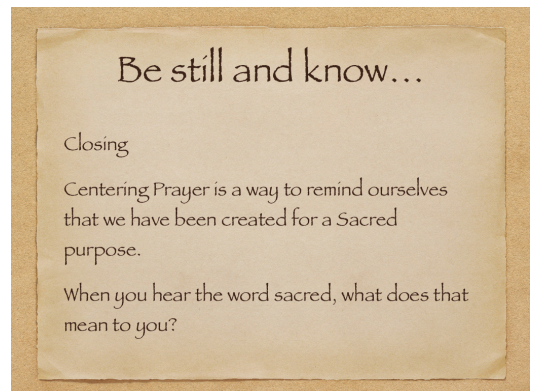
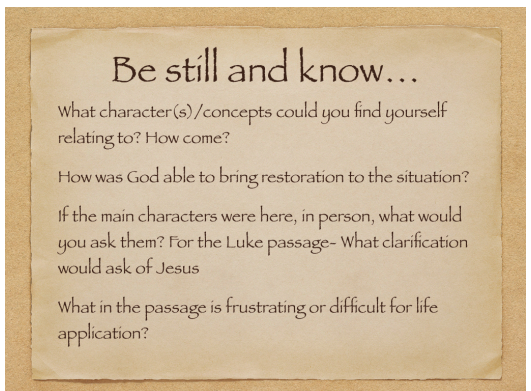
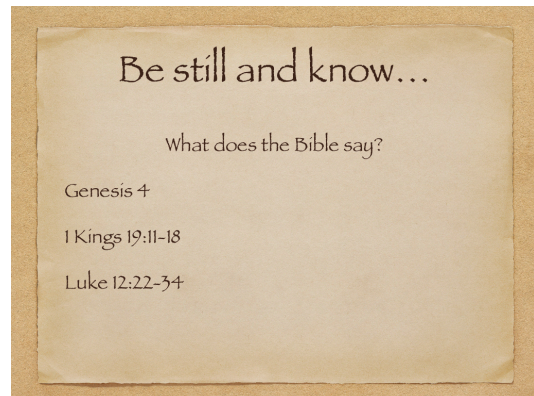
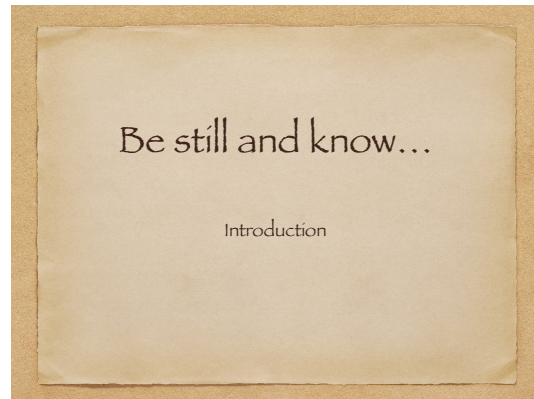
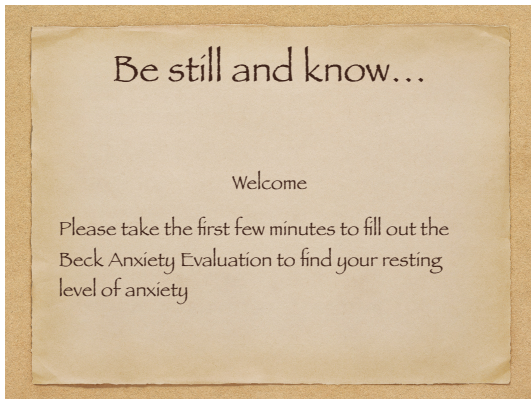
21. Since the retreat I am overall less anxious.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

22. What from the retreat has made you less anxious? _____

Do you have any other comments about the presenter or retreat that you would like to add?

APPENDIX E
POWERPOINT SLIDES USED



Be still and know...

What Centering Prayer Is and Is Not

It is not a charismatic gift but a path of transformation.

It is not a form of self-hypnosis but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.

It is not a para-psychological experience but an exercise of faith, hope and selfless love.

It is not a relaxation exercise but it may be quite refreshing.

It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a deeper relationship with God.

It is not limited to the "felt" presence of God but is rather a deepening of faith in God's abiding presence.

It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions.

Be still and know...

Centering Prayer

Please fill out another evaluation before you leave for the night. Thank you!

Be still and know...

Please fill out an evaluation before we begin.

Myers-Briggs Type Indicator

Be still and know...

If you would like to take a free test, it takes 15-20 minutes and you can find one at:

16personalities.com

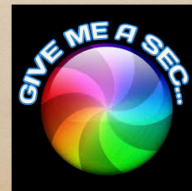
Be still and know...

"Freidman's Fables" The Ganglia

Edwin Freidman was a Jewish Rabbi that wrote "Generation to Generation." This book outlined the form and function of the church through the structure of Bowen's Family Systems Theory.

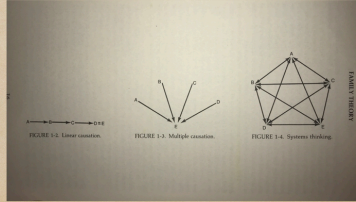
Be still and know...

Thinking In Systems



Be still and know...

Thinking In Systems



Be still and know...

Identified Patient
Homeostasis
Self-differentiation
Extended Family Field
Emotional Triangles

Be still and know...

Genogram

Be still and know...

Centering Prayer

Be still and know...

Please remember to take the
evaluation again before you leave.
And take a copy with you to return
to me by March 24th.
Thank you again!!

Be still and know...

that I am God and I am with you.
Amen

APPENDIX F BROCHURE ABOUT CENTERING PRAYER

THE METHOD OF CENTERING PRAYER THE PRAYER OF CONSENT

Thomas Keating

Be still and know that I am God. PSALM 46:10

Contemplative Prayer

We may think of prayer as thoughts or feelings expressed in words. But this is only one expression. In the Christian tradition contemplative prayer is considered to be the pure gift of God. It is the opening of mind and heart — our whole being — to God, the Ultimate Mystery, beyond thoughts, words, and emotions. Through grace we open our awareness to God whom we know by faith is within us, closer than breathing, closer than thinking, closer than choosing, closer than consciousness itself.

Centering Prayer

Centering Prayer is a method designed to facilitate the development of contemplative prayer by preparing our faculties to receive this gift. It presents ancient Christian wisdom teachings in an updated form. Centering Prayer is not meant to replace other kinds of prayer; rather it casts a new light and depth of meaning on them. It is at the same time a relationship with God and a discipline to foster that relationship. This method of prayer is a movement beyond conversation with Christ to communion with him.

Theological Background

The source of Centering Prayer, as in all methods leading to contemplative prayer, is the indwelling Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The focus of Centering Prayer is the deepening of our relationship with the living Christ. It tends to build communities of faith and bond the members together in mutual friendship and love.

The Root of Centering Prayer

Listening to the word of God in Scripture (*Lectio Divina*) is a traditional way of cultivating friendship with Christ. It is a way of listening to the texts of Scripture as if we were in conversation with Christ and he were suggesting the topics of conversation. The daily encounter with Christ and reflection on his word leads beyond mere acquaintanceship to an attitude of friendship, trust, and love. Conversation simplifies and gives way to communing. Gregory the Great (6th century) in summarizing the Christian contemplative tradition expressed it as “resting in God.” This was the classical meaning of contemplative prayer in the Christian tradition for the first sixteen centuries.

Wisdom Saying of Jesus

Centering Prayer is based on the wisdom saying of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: “When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father, who sees in secret, will reward you” (MT 6:6). It is also inspired by writings of major contributors to the Christian contemplative heritage including John Cassian, the anonymous author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*, Francis de Sales, Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross, Thérèse of Lisieux, and Thomas Merton.

The Guidelines

1. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
2. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.
3. When engaged with your thoughts,* return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.
4. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

*thoughts include body sensations, feelings, images, and reflections

Centering Prayer Guidelines

I. Choose a sacred word as the symbol of your intention to consent to God's presence and action within.

- Having chosen a sacred word, we do not change it during the prayer period because that would be engaging thoughts.
- Instead of a sacred word, a simple inward glance toward the Divine Presence, or noticing one's breath may be more suitable for some persons. The same guidelines apply to these symbols as to the sacred word.
- The sacred word expresses our intention to consent to God's presence and action within.
- The sacred word is chosen during a brief period of prayer to the Holy Spirit. Use a word of one or two syllables, such as: God, Jesus, Abba, Father, Mother, Mary, Amen. Other possibilities include: Love, Listen, Peace, Mercy, Let Go, Silence, Stillness, Faith, Trust.
- The sacred word is sacred not because of its inherent meaning, but because of the meaning we give it as the expression of our intention to consent.

II. Sitting comfortably and with eyes closed, settle briefly and silently introduce the sacred word as the symbol of your consent to God's presence and action within.

- If we fall sleep, we simply continue the prayer upon awakening.
- We close our eyes as a symbol of letting go of what is going on around and within us.
- We introduce the sacred word inwardly as gently as laying a feather on a piece of absorbent cotton.
- Whatever sitting position we choose, we keep the back straight.
- “Sitting comfortably” means relatively comfortably so as not to encourage sleep during the time of prayer.

III. When engaged with your thoughts, return ever-so-gently to the sacred word.

- By “returning ever-so-gently to the sacred word” a minimum of effort is indicated. This is the only activity we initiate during the time of Centering Prayer.
- During the course of Centering Prayer, the sacred word may become vague or disappear.
- Thoughts are an inevitable, integral and normal part of Centering Prayer.
- “Thoughts” is an umbrella term for every perception, including body sensations, sense perceptions, feelings, images, memories, plans, reflections, concepts, commentaries, and spiritual experiences.

IV. At the end of the prayer period, remain in silence with eyes closed for a couple of minutes.

- The additional two minutes enables us to bring the atmosphere of silence into everyday life.
- If this prayer is done in a group, the leader may slowly recite a prayer, such as the Lord’s Prayer, while the others listen.

Some Practical Points

1. The minimum time for this prayer is 20 minutes. Two periods are recommended each day, one first thing in the morning and the other in the afternoon or early evening. With practice the time may be extended to 30 minutes or longer.
2. The end of the prayer period can be indicated by a timer which does not have an audible tick or loud sound when it goes off. There is a free Centering Prayer mobile app timer available.
3. Possible physical symptoms during the prayer:
 - We may notice slight pains, itches, or twitches in various parts of the body or a generalized sense of restlessness. These are usually due to the untying of emotional knots in the body.
 - We may notice heaviness or lightness in our extremities. This is usually due to a deep level of spiritual attentiveness.
 - In all cases we pay no attention and ever-so-gently return to the sacred word.
4. The principal fruits of Centering Prayer are experienced in daily life and not during the prayer period.
5. Centering Prayer familiarizes us with God’s first language which is SILENCE.

Points for Further Development

1. During the prayer period, various kinds of thoughts may arise:
 - Insights and psychological breakthroughs.
 - Ordinary wanderings of the imagination or memory.
 - Self-reflections such as, “How am I doing?” or, “This peace is just great!”
 - Thoughts and feelings that arise from the unloading of the unconscious.
 - Thoughts and feelings that give rise to attractions or aversions.
 - When engaged with any of these thoughts return ever-so gently to the sacred word.
2. During this prayer we avoid analyzing our experience, harboring expectations, or aiming at some specific goal such as:
 - Achieving a spiritual experience.
 - Feeling peaceful or consoled.
 - Having no thoughts.
 - Making the mind a blank.
 - Repeating the sacred word continuously.

Ways to Deepen Our Relationship with God

1. Practice two 20-30 minute periods of Centering Prayer daily.
2. Listen to the Word of God in Scripture and study *Open Mind, OpenHeart*.
3. Visit our website to access various online resources, practices, courses and groups.
4. Join a weekly Centering Prayer Group.
 - It encourages the members of the group to persevere in their individual practices.
 - It offers an opportunity to support and share the spiritual journey.
 - It provides an opportunity for further input on a regular basis through multi-media resources and discussion.

What Centering Prayer Is and Is Not

- It is not a charismatic gift but a path of transformation.
- It is not a form of self-hypnosis but a way to quiet the mind while maintaining its alertness.
- It is not a para-psychological experience but an exercise of faith, hope and selfless love.
- It is not a relaxation exercise but it may be quite refreshing.
- It is not a technique but a way of cultivating a deeper relationship with God.
- It is not limited to the “felt” presence of God but is rather a deepening of faith in God’s abiding presence.
- It is not reflective or spontaneous prayer, but simply resting in God beyond thoughts, words, and emotions.



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