



Living
Soul-Full
Participant's Appendix

This Appendix includes additional material to supplement several Living Soul-Full lessons. You may keep it digitally for easy access, print it to place in a separate notebook, or store it in the back of your participant workbook—whichever you prefer.

Appendix A

LIVING SOUL-FULL GROUP COVENANT

Taking this journey together is a commitment to nurture one another's desire for intimacy with Christ and to support one another in living into this desire. This includes the commitment to:

- Be faithful and attentive to our own individual spiritual practices.
- Honor your group's designated meeting time as a sacred and protected space within your weekly rhythms, being present for and with one another during group time
- Commit to attend a spring retreat with your Soul Care group.
- Support and pray for one another as we seek and create space for God's activity in our lives, respecting each other's personal relationship with God.
- Create a safe place for being with strong emotion and unresolved questions. Listen rather than fix. Ask questions rather than give answers.
- Cultivate self-awareness and be self-disclosing as appropriate, bringing a willingness to risk vulnerability for the purpose of spiritual growth and transformation.
- Speak the truth with love and grace. Be committed to speak with each other when misunderstanding or offense takes place to prevent any hindrance to full participation and growth. (Matthew 5: 23-24, 18:15-20)
- Hold in confidence what is shared in the group and receive in reverence that which is spoken. Honor "double confidentiality" as well, which is agreeing to not bring up at a later time the things communicated in group with other group members. Let the person who has shared a confidence be the one to revisit this if needed, rather than group members asking for follow up.
- Call one another back to these commitments whenever it feels like we're slipping, or the covenant has been broken.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix B

DISCIPLINES/PRACTICES WITHIN LIVING SOUL-FULL CURRICULUM

Spiritual Friendship
Group Spiritual Direction
Journaling
Listening with Intent to Understand
Silence
Solitude
Lectio Divina
Visio Divina
Contemplative “Knowing”
Breath Prayer
Self-Examination
Non-Attachment/Holy Indifference
Practice of the Presence
Discernment
Surrender
Cycles of Shame and Grace
Developing the Inner Witness
Emotional Objectivity
Centering Prayer/Welcoming Prayer
Unburdening/Forgiveness
Consolation/Desolation
Daily Examen
Community

Additional Books With Assigned Readings to Complement *Living Soul-Full*

- David Benner, *Sacred Companions*
- Henri Nouwen, *The Way of the Heart*
- Brennan Manning, *Abba’s Child*
- Father Thomas Keating, *The Human Condition*

Appendix C

The Quiet Miracles of Spiritual Direction in Groups, by Ginger Essink

(February 2017, Shalem eNews, <https://shalem.org>)

I fell in love with ... group spiritual direction. During the five years I was with my group, I was more enriched than I had ever imagined possible. This program of once-a-month meetings can create deep relationships in small groups of people, often lasting for years, where quiet miracles occur as people share their journeys within sacred space.

My own involvement began because I was strongly drawn to the whole idea of spiritual direction in groups and I had heard of Shalem through a friend. I was in transition—I had recently “retired” from corporate life after 17 years, to address chronic migraines and to spend better time with my son before he grew up. It was through God’s grace that I had finally been able to leave my work world, and now I was straining to hear what on earth I was to do next. The idea of a little community who could somehow help me hear God and share the ups and downs of my journey seemed an answer to an unasked prayer. I learned what I could through the web site and by reading Rose Mary Dougherty’s book on group spiritual direction.

People who wish to partake of the bounty of group spiritual direction need to have some kind of relationship with God that they want to deepen, and they have to be willing to show up for each other and to share their journeys with each other. There is no group, no spiritual, no direction without these. When people do show up and practice spiritual direction in groups, lives can be greatly enriched. How is this possible? What actually happens?

The process sounds simple enough. A facilitator guides each new small group in a sort of graceful dance: a time of sharing and intense listening, then prayerful silence while group members wait for guidance in how to respond, then responding, silence, and then the “dance” with the next person. At the end we always take time to talk about how the experience worked that day. I found that the silence after sharing stopped any tendency (however well-intentioned) to listen with half an ear while thinking of an appropriate response. I learned what it meant to listen and be listened to with full attention. And from the silence I found much more.

Although I’m still uncertain about the future, I’ve learned through this process that my life is infinitely richer if I pay attention to where God is in my life now. I had, it seems, segmented God. I knew God intimately in certain places—in most natural settings, and in times of joy and sadness. Early on I learned that someone in the group could always be counted on to ask, “Where is God in this?” and I learned to find God in entirely new places—in arguments with my adolescent son, in places of deeply held anger with my spouse, even in places of intense frustration with my computer. Someone in my group always responded to my sharing with an image, others with a phrase, a word, a question, and I often found an entirely new way of looking at things. And, always, regardless of whether I came in feeling troubled or happy, I left feeling that people who cared about me and my journey with God had helped me see my path better.

I was initially attracted to the group for companionship. It wasn’t until I had been in group spiritual direction for a while that it dawned on me that this process works not only because the groups are safe places to share, but because each person in a group learns to become a spiritual director for the others. In this facilitated process of sharing, listening and silence, I learned what it felt like to wait until a response seemed to bubble up and needed to be said versus my instincts to jump and offer consolation, empathy, or worse, advice. And the times that my own ego caught me up and I couldn’t hear that deep place of truth within, the facilitator and group process gently got me back on track. Learning to hear that voice within for others, in ordinary times, has been an extraordinary gift—one more quiet miracle of spiritual direction in groups.

Appendix D

“The Gift of Presence, the Perils of Advice”

-- Parker J. Palmer, April 27, 2016, <https://onbeing.org/blog>

When my mother went into a nursing home not long before she died, my wife and I were told that, for a modest increase in the monthly fee, the staff would provide a few extra services to improve her quality of life. We gladly paid, grateful that we could afford it.

Now in our mid-seventies, my wife and I have no imminent need for assisted living or nursing care. But the house we live in is, by definition, a two-person residential facility for the aging. Here at what we fondly call *The Home*, it's not uncommon for one of us to try “improve” the other's quality of life by offering “extra services.” Unfortunately, those services often take the form of advice.

A few years ago, my wife gave me some advice that struck me as — how shall I say? — superfluous. Remembering our experience with my mother, I said, “Could I pay a little less this month?” To this day, that line gives us a chance to laugh instead of getting defensive when one of us attempts, as both of us do now and then, to give the other unsolicited and unwanted “help.”

Advice-giving comes naturally to our species and is mostly done with good intent. But in my experience, the driver behind a lot of advice has as much to do with self-interest as interest in the other's needs — and some advice can end up doing more harm than good.

Last week I got a call from a man who'd recently been diagnosed with terminal cancer. He'd emailed his bad news to a few family members and friends, one of whom had come over right away. “How are you feeling?” his friend asked.

“Well, as I said in my email, I'm feeling amazingly at peace with all this. I'm not worried about what lies ahead.”

The friend replied, “Look, you need to get a second opinion. At the same time, you should start exploring complementary medicine. You should also sign up for a meditation program, and I know a good book that can get you started down that path.”

I asked my caller how that response had made him feel. “I'm sure my friend meant well,” he said, “but his advice left me less at peace.”

I told him I'd have felt the same way and offered this image: Imagine that I need support with a serious problem, when along comes a guy with advanced CPR certification. He's so eager to show off his skills that he isn't able to hear my true need. Instead, he starts administering chest compressions and “rescue breathing,” even though I'm perfectly able to breathe for myself. Now I have another big problem as I try to fight off the “helper” who's smothering me.

I asked my caller how he would have felt if his friend had simply said, “How great that you're at peace! Tell me more.”

“That would have been wonderful,” he replied. “But everyone I talked to had advice for me, including a relative who said I needed to join her church before it was too late.”

I asked how he'd been feeling recently — he said he'd been feeling afraid.

“Do you want to talk about your fear?” I asked. He talked while I listened and asked a few more questions. When we were done, he told me that some measure of peace had returned. It was a peace that had come from within him, not from anything I'd said. I'd simply helped clear some rubble that blocked his access to his own soul.

My misgivings about advice began with my first experience of clinical depression thirty-five years ago. The people who tried to support me had good intentions. But, for the most part, what they did left me feeling more depressed.

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Some went for the nature cure: “Why don’t you get outside and enjoy the sunshine and fresh air? Everything is blooming and it’s such a beautiful day!” When you’re depressed, you know intellectually that it’s beautiful out there. But you can’t feel a bit of that beauty because your feelings are dead — and being reminded of that gap is depressing.

Other would-be helpers tried to spruce up my self-image: “Why so down on yourself? You’ve helped so many people.” But when you’re depressed, the only voice you can hear is one that tells you that you’re a worthless fraud. Those compliments deepened my depression by making me feel that I’d defrauded yet another person: “If he knew what a worm I am, he’d never speak to me again.”

Here’s the deal. The human soul doesn’t want to be advised or fixed or saved. It simply wants to be witnessed — to be seen, heard and companioned exactly as it is. When we make that kind of deep bow to the soul of a suffering person, our respect reinforces the soul’s healing resources, the only resources that can help the sufferer make it through.

Aye, there’s the rub. Many of us “helper” types are as much or more concerned with being seen as good helpers as we are with serving the soul-deep needs of the person who needs help. Witnessing and companioning take time and patience, which we often lack — especially when we’re in the presence of suffering so painful we can barely stand to be there, as if we were in danger of catching a contagious disease. We want to apply our “fix,” then cut and run, figuring we’ve done the best we can to “save” the other person.

During my depression, there was one friend who truly helped. With my permission, Bill came to my house every day around 4:00 PM, sat me down in an easy chair, and massaged my feet. He rarely said a word. But somehow, he found the one place in my body where I could feel a sense of connection with another person, relieving my awful sense of isolation while bearing silent witness to my condition.

By offering me this quiet companionship for a couple of months, day in and day out, Bill helped save my life. Unafraid to accompany me in my suffering, he made me less afraid of myself. He was present — simply and fully present — in the same way one needs to be at the bedside of a dying person.

It’s at such a bedside where we finally learn that we have no “fix” or “save” to offer those who suffer deeply. And yet, we have something better: our gift of self in the form of personal presence and attention, the kind that invites the other’s soul to show up. As Mary Oliver has written:

“This is the first, the wildest and the wisest thing I know: that the soul exists and is built entirely out of attentiveness.”

I leave you with two pieces of advice — a flagrant self-contradiction for which my only defense is Emerson’s dictum that “consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.” (1) Don’t give advice, unless someone insists. Instead, be fully present, listen deeply, and ask the kind of questions that give the other a chance to express more of his or her own truth, whatever it may be. (2) If you find yourself receiving unwanted advice from someone close to you, smile and ask politely if you can pay a little less this month.

Appendix E

WAYS TO LISTEN TO AND RESPOND TO OTHERS WITHIN A SPIRITUAL FORMATION GROUP

These questions are a resource on how to frame open questions to others in your groups in general, but especially during journaling meetings. Our questions in group spiritual direction are for the purpose of helping others to discern the leading of the Holy Spirit. Each person will use these responses uniquely in a way that feels natural.

They are just suggestions and examples. We do not want to get “stuck” on phrasing every question according to any formula. Be open to the Spirit’s leading when responding to others and learn to follow your own intuition. Read and reread these questions to get a good sense of their purpose.

Remember: A loving silence is often the most appropriate response. Resist your own need to say something if it does not improve upon silence.

*Sending gratitude to all the “Soul Care” participants who added their own insightful questions to these lists.

QUESTIONS FOR CLARIFICATION: Focus on inner responses to our daily lives

How are you after reading that?

Could you say a little more about _____?

What do you think/feel God is doing in you as you experience this situation or relationship?

Do you sense any gentle nudges from God in this?

Are you sensing any direction from the Holy Spirit in this?

How do you think God is inviting you to respond to this?

What would you like Jesus to do for you?

What was that like for you? How do you feel about the situation?

What are the desires of your heart in this matter?

What things in your life draw you to God? Pull you away?

Where or when are you most likely to be aware of God’s presence? least aware?

What is your soul longing for?

How does this affect your relationship with God?

How is your view of God changing because of this experience?

How would you like God to help you in this?

What do you think the Spirit of Jesus might be whispering to your spirit in this situation?

How are you being changed by this?

How would you like to experience God in this?

Do you sense any invitation from God in this? What would you like for this invitation to be?

What do you need from God to feel at peace in this situation?

What do you see as the first (or next) step on this spiritual journey?

What would be helpful to you right now?

What do you most need from us in this?

GOOD QUESTIONS TO HELP DEFINE FEELINGS

Do you have a sense of whether your feelings are rooted in reality, fear, or something else?
What does the Spirit say about how you should respond to this feeling in light of God's presence in your life?
What does your response tell you about what you most value in this situation?
Can you say more about the _____ you are feeling?
How does your body respond to that feeling?
When in this relationship or situation are you most likely to have that feeling?
As you think about _____, what feelings rise up within you?
What other times in your life have you had the feeling you're describing now?
Would you say you're feeling _____ or _____ about this?
Would you like us just to sit with you for a few minutes in silence to let process how you're feeling?

MORE GOOD QUESTIONS

What do you hear the Holy Spirit saying to you about _____?
What would it feel like to embrace those words of God in that moment?
In what ways have you sensed/encountered God's presence in the midst of _____?
How have you felt loved by God through _____?
What response do you sense God asking of you?
What would change in your life if you let this go?
If there is resistance in your spirit, what do you think the resistance is about?
How do you sense God asking you to pray about this?
What do you need from Christ in this?
What have you heard God say up to this point?
What is it you want from (a person) that they are not giving you?
What's your sense of how _____ will change your relationship with Christ?
What would it look like/feel like to move into that place?
Do you have any sense of what you need from Jesus in this?
Could you speak into what you are longing for? What is God saying to you through those longings?
Do you have a sense of where the line between your responsibility and God's responsibility is in this circumstance?
What do you think Jesus is doing in this, and why do you think He is doing this work at this time in your life?
What were you feeling when _____? What are you feeling right now as you talk about _____?
How do you sense God's love for you in the midst of this discovery?
How are you experiencing _____ (love, joy, hope, peace, freedom, surrender, etc.) about this?
If there is a conflict or struggle here, where do you see Christ at work in this?
What are the next steps of response you sense Christ asking of you? How do you feel about taking those steps?

SAMPLES OF POTENTIAL UNHELPFUL RESPONSES:

I know just how you feel; All you need to do is TRUST in God; Don't worry – it will get better; At least it's not cancer (or any response that begins with "at least..."); When God closes a door, he opens a window; Everything happens for a reason; I can't believe they did that to you, etc.

Appendix F

Taken from article, “Say it Again, A Mantra Really Works”

--Elizabeth Bernstein, Wall Street Journal, May 9, 2017

Do you have a personal mantra? You should.

Research shows that thinking of a word or phrase that affirms our values—and repeating it over and over—produces powerful physiological changes. It can lower our cortisol levels, enhance endurance and reduce perception of effort during physical exertion.

Perhaps even more compelling, a mantra can quiet the mind. A 2015 study in the journal “Brain and Behavior” showed that silently repeating a single word led to a widespread reduction in activity across the brain, primarily in the “default mode network,” which is responsible for self-judgment and self-reflection.

Every thought we have is made up of a complex pattern of activity influenced by gene expressions, neural connections, proteins and other chemicals in our brain. The more we have a thought, the stronger that circuit grows. You can think of any two neurons as friends, says Alex Korb, a neuroscientist and author of “The Upward Spiral: Using Neuroscience to Reverse the Course of Depression, One Small Change at a Time.”

“The more they communicate, the stronger their connection becomes,” he says.

This isn’t a bad thing—as long as we’re thinking thoughts that are beneficial. But too many of us beat ourselves up, ruminating on the same negative beliefs.

Mantras can create and strengthen new neural pathways that are positive and not toxic. And that can make our brain much calmer and happier.

Appendix G

Examples of Universal Human Needs and Longings

Acceptance, Affection, Air, Appreciation, Authenticity, Autonomy, Awareness, Beauty, Belonging
Celebration, Challenge, Choice, Clarity, Closeness, Communication, Communion, Community,
Companionship, Compassion, Competence, Connection, Consciousness, Consideration, Consistency,
Contribution, Cooperation, Creation, Creativity, Discovery, Ease, Effectiveness, Efficacy, Empathy,
Equality, Exercise, Food, Freedom, God’s Presence, Grace, Growth, Harmony, Honesty, Humor,
Inclusion, Inspiration, Integrity, Intimacy, Joy, Learning, Love, Meaning, Mourning, Movement,
Mutuality, Nurturance, Order, Participation, Peace, Physical, Play, Presence, Purpose, Respect/Self-
Respect, Rest, Self-Expression, Sexual Expression, Shelter, Sleep, Spontaneity, Stimulation, Support,
Touch, Transparency, Trust, Understanding, Validation, Warmth, Water, Well-being of Self and Others,

Appendix H

Emotional Word Bank

Anger and Apathy:

Apathetic, Cold, Cranky, Critical, Displeased, Frustrated, Impatient, Indifferent, Irritated, Affronted, Aggravated, Angry, Antagonistic, Arrogant, Indignant, Inflamed, Mad, Offended, Resentful, Sarcastic, Appalled, Belligerent, Bitter, Contemptuous, Disgusted, Furious, Irate, Livid, Outraged, Spiteful, Vengeful, Vicious, Vindictive, Violent

Shame and Guilt:

Abashed, Awkward, Flustered, Hesitant, Humbled, Reticent, Self-Conscious, Withdrawn, Ashamed, Contrite, Embarrassed, Guilty, intimidated, Regretful, Remorseful, Degraded, Disgraced, Humiliated, Mortified, Self-Condemning

Fear and Anxiety:

Apprehensive, Cautious, Disoriented, Doubtful, Hesitant, Indecisive, Insecure, Shy, Uneasy, Afraid, Alarmed, Anxious, Distrustful, Fearful, Nervous, Suspicious, Unsettled, Wary, Worried, Horrified, Panicked, Paralyzed, Shocked, Terrified, Terrorized

Jealousy and Envy:

Distrustful, Insecure, Protective, Suspicious, Vulnerable, Demanding, Envious, Jealous, Grasping, Greedy, Possessive, Resentful

Happiness and Joy:

Calm, Content, Encouraged, Hopeful, Inspired, Open, Peaceful, Cheerful, Delighted, Excited, Fulfilled, Gratified, Happy, Joyful, Lively, Optimistic, Playful, Pleased, Proud, Satisfied, Blissful, Ecstatic, Enthusiastic, Elated, Jubilant, Manic, Overjoyed, Radiant

Sadness and Grief:

Contemplative, Disappointed, Disconnected, Depressed, Listless, Regretful, Dejected, Discouraged, Drained, Forlorn, Grieving, Heavy-hearted, Melancholy, Mournful, Sad, Sorrowful, Weary, Anguished, Despairing, Despondent, Heartbroken, Hopeless, Inconsolable, Joyless, Desolate, Despairing, Drained, Empty, Miserable, Overwhelmed, Anguished, Devastated, Numbed, Reckless, Tortured

Appendix I

FIVE PART DAILY EXAMEN BY ST. IGNATIUS

1. Stillness: Recalling God's Presence

Relax in God's presence in your favorite prayer place and posture. Be aware of how God shows his love for you in all his gifts to you. Be thankful as you think of God the Father's love, the love of his Son Jesus, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to come into your heart and to help you to look honestly at your actions this day and how you have responded in different situations. With the Spirit's inspiration, you can recognize what draws you close to God as well as what pulls you away from God.

2. Gratitude: Expressing Thankfulness

Review your day and give thanks to God for his gifts. Try not to choose what to be thankful for but to see what springs to mind as you reflect. Think of the concrete details of your day—the aroma of coffee brewing, a smile from a co-worker, or a beautiful image. Recall the gifts God has given you that you can share with others—your ability to help in a crisis, your sense of humor, or your patience with children. Pause and express your gratitude to the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. Reflection: Looking Back on Your Day (the longest of the five steps)

Again, review the events of the day and notice how you acted in the many situations in which you found yourself. Ask yourself: 1. When did I love? 2. When did I fail to love?

Recall your feelings and motives to see whether you considered all of the possibilities and freely followed God's will. Ask yourself when you were conscious of God's presence. Think about opportunities you had to grow in faith, hope, and love. When we think about why we did or did not take advantage of these opportunities, we can become aware of how we might change our actions in the future. Be grateful for the occasions when you freely chose a course to help others. Perhaps you let a shopper with a small order go ahead of you in line or did not join in a conversation critical of a co-worker. These are examples of responding freely, as God wants us to. When we reflect on the times we did or didn't act with God's grace, we can be more sensitive to developing habits of positive responses.

4. Sorrow: Asking for Forgiveness

After you have asked for the Holy Spirit's guidance in recalling and reflecting on the actions of your day, spend time talking with God or Jesus. Express sorrow for the times you failed to follow his direction and ask him to be with you the next time you encounter a similar situation. Give thanks to God for the grace that enabled you to follow his will freely. *Feel the sorrow and gratitude in your heart* as you converse with God.

5. Hopefulness: Resolving to Grow

Ask God to help you as you look forward to a new day tomorrow. Resolve to cooperate and trust in the loving guidance of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. By prayerfully reviewing your day, you will experience the difference it can make in how you live. If you make a habit of practicing the Daily Examen, you will grow closer to God in your thoughts and deeds and be free to choose to follow him.

Appendix J

Simple Practices for the Present

We must develop intentional practices to “be transformed by the renewing of our minds.” (Romans 12:2) As we learn to live, conscious of the present moment, we open up space for the Spirit to move in and through us. We will be less likely to be reactive to situations and better able to choose how to respond with wisdom and grace.

Look over the following suggested practices to develop mindfulness. See which ones you can incorporate into your week. What additional actions could be helpful for you?

1. When you wake up in the morning, take slow, mindful breaths before you get out of bed.
2. Try smiling for no reason and see what happens.
3. Transform any moment of waiting (in line, for an appointment, on hold on the phone) into an opportunity to be aware and present.
4. Eat a meal occasionally in silence, eating slowly and savoring the taste of your food.
5. Be mindful while driving to notice where you are and what you are driving past.
6. Set an alarm on your cell phone or computer to ring at random times during the day, paying attention to where you were at that moment (past, present, future).
7. Each time you become aware of feeling anxiety or stress, take the time to stop and just breathe and be fully in your body.
8. When you find yourself feeling frustrated, angry, or hateful towards another, find and adopt a standard prayer, such as the Welcoming Prayer.
9. Like Brother Lawrence, make everyday tasks like cleaning and cooking become meditation. Do them slowly, completely, and beautifully while aware of the grace surrounding you.
10. Create small notes and place them throughout your home, workspace, car, etc. with reminders, such as “Wake up” or “Pay attention.”

Appendix K

FAMILY OF ORIGIN QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER, IF APPLICABLE

1. What is your earliest memory of your family of origin?
2. To the best of your knowledge, what were your parents' reactions to discovering their pregnancy w/ you? To seeing you for the first time?
3. What was your birth order and how did this affect the way you interacted with your family?
4. How do you think your mother felt about your gender? Your father?
5. What does the name/nickname you were given imply about your parents' expectations of you or who you were?
6. How would you characterize your early relationships with siblings and peers? Pick examples and characteristic of those relationships.
7. What roles were you expected to play in your family of origin?
8. What roles did you actually play?
9. What were the costs in not playing the roles you were expected to play? What were the payoffs?
10. How do these roles influence your behavior today?
11. How was conflict typically dealt with in your family of origin?
12. What was your role during family conflict?
13. How were you typically disciplined as a child and what impact did this have on you? Give an example.
14. What were the unspoken rules in your family? (ex: What topics were you not allowed to discuss? Were certain emotions unacceptable?)
15. How did your parents' relationship influence your family then and now?
16. How well did your family face the truth? What things did your family use to hide the truth? (ex. painted a rosy picture, used a scapegoat, presented a united front, barred outsiders from intimacy, etc.)
17. On a separate sheet of paper describe the a) positive influences and b) negative influences of each of your parents and grandparents, or the caregivers that stood in their place in your life: Maternal Grandmother, Maternal Grandfather, Paternal Grandmother, Paternal Grandfather, Mother, and Father.
18. When considering your parents and their influences on your life, answer the following questions as best as you can:
 - a. What did my father/mother see modeled in their homes?
 - b. How were my father/mother treated by their own parents?
 - c. What rewards and punishments did my father/mother receive from their parents?
19. What emotional and physical needs did you have as a child that were met?
20. What emotional and physical needs did you have as a child that were NOT met?

Appendix L

Selections on the topic “Community” from the blog of Christian author Brett McCracken at brettmccracken.com

February 5, 2015 — Church Should Be Uncomfortable

I grew up attending Baptist churches in the Midwest--the kind where men’s quartets sing gospel songs as “special music” but no one dares raise their hands during a worship song. For most of my 20s I attended a Presbyterian church where things like Maundy Thursday and Advent candles were a big deal. These days I consider myself Reformed and read books about Thomas Cranmer for fun. My ideal church service would involve the Book of Common Prayer, an organ, Eucharist and a sermon out of a Pauline epistle that referenced everyone from Augustine and Spurgeon to Marilynne Robinson and N.T. Wright. In my dream church the “peace” would be exchanged every Sunday, ashes imposed every Ash Wednesday, and G.K. Chesterton discussed in the high school youth group.

The picture I’ve just painted of my “dream church” looks nothing like the church where I am now a member. The local church where I now serve is non-denominational, meets in a renovated warehouse and has no liturgical bent. The music is loud and contemporary. It’s Reformed-ish but Holy Spirit focused, with impromptu “words” from the congregation and quiet prayer in tongues a not-uncommon occasion. To be honest the worship services often make me a bit uncomfortable.

And I’m perfectly happy with that. I love my church.

Talking about one’s “dream church” is--increasingly, I’ve come to think--an exercise in not only futility but flat-out gospel denial. The church does not exist to meet our every need and satisfy our various checklists of tastes and “comfort zone” preferences. If anything, it exists to destabilize such things. The church should draw us out of the dead-eye stupor of a culture of comfort-worship. It should jostle us awake to the reality that comfort is one of the greatest obstacles to growth.

The two years I’ve attended my current church have been difficult and full of discomfort, but also probably the most spiritually enriching two years of my life. There’s serious wisdom in the familiar adage to “get out of your comfort zone.” Nothing matures you quite like faithfulness amidst discomfort.

For too long the mantra in Christian culture has been seeker-sensitive and “have it your way.” The mentality has been consumer comfort. Find a church that meets your needs! Find a church that feels like home! Find a church where the worship music moves you, the pastor’s preaching compels you and the homogenous community welcomes you! If it gets difficult or uncomfortable, cut ties immediately; there are a dozen other options waiting to be discovered!

But this model doesn’t work. Not only is it coldly transactional (what have you done for me lately?) and devoid of covenantal commitment, ...it’s also anti-gospel. A true gospel community is not about convenience and comfort and chai lattes in the vestibule. It’s about pushing each other forward in holiness and striving together for the kingdom, joining along in the ongoing work of the Spirit in this world. Those interested only in their comfort and happiness need not apply. Being the church is difficult.

In *Love in Hard Places*, D.A. Carson suggests that ideally the church is not comprised of natural “friends” but rather “natural enemies.”

Soul-Full Living Participant Appendix

What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything of the sort. Christians come together, not because they form a natural collocation, but because they have been saved by Jesus Christ and owe him a common allegiance.

Taking up the challenge of committing to a local church is incredibly difficult but decidedly biblical. You don't have to read much of the New Testament to see how messy things get when natural enemies commit to being the unified people of God (e.g. Jew and Gentile, male and female, slave and free, etc....Gal. 3:28). It's inevitably uncomfortable but undeniably important.

The thing is, young people today resonate with this. They're sick of being sold spiritual comfort food. They want to be part of something that isn't afraid of a challenge, something that has forward momentum... They want a community that is so compelled by the gospel and so confident in Christ that they pay little heed to target-demographics and CNN articles about what twentysomethings are saying today about their "dream church."

College students I know are not interested in a church with a nice shiny college ministry. They want a church that is alive, bearing fruit and making disciples. The young professionals in our life group do not meet week after week because hanging out with a diverse array of awkward personalities after a long day's work makes their lives easier. No. They come because there is power in living beyond the comfort of one's own life. There is growth when believers help each other look outside of themselves and to Jesus.

Looking outside of oneself. Serving someone beyond the self. Putting aside personal comfort and coming often to the cross. This is what being the church means.

It means worshiping all together without segregating by age or interest (e.g. "contemporary" or "traditional"). It means preaching the whole counsel of God, even the unpopular bits. It means fighting against homogeneity and cultivating diversity as much as possible, even if this makes people uncomfortable. It means prioritizing the values of church membership and tithing, even if it turns people off. It means being OK with the music that is played even if it's not your favorite style. It means sticking around even when the church goes through hard times. It means building a tight-knit community but not an insular one, engaging the community and sending out members when mission calls them away. It means bearing with one another in love on matters of debate and yet not shying away from discipline. It means preaching truth and love in tension, even when the culture calls it bigotry. It means focusing on long-term healing rather than symptom-fixing medication.

None of this is easy, and none of it is comfortable. But by the grace of God and with the Holy Spirit's help, uncomfortable church can become something we treasure.

Appendix M

The Practice of Lectio Divina

Lectio Divina (“Divine Reading” in Latin)-an ancient spiritual practice where the goal is not to gain larger quantities of information but to deeply experience the truth of a small amount of Scripture, reading with our hearts, not just our minds.

“The more we slow down our reading, the more likely it is that we will catch sight of something unexpected.” Michael Casey, Cistercian monk

Four Readings of the selected scripture passage and Four Moves: Read, Reflect, Respond, and Rest

Focus Questions: Each reading is guided by a focus question to help us engage deeply with God’s Word. The leader gives the focus question before each reading.

1st Reading: READ-Listen to the Holy Spirit minister God’s Word to you. What one word or phrase especially touches your heart?

2nd Reading: REFLECT-Enter the passage. Pay attention to any visceral (gut) reaction or emotions that rise up. What personal struggle or longing in your life is God speaking into?

3rd Reading: RESPOND-Receive what Christ has for you today. Listen for a personal invitation from God. What is your response?

4th Reading: REST- As you listen the last time to this passage, release your thoughts and simply rest in it.