

## SF 1.5 – Spiritual Vitality

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### Spiritual Formation Encounter – Personal Identity, Spiritual Formation Movements, Spiritual Disciplines, & Spiritual Vitality:

1. I believe there are two questions that form the crux of our personal identity – who am I, and who is Jesus.
  - a. With regard to myself, I am either a happy mistake born from the convergence of numerous improbable circumstances – this is the modern humanistic view of anthropology and evolution. Alternatively, I am a masterful creation of the God of the universe. As a scientist and a Christian, I believe the latter.
  - b. Are reason, perception, creativity, etc. naturally occurring conceptualizations or are they a reflection of a Creator who possesses these qualities?
  - c. If there is no God, then there is no objective moral and ethical compass by which to orient myself and society around. Humanity is free to do whatever they like with no restraint but what the societal mores allow.
  - d. If God does truly exist, and Creation and the Fall of humanity transpired in some fashion as recorded in Scripture, then humanity would need a Messiah to restore humanity to the Edenic “Pre-Fall” condition of perfection. In this context, the arrival of Jesus as the “Suffering Servant” predicted some 800 years earlier by the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Covenant recorded in the Old Testament of the Bible. There are so many specific prophecies fulfilled that it is impossible that Jesus is anything other than the predicted Messiah.
  - e. The 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians held to a “High Christology” – that is, they held to a high understanding of the Deity of Jesus and worshiped Him as God in the flesh. Paul’s writings reflect this High Christology, as do John’s and Peter’s writings. They knew Jesus to be God, and any lesser suggestion that He was a prophet or teacher they considered blasphemy.
  - f. If Jesus is Who He claimed to be... God in the flesh, and the recorded Word’s He spoke as the “Living Word of God”... a Personal disclosure of the reality of Heaven and earth by God, how am I expected to live, act, and think?
  - g. Some thoughts on the matter:
2. PERSONAL IDENTITY: As an individual, through whose eyes do I see myself?
  - a. View # 1 – My view from my own perspective, I see the incompleteness and imperfection of my being – I am not the person I want to be, and I know I am not the person God expects me to be.
    - i. Though I often try to ignore it, I know the desperate wickedness of my own heart and mind. I am often astonished by the weakness I observe within myself. If Jesus is the objective standard of humanity, then without Grace I know I’m doomed. I will never measure up to God’s standard without His graceful intervention.
    - ii. God’s standard is perfection – how can I ever measure up? What does God really expect of me? Philippians 1:6 – “being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.” Reason declares that my efforts alone will not be sufficient and Grace declares that my perfection is not the

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- result of my action alone, it is rooted and guaranteed by God and His promise and character will insure it.
- iii. **Isaiah had a vision of God in Heaven, and when he looked upon the Perfection that Is God he proclaimed Isaiah 6:5 – “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the LORD Almighty.” It is interesting that God didn’t disagree with Isaiah’s self judgment, but provided a suitable resolution to satisfy his deficiency. I am inclined to think that our judgment in Heaven will also be self disclosed... much like our personal assessment when we meet someone who is obviously more attractive or wise than ourselves and we can’t help but make a personal comparison. When Isaiah looked upon the Perfection that is God, he saw his own failing and weakness.**
  - iv. **I think to the extent that our identity is linked to our own self-assessment, that we cannot reasonably be satisfied with our own natural state... we know our own deficiencies and we long for Grace.**
- b. **View # 2 – Family/Friend/Lover/Spouse view – As long as I see myself through the eyes of another person [other than God], I will be seen inaccurately through the alternating eyes of love, acceptance, expectation, and judgment.**
- i. **If another [even a friend or loved one] is the standard by which my identity is rooted, then my life and actions must secure their acceptance and approval for me to maintain a healthy self image. We are all aware of those whose emotional and personal identity requires the acceptance of a parent, or lover, or friend through whose eyes we find acceptance.**
  - ii. **If we accept a Biblical perspective, we understand that we are made for community, wherein we discover our place and identity validation. The most miserable people are those who are alone... we don’t live well or long in solitary confinement... we need companionship.**
  - iii. **A healthy marriage and family provides an environment where acceptance and relational intimacy are experienced. The healthiest intimacy finds acceptance “warts and all” without the precondition of personal performance. However, most of us live in environments that are less than perfect, where performance is a factor in evaluating my identity. In dysfunctional settings, individuals often find judgment and condemnation rather than acceptance and love. One of my professors expressed that love without God in his home with an alcoholic and abusive father was “a slightly lower level of suspicion.” It would take years of Godly reparenting before Grace and the Spirit produced a healthy self-image.**
  - iv. **When people depend on a worldly humanistic view of themselves, with each person having a number of variables impacting their perception of truth and reality coupled with their own foibles, inaccurate perceptions, limitations and failures... we multiply**

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- exponentially the total criteria by which I must aspire and conform to. Clearly, if my identity is based upon what other imperfect individuals think of me and the consistency of my performance amid the inconsistency of their appraisal... then I become an actor in a tragic play with critics constantly evaluating my performance based on their subjective standards.
- c. **God’s view – God sees me as I am, warts and all and loves me completely and passionately. So much that He entered history as a human to provide both the witness of Truth and the standard of Life. As a Child of God, reclaimed by the Blood of Christ and sealed by the Spirit... God sees me as the son/daughter He loves without judgment and full of Mercy and Grace.**
    - i. **If God is the standard by which all other measures are taken, then I have only one set of expectations to live up to.**
    - ii. **Though I may still desire acceptance and approval of others, God is the only objective standard of life and conduct.**
    - iii. **In such an environment my identity has a consistent and reliable standard, as well as the promise that God will complete the work He began in me (Phil 1:6). And importantly, when I mess up and fail... which I know I will... God is faithful and true and will forgive me and accept me (Rev 3:14; 1 John 1:9).**
  - d. **Family Background: Take the “Family Atmosphere Survey” at the end of this study.**
    - i. **Recognize that our identity is a complex matter formed through all of my life experiences.**
      1. **We have a background influence from our childhood.**
      2. **We have a current influence from our life and work experiences.**
      3. **Most of us had no choice as to what sort of background we had.**
      4. **We have a choice as to breaking a cycle of troubled or destructive behavior and moving toward wholeness and health, or continuing.**
      5. **Self analysis and prayerful evaluation is an opportunity for self understanding, predicated on which standard I ascribe to and what sort of person God desires me to become.**
      6. **Pastors and Christian Family Therapists are a good resource to help you deal with your life and move forward confidently. Spiritual coaches are another resource.**
    - ii. **Recognize that what I think “I am” is different than “who” others may think I am, and different still from who God intends me to be.**
      1. **What do you think God intends you to be? What vision has He shared with you?**
      2. **CS Lewis observes that if we saw others and ourselves in our Glorified condition in Heaven, that we would see a being so wondrous that we would be inclined to worship them. Think about this... instead of this inconsistent and generally unimpressive person, God intends a perfected being of such character and standing that others would be amazed at.**
      3. **We choose who we will listen to and believe in:**

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- a. The Accuser will always condemn and seek to confuse. His purpose is to destroy.
  - b. The Advocate will always promote the forgiveness cycle of conviction, confession, repentance, restitution and restoration. The Spirit's intent is always to absolve. His purpose is to build up and encourage.
  - c. The conviction of the Spirit may hurt for the moment but will always promote health through healing and absolution.
- iii. It is important to accept who God says I am in favor of who I or others see me to be:
1. "Sinner saved by Grace" or "Saint who sometimes sins."
  2. "Weed in the garden" or an "Oak of Righteousness."
  3. We are simultaneously both, but we are moving from the former to the latter.
3. Footprints of God<sup>1</sup> - Who is Jesus? This is the question of profound theological and spiritual importance. For our purposes here we will look at only a few perspectives. We tend to gravitate to one or another of these perspectives, but all are equally true.
- a. The question is, how do you most often relate to Jesus? He is:
    - i. My Savior – He forgives me and sets me free... focus is on my sin and need.
    - ii. My Teacher – He teaches me and leads me into His truth... focus is on knowledge and truth.
    - iii. My Lord – He lives as the authority of my life... focus is on actively relating and living out my faith.
    - iv. My Friend – He understands and comforts me... focus is on compassion and mercy.
    - v. My Great Physician – He heals, helps and nurtures me... focus is on healing and helping.
    - vi. My Good Shepherd – He leads me to green pastures and still waters... focus is on the abundant life in the best of all there is.
    - vii. My God and King – He is Master of Heaven and earth and all of creation... focus on His eternity and my Hope for restoration in the future.
  - b. Equally important is to recognize that we each should have a "High Christology" – that is we should have an expansive view of the Greatness of God revealed in Jesus Messiah.
  - c. Another factor is to recognize that God has been at work throughout redemptive history, and while His standard and revealed Truth is consistent the way it has been understood individually and through the church has changed over time. God being Faithful and True holds us accountable for what we know in light of what we believe. It is a matter of Grace that flows through time. Thus, our own understanding of proper theology and doctrine should be held gently and reverently. Too many hold too rigid a standard and condemn those who practice a different tradition of Christian experience as though they were non-believers. Instead we should build on the basics and most elemental of the faith... the Creeds.

#### 4. SPIRITUAL FORMATION MOVEMENTS IN REDEMPTIVE HISTORY:

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<sup>1</sup> Smith & Graybeal, *Spiritual Formation Workbook: A Renovare Resource for Spiritual Renewal*, Harper Collins, 1993

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- a. God has been working consistently advancing His Kingdom through the various waves of redemptive history. Identity and relational intimacy are shaped by cultural expectations and historical norms. It is thus not surprising to observe change over time as God works through life and circumstance.
  - i. What we now know as “normative faith” is a modern construct built upon the foundations of the past. The concept of normative faith though Scripturally established is interpreted through the culture in real time.
  - ii. The faithful of every age have all walked with God in their own “normative faith reality.” God’s grace judges humanity on what they know and what they do – when the perceptions of reality shift interpretive emphasis, God takes that into consideration.
  - iii. God looks at the heart and judges the motives... not merely the thoughts of the actions.
- b. The Classical “Six Traditions” of Christian History each had their own identity and outworking of their faith in redemptive history. These traditions include:
  - i. The “Inception Movement” – the 1<sup>st</sup> through 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries laid the foundations of the faith that later traditions would build upon. The earliest Christians were Messianic Jews... Jews who came to faith in Jesus as their Messiah. The Pagan cultures were caught up with them in the inception movement.
  - ii. The “Contemplative Movement” – the 4<sup>th</sup> century “Desert Fathers and Mothers” emphasized the importance of solitude, meditation, and prayer in their personal devotion to God. The corrupt nature of society caused many to seek God in separated communities.
  - iii. The “Social Justice Movement” – in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century Saint Francis of Assisi began the Franciscan Order followed by the Poor Clare Order which focused on a life of simplicity, personal denial, and service to the poor and disenfranchised. Serving others was equated as serving Jesus.
  - iv. The “Evangelical Movement” – in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Martin Luther and the Reformation gave rise to a renewed interest and study of the Bible, and the Gospel proclamation of hope and victory. The Bible was increasingly made available to the public and church services were made more accessible though the language of the peasantry not of academia. There was also a resurgence of monastic life through the work of Teresa of Avila and Saint John of the Cross. Though past monastic orders separated from society, these were orders that were in contact with their culture as “salt and light.”
  - v. The “Charismatic Movement” – in the 17<sup>th</sup> century the “Quakers” practiced the “active presence of the Spirit” in which God was the center of their identity and worship, and propelled their evangelism, missions, and social concerns.
  - vi. The “Holiness Movement” – in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century John Wesley ignited a “Holy Club” that reacted against the moral laxity and church acceptance of sinful practices of the era.

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They refocused personal identity based upon God’s perfection and holiness, and did so in a manner that encouraged personal responsibility and free will.

vii. The “Incarnational Movement” – in the 18<sup>th</sup> century the Moravians practiced a lifestyle of Bible study, praying, evangelizing, and helping as part of a community of faith under the unifying outpouring of the Spirit.

c. In recent times we have additional traditions of:

i. The “Modern Reformed movement” of the 1940’s and 1950’s which gave rise to the non-denominational Bible church and mega-church movement. This included a strong push to bring people to Faith in Jesus through evangelism, but they did a rather poor job of discipleship and engaging the faithful as ministers of the Gospel. Instead they accepted attendance and involvement presuming this would lead ultimately to transformational life.

ii. The “Jesus Movement” of the 1960’s and 1970’s as a consciously anti-establishment and counter-cultural Christian movement. Focus was on a more experiential life in the Spirit along with personal study, and dissatisfaction with the normative experience and lifestyle of their parents’ generation.

iii. The “Post-modern movement” of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Millennium AD with an emphasis on spirituality, community and social justice.

d. Every generation God raises up new responses of following God in their cultural and historic setting. This doesn’t mean that “TRUTH” changes, but rather it finds new expressions for relevancy **Lamentations 3:22-26**: Because of the LORD'S great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself, “The LORD is my portion; therefore I will wait for him.” The LORD is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD. **Hebrews 4:12-13**: For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.

5. **SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINES** – the disciplines include the following... refer to SF 1.0 “Introduction to the Spiritual Disciplines” for more detailed information and development. For now we are seeking to point out what the list includes.

a. Foundationally, all the Practices flow through prayer and are forms of prayer.

i. **INWARD:**

1. Prayer
2. Fasting
3. Study
4. Meditation
5. Contemplation

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### ii. OUTWARD:

1. Simplicity
2. Solitude
3. Submission
4. Service
5. Giving

### iii. CORPORATE

1. Confession
2. Worship
3. Guidance
4. Celebration

- b. The purpose of the disciplines is to incline our minds and hearts toward God... to allow us to see and become caught up with what the Lord is already doing in the world around us. One of the great questions we should ask God is how may we cooperate with the Spirit? How may we increase the life and vitality of the Spirit with us?

6. **SPIRITUAL VITALITY:** from a teaching I presented on “Inductive Spiritual Vitality” God is Spirit and He calls us to live a Spiritual life. He asks us to come close to Him and promises He will come close to us. So how does the reality of a Spiritual life play out in our life? God is Supernatural, and He invites us into a Supernatural experience with Him. Humanity is natural, however and we find it difficult to enter the Supernatural realm with any kind of consistency. How then do we grasp and develop the “Transcendent Nature” God wants for us? What concepts help us move forward in understanding and developing of our transcendent nature?

- a. The first concept in developing the transcendent nature is born out of **“Obedience and Dependence.”**

- i. **Jesus said of obedience in love: John 14:15-24:** “If you love me, you will obey what I command. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever— the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. “If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.
- ii. **Paul wrote of spiritual dependence: Romans 12:1-2** Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

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- iii. **Isn't it interesting that God would use disciples and the church to prove what the Will of God is to the world? That which is good, acceptable, and perfect? I find this really amazing! God says that I was created just a little lower than the Angels, and yet I see myself as just a little lamer than anyone else. To encourage us, Paul also wrote: Phil 1:6 For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.**
  - iv. **God began the process of Spiritual Transformation in my life and He promises to complete the work. I have a role to play in cooperating with Him, but His purpose ultimately will prevail. My initial role is of obedience, allowing the good work God desires to emerge in me and thereby encourage dependence upon Him.**
- b. **The second concept in developing the transcendent nature is the "Immanence of the Spirit" in the out working of faith.**
- i. **King David wrote wonderful soaring poetry of God and his understanding of the Greatness of God. God's immediacy [God's constant Presence] in David's life is stunning. Note Psalm 139: O LORD, You have searched me and known *me*. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; You understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, And are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, Behold, O LORD, You know it all. You have enclosed me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me. *Such* knowledge is too wonderful for me; It is *too* high, I cannot attain to it. Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence? If I ascend to heaven, You are there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, You are there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Your hand will lead me, And Your right hand will lay hold of me. If I say, "Surely the darkness will overwhelm me, And the light around me will be night," Even the darkness is not dark to You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike *to You*. For You formed my inward parts; You wove me in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret, *And* skillfully wrought in the depths of the womb; Your eyes have seen my unformed substance; And in Your book were all written The days that were ordained *for me*, When as yet there was not one of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You. Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way.**
  - ii. **I love it that King David was such an interesting combination of sinner and saint; of poet and warrior. He was certainly an imperfect man, but he had a heart for God and God commended him for it. One reason David had a great heart for God is that he had an exulted view of God and was acutely aware of being surrounded by the Presence of God.**

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- An awareness of God’s immanence – that He was inherently present everywhere and immediately accessible was one of the wonders of David’s faith. When I think of someone I would like to meet or be like, King David comes to mind as a result.
- iii. There aren’t many people with whom I would consider trading places. One example I would certainly reject is a former employer of mine. I once worked for an extremely wealthy Bay Area businessman, he is in fact a billionaire. I was part of his senior executive team as his operations officer. I once asked our Financial Officer who knew him well what made him happy? His answer was “doing a deal... he is just a deal junkie and lives for the next deal or the next company he starts.” I clarified; no I mean... what gives his life meaning and joy? He said, “That’s it... there isn’t anything else.”
  - iv. This man has power, influence, prestige, and more money than he can ever spend. He is also a jerk, his wife and kids aren’t good enough for him, none can meet his high expectations, there is no one he considers as smart as he is, his friendships are many but they are predominantly shallow friends of influence, not people to count upon and depend upon. He has no real concept of loyalty evidenced by the constant turnover in his companies. His ethics and morality are compromised by his unitary focus of success, pleasure, and wealth. He excuses his mistress as evidence of his Mediterranean cultural identity. I look at him and see a shell of a man, an empty husk with no real heart for God or love for people, and I feel sorry for him.
  - v. On the other hand, I have seen videos of an amazing young man from Australia named Nick Vujicic who was born without arms or legs. Have you noticed his face when he speaks? His face is captivating, much more so than his incomplete body. His face radiates joy and peace and love. Here is a man who has every right to be angry and miserable, but instead he is obviously and unabashedly joyous! This defies worldly logic, but makes perfect sense in God’s economy.
  - vi. On one hand you have a wealthy man who has everything the world values and is a miserable excuse of a person. On the other hand you have a poor man with nothing, less than nothing with an incomplete body, and yet he has everything of value and I envy his walk with God. The immanence or presence of God is manifest in Nick Vujicic, and the outworking of God’s Spirit is abundantly apparent. I see him as a person to be envied.
  - vii. A.W. Tozer made a point of reading from the great classic theologians. He remarked that when you “come near to the Holy men and women of the past you will soon feel the heat of their desire after God.” Nick Vujicic is a contemporary man who radiates his passion for God like a beacon. Joni Erickson Tada is a similar example from a female perspective. Their stories are compelling, but the presence of God in their life is palpable.
- c. The third concept in developing the transcendent nature is “Intimacy in the Spirit” – love of God that is manifest and furthered through the spiritual disciplines where enjoyment of the reality of God is experienced.

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- i. **Oswald Chambers has said:** To say that prayer changes things is not as close to the truth as saying prayer changes me and then I change things. God has established things so that prayer, on the basis of redemption, changes the way a person looks at things. Prayer is not a matter of changing things externally, but one of working miracles in a person's inner nature. If we have been learning to worship God and place our trust in Him, then any crisis we face will reveal that we can stand, without breaking our confidence in Him.
- ii. **The Apostle John writes of Jesus' mission and passion for the redemption of humanity which is being advanced through His followers. When we are caught up in God's purpose working in and through us, Jesus speaks of the intimacy with God which is ours in John 17:22-26:** [Holy Father] "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me. "Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. "O righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You; and these have known that You sent Me; and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them."
- iii. **Here Christians are portrayed as perfected in unity, and invited into the Spiritual dance within the Triune God. Too often when we think of God as Trinity, we imagine three distinct and separate things and miss the concept of unity. Scripture repeatedly teaches that "God is One" which is the Shema of the Old Covenant. I have recently come to think of God in terms of Trinity as intersecting circles within a circle... where individuality and unity flow together. Dr Eckman refers to Trinity as a "dance occurring within the God head", into which we are invited into this dance. This works for me. Intimacy with God is one of the most compelling and powerful transformational motivators to Spiritual life and vitality.**
- d. **This brings us to the forth concept in the transcendent nature, the "Vitality of the Spirit" – this is where I think these three previous concepts come purposefully together.**
  - i. **Spiritual Vitality I believe to be the wind in the sails of a boat of our faith... it is where the power of the Spirit is felt and drives us purposefully along. I believe that spiritual vitality can be seen in the form of a spiritual formula emerging from Philippians 2:12-13, where Paul writes:** So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not just in my presence only, but now even more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for *His* good pleasure.

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- ii. In considering this passage, I saw a spiritual formula emerging. Not that we can reduce God to a formula or methodology, but rather we may see such a difficult concept in a different light that allows a better understanding of how God operates in us. The formula goes like this...
1. SPIRITUAL VITALITY (SV) is approximately equal to my obedience (O) resulting with my intentional work which is the outward working of my faith (WO).
  2. God works in me (WI) to continue the Spiritual Transformation process He began and sustains it in accordance with His Will and Good Pleasure (WP).
  3. Fear & trembling – literally awe & wonder (A+W) flows out of my close personal experience of God’s Greatness and from my dependence on Him. In considering this, I see the awe and wonder component as the transformational driver, and thus I give it a power of infinity... because the greater God is in your life and experience, the greater the multiplier in the spiritual vitality formula.
  4. The formula is –  $SV \approx ((O+WO) \times (WI+WP)) \times (A+W)^\infty$
- e. The implications of this transformational component I believe to be of critical importance to individuals and to the church as it forms a conceptual framework from which discipleship and Christian maturity and equipping may be appraised.
- i. It may just be me, but I find it a rare occasion when I emerge from a corporate church service feeling that I have met God, and that He is conducting business with me... where the presence, wonder and greatness of God converge to draw me close to Him.
  - ii. Usually such experiences of presence, wonder and intimacy occur in my private prayer life, contemplation and meditation.
  - iii. Personally, I think this is a problem that the church needs to address. We need to make room for intentional development of the perception of awe and wonder of God corporately.
  - iv. Ravi Zacharias says that “the human heart desires wonder and magic.” He says that “technology is what we now use to supplant our desire for awe and wonder.” He says that what “the human heart is really longing to do is to worship God, to stand in awe of a God we don’t understand and we can’t explain.”
  - v. Donald Miller says it differently in his book Blue Like Jazz, he says... “We worship a Being our life experience does not give us tools with which to understand. If we could, God would not inspire awe. You cannot be a Christian without being a mystic. The little we do understand [of God] that grain of sand our minds are capable of grasping, those ideas such as God is Good, God Feels, God Loves, God Knows all, [these things] are enough to keep our hearts dwelling on His Majesty and otherness forever.”
  - vi. What they are describing is a “transcendent mystical experience” where our mind and heart is caught up in the awe and wonder of God ---- when was the last time you had one? Do you remember it? What did it do in encouraging your dependence upon and

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- confidence in God? My mystical experiences are indelibly etched into my consciousness. They speak of God's existence in the supernatural... where He desires to connect with me. These experiences serve to support and intensify my understanding of Scripture and the strength of my faith. I have directly experienced God, and it has changed everything. Faith for me is objective and experiential, and I have experienced something of the Object of my faith. These experiences promote the assurance that I don't think we'll be bored contemplating the God for eternity.
- vii. For a moment... presuming this may be true – a number of questions come to mind.
1. How do we gain and maintain this mystical Spiritual Vitality?
  2. How do I fan the flames of Spiritual Life in myself and those around me?
  3. In my church, how do we develop a passion for God and the longing to live in the Spirit?
  4. How do I cooperate with God in that internal aspect of the Life of the Spirit that draws me to God and fuels the life-long process of sanctification?
  5. What do I need to do to cooperate with God, and hopefully even accelerate the spiritual transformational process He desires to accomplish in me?
- viii. Ravi Zacharias argues that it is a reasonable desire to press into the Supernatural and experience awe and wonder before God. He says we need to promote awe and wonder rather than settling for the emptiness of ritual with its minimal spiritual significance. I agree with him... as a result, I believe the role the church plays in promoting our sense of awe and wonder is one of the great failures of the modern church movement. We have intellectualized God, mechanized knowledge and worship, and all but ignored awe and transcendent wonder. When we do speak of God in corporate worship we may speak of His Greatness, and even sing songs about it. But it is rare that we sense a pressing into the supernatural life of God, and rarer still that we are encouraged to explore the depths of God. What a pity. God is reduced to a safe entity we can approach merely as our friend. He is that, but He is much more! He is the great Creator of Heaven and earth who deserves our loyalty and complete obedience. Further, He is our adoptive Father who desires us to be conscripted as His ambassadors furthering His Kingdom. When we see God in a limited and safe manner He is reduced to an abstract concept rather than the Ultimate Reality I may experientially engage and enjoy now and for eternity.
- ix. The concept of a transcendent experiential relationship with God makes sense in the context of Jesus asking us to become a supernatural living sacrifice. This involves the deliberate laying down of my right to rule my life and submitting completely to God's rule. It is an act of love and obedience. This is the heart of Christian discipleship. The focus is not conforming to the world's standard, and instead to be transformed in the renewing of my mind to God's standard, which comes as a result of deliberately living in the supernatural with God. It comes from pressing into God determinately, and applying

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His Word to my life liberally. The Spirit living within longs to carry us as perfected beings into God's Presence, and my work is one of obedience and cooperation with what He is doing.

- x. George Barna commented in his book Growing True Disciples, that "Almost every church in our country has some type of discipleship program or set of activities, but stunningly few churches have a church of disciples." With Jesus' Great Commission" ringing in our ears, "Go and make disciples of the nations," Barna says we settle for sound-bites, making people feel better about themselves, and helping them so their life works better. While these may be a nice secondary benefit, they are not the primary goal of discipleship, and they are certainly not the calling of the church in equipping and maturing disciples for ministry. True discipleship raises up people who reflect Jesus' life and priorities in their everyday world. That is what being salt and light is all about. It is about "*being disciples*" who are committed and engaged in Jesus' missional commands.
- f. In conclusion, I believe our Spiritual life is born out of four spiritual concepts:
  - i. The first is Obedience and Dependence.
  - ii. The second is the Immanence or Immediacy of the Spirit.
  - iii. The third is the reality of Intimacy with God in the Spirit.
  - iv. And the fourth is the Vitality of the Spirit.
  - v. As demonstrated in the Spiritual Formula  $SV \approx ((O+WO) \times (WI+WP)) \times (A+W)^\infty$  I see "Awe and Wonder" as the driver that has much to do with our progress in developing and maintaining Christian spiritual life and vitality. Where we have failed to cultivate a sense of the Greatness of God, awe and wonder become merely secondary considerations and we are robbed of transcendence.
  - vi. I believe one of the main reasons Christians have an anemic faith is because their God is too small, and they are too comfortable with Him as their friend rather than their Lord. Our faith remains weak because we don't take seriously enough the Spiritual dimension of faith, and we don't consciously press into the supernatural.
  - vii. To this end, the concepts that lead us further into the transcendent nature – obedience, immediacy, intimacy, and Spiritual Vitality draws us to God like a moth to a flame.

### Family Atmosphere Survey [item 1-D at the bottom of page 1]:

Circle "Yes" or "No" in answer to the following questions as they relate to your family of origin (this is for your own evaluation).

We all have "background noise and experiences" that affect how we experience life. We are all different with both wonderful and difficult experiences. As you answer these questions, for the "Child" column recollect your life as a pre-teen at about 12 years of age. How would you have responded based upon that

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time frame to each question. For the “Now” column consider how you would respond to these questions in the present tense in your family situation. Be as honest as possible.

Child   Now

- 1) Y/N   Y/N   Did you often feel high amounts of tension & stress dealing with family members?
- 2) Y/N   Y/N   Did you feel you had to be extremely careful in how you responded to family members to avoid confrontation or physical/emotional outbursts?
- 3) Y/N   Y/N   Did some family members behave as if they were driven by inner tensions, urges, or desires?
- 4) Y/N   Y/N   Did people in your family act the way they did because they felt they had to maintain an image (not because they felt free to be themselves)?
- 5) Y/N   Y/N   Were any family members constantly critical of other family members?
- 6) Y/N   Y/N   Did you feel more accepted by family members when you were doing well than when you were not?
- 7) Y/N   Y/N   Did family members verbally attack each other when there was a conflict?
- 8) Y/N   Y/N   Was it sometimes hard to know what a family member was thinking or feeling by what he or she said?
- 9) Y/N   Y/N   Was there a dominant person in your family that others worked around?
- 10) Y/N   Y/N   Did you feel the need to go along with certain family members to keep the peace?
- 11) Y/N   Y/N   Did you feel uncomfortable to be yourself with your family members?
- 12) Y/N   Y/N   Did you feel uncomfortable to say what you felt or thought around family members?
- 13) Y/N   Y/N   Was your home a place you would not have chosen to go when you wanted to relax or have fun?
- 14) Y/N   Y/N   Did you sometimes get tense with the prospect of family gatherings at holidays or events?
- 15) Y/N   Y/N   Was the atmosphere of your family home a place you didn't feel comfortable to bring your friends?

\_\_\_\_\_   \_\_\_\_\_   Totals

Now that you have completed the questionnaire, please count the number of questions to which you answered "Yes" in each column.

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**0-5 yes responses = Group 1 “Consistent Family” background – this group had love, trust and discipline in a healthy balance where the personal identity development is secure and love well modeled. People in this group will find it relatively easy to be open and vulnerable with others. You’ll tend to find it easier to trust others and extend love.**

**6-10 yes responses = Group 2 “Inconsistent Family” background – this group had love and discipline displayed in an inconsistent and unbalanced manner where personal identity developed amid an inconsistent standard. People in this group will find it more awkward to be open and vulnerable with others. They will find it more difficult to trust and extend love.**

**11-15 yes responses = Group 3 “Confused Family” background – this group had love and discipline so inconsistently modeled that they developed a more confused identity in terms of love and vulnerability. People in this group will have greater difficulty being open and vulnerable as their expectations of reciprocal responses are more confused.**

**What does this mean?**

**Depending on your family background you will have different expectations and emotional responses in daily situations. Your spouse, children and friends will be affected by how you respond. And you will likely impose those expectations upon how you see God responding to you.**

**What can I do?**

**Understand that God has invited you into a new family, and given you a new identity in Christ. You don’t have to remain a victim to your old identity. God has invited you into the love affair that exists among the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Your new family is a Perfect Family, with a loving and caring, easy-going God that thinks you are wonderful. He sent His Son to die for you, and gave you the Holy Spirit as a down payment for the eternal life you can expect to enjoy with Him.**

**The value of this questionnaire is that you have more substance to help you evaluate your life responses. You also have a choice as to whether you will continue where you are or reach for something better. Troubled pasts may prevent you from seeing God as He is. Most churches have in house resources or referrals for helping people deal with their family backgrounds. Talk with your pastor if you desire help in moving closer to God.**