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DEEP CHANGE: HOW THE TRANSFORMATIONAL
LEARNING THEORIES OF MEZIROW AND LODER APPLY
TO PASTORAL MINISTRY

By

CURTIS JOHN YOUNG

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE
FACULTY OF COVENANT THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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Dr. Tasha D. Chapman, Faculty Advisor Tasha D. Chapman
Dr. Donald C. Guthrie, Second Faculty Reader Donald C. Guthrie
Dr. Robert W. Burns, Director of D.Min. Program Robert W. Burns
Rev. James C. Pakala, Library Director James C. Pakala

ABSTRACT

Over the last thirty years, theorists in the area of “transformational learning” have devoted themselves to describing and understanding the critical dimension of human experience known as deep learning. The principal architects in the development of these theories are Jack Mezirow and James E. Loder.

The findings have particular relevance to ministers. Loder particularly shows how the profound changes ministers seek to foster in others are the result of a learning process that the Holy Spirit uses. This learning process is knowable, and ministers with this knowledge can be more effective as agents of change in their congregations.

As significant as the findings from research into transformational learning are, most ministers are unfamiliar with them. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to describe pastors’ understanding of how transformational learning occurs among adults in their ministries. With this information, colleagues and mentors can design and provide ministers with learning experiences that fill in the gap between transformative learning theory and the knowledge they have acquired.

The heart of this study consisted of qualitative research involving in-depth interviews with nine ministers in the Washington, D.C. area. The research was supported by extensive study in three literature areas: transformational learning theory; a biblical case study in transformational learning from the life of Simon Peter; and findings from transformational learning research that relate particularly to pastoral ministry.

Subsequent analysis found remarkable agreement between transformational learning theory and the ministers’ insights into how deep learning occurs. Analysis also identified substantial gaps in the ministers’ understanding. Based on the findings, the

study concluded with ten recommendations to integrate the insights of transformational learning into ministerial practice.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Problem Statement and Apologetic

Can people change? For ministers called to foster nothing less than redemptive change in the lives of their congregants, this is no academic question, but a profoundly practical and theological one.

Those who accept the call to ministry must assume the answer to the question is “yes.” The assumption originates in the unambiguous testimony of scripture: God causes people to change. Conversions occur because God “saves us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit...”¹ Sanctification occurs because “it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”² What’s more, the Holy Spirit makes people “shepherds of the church of God.”³ He calls them, in other words, to become ministers, his instruments in conversion and sanctification. Persuaded of the truth of these biblical testimonies and responding to this deep sense of calling from God, people become ministers. Not only their labors, but also the results are bound up with their faith. There is much at stake personally for pastors in whether their expectations come to pass.

This deep personal investment is evident from the crippling doubt, discouragement, or fatigue many pastors experience after investing deeply in ministry only to see relatively little spiritual transformation as a result. When pastors perceive that they are having a minimal effect on their congregations or that their time is consumed

¹ Titus 3:5.

² Philippians 2:13.

³ Acts 20:28.

with members mired in a cycle of perpetual crisis, the result can be a profound sense of failure and despair.

Granted, spiritual progress is hard—if not impossible—to measure; only God knows the heart. Furthermore, the pastor who is personally caught up in ministry may be the least qualified to see clearly the fruits of his or her labor

If they are unable to measure results, then how can ministers connect the theology of change they espouse with their ministry practice? Is there a link between the work of God and their own work in the lives of individuals? To plead that the process is all a mystery is to deny ministers practical, informed confidence in the way they go about ministry. As it turns out, it is also misleading.

The Learning Theories of Jack Mezirow and James E. Loder, Jr.

In the field of education, considerable attention is now focused on the question of how people come to experience deep, permanent change in their lives. The result is a growing body of information published under the theme of “transformative learning theory.” Initially presented in 1978 by Dr. Jack Mezirow, now Emeritus Professor of Adult and Continuing Education at Teachers College, Columbia University,⁴ transformative learning theory did not attract widespread attention or gain a substantial following among educators until 1991, with Mezirow’s publication of *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*.⁵ Today transformative learning theory “seems to have replaced androgogy as the dominant education philosophy of adult education, offering teaching practices grounded in empirical research and supported by sound theoretical

⁴ Edward W. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 287.

⁵ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

assumptions.”⁶ Not all educators agree that the empirical research is sufficient, but the essential tenets of the theory are widely accepted, with many efforts under way to apply it.

The goal of personal transformation through learning is ancient, and Mezirow is not single-handedly responsible for recovering it. What Mezirow’s theory accomplished was the incorporation of various lines of research and inquiry into an open-ended theory that describes individual learning as an interactive *process* between the individual and his or her social and physical environment. The result of this process is “perspective transformation,” a permanent change in the way individuals perceive their world and construct meaning from their experiences, so that they themselves are transformed in their own values, commitments, and behavior.⁷ Mezirow and his associates characterize transformative learning as a “theory in progress.”⁸

The learning process that leads to transformation is an integral aspect of human nature, so it applies regardless of the subject matter. Whether the content in view is scientific or theological, secular or sacred, pertaining to this life or the age to come, the learning process that leads to deep change is the same. James E. Loder, late Professor of Practical Theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, underscored that this same learning process, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, leads to “convictional knowing.” Through convictional knowing, the individual is led beyond transformational understandings of the self and the world, into transformational knowledge of “the void”

⁶ Edward W. Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Third Update on Adult Learning Theory*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 12-13.

⁷ Jack Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 3-33.

⁸ Patricia Cranton, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning: A Guide for Educators of Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 39.

(death in its many expressions) and of the Holy (God in his self-revelation).⁹ The themes Loder introduced in his seminal work, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, first produced in 1981, continue to be explored and developed.¹⁰ His volume is considered “a classic.”¹¹

Extensive literatures searches confirmed that although Loder’s and Mezirow’s institutions (Columbia University and Princeton Seminary) were proximate and the two men shared an interest in transformative learning, there is no record of any substantial professional association between them. This lack of interaction may be the result of the isolation of the disciplines of theology and education from each other. Each scholar occupied a different domain. Mezirow does summarize Loder’s theory twice in *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*.¹² Loder referred to Mezirow ally Paulo Friere in his 1981 inaugural address at Princeton Theological Seminary.¹³

Even so, the absence of mutual critique and the unique idiosyncrasies in their respective vocabularies cannot cloud the similarities in their work and findings. Each brings a distinct perspective to bear on the learning process that leads to transformation. Mezirow’s transformative learning theory enjoys greater attention and development from within the field of education and for this reason was examined first in this research. Loder’s theory of convictional knowing was considered next. It served in critiquing

⁹ James E. Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 92.

¹⁰ Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel, *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004).

¹¹ Daniel S. Schipani, “Transforming Encounter in the Borderlands: A Study of Matthew 15:21-28,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 116.

¹² Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 26-27, 163-164.

¹³ James E. Loder and James W. Fowler, “Transformation in Christian Education,” *Religious Education* 76, no. 2 (1981): 210.

Mezirow's theory and added theological insight to describe transformation under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

The Overlooked Witness of Scripture to the Learning Process

Loder, in making his case for the use of theology in understanding the learning process, recognized the uncommon character of his pursuit:

Theology, in contrast to the human sciences, has concentrated on *what* to believe and it has paid relatively less attention to *how* one comes to believe what is theologically sound. Most of the theological answers to *how* have either been subtly turned into questions of *what* or have been relegated to the Holy Spirit. However, of all doctrines central to Christianity, that one is the most ill-defined, fraught with mystery, and lost in confusion. How the Holy Spirit teaches, comforts, afflicts, and leads into 'all truth' is largely a theological blank."¹⁴

This dissertation is meant to help fill in the blanks of how one comes to believe through new qualitative research and by drawing on the insights of Mezirow and Loder. This kind of study is needed because it is relatively rare. Most exegetical and theological study of scripture focuses on the historical or doctrinal content of passages or books. While doctrine is often derived from dialogue, action, or textual commentary on a biblical character, the learning process—though apparent—is overlooked as less important, serving as a mere means to the doctrinal end.

Biblical case studies of individuals whose relationships with God are chronicled in rich detail over extended periods of time are particularly useful in examining the learning process within the Scriptural witness. It is possible to describe not only what they came to believe, but how they came to believe it so deeply that they were significantly changed. This study examines the life of the Apostle Peter. It draws on

¹⁴ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 13.

insights from numerous scholars, including German theologian Oscar Cullman¹⁵ Richard J. Cassidy, Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary,¹⁶ and biblical commentators R.T. France,¹⁷ Leon Morris,¹⁸ and F.F. Bruce.¹⁹

Statement of Purpose

Transformative Learning Theory: A Valuable Ministry Resource

Transformative learning theory represents a remarkable advance in the understanding of adult learning. Its particular contribution is in understanding how adults learn at a level deep enough to change their most basic perspective. In other words, this kind of learning transforms the very foundation of their beliefs, values, commitments and conduct.

The learning process that leads to transformation is not rendered obsolete or unnecessary when the change in view is spiritual in nature. In relation to its effects, all transformational learning is spiritual. God's transformational work in a believer consists initially in enabling the individual to believe in Christ, and subsequently in a continual renewing of his or her mind. The Holy Spirit does not circumvent, but rather facilitates transformative learning.

Professionals in roles of influence on others especially benefit from transformative learning theory. Insights into how people learn at a profound level are being translated into guidance in how to teach, lead, guide, relate to, and organize people.

¹⁵ Oscar Cullmann, *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr*, trans. Floyd V. Filson (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1953).

¹⁶ Richard J. Cassidy, *Four Times Peter: Portrayals of Peter in the Four Gospels and at Philippi*, ed. Barbara Green, Interfaces (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007).

¹⁷ R.T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew*, ed. Gordon D. Fee, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

¹⁸ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to St Luke*, ed. R.V.G. Tasker, vol. 3, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1976), and *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

¹⁹ F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1983).

Problems and challenges that garner reactions of fear and resistance can be addressed as genuine learning opportunities.

Given the correspondence of ministers' tasks with the aforementioned roles, there would seem to be a *prima facie* case for incorporating transformative learning theory into ministry practices. Deep change, or profound transformation, is the goal in all major aspects of pastoral ministry—preaching, teaching, counseling, leadership development, and even administration, with its planning and coordination to bring people together to solve problems and grow as believers. Transformation is both the means and the end of ministry. It constitutes both the process and goal of sanctification.

The Problem: Limited Ministerial Understanding

The incorporation of transformative learning theory into ministry cannot occur until major gaps in knowledge are closed. Most ministers are unaware of the theory and weight of research that supports it. Very few pastors have any formal training in transformative learning and its potential usefulness in all facets of ministry. Although scripture points to transformation as the goal of ministry and pastors are committed to it, it does not follow that pastors understand transformation as a learning process in which they are called to play a pivotal role.

This knowledge gap may produce a gap in practice, so that the effectiveness of one's ministry is compromised. The perception of one's own ineffectiveness can be a cause of frustration and even desperation in ministry. Over time, these disappointments can significantly decrease ministerial effectiveness as pastors become passively cynical or aggressively confrontational. Either way, they lose credibility and generate resistance within their congregations. The greater loss is suffered by the church herself, as believers

develop similarly negative attitudes and lower their expectations for spiritual growth and the significance of the Christian life.

The implications, then, for closing the gap between ministerial knowledge and insights from transformative learning theory are considerable. Education and training are needed to begin fostering a transformation within ministers themselves. Only then can they experience a shift in the way they view themselves, their congregation, and their practice in relation to the Holy Spirit's work. But this shift calls for foundational research because a second knowledge gap must also be closed.

The Needed First Step: Qualitative Research

Effective training requires not only knowledge of the particular subject, but also of the learner. Qualitative research in transformative learning has focused largely on teachers in the field of education. Research targeted to the context of the local congregation and ministerial practice is scarce at best.

What perspectives do ministers have on how their members experience transformational change? What role do they see for themselves in this process? What meaning do ministers make of their own experience in seeking transformation in their churches?

Discovering what ministers understand about transformative learning in their ministry context is necessary before intentional integration of transformative learning into ministry theory and practice can occur. In her book *On Teaching and Learning*, Jane Vella stresses the necessity of understanding “who” one is seeking to teach before determining the parameters of “what” is to be taught. Who, she argues, is the first question to ask.

This is the operative question because the learning of these men and women is the given purpose of any learning design. This question is most useful as the first and operative step because it demands that we fully consider the quality of learning that is possible.... Learning tasks and materials can be selected that are inappropriate for the learners, the time set may not work for the group, the content is often not immediate or engaging, and the objectives seem to serve the teacher, not the learners. The primary consideration is the learners – their needs and hopes... Who? clearly shows that your purpose in designing and teaching is *their* learning.²⁰

Vella emphasizes the teachers' need to know who their adult students are before attempting to teach them. Raymond J. Wlodkowski, author of *Enhancing Adult*

Motivation to Learn, reinforces this priority on the basis of neuroscience:

For all learning, the most pragmatic approach to instruction is to find ways to connect and build on learners' prior knowledge, to begin with what they already know and biologically assemble with them the new knowledge or skill by connecting the established networks and the new networks. A biological approach to learning requires us to find out what adult learners understand and can do, to see such information as a foundation and a map for what we design for the instructional process. The road to masterful teaching takes a compassionate route.²¹

In his capacity as a psychologist, Wlodkowski has conducted research that found "that the learner's perspective, language, values and ways of knowing must be considered in order to foster adult motivation to learn."²² The assumption is that individuals in the role of learners have different perspectives from those who would teach them, and that these perspectives have substantial value and deserve consideration.

Even though the learners' internal logic may not coincide with our own, it is present nonetheless. To be effective we must understand that perspective. Rather than trying to figure out what to "do to" learners, we should "work with" them to elicit intrinsic motivation.... Seeing adults as unique and active, we emphasize

²⁰ Jane Vella, *On Teaching and Learning: Putting the Principles and Practices of Dialogue Education into Action* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 32-33.

²¹ Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 13.

²² *Ibid.*, 20.

communication and respect, realizing that through understanding and sharing our resources we create greater energy for learning.²³

In this spirit and hope, the purpose of this study is to describe pastors' understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries.

Primary Research Questions

The following research questions guided the research:

1. What is transformational learning?
2. How does transformational learning occur?
3. What role do ministers play in fostering transformational learning?

Significance of the Study

This study was designed and undertaken to be of immediate benefit to ministers, those who are instrumental in the initial training and ongoing professional development of ministers, and ultimately to the church.

The minister's calling is one of partnership with the Holy Spirit.²⁴ With a clearer understanding of the learning process that leads to transformation, ministers will better understand what it means to cooperate with the Spirit in his work. They will be better able to assess the learning challenges that their congregants face, and to come alongside and support them. Hodgson has described the role of ministers in poetic terms:

Human beings are already implicitly connected with the truth, the knowledge of virtue, the eternal ideas. The task of the 'midwife' teacher is to elicit this truth from the student through a dialogical process that engenders thinking and overcomes forgetfulness and distortion. The teacher cooperates with the divine *paideia* just as a midwife cooperates with the birthing process or a physician with the curative powers of nature. Clement of Alexandria made use of the latter

²³ Ibid., 21.

²⁴ Robert W. Pazmino, *God Our Teacher: Theological Basics in Christian Education* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 96.

analogy, and thus he emphasized that the Word of God uses persuasion and the arts of healing rather than force.²⁵

Ministers will benefit from knowledge that assists them in understanding their own ministry experience. As they reflect on their expectations, priorities, and practices in light of the study's findings, they may find their own perspective transformation that fuels fresh motivation and imagination to minister in ways that transform rather than merely inform their congregations. Pastors will have information and ways of talking about ministry with colleagues that foster discourse about transformational learning and contribute to transformation among themselves.

Seminaries and those who teach ministerial students are also intended beneficiaries of this research. They will have information that may be used to design course content and teaching methodology that better prepare students for the practice of transformational ministry. The more clearly professors model the awareness and commitments necessary for transformative learning, the more likely students are to embrace these for themselves.

Similarly for those who provide continuing pastoral education to ministers, an understanding of the ministers' perspective on transformative learning will provide the basis for teaching that is on target with the learners and directly useful in increasing ministerial competence. God willing and most importantly, churches will benefit as shepherd-leaders minister to God's people in ways that are more intentionally and skillfully transformative.

²⁵ Peter C. Hodgson, *God's Wisdom: Toward a Theology of Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 80.

Definition of Terms

Church: Unless otherwise noted, a local congregation of worshipping Christian believers who are under the care of one or more pastors.

Convictional knowing: Based on Loder's theory, convictional knowing is transforming knowledge that comes from the Holy Spirit and serves to shape one's faith and commitments.

Disciple: As a verb, to cause someone to learn from Christ at such depth as leads to personal transformation. As a noun, an individual committed to such learning.

Discourse: Conversation about one's perspectives and the meaning of experiences with others.

Pastor: An ordained minister in the local church setting.

Perspective: An individual's mental model of reality— how things are - by which he or she makes sense of life.

Reflection: The critical review of one's assumptions and perspectives in light of experiences in order to make sense of their meaning.

Transformation: A change of one's perspectives that leads to modifications in one's faith, values, commitments, and practices.

Transforming moment: Based on Loder's theory, the point at which transforming knowledge becomes apparent to the individual. This point may be instantaneous or occur as a progression of realizations.

Transformational learning: The process of learning that leads to deep change, as broken down in the theories of Jack Mezirow, James Loder and others.

Transformative learning: The theory of adult learning developed by Jack Mezirow that describes the cognitive-emotional process adults go through in order to experience permanent change in their most basic perspectives.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study is to describe pastors' understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries. In support of this goal the review of selected literature focused on three areas. The first is transformative learning theory with a reliance on studies that describe the theory and the research that supports it. The second is a biblical case study from the life of the apostle Peter that identifies and describes the learning pattern in his experience that led to deep personal transformation. Studies in support of this research area include exegetical works, commentaries, and works on the life of the Peter. The third area is the application of transformative learning theory to ministry practices and ministry settings. Studies in this area are limited as is theoretical writing in support of this application. Nonetheless, the consideration of these works was especially pertinent to the aim of this dissertation.

Learning as a Sacred Task

From antiquity, learning has been recognized as holy work, not only when the content is deemed sacred but also when it is not. The process of learning itself has been regarded as holy and divine, for God is at work through the teacher and in the learner.

Peter C. Hodgson, Professor of Theology at Vanderbilt University Divinity School observes:

Apparently a widespread assumption of the ancient, medieval, and early modern worlds was that education is an essentially religious activity with a religious object as the ultimate referent of education (truth, goodness, beauty, holiness, eternity, divinity) and a religious power or agent as the ultimate teacher (Platonic ideas, the highest good, the divine Spirit, God, Christ, Wisdom, Torah).²⁶

²⁶ Ibid., 2.

Aside from content, the process of learning has been assigned a divine origin because of the profound effect it has on the learner. The biblical assumption that “knowledge not only informs, it transforms,” is embraced in circles well beyond the Christian church.²⁷ As Robert W. Pazmino underscores in *God Our Teacher*,²⁸ the teaching that leads to such knowledge is first and foremost the work of God.²⁸ God shapes individuals by teaching them.

More recently a division has occurred between theology and education. Hodgson describes it in his overview of “Classical and Modern Theologies.”²⁹ Beginning with the Enlightenment, the theological foundation of education became increasingly secularized. Direct references to God were abandoned, though the perspective that education is a divine or sacred work continued.³⁰ As secularism gained ground, the commitment to relate theology and education was marginalized. As a result the relative vocabularies of the two disciplines grew apart, so that education theory today describes the phenomenon of learning in the language of psychology, cognition, sociology, culture and neurobiology without reference to God. This same learning phenomenon, however, is also recognized in theologies of education and link it to the intention and purposes of their Creator.

Theological institutions and education institutions developed separately from one another, mirroring the compartmentalization of the disciplines.

For the past hundred and fifty years, relatively little of a strictly *theological* character has been written about education *as such*.... What was once a unitary subject (education, *paideia*, *Bildung*) has become compartmentalized. Nonreligious or secular theories of education are now the province of schools of

²⁷ Ibid., 15.

²⁸ Pazmino, 14.

²⁹ Hodgson, 11-50.

³⁰ Warren S. Benson, “Philosophical Foundations of Christian Education” in *Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 30.

education and departments of psychology and philosophy, while religious theories of education are principally the products of churches, synagogues, and schools of ministry or theology. Compartmentalization has been an inevitable consequence of both the secularization of Western culture and modern academic specialization.”³¹

Hodgson believes that the state of intellectual tension and institutional division of theology and education has been detrimental to both fields of study. Theological insight can richly inform educational theory. Educational theory can provide insight into biblical narratives and richly inform ministry practice.

Collaborative potential exists, especially in light of postmodern theories of education in which the goal is nothing less than the evolution of humanity and transformation of the human order.³² Ideals so universal in scope and so absolute in impact have traditionally been reserved for the religiously motivated. These are now also the domain of the politically motivated and ideologically convinced, many of whom regard any claim of exclusive truth to be repressive.³³ Nonetheless, in the course of identifying the learning process that can lead to such transformation, the spiritual nature of human beings, as a matter of necessity, is on the table once more. Research into spiritual pedagogy enjoys rising status in education. The understanding people have of themselves, their world, their relationships to others, and to whatever they hold as ultimately significant are regarded as among the most serious factors in learning. As a result, the learning process that leads to transformation, in which Christians have such a vested interest, is being described and clarified in striking detail.

³¹ Hodgson, 51.

³² Ibid., 4, 51-86.

³³ Sharan B. Merriam, Rosemary S. Caffarella, and Lisa M. Baumgartner, *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 187-269.

The emphasis is notably on the term “spiritual” rather than “religious.” “Spiritual” pertains to “an individuals’ personal experience with the sacred, which can be experienced anywhere.” “Religious,” on the other hand, is “about an organized community of faith, with an official creed, and codes of regulatory behavior.”³⁴ The distinction is that religion includes adherence to an authoritative creed and symbols, whereas spirituality is non-specific with regard to creed or allegiance other than to self. Insights from learning theory and research also apply to the religious person or community when the focus is on the learning process rather than content.

First Literature Area: Transformative Learning Theory

Jack Mezirow’s Theory of Transformative Learning

The potential for collaboration between theology and post-modern adult learning theory is particularly apparent with transformative learning theory. This theory seeks to identify the process that adults go through in order to learn on a deep level that changes their outlook and behavior, and that leads, in the vocabulary of the theory, to “perspective transformation—a paradigmatic shift.”³⁵

As originally developed by Jack Mezirow, the theory maintains that there are ten phases of cognitive experience through which an individual passes on the way to profound, permanent change in his or her life:

1. A disorienting dilemma
2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame
3. A critical assessment of assumptions
4. Recognition that one’s discontent and the process of transformation are shared
5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

³⁴ Elizabeth J. Tisdell, “Spirituality and Adult Learning,” in *Third Update on Adult Learning Theory*, ed. Sharan B. Merriam, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 28.

³⁵ Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” 5.

6. Planning a course of action
7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans
8. Provision trying of new roles
9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships
10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective³⁶

Proponents are careful to refer to these stages as “phases” rather than “steps,” because the phases do not constitute a rigid sequence in which each task must be completed before the next task can begin. Research confirms the correctness of this assertion, and has found that when the learning process extends over decades, the distinct stages become indistinguishable.³⁷ They may overlap, and some may be omitted. For transformation to occur, however, the individual must reach the point of acting on the new meaning that he or she is creating.³⁸ C.M. Clark concurs and names three dimensions of perspective transformation: “Psychological (change in understanding of the self); convictional (revision of belief systems) and behavioral (changes in lifestyle).”³⁹ His description underscores that a change in behavior is not an aftereffect of transformational learning, but is essential and integral to the process. Without it, full perspective transformation has not occurred.

Mezirow regards his ten-step summary as accurate, but not exclusively so. He also affirms Jane Taylor's six-step model of the learning process, summarized in this fashion:

³⁶ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 168-169.

³⁷ Edward W. Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 200), 291.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

³⁹ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 297.

Phase I	Generation of consciousness Step 1: Encountering trigger events Step 2: Confronting reality
Phase II	Transformation as consciousness Step 3: Reaching the transition point (a) Decision to shift vision or reality (b) Dramatic leap or shift that 'just happens' in a way not consciously planned Step 4: Shift or leap of transcendence
Phase III	Integration of consciousness [sic] Step 5: Personal commitment Step 6: Grounding and development ⁴⁰

Taylor's description of the process, unlike Mezirow's, is less rationalistic and more emotional. It acknowledges that the process of learning cannot be reduced to a series of deductions. When researchers regard learning as though it were solely rational, they miss or dismiss the roles of intuition, imagination, and influences that do not require the conscious attention or effort of the learner.

Because Mezirow's formulations of his theory tended to include language that is awkward, Mezirow himself, and especially his associates and successors, have worked to clarify and simplify the vocabulary so that the theory may be more easily applied to professions outside the field of education. Foremost among them is Patricia Cranton, visiting professor of adult education at The Pennsylvania State University at Harrisburg, and adjunct professor at Mezirow's school, Teachers College, Columbia University. In her work, *Understanding and Promoting Transformative Learning*, Cranton recasts the ten phases of transformation into four "facets of transformation": reacting to a disorienting event, critical reflection and self-reflection, discourse, and revision of habits of mind.⁴¹ The third phase, discourse, underscores a prominent feature of transformative

⁴⁰ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 172-173.

⁴¹ Cranton, 93-96.

learning; in order to learn, individuals must be socially engaged in dialogue about their shared human experience rather than being isolated.

The open nature of the theory invites many contributions to its understanding, and even reinterpretation. Nonetheless, the central tenets of transformative learning are clear after thirty years of research and analysis.

Transformative Learning Distinguished from Traditional Pedagogy

Transformative learning theory is distinguished from traditional pedagogy in that it is learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. It is focused on the individual and the learning process that he or she goes through rather than on the teacher and the content of what is presented.⁴² The theory assumes that the learner is an active participant in learning, and that learning is not something that happens to or is done to him or her.

Mezirow sharply distinguishes transformative learning from behaviorist or mechanistic theories “which emphasize either the functioning of stimulus-response associations or the encoding, storage, and retrieval of information.”⁴³

Moreover, the theory is unique in that it pertains only to adults. It assumes that the individual has “a coherent body of experience—assumptions, concepts, values, feelings, conditioned responses—frames of reference that define their world.”⁴⁴ For developmental reasons, a child does not possess these. There remains of course an important role for “informational learning” in which the goal is to “extend already established cognitive capacities into new terrain.”⁴⁵ This is also called “instrumental learning” and involves the

⁴² Maryellen Weimer, *Learner-Centered Teaching: Five Key Changes to Practice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 8-16.

⁴³ Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*, 9.

⁴⁴ Jack Mezirow “Transformative Learning: Theory to Practice,” in *Transformative Learning in Action: Insights from Practice*, ed. Patricia Cranton, New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 5.

⁴⁵ Merriam, 130.

acquisition of “technical knowledge” that comes through the senses.⁴⁶ Transformational learning, rather than adding to one’s information or technical knowledge, involves changing what we know in the sense of how we view ourselves and the world around us.

The Significance of Perspective in Transformative Learning

According to Mezirow, “Transformative learning occurs when there is a transformation in one of our beliefs or attitudes (a meaning scheme), or a transformation of our entire perspective (habit of mind).⁴⁷ Learning is a matter of the individual making sense of his or her world after an experience in which it did not make sense.⁴⁸

This understanding is grounded in the epistemological assumption that knowledge is constructed. The constructivist orientation holds that learning is the process of constructing meaning.⁴⁹ Mezirow describes this constructive process for adults.

As there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge, and because circumstances change, the human condition may be best understood as a continuous effort to negotiate contested meanings...If there were too much incontestable meaning in the world we would succumb under its weight. This is why it is so important that adult learning emphasize contextual understanding, critical reflection on assumptions, and validating meaning by assessing reasons.” The justification for much of what we know and believe, our values and our feelings, depends on the context—biographical, historical, cultural—in which they are embedded.⁵⁰

The philosophical assumption of relativism that underlies transformative learning is addressed in the fifth chapter of the dissertation. The consideration at present is Mezirow’s recognition that adults experience life from particular “habits of mind” expressed as “points of view” that have developed and strengthened over time.⁵¹ These

⁴⁶ Cranton, 11.

⁴⁷ Merriam, 133.

⁴⁸ Cranton, 61-63.

⁴⁹ Merriam, 291.

⁵⁰ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 3.

⁵¹ Ibid., 18.

habits of mind become integrated into “systems of belief that unite the particular with the universal” to become “worldviews.” Mezirow illustrates the notion of worldview by drawing on the Greek and Christian concepts of “logos” and on the twentieth century idea of “science and technology.”⁵² Habits of mind become the lenses through which meaning is assigned to life experiences. He refers to these as “frames of reference.”

A frame of reference is the structure of assumptions and expectations (aesthetic, sociolinguistic, moral-ethical, epistemic, psychological) through which we filter and make sense of our world. It is indicative of a ‘habit of mind’ that is expressed as a point of view. A point of view is made up of meaning schemes -- sets of immediate specific expectations, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and judgments that tacitly direct and shape a specific interpretation and determine how we judge, typify objects, and attribute causality.⁵³

When Perspective Clashes With Experience: The Disorienting Dilemma

At the same time that frames of reference are used to assign meaning to human experience, experience in turn challenges one’s frames of reference with the unexpected, the unknown, the incomprehensible— in short, contradictions to those frames of reference on which the individual has relied. The result is a crisis, or “disorienting dilemma,” in which the individual structure for creating meaning—cognitive, affective, and conative—falls short.⁵⁴

A disorienting dilemma is often the “result of an acute personal or social crisis, for example, a natural disaster, the death of a significant other, divorce, a debilitating accident, war, job loss or retirement,” and can be deeply traumatic.⁵⁵ Alternatively, it can occur as a result of emotional or cognitive changes over time that are not so apparent.⁵⁶ This would include a crisis of faith or of unbelief. Regardless of outward evidence, when

⁵² Ibid., 17.

⁵³ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 293.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 299.

⁵⁵ Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” 6.

⁵⁶ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 303.

the disorienting dilemma occurs, the individual cannot in the end successfully suppress or evade it. He or she cannot avoid wondering, questioning, or doubting. One feels something is wrong with his or her beliefs, and perhaps tries to justify them. In the end, having failed, one is compelled to revise those beliefs. Individuals can feel carried along in this direction against their will. For this reason, many researchers now characterize this process as a spiritual odyssey that “requires discomfort prior to discovery.”⁵⁷ It involves soul searching or “critical self-reflection” in order to understand, come to a new perspective, and then act on it.⁵⁸

From Disorienting Dilemma to Critical Reflection

Peter M. Senge, in his seminal work, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, coins the term “metanoia” to describe what this kind of learning involves. The term is a transliteration of the New Testament Greek term for “repentance” and denotes a change of mind. Though Senge does not assign the moral significance to the term that Christians do—repentance as a turning from sin—he does address a key aspect of the term that may be overlooked.

To grasp the meaning of “metanoia” is to grasp the deeper meaning of “learning,” for learning also involves a fundamental shift or movement of mind.... Taking in information is only distantly related to real learning.... Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning, we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. There is within each of us a deep hunger for this type of learning.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” 6-8.

⁵⁸ Cranton, 94-95.

⁵⁹ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 13-14.

From the point of the disorienting dilemma, the learner is committed to step into the next phase, called “critical reflection” or, less frequently, “premise reflection.”⁶⁰

Individuals become “critically reflective of our assumptions or those of others...of the process of solving the problem...of our premises in defining the problem....”⁶¹ In 1995, Mezirow wrote:

Critical scrutiny, or more specifically critical reflection, is seen as conscious and explicit reassessment of the consequence and origin of our meaning structures. It is a process by which we attempt to justify our beliefs, either by rationally examining assumptions, often in response to intuitively becoming aware that something is wrong with the result of our thought, or challenging its validity through discourse with others of differing viewpoints and arriving at the best informed judgment.⁶²

The duration of the process varies. It may be “epochal, a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, or incremental, involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view.”⁶³ It can take moments, or a lifetime.

Transformative learning underscores that it is not experience alone, but critical reflection on experience that leads to transformation. This includes reflection on one’s actual experience (content), on ways of dealing with it (process), and on one’s long held assumptions, beliefs and values about the experience (premise).⁶⁴ The result is not only a changed understanding of one’s world but of oneself, of the meaning of life, and one’s significance. These internal changes in turn result in profound changes in the way one lives.

⁶⁰Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 301.

⁶¹Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 20.

⁶² Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” 6.

⁶³ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 21.

⁶⁴ Merriam, 145.

From Critical Reflection to Perspective Transformation

Transformational learning has occurred when a “problematic frame of reference” has been made “more dependable in our life by generating opinions and interpretations that are more justified.”⁶⁵ If it begins with a disorienting dilemma that calls for reflective thinking, then it leads to a “transformative insight” that permanently alters how the individual views life.⁶⁶ Mezirow’s theory is described, then, as “a model of perspective transformation.”⁶⁷ Significantly, perspective transformation “has been found to be an enduring and irreversible process.” It involves not only “an epistemological change in worldviews” but “an ontological shift reflective of a need to act on the new perspective.”⁶⁸ In other words, perspective transformation leads individuals to a different view of the world, of their role in it, and of whether or how it is possible to come to knowledge.

Educators, beginning with Brazilian activist Paulo Freire, have described transformative learning in terms of emancipation, of being freed from assumptions and beliefs that have been used to subjugate people and exert power over them.⁶⁹ Robert Kegan similarly describes transformation as liberation from social or cultural assumptions that have been used to manipulate or control the individual.⁷⁰

In traditional adult education the goal is “to help adult learners assess and achieve what it is they want to learn.” In transformative learning theory, the goal is quite different: To “help adults realize their potential for becoming more liberated, socially

⁶⁵ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 21.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁷ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 288.

⁶⁸ Taylor, “Transformative Learning Theory,” 10-11.

⁶⁹ Cranton, 46.

⁷⁰ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 25.

responsible, and autonomous learners....”⁷¹ Each of these terms potentially carries much ideological baggage. Serving adults’ interest to learn has become the means of affecting them at a more profound level. The potential for the exploitation or indoctrination of learners is not lost on educators.

The Need for Social Context: The Learning Community

Critical reflection is not an isolated exercise in introspection. Tectonic shifts in the meaning one assigns to self and others requires that individuals be in dialogue with others. Researchers independently confirm that critical reflection cannot begin until “emotions have been validated and worked through.” This process requires relationships.⁷² Though transformative learning theory focuses on the individual, it assumes each person is a social being. “Learners move toward connection with others. They learn to bring themselves fully into relationship and community while still maintaining their integrity as individuals.”⁷³

Mezirow writes, “Rational discourse is seen as the essential medium through which transformation is promoted and developed.”⁷⁴ “Relational ways of knowing” involve subjective elements that include “trust, friendship, [and] support.” These “seem to provide the conditions essential for effective rational discourse.”⁷⁵ Although Mezirow’s definition of transformative learning focuses on the individual, it includes “participation in constructive discourse to use the experience of others to assess reasons justifying these assumptions, and making an action decision based on the resulting

⁷¹ Ibid., 30.

⁷² Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 303.

⁷³ Kathleen Taylor, “Teaching with Developmental Intention,” in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 163.

⁷⁴ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 307.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 306.

insight.” In his view, “The only alternatives to discourse for justifying a belief are to appeal to tradition, authority, or force.” Discourse is preferred because it actively engages individuals in creating meaning for themselves. Discourse taps “collective experience to arrive at a tentative best judgment.”⁷⁶

The essential role that discourse plays as part of critical reflection in transformative learning underscores why the process is limited to adults.

Effective participation in discourse and in transformative learning requires emotional maturity—awareness, empathy, and control—what Goleman (1998) calls “emotional intelligence”—knowing and managing one’s emotions, motivating oneself, recognizing emotions in others and handling relationships—as well as clear thinking.⁷⁷

Discourse is incompatible with debate. The current “argument culture” makes discourse less likely as individuals relate in an adversarial manner and use words as symbols of power to establish dominance.⁷⁸ The alternative is “reflective discourse,” described as “a conscientious effort to find agreement, to build a new understanding.”⁷⁹ If discourse is essential for transformation, then advocates of transformation, beginning with adult educators, are tasked to “create a protected learning environment in which the conditions of social democracy necessary for transformative learning are fostered.”⁸⁰ The tendency to wield power over others, or to use people for the ends of personal power, must be curbed.⁸¹ First and foremost, the educator’s power for transformative learning is “disciplinary” in regard to himself or herself. The educator restrains the temptation to assert power over others, is mindful of where and how power is projected (e.g. eye

⁷⁶ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 10-11.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 11.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁷⁹ Merriam, 134.

⁸⁰ Mezirow, “Learning to Think Like an Adult: Core Concepts of Transformation Theory,” 31.

⁸¹ Cranton, 119ff.

contact, seating location, verbal communication), and encourages openness in naming expressions of power.⁸²

Community experience figures prominently in either creating or inhibiting transformation, fostering emancipation or perpetuating repression. For the sake of individual learning, leaders are tasked with fostering a learning community in which the members share commitments to know each other personally, express perspectives freely, test new ones, and act with mutual support and encouragement. Leaders, beginning with educators in the classroom, are responsible to promote “a sense of safety, openness, and trust; the importance of instructional methods that support a learner-centered approach and encourage student autonomy, participation, and collaboration; and the importance of activities that encourage the exploration of alternative personal perspectives via problem posing and critical reflection.”⁸³

To foster a learning community, the educator’s personal commitments are as necessary as his or her professional expertise. There is a “need for teachers to be trusting, empathetic, caring, authentic, sincere, and demonstrative of high integrity.”⁸⁴

Embedded in the educator’s commitment is the dedication to be a learner oneself and to model transformative learning in one’s own life. Educators must walk out the transformative journey in order to foster it in others. This consistency is essential to successful teaching.⁸⁵ Cranton expounds three roles for educators in light of the types of knowledge they deal with. For technical knowledge the educator is an expert authority.

⁸² Ibid., 108-110.

⁸³ Taylor, “Analyzing Research on Transformative Learning Theory,” 313.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 313.

⁸⁵ Cranton, 181-199.

For practical or communicative knowledge, the educator is a mentor/model. For emancipatory learning the educator is a co-learner.⁸⁶

Mezirow's writing includes no references to God or the divine. He embraces the work of other colleagues such as Edward K. Taylor who includes "spirituality" among "alternative conceptions" of transformative learning.⁸⁷ But for Taylor, "spirituality" refers to ultimate questions of being, meaning and commitment that are common to humanity. Learning cannot be transformative apart from gaining insights into these kinds of questions. Although transformative learning brings people to a higher sense of themselves, Mezirow nonetheless regards it as the result of a pragmatic process derived from earthly experience.

Transformation Theory does not hold that critical reflection and rational discourse represent some transcendental version of the eternal verities or are of an order of reality that transcends the empirical world of change, but simply that they have been found to work better in more circumstances than have other options. They are universal in the sense that discourse is predicated upon universal principles.... The alternatives to discourse involve basing understanding upon tradition, authority, or physical force. In cultures where the objective is to perpetuate a religion or a regime, or to produce a docile workforce, critical reflection and discourse are commonly limited.⁸⁸

Any acknowledgement that transformative learning is possible because humans are made in God's image, and are designed to know the world, its Creator, and their place within the world, goes well beyond any understanding that Mezirow would allow. James E. Loder would attribute Mezirow's limited understanding to a lack of imagination, though imagination is essential for learning.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 102-108.

⁸⁷ Taylor, "Transformative Learning Theory," 7-10.

⁸⁸ Jack Mezirow, "On Critical Reflection," *Adult Education Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (1998): 185-198.

James E. Loder's Theory of Convictional Knowing

Eight years before the publication of his landmark book, *The Transforming Moment*, Loder wrote a brief article for the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* called "Authenticating Christian Experience: A Research Request."⁸⁹ In it he described "still explorative" research into the nature of what he called "authentic Christian experience." What caught his imagination was the way in which people reported their experiences of dawning conviction and unexpected, deep insight that changed the way they perceived and lived their lives.

The distinctiveness of experiences such as that described above is that they are reported to be in response to the otherness of God and the personality itself is the recipient, not the agent of the act of creation.⁹⁰

Drawing from the ranks of both theology (Luther) and psychology (Carl Jung), Loder took seriously people who reported they were on the receiving end of a deep learning experience rather than the initiators of such experiences.⁹¹ The result was a forty-year quest to bring the insights of theology together with what he called "the human sciences," including psychology and sociology, to describe and validate what he would describe as "convictional experiences."

Eight years later, in 1979, in his inaugural address as Professor of Practical Theology at Princeton, Loder posed the critical question that drove his lifelong enterprise:

What basis for integration can be found for correlating the foundational disciplines among themselves such that they can inform educational concerns without generating contradiction and hopeless confusion in the answers they

⁸⁹James E. Loder and Mark Laaser, "Authenticating Christian Experience: A Research Request," *The Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 66, no. 1 (1973).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 123.

⁹¹ Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," 211.

provide for educational practice? This it seems to me is a prior question, not something that will emerge as the practice of Christian education goes on.⁹²

Loder was searching for the basis from which to draw science and theology—"the foundational disciplines"—together, in order to provide an explanation of, and apologetic for the human experience of God. He underscored that this apologetic was needed as a response to the rigors of skeptical science and of theology. In regard to the latter, he wrote:

Yet often theology, which should be the language of conviction, has also had trouble with such experiences. They are too subjective for those preoccupied with rigorous demands for theological thinking, and more unique and particularized than can be coped with by highly generalized theological systems.⁹³

Both science and theology have leveled the charge of subjectivity against the experience of God. But no experience of God is exclusively subjective if the being of God is taken seriously. Rather, the experience is transcendent, because God is present.

Loder called for "an organizing and integrating principle" that could draw all the disciplines together to study profound learning experiences.⁹⁴ Later, in *The Transforming Moment*, he considered the concept of "conversion," but ultimately dismissed it because of its conventional use for a person initially coming to faith. Drawing from the work of H. Richard Niebuhr, Loder proposed "metanoia" (the Greek New Testament term translated "repentance") as the integrating principle, but then dismissed it as insufficient theological guidance for the experiences he sought to explain. He concluded by settling for "transformation."⁹⁵

⁹² Ibid., 204.

⁹³ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 107.

⁹⁴ Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," 206.

⁹⁵ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 13-20.

Loder's choice of the term "transformation" was not the result of using "the logic of induction," but was instead the fruit of his own convictional experience.⁹⁶ It was the presupposition from which he worked, the given that was made apparent to him rather than a discovery he had worked toward. In his inaugural address as Professor of Practical Theology at Princeton, he said, "The theme of transformation taken as a whole is a deep structure of experience that generates a multiplicity of personal, social and cultural expressions. Accordingly it appears in virtually all the major disciplines foundational to Christian education."⁹⁷ The opening pages of *The Transforming Moment* contain Loder's personal testimony of a convictional experience that redirected the course of his work. Through that experience he recognized that transformation rather than change is the essence of being, because faith recognizes that all things are the result of "the creative and loving activity of God."⁹⁸

Loder's "Grammar" of Transformation

Loder articulated the transformational process in much the same way as Mezirow. His vocabulary differed, and because of his perspective, he brought a depth of insight to the understanding transformational learning that others, including Mezirow, did not have. Loder called this process "transformational logic," or "the grammar of the knowing event."

The knowing event may occur in contexts as seemingly alien as puzzle solving, scientific discovery, poetry writing, psychotherapy, and religious conversion. Such expressions of transformation vary at the surface, but the deep, underlying pattern remains the same. It is innate to want completion of transformational logic wherever it appears, just as we want completion of any recognizable sentence or any narrative form.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Ibid., 22.

⁹⁷ Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," 207.

⁹⁸ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 38.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 37.

Loder used grammar as a metaphor to underscore that the same process of transformation applies in every discipline that addresses human development (e.g. psychology, sociology, practical theology). Each discipline generates its own vocabulary to convey the process, but the same learning structure is being defined.¹⁰⁰ Loder described the grammar as consisting of five steps. Like Mezirow, he insisted that an individual may enter the process at any point or be drawn through the whole.¹⁰¹

The first is *conflict*, “an apparent rupture in the knowing context.”¹⁰² An event occurs that contradicts the individual’s expectation of what is possible because of his or her understanding of reality. This episode corresponds to Mezirow’s “disorienting dilemma,” wherein an experience cannot be reconciled with what has been one’s underlying worldview.

Second is *an interlude for scanning*, a period for “contemplative wondering.” According to Loder, “It is like following an inner voice or carrying on an internal dialogue with the unseen teacher as Augustine and Calvin suggested.” This conversation is not carried out in isolation, but “requires legitimation and support” from others. Otherwise the resulting insights will be “proportionately shallow and governed by expediency rather than satisfying the deeper longings behind contemplative wondering.”¹⁰³ Mezirow’s course of discovery similarly led him to the concept of “critical reflection” and “critical self-reflection” which require “discourse” with others. Like Mezirow, Loder maintained that this period of “searching out possible solutions, taking apart errors, keeping parts, and discarding others” may take place “for only a

¹⁰⁰ Loder, “Transformation in Christian Education,” 208.

¹⁰¹ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 37.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 31.

¹⁰³ Loder, “Transformation in Christian Education,” 219.

second” or “it may last years.” Lest this step in the process of transformation be regarded as purely logical, Loder underscored that it unfolds within the unconscious as well as on the conscious levels of a person’s being.¹⁰⁴

Third is the *constructive act of the imagination*, the turning point in the transformation process. Loder dubbed this “the transforming moment.” He describes it as follows:

An insight, intuition, or vision appears on the border between the conscious and unconscious, usually with convincing force, and conveys in a form readily available to consciousness, the essence of the resolution. Arthur Koestler’s term ‘bisociation’ is a handy way to summarize the crux of such an imaginative construct; it is two habitually incompatible frames of reference converging, usually with surprising suddenness, to compose a meaningful unity.¹⁰⁵

A conflicting experience may lead to—but does not cause—this transformation in the individual. Rather, a new “perception, perspective, or world view is bestowed on the knower.”¹⁰⁶ This directly corresponds to Mezirow’s “perspective transformation.” The individual sees as he or she has not seen before, and as a result is freed to live and act on a higher level than previously. This change may be seen in a higher level of functioning, but the substance of the transformation is inward and consists of an “imaginative leap” that the individual could not have foreseen. Loder used “gnosis” (the New Testament term for knowing) to describe this leap because it “emphasizes the participatory quality of knowing that is so dependent on the imaginative act.”¹⁰⁷ In other words, the individual does not merely receive the insight but is deeply affected by it. The individual and his new knowledge mutually embrace. On the most profound level, when God’s Spirit has engaged the individual in this process to impart the knowledge of grace, the individual’s

¹⁰⁴ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 32.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 32.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 19.

experience is one of love, and evokes the response of worship, which is encompassed in Loder's fourth stage.

He called that fourth stage the *release of energy* found in the experience of freedom from the prior conflict along with the joy inherent in that freedom. This release of energy involves more than a redeployment of energy once taken up with the conflict. Rather, it is a surge of energy whose first purpose is celebration; its second purpose is learning.

Although "learning" and "celebration" may sound to some like a contradiction of terms (since some associate celebration with what you do after learning is done), that is precisely the perversion of celebration and calls us to the importance of rethinking celebration according to the grammar of transformation. Celebration in transformation is not an isolated outburst; it is not a temporary self-indulgence in random selection of instant gratification, but the repeated awakening to and profound appreciation of the fundamental but hidden order of all things undergoing transformation in to the glory of God.... One tends to learn what one celebrates or whatever generates energy and enthusiasm. Hence what order or whose order one celebrates is the all important consideration since that is the order which will be learned.¹⁰⁸

Loder's later writing did not underscore this celebrative element in the fourth stage,¹⁰⁹ yet according to the Apostle Paul, if gratitude for the goodness of human experience is absent, it is the result of suppression.¹¹⁰ Suppression leads to a loss of energy and impedes further learning. Neither Mezirow's ten phases of transformative learning nor Cranton's "four facets of transformation" identify this release of imaginative sustaining energy as a step in the transformation process. Regardless, their subsequent phases or facets of transformation assume if not require it. Mezirow would identify this energy as that freed up by the resolution of the consuming dilemma. Loder went further,

¹⁰⁸ Loder, "Transformation in Christian Education," 218-219.

¹⁰⁹ Donald Ratcliff, "Qualitative Data Analysis and the Transforming Moment," *Transformation* 25, no. 2-3 (2008): 117.

¹¹⁰ Romans 1:18-21.

stating that as a person is drawn closer to God, or becomes more the person God created them to be, they experience infusion of life from the *Spiritus Creator*.¹¹¹

Fifth is the “*interpretation* of the imaginative solution into the behavioral and/or symbolic constructed world of the original context.”¹¹² In other words, interpretation involves reinterpretation that extends not only to the original conflict, but backwards to one’s past as well as forward into the future.¹¹³ This reinterpretation is accompanied by *responsible action*. The evidence or proof that an individual has been transformed by new understanding is the restructuring of the way he or she acts. Cranton addressed this same step in her fourth facet of transformation, which she called the “revision of habits of mind.” This facet stressed behavioral change. The last six phases in Mezirow’s list of ten speak to the same point of responding to and integrating the new habit of mind into one’s life.

As previously noted, where Loder exceeds Mezirow is in his understanding of transformational learning as it relates to the work of the Holy Spirit. God created mankind so that all learning, regardless of subject, would be Spirit-infused and lead to deeper knowledge of him. The disintegrating effects of sin and enshrouding influences of death have left people devoid of the Spirit, yet the capacity to learn remains. The grammar of transformation applies to humanity in its ego-centeredness, but only as a consequence of God’s original intent. Through Christ, God’s Spirit is working to bring what Loder describes as “the transformation of transformation.” In essence, this means a recovery of the learning process under the influence of the Spirit on the individual. The

¹¹¹ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 157.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 34.

¹¹³ James E. Loder and James W. Fowler, “Conversations on Fowler’s Stages of Faith and Loder’s the Transforming Moment,” *Religious Education* 77, no. 2 (1982): 141.

result is “convictional knowing,” in which one’s origin and destiny are grounded in God, and he becomes the goal of all learning. Loder defines convictional knowing as “the patterned process by which the Holy Spirit transforms all the transformations of the human spirit.”¹¹⁴

“Conversion through the Spirit” is for Loder just one experience of convictional knowing which he perceived in the experience of Martin Luther.

This is the intention of the Spirit in Luther, to convict through conflict and then to overcome that conflict through the Word of the Gospel.... Thus Luther himself is moved by that Spirit from the just God who condemns to the just God who justifies by faith. Between the mortification and the vivification, the death and the new life, is anguish and longing, a struggle of immense proportions, far beyond the dimension scanned in an ordinary growth process and certainly beyond those dimensions scanned by the creative scientist or artisan in the throes of productivity.¹¹⁵

Loder sees all elements of the grammar of transformation in conversion: conflict, interlude for scanning, and a constructive act of the imagination resulting in a release of energy and interpretation (or reinterpretation of human existence) in light of the transcendent knowledge. Yet this work of the Spirit is not unique to conversion.

Let it be clear that the transformational activity of Christ’s Spirit in the church and the world reflects the same grammar personally expressed in conversion, but transposed and extended to the redemption of all creation. Conversion is not conversion out of but *into* the transformation of *all* things.¹¹⁶

For Loder, conversion is a transformation of the individual as part of the transformation of all things. Apart from the Spirit, the process of transformation breaks down under the weight of an ego-centeredness that Loder describes as the essence of sin. In other words, rather than leading to genuine transformation, the process can result in what Loder calls “perversity” at every stage. Rather than “face and embrace appropriate

¹¹⁴ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 92.

¹¹⁵ Loder, “Transformation in Christian Education,” 213.

¹¹⁶ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 214.

conflict with perseverance,” learners risk becoming “narcissistically preoccupied with the *human* struggle.”¹¹⁷ The release of energy and celebration that follow the constructive act of imagination can deteriorate into self-indulgence and instant gratification.¹¹⁸ Loder also noted the perversity that can warp the final step in the transformation process, that of interpretation. Perhaps unexpectedly, he addressed this potential distortion as occurring within a Christian context:

Interpretation slips into becoming the answer. Similarly the learners’ action becomes imitative and not a personal engagement that generates further insight vis-à-vis the demanding claims of the content Christianity teaches. In essence the perversity is that interpretation is reduced to answers, albeit “good” ones, and practice is reduced to imitation and following “good” advice, with the result that professionalism emerges in the wake of stagnant ideas and empty jargon. Instead, learning interpretation in correlation with responsible action is staying alive and responsive to the transforming Spirit of God who continually gives rise to biblical, theological and historical meaning in the very midst of current human action.¹¹⁹

Transforming insights received under the influence of the Spirit by one generation can become the rote orthodoxy of the next. Rather than settling for the effects of the Spirit’s work on others, the challenge in the present is to welcome the insights of spiritual forbearers together with openness and longing for the Spirit’s continued work. The Spirit’s work is generative in relating truth to individuals. The result is new initiative under the Spirit’s infusion of energy. By this process the Spirit perpetuates deep learning.

Loder’s Four Dimensions of Existence

Loder’s description of the Spirit’s work in producing convictional knowing extends beyond the recovery or restoration of the learning process to the content or nature of what is learned. In making his point Loder described existence as comprised of four

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 218.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 218-219.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 217-218.

dimensions. Transforming moments that occur apart from the work of the Spirit are only two-dimensional in nature. That is, the knowing that results is only in relation to the “self” and “the lived world.”

The third dimension of existence is “the void,” which Loder defines as “the possibility of annihilation, the potential and eventually inevitable absence of one’s being.”¹²⁰ This void extends into the lived world; it is “the implicit aim of conflict, absence, loneliness, and death.” It is the intrusion of the void into the lived world that produces a conflict that “moves transformational knowing into action.” People strive to recompose their perception of reality, or “the world,” in order to remove the threat which they feel. Loder noted,

Even death is not ultimate. It too is a metaphor supplied by the end of life to suggest dissolution of existence into absolute empty silence. Void is the ultimate end of all creation and as such it is, ironically speaking, the “goal” of evil.... All evil presses toward the reversal of God’s creative action; God created everything out of nothing, but evil seeks to return everything to nothing.¹²¹

Loder then asks why “we” go on living. His answer: “The reason we do not cease to live is the deep sense that we are not merely three-dimensional creatures.” Loder brilliantly taunts Sartre, “the early Camus,” and other existentialists:

To take the void seriously, to let the magnitude of its implications wash over and soak in, is not to write books, organize protests, or make pronouncements; it is to fall into deep despair and to identify with the overpowering aggressor. They do not believe what they say; the void or nothingness fascinates and awes them. Sartre declares that, like an unholy ghost, “nothingness haunts being.” His nothingness is little less than a negative surrogate for the Holy.

The will to live is not an unsupported act of psychic strength in the face of despair. Deeper than despair can penetrate, “in the center of the self, for all of its potential perversity, we experience again and again the reversal of those influences that

¹²⁰ Ibid., 66-67.

¹²¹ Ibid., 81.

invite despair and drive toward void.”¹²² Here is pervasive grace, routinely minimized as “common.”

The fourth dimension of existence, beyond the self, the lived world, and the void, is “the Holy,” characterized by the experience of God in his Otherness. Such experiences are known by their effects:

When serenity comes up out of anxiety, joy out of depression, hope out of hopelessness; when good is returned for evil, forgiveness replaces retaliation, and courage triumphs over fear, then we recognize the movement of something beyond the personality and mental health. Such profound manifestations of the human spirit are the faces of the fourth dimension, which I have called the Holy.¹²³

These experiences are the work of God’s Spirit, the *Spiritus Creator*, so that the distance and separation between self and God is made as nothing. They are evidences of convictional knowing. This work of the Spirit does not occur independent of Jesus and his mission but as the result of it. According to Loder, convictional knowing is a “four-dimensional, knowing event initiated, mediated, and concluded by Christ.”¹²⁴ Such transforming moments are incomprehensible within materialism and ridiculous within existentialism because they come from beyond the boundaries of existence that they draw. Loder put the matter in these terms:

The absolutely unique claim of Jesus that one could be on “Abba” terms with the Holy, and the same claim made by St. Paul, is based on simple trust; yet it is highly complicated by its offensiveness to two-dimensional existence and the demoralized outlook of three-dimensional atheism.¹²⁵

Loder developed and applied his theory of “the transforming moment” and especially “convictional knowing” within the context of Christian faith. His framework,

¹²² Ibid., 84.

¹²³ Ibid., 88.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 92.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 89.

however, was not theological per se. John S. McClure has written that Loder “assumed an existentialist-developmental framework for his exploration of transformation in relation to practical theology.”¹²⁶ Given that his aim from the outset was the interdisciplinary consideration of transformation, this framework is not surprising. As a consequence, however, Loder applied biblical exegesis sparingly. Though biblical narratives may be a rich source of data for explaining the learning process that leads to transformation, Loder did not delve into them. He did analyze two incidents from the New Testament—the disciples’ encounter with the resurrected Jesus on the Emmaus road and Saul’s Damascus road experience with the glorified Jesus—from which he showed evidences of transformational logic.¹²⁷ In his introduction to “the Emmaus Event,” he wrote, “It would be intriguing and helpful to pursue transformational logic as a key to biblical narrative, but that would be a separate book in itself.”¹²⁸ Loder thus pinpointed the need for additional research. The literature review that follows is an effort to contribute to that research.

First Literature Area Summary: Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory seeks to understand how adults learn on a deep level. From the field of education, Jack Mezirow is the originator and principal architect of the theory. It focuses on the process of learning rather than on the content. By assigning primary significance to the process, it recalls the high regard for learning in antiquity, embraced by Christian thinkers ever since, that learning is a sacred act and work of God in the individual.

¹²⁶John S. McClure, “The Way of Love: Loder, Levinas, and Ethical Transformation through Preaching,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 96.

¹²⁷Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 14-18, 96-123.

¹²⁸Ibid., 96.

The theory holds that adults bring to their life experiences a perspective shaped by knowledge accumulated over a lifetime. Their perspective includes their worldviews, beliefs and values as well as their views of themselves and others. It is their frame of reference. With it they understand and interpret both their subjective and objective experiences.

When an experience occurs that their perspective cannot explain, they are left with a disorienting dilemma. They live with the distressing contradiction between their most basic view of reality and their experience. Their core assumptions are inadequate. In some respect they are wrong. Self-examination and self-reflection follow. So does reflection on their assumptions and life circumstances. Discourse with others is essential to this process so that their perspectives also are considered. This process leads to a truer and better understanding of reality. This becomes their new perspective, and individuals make the commitments necessary to change accordingly. These commitments include planning, acquiring new skills, testing new roles and relationships, building competence and confidence, and living a more functional, integrated life. As a result individuals are better adapted to their circumstances and achieve a fuller expression of their human potential.

Mezirow originally proposed that transformative learning consists of ten phases. He has since endorsed other formulations that are more simple and less rationalistic. Patricia Cranton has popularized the theory by writing of four facets of transformation, which she describes as reacting to a disorienting event, critical reflection and self-reflection, discourse, and revision of habits of mind. By habits of mind, she means the ways individuals interpret reality and make meaning from their experiences.

Mezirow describes transformative learning theory as “a theory in progress,” welcoming modifications to improve it. Principal among these is the need for a supportive community to provide individuals with security, encouragement and freedom to raise awkward questions and be honest with themselves and others. Democratic values are essential in this community so that due consideration is given to many perspectives. For this social context to develop, the community’s leaders (e.g. teachers) must model transformational learning in their own lives and restrain the impulse to use power to inhibit or control others.

Transformative learning theory assumes that individuals acquire knowledge by constructing it. It is grounded in the assumption that “there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge.” In this respect Mezirow’s theory is relativistic.

From the field of practical theology, James E. Loder developed another transformational learning theory described as “convictional knowing.” It centers on the notion of “the transforming moment,” in which individuals feel themselves to have received a new insight or perspective that leads to profound personal change. The theory of convictional knowing regards the individual as the recipient rather than the source of insight. Loder sought to integrate findings from the human sciences and theology to develop a theoretical framework for recognizing and describing authentic experiences with God. The core concept in Loder’s theory is “transformation.” Transformation is a recognized and accepted concept in all the human sciences because all things are the result of “the creative and loving activity of God.”¹²⁹ Transformation is integral to God’s design and purposes for his creation.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 38.

Just as Mezirow's theory describes transformative learning in terms of ten phases or four facets, Loder describes "the logic" or "grammar" of transformation in terms of five steps: a conflict, an interlude for scanning, a constructive act of the imagination, a release of energy, and interpretation. The first two steps are virtually indistinguishable from the disorienting dilemma and reflection phases in Cranton's formulation. Loder includes the need for dialogue under scanning, and he also writes of the importance of social support. Loder's theory is distinguished in its attempt to pinpoint the inner dynamic that occurs as an individual embraces a new perspective and immediately experiences a release of energy. Mezirow's attention is focused more on those actions leading up to and following from a "perspective transformation." The fifth step in Loder's grammar, interpretation, extends to responsible action that includes individuals' reinterpretation of their past and future.

Loder exceeds Mezirow in his understanding of transformational learning in relation to the Spirit of God. Mezirow's assumptions will not allow him to acknowledge the possibility of divine intervention. God created humankind in such a way that all learning comes as a gift from him. As a result of sin and death, human beings have become ego-centered. The grammar of transformation still functions but easily breaks down under the weight of ego-centeredness. Insight and perspective are limited to the self, and the "lived-in world." Referring to the threat of annihilation and consequences of mortality as "the void," Loder casts these threats as barriers to further knowledge. People evade and deny the void wherever it is expressed in their experience. It hems them in, and their knowledge cannot penetrate beyond it.

God's Spirit works redemptively to bring about "the transformation of transformation," by which he restores the learning process to its original purpose. Using the grammar of transformation, he engages individuals in deep learning that brings them to "convictional knowing." They live with knowledge of the three dimensions of human existence: the self, the lived-in world, and the void. Through the work of the Spirit, individuals acquire knowledge of the fourth dimension. This dimension is called "the Holy" and refers to God in his otherness. As a result individuals see their origin and destiny in God. Knowing God becomes the goal of all learning regardless of the discipline. Transformational learning under the Spirit describes the experience of Christian conversion, but is not limited to conversion; it describes the process of sanctification as well.

The result of convictional experiences through the Spirit is new vitality that enables individuals not merely to adapt or survive on this side of the void, but to thrive and flourish as God's children in spite of the void. God nullifies the void for them. Individuals live in celebration of their freedom from ego-centeredness and deliverance from death through their reunion with God in Christ. Flourishing has always been God's purpose for people in learning. Through the Spirit, learning once again serves the Creator so that individuals are permanently transformed.

Although Loder evidenced an extensive knowledge of theology in developing his theory, he referred infrequently to scripture. Loder noted this deficiency and encouraged others to explore scripture in relation to transformational learning.

Second Literature Area: A Biblical Case Study of Peter

Scripture as Data for the Study of Transformational Learning

This exegetical study of scripture relative to transformative learning was not undertaken as if scripture were a sourcebook for illustrations of particular theories or points of view, but from regard for it as divine revelation and as therefore useful in describing the four dimensions of existence. As a result, scriptural insights are treated as primary and instructive. The process of deep learning described by the observational disciplines of social science should inform one's reading of scripture. Conversely, the exegetical and theological study of scripture should inform the interpretation of data from the social sciences. Practically speaking, findings that are congruent with both theology and science have the best prospect of widespread, lasting influence. In the matter of transformative learning, the research described below will show that the congruence is remarkable.

An Old Testament Scriptural Foundation for Transformational Learning

In the book of Genesis, when God told Adam and Eve to “subdue” the earth and then, to “rule over...every living creature,” he was calling them to be wise managers of his creation and to rule over the creation as his appointed guardians.¹³⁰ This directive calls for understanding, and understanding requires learning. The “cultural mandate” then, was also a learning commission.

In Genesis 2, when God brought the animals to Adam for him to name, he was engaging Adam in this learning commission. Adam's experience drew God's attention, for he “brought them to the man *to see* what he would name them.”¹³¹ God brought the

¹³⁰ Genesis 1:28.

¹³¹ Genesis 2:19-20; *emphasis added*.

creatures to Adam to observe, examine, reflect upon, and finally, to name. As Adam did so, he conferred identities on them, identities consistent not only with their nature but with their relationship to the man.¹³² The express goal was to find a “suitable helper for him,” as underscored by the use of the phrase both to introduce and conclude the learning experience.¹³³ God did not inform Adam that no creature was a suitable helper, but caused Adam to learn this. Adam was deeply affected by the realization, because it was *his* realization. When he realized how different the other creatures were from him, he was left longing for a suitable helper. Adam had learned about himself as well as the creatures. Yet God had been the author of the entire experience. Adam had learned on a profound level, with God as his teacher. Not only Adam’s mind but also his heart—the disposition of his being—were prepared to embrace Eve. When he saw her, he received her with joy: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.”¹³⁴

In Genesis the precedent is set for learning observable throughout the scriptures. The learning God has for humans to do is profound, transformational learning. God desires humans to understand themselves, him, the world, and their various relationships with each other. All truth is interconnected, and deep learning involves recognizing connections in the construction of knowledge. John Calvin’s timeless volume of theology, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, begins with this point. Calvin underscores the interrelation between the knowledge of self and knowledge of God, and the necessity

¹³² John Calvin, *Genesis*, trans. John King, Calvin’s Commentaries (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1:131-132.

¹³³ Genesis 2:18, 20.

¹³⁴ Genesis 2:23.

of both, for the sake of eternal salvation.¹³⁵ This depth of perspective is the result of learning on a transformational level.

The Significance of Transformational Learning in the New Testament

Moving from the Old Testament to the New Testament, the divine significance of the learning process is confirmed for Christians in the testimony concerning Jesus. If it was necessary for Jesus as God's Son to learn obedience from what he suffered, because by this learning he became perfect and the source of eternal salvation, then understanding how such learning occurs takes on pressing importance.¹³⁶ As revealed in Jesus, learning is God's means to the end of deep knowing that transforms and perfects. Jesus was both the archetypical learner as well as the archetypical teacher.

When Jesus said, "Come to me...learn from me," he was calling people to become his disciples.¹³⁷ In Greek the noun form of the verb for "learn" is "disciple."¹³⁸ Not only was Jesus calling people to learn what he had learned (content), but also to learn as he had learned (process) from the Father. In his gospel, John records a heated debate between Jesus and some Jewish leaders over the validity of Jesus' testimony:

They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father. So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am the one I claim to be and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has *taught* me. The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what pleases him." Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him. To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you *hold* to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."¹³⁹

¹³⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Henry Beveridge (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 1:37-39.

¹³⁶ Hebrews 5:8-9.

¹³⁷ Matthew 11:28-29.

¹³⁸ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), s.v. "manthano," by Karl Heinrich Rengstorff.

¹³⁹ John 8:27-32; *emphasis added*.

Jesus insists that a true disciple both understand and hold to his instruction.

Though the idea of obedience is implicit, he does not use the term. “Hold” is the English translation of a Greek term that may also be rendered “remain” or “abide.”¹⁴⁰ It implies an ongoing process of deepening engagement with Jesus’ teaching that leads to deepening insight—“If you abide...you will know.” That process is the transformational learning this research is concerned with.

All four New Testament Gospels portray Jesus as a man on the move. Jesus’ call to discipleship is a call to “follow me.”¹⁴¹ The obvious physical reference in using the term does not exhaust its significance when the teacher/disciple relationship is in view. When Jesus called his disciples to learn *from* him, he was also calling them to learn *with* him. As they became part of his discipling community, they witnessed Jesus in the process of learning through what he suffered. They saw and heard Jesus process his life experience, including his experience with the Father. Jesus was the perfect discipler because he was himself the perfect disciple, the perfect learner. He knew how to teach because he knew how to learn from the Father in every circumstance.

The learning process Jesus intended for his disciples continues in the church, under the name sanctification. Sanctification is the Spirit-originated, Spirit-sustained process of learning within the Christian. It results in profound personal transformation “whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.”¹⁴² This learning encompasses not only what Christians think and believe, but how and why. It also includes what they

¹⁴⁰ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), s.v. “meno,” by Friedrich Hauk.

¹⁴¹ Jesus’ admonition to “follow me” is recorded on six separate occasions in Matthew, and on four separate occasions in each of the other three Gospels. See Matthew 4:19, 8:22, 9:9, 10:38, 16:24, 19:21.

¹⁴² *Westminster Shorter Catechism* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), Q. 35.

commit themselves to as a result of that learning. This transformation in turn shapes their values, ethics, character and conduct, all in sharp contrast to the lives they lead before being transformed. Such transformational learning, or sanctification, results in obedience to God's word and will.

The apostle Paul explicitly framed sanctification as a learning challenge in his letter to the Romans: "Do not conform¹⁴³ any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Similarly, he wrote to the Ephesians, "*You were taught*, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."¹⁴⁴

Telling and teaching are remarkably different tasks, just as information and transformation are profoundly different results. If telling were sufficient for learning, there would be no need for the Spirit in sanctification, but Paul underscores that sanctification is the "work of the Spirit."¹⁴⁵ In this role, the Holy Spirit serves as the Christian's teacher and fulfills Jesus' promise to his disciples. In the Upper Room discourse, Jesus emphasized to his disciples that their learning under him was incomplete, but that it would continue through the Holy Spirit.¹⁴⁶ He promised he would ask the Father, and the Father would send them "another counselor to be with you forever—the

¹⁴³ Romans 12:2.

¹⁴⁴ Ephesians 4:22-24; emphasis added.

¹⁴⁵ II Thessalonians 2:13; I Peter 1:2.

¹⁴⁶ John 16:12.

Spirit of truth.”¹⁴⁷ Four times Jesus described the promised Spirit as their “counselor,”¹⁴⁸ which is probably the best translation of a challenging term.¹⁴⁹ Using this title, Jesus promised his disciples that the Holy Spirit “*will teach you* all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you... *will testify about me...will convict the world* of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment...*will guide you* into all truth...will not speak on his own...*will speak* only what he hears...*will tell you* what is yet to come...will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and *making it known to you*.”¹⁵⁰

While Jesus’ latter statements underscore the revelatory function of the Spirit, (largely understood as limited to apostles and resulting in the New Testament canon), this revelatory work is presented as one aspect of the Spirit’s broader, transformational work of teaching.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose..¹⁵¹

The sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit assumes that the individual is actively and cooperatively responding. Regardless of the mystery surrounding the Spirit, the believer is to engage in the learning process as the Spirit convinces hearts, enlightens minds, and renews wills.¹⁵² By such inner work, the Holy Spirit not only calls people to Christ, but transforms them for Christ as he “powerfully works” in them.¹⁵³

¹⁴⁷ John 15:16.

¹⁴⁸ John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7.

¹⁴⁹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), s.v. “paraklatos,” by Johannes Behm.

¹⁵⁰ John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14; emphasis added.

¹⁵¹ Philippians 2:12-13.

¹⁵² *Westminster Shorter Catechism*. Q. 31.

¹⁵³ Colossians 1:29.

Sanctification, then, involves neither the repression nor obliteration of any aspect of humanity, including learning, but the recovery of them all under the gracious rule of the Savior. There is no “rupture” between the way God brings people to truth and the way they naturally learn.¹⁵⁴ Rather, the natural process of learning, deformed under the influence of sin, is itself transformed. Its purpose in creation is fulfilled, and its corrupted function is restored. Christian educator Ronald T. Habermas writes:

The structure of our development does not change, nor does the process by which we learn. We are a new creation by virtue of our restored relationship to Christ. The transformational way of learning that is inherent in our humanity is not to be set aside as obsolete because of the change, for it has been redeemed in the individual. It has been free from sin in order to be used for the glory of God. The process must be understood and fostered, not ignored as unnecessary. Because of the Spirit it may be used for the need to which it was created.¹⁵⁵

The Holy Spirit works within the Christian to enable the Christian’s work of learning. The Spirit influences Christians to learn on such a profound level that they change, becoming conformed more and more to the image of Christ.¹⁵⁶ This encompasses understanding, outlook, commitments, values and conduct—the entirety of one’s life.

Simon Peter: A Case Study

Because the purpose of this dissertation is to describe the sacred process of learning for the sake of Christian ministers and those who train them, research focused on the New Testament. It is so abundant as a primary source that some strategy was necessary to limit the data to a manageable portion. Therefore, this study focused on the life of the Apostle Peter and his relationship to Jesus. In essence a case study, this

¹⁵⁴ Hodgson, 48.

¹⁵⁵ Ronald T. Habermas, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice for Christian Educational Ministry*, 10th Anniversary ed. (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2001), 93.

¹⁵⁶ Romans 8:29.

research described the learning process that lead to lasting transformation for Peter, both as a disciple and an apostle.

Apart from Jesus himself, we have a more complete account of the life of Simon Peter than any other person in the New Testament. Brennan Manning calls him “the most well-developed character in the Gospels aside from Jesus.”¹⁵⁷ Edwin Hodder asserted that “Simon Peter, more than any other character in the whole range of Bible narrative, stands out as a living personality.”¹⁵⁸

Lola Wells contrasts the portrayal of Peter with that of others in Biblical narrative. The Bible is not a novel in the Western literary tradition. Typically “minimal attention” is paid to characters feelings, intentions or attitudes. Yet Peter is presented “as a strong three-dimensional character...by intent.”¹⁵⁹ Wells argues for the relevance of studying the entire record of Peter’s life because it is the story of one man’s “struggle to let go of his view of reality to make room for Jesus’ view.”

Narratology is a fancy word for approaching Scripture as story. By focusing on the telling of the tale, narratology moves the reader into the world of story, plot, and character. Occasionally there emerges from the biblical narrative a character who mirrors the human struggle to live with God on God’s terms—a familiar tale to anyone intent on living the spiritual life. Such a character is Peter, whose story reflects his struggle to let go of his view of reality to make room for Jesus’ view.¹⁶⁰

From the perspective of narratology, Wells insists that “relying on anything short of the entire narrative [of Luke-Acts] results in an incomplete picture of Peter.”¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ Michael Card, *A Fragile Stone: The Emotional Life of Simon Peter* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 7.

¹⁵⁸ Edwin Hodder, *Simon Peter: His Life, Times, and Friends* (New York: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1884), vii.

¹⁵⁹ Lola M. Wells, “Peter’s Characterization in Luke-Acts,” *Review for Religious* 51, no. 3 (1992): 398.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 397.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 397.

Studying the entire recorded course of his transformation provides an understanding of how the same process is at work in other people.

Recorded incidents from Peter's life extend from three years prior to the resurrection to some twenty years afterward, with the two epistles of Peter ascribed to the period near his death, presumably around AD 62. Just as the four Gospels provide four separate portraits of Jesus, they also provide four separate portraits of Peter. Luke continues his extended account of Peter's life from Pentecost to the Jerusalem Council as part of the history of the early church as recorded in the book of Acts.

Richard J. Cassidy, Professor of Sacred Scripture at Sacred Heart Major Seminary in Detroit, makes the four Evangelists' portraits of Peter the rubric for his work, *Four Times Peter: Portrayals of Peter in the Four Gospels and at Philippi*. PHEME PERKINS, Professor of New Testament at Boston College, also focuses on each Gospel's narrative portrayal in *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church*.¹⁶² Nevertheless, the most significant contribution to the understanding of Peter since the mid-twentieth century remains OSCAR CULLMAN's *Peter: Disciple-Apostle-Martyr*, in which he traces Peter's life through the Gospels, Acts, and church Fathers, from his first encounter with Jesus to his martyrdom.¹⁶³

Peter's role is distinguished throughout the four Gospels. He is named first in every list of disciples; Matthew even names him first in his list.¹⁶⁴ Peter is not only presented as the spokesman for the other disciples, he is their group leader. This is underscored after Jesus' resurrection, but before Jesus restores Peter from his thrice-

¹⁶² PHEME PERKINS, *Peter: Apostle for the Whole Church*, ed. D. MOODY SMITH, *Studies on Personalities in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000).

¹⁶³ CULLMAN.

¹⁶⁴ MATTHEW 10:2.

repeated denial. When Peter says, “I’m going out to fish,” the others respond as one, “We’ll go with you.”¹⁶⁵

Many of the disciples whom Jesus named apostles are referenced repeatedly in the Gospels and at least mentioned in Acts.¹⁶⁶ Yet compare the references to Peter in the Gospels with the rest, and the numbers are not even close. Peter is mentioned 102 times as compared to twenty-three for John, seventeen for James, twelve for Andrew, ten for Thomas, and many fewer for the others.

Even so, word counts of names are only marginally useful compared with the stories in which they are embedded. Most references to the other disciples are contextual; they are named as hearers or observers in scenes where a significant incident occurred. Most often they are referred to as a group, i.e. “the disciples.” The Evangelists recorded few of the other eleven other apostles’ words. With some exceptions, such as Jesus’ resurrection appearance when Thomas was present,¹⁶⁷ the disciples play incidental roles in passages where they appear.

In stories that include Jesus’ inner circle of disciples—Peter, James, and John—neither James nor John speak on their own, apart from Peter. The two brothers’ only recorded words are their requests to Jesus to allow them to sit on either side of him in the kingdom and to call down fire from heaven on a Samaritan village that rejected him.¹⁶⁸ There is no recorded speech of James apart from John. Apart from James, John speaks to Jesus only twice, announcing his rebuke of a man who cast out demons in Jesus’ name,

¹⁶⁵ John 21:3.

¹⁶⁶ Acts 1:13.

¹⁶⁷ John 20:24-29.

¹⁶⁸ Mark 10:35-37; Luke 9:54.

and, after being prompted by Peter at the Last Supper, asking Jesus who his betrayer would be.¹⁶⁹

In marked contrast, Peter proves to be the principle actor alongside Jesus in passage after passage. He is either engaging Jesus in conversation or being engaged by him. What's more, the theme of these passages is derived from their discourse.¹⁷⁰

If the major storyline of each gospel revolves around the question, "What's going to happen to Jesus?" then the first subplot of each gospel revolves around, "What's going to happen to Peter?" This parallel tension is traceable throughout the Gospels right up to Jesus' betrayal. While Jesus is being interrogated inside the house of the chief priest, Peter is in the courtyard outside undergoing his own interrogation in which he denies Jesus three times. Unlike the Synoptic Evangelists, John concludes his Gospel by adding an epilogue after the resurrection account. Jesus has been raised after his crucifixion, but what about Peter after his denial? In John 21, the Evangelist answers that question with a soul-stirring account of how Jesus restored him.

All four Gospel writers underscore that Jesus rests the future of the church on Simon, son of Jonah. Matthew, Mark, and Luke each record Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea.¹⁷¹ Matthew's account includes Jesus' response: "And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. And I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."¹⁷² In Mark the angels at the tomb set Peter apart as they tell the women, "But

¹⁶⁹ Mark 9:38; John 13:23-25.

¹⁷⁰ Cassidy, 128-130.

¹⁷¹ Matthew 16:3-20; Mark 8:27-30; Luke 9:18-27.

¹⁷² Matthew 16:18-19.

go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee....’¹⁷³ Luke records that even as Jesus predicted Peter’s denial, he told him, “Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.”¹⁷⁴

Even the fourth Gospel which “manifestly wishes to emphasize the particularly close relationship between Jesus and the ‘Beloved Disciple,’ nevertheless nowhere attempts to deny directly the special role of Peter within the group of disciples.”¹⁷⁵ John presents Peter in the closest possible relation to Jesus. He records Jesus’ earliest reference to Peter toward the beginning of his Gospel when he met Simon—“You will be called Cephas (which, when translated, is Peter).”¹⁷⁶ He assigns to Peter the extraordinary confession of faith after the feeding of the five thousand, and makes Jesus’ restoration of Peter the conclusion of his Gospel, in which he three times commissions Peter to “feed my sheep.”¹⁷⁷ The man who had so recently played the hireling in denying Christ has the full faith and confidence of the Good Shepherd to shepherd his sheep.¹⁷⁸ Peter’s preeminence is unmistakable.

From Pentecost onward, Luke records how Peter was the leader of the early church. Peter directs the selection of a replacement for Judas, rises to preach at Pentecost, and along with John works miracles and faces the wrath of the Sanhedrin. Peter pronounces discipline on Ananias and Sapphira. Shortly thereafter, he and John represent the church in attesting to the conversion of the Samaritan. As they pray the Holy Spirit

¹⁷³ Mark 16:7.

¹⁷⁴ Luke 22:32.

¹⁷⁵ Cullmann, 27; John 13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20.

¹⁷⁶ John 1:42.

¹⁷⁷ John 6:68-69, 21.

¹⁷⁸ Cassidy, 99.

falls on them. Peter then becomes the one through whom the Lord extends the Gospel to the Gentiles. He subsequently becomes chief missionary to the Jews throughout the Diaspora.¹⁷⁹

Peter as a Learner

Given the role Peter played in the early church (not to mention the ongoing debate between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism over the implications of Peter's calling for church ecclesiology), much attention has been devoted to those passages which portray his life. Yet aside from studying his life for the sake of polemical or ecumenical exegesis, or doctrinal exposition, other possibilities for study remain. How did Jesus prepare him for his prominent role? What did he learn, and how did he learn it?

Readers know Paul largely by his thirteen New Testament letters. They know Peter by his life. They learn doctrine from Paul after he reached maturity in his faith and understanding. They see Peter on the journey of discipleship from a newly called follower of Jesus to his leadership of the early church. It may be, then, that these questions concerning Peter's growth are exactly the ones that should be asked. The study of Peter's life is a study of marked transformation from unbelief to the deepest possible conviction and commitment. Though the circumstances in which he learned were unique, the process of transformation is broadly applicable to the church.

If Jesus is at the center of every story in the Gospel, Peter is constantly in his shadow, because he is Jesus' disciple. "Disciple" means learner. Jesus called Peter to be his foremost disciple, his foremost learner. The records of the Gospels and Acts are unequivocal that this did not mean that Peter was the most outstanding but rather the most transformed and matured.

¹⁷⁹ Perkins, 10, 20.

Matthew 11 recounts two reflections by Jesus: a sorrowful reflection on people's rejection of him and the Gospel, and a joyful one—that while God sovereignly hides the Gospel from the “wise and learned,” he reveals it to “little children.” On the heels of these two certainties, Jesus issues his majestic call to discipleship:

Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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.¹⁸⁰

The kind of learning Jesus had in mind was learning that affects the soul, the kind that changes who a person is and how he or she experiences life. “Rest” speaks of peace and restoration contrasted with the normal human condition of alienation and agitation. Jesus promised “rest for your souls” to those who learned from him. This learning, then, is a matter of deep transformation, and Peter's life embodied it. If Cassidy is correct that “the principle purpose of each Gospel” is “to testify to Jesus and to foster discipleship in his name,” then consideration of Peter's life is warranted for understanding the experience of discipleship.¹⁸¹

Over against his protests, objections and even rebukes of Jesus, Peter learns that this rabbi is the Christ, the Savior and Lord who must suffer, die, and rise for him. Peter learns Christ.¹⁸² Peter was the first disciple to tell Jesus that he believed he was the Christ though the case had yet to be fully been made. In response, Jesus made a confession of his own: “And I say to you that you are Peter,” though there was no case to be made. Cullman notes, “It is hardly possible to give a psychological basis for the unique position of Peter and for the giving to him of this name.”¹⁸³ Within five verses of Peter's

¹⁸⁰ Matthew 11:28-30.

¹⁸¹ Cassidy, 7.

¹⁸² Cf. Ephesians 4:20.

¹⁸³ Cullmann, 31.

confession, Matthew records Jesus rebuking him as “Satan” and denouncing him as “a stumbling stone to me,” because Peter had rebuked him for disclosing that he must suffer and die in Jerusalem.

Scholars uniformly agree Jesus’ confession of Peter was prophetic. Yet this understanding leaves unaddressed the insight that when he spoke to Peter, Jesus spoke as his rabbi and Lord. Jesus had given the brothers James and John the nicknames “Sons of Thunder” because of the kind of people they were—loud, raucous, competitive.¹⁸⁴ It was not uncommon for rabbis to bestow such names on followers.¹⁸⁵ When Jesus bestows on Simon the name of Peter, meaning “rock,” it is because that is what he would teach him to be. He would cause Simon to learn so that he became Peter. This prophetic renaming of Simon, reminiscent of Yahweh’s renaming of Abram as “Abraham” and Jacob as “Israel,” would come to pass through learning.¹⁸⁶

Multiple incidents in the Gospels and Acts feature Peter with Jesus or under the provocation of the Holy Spirit. They include Andrew’s introduction of Peter to Jesus,¹⁸⁷ Jesus’ healing of Peter’s mother-in-law in his home,¹⁸⁸ Jesus’ calling Peter to discipleship along the Sea of Galilee,¹⁸⁹ Peter’s coming to Jesus on the water,¹⁹⁰ Peter’s going with Jesus to heal,¹⁹¹ Jesus’ questioning the Twelve whether they will leave him along with others after the feeding of the five thousand,¹⁹² Peter’s confession at Caesarea Philippi

¹⁸⁴ Mark 3:17.

¹⁸⁵ Cullmann, 19.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 21.

¹⁸⁷ John 1:35-42.

¹⁸⁸ Luke 4:38-44.

¹⁸⁹ Luke 5:1-11.

¹⁹⁰ Matthew 14:22-33.

¹⁹¹ Luke 8.

¹⁹² John 6.

and subsequent rebuke by Jesus,¹⁹³ the transfiguration,¹⁹⁴ Peter's questioning Jesus about forgiveness,¹⁹⁵ Peter's protest after Jesus' discourse with the rich young ruler,¹⁹⁶ Peter's exchanges with Jesus at the Last Supper as Jesus washes his feet and predicts his betrayal,¹⁹⁷ Gethsemane,¹⁹⁸ Peter's slashing off Malchus' ear at Jesus' arrest,¹⁹⁹ Peter's denials in the courtyard,²⁰⁰ Peter's solo encounter as the first of the Twelve to see Jesus after his resurrection,²⁰¹ Peter's restoration beside the Sea of Tiberius,²⁰² Pentecost and the early days following,²⁰³ Peter's experience of the Holy Spirit in Samaria,²⁰⁴ Peter's vision and the conversion of Cornelius,²⁰⁵ and Peter's withdrawal from Gentile believers at Antioch.²⁰⁶

Remarkably, every one of the aforementioned was a discipling event. Jesus, by his words and actions, intentionally engages Peter in the learning process. He says or does something that contradicts Peter's fundamental understanding of Jesus, of himself, or the world as he knows it. Two cases in point are Jesus' announcement, after Peter confesses him to be the Christ, that he must be rejected, suffer and die in Jerusalem; and Jesus' declaration to the rich young ruler that he must sell all that he has and give to the poor in order to follow Jesus.²⁰⁷ The resulting inner conflicts leave Peter disoriented,

¹⁹³ Matthew 16:13-28.

¹⁹⁴ Matthew 17:1-13.

¹⁹⁵ Matthew 18:21-35.

¹⁹⁶ Matthew 19:16-30.

¹⁹⁷ John 13.

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 26:36-46.

¹⁹⁹ John 18:1-11.

²⁰⁰ Luke 22:54-62.

²⁰¹ I Corinthians 15:5.

²⁰² John 21.

²⁰³ Acts 2-4.

²⁰⁴ Acts 8:14-25.

²⁰⁵ Acts 10:1-11:18.

²⁰⁶ Galatians 2:11-16.

²⁰⁷ Matthew 16:21; 19:21.

trying to make sense of his experiences with Jesus. Peter's responses include rebuke, protest, questioning and discourse with his fellow disciples.

Peter is not immediately transformed following each encounter with Jesus. In most instances no transforming moment or new commitment is recorded. On the contrary, the Gospels often record that Peter, along with the other disciples, does not understand, typically because of his unbelief.²⁰⁸ For example, Mark comments that "they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened."²⁰⁹ Jesus repeatedly rebukes the disciples for their unbelief. Sometimes the rebuke is mild ("you of little faith"²¹⁰), but other times it is harsh ("Are you so dull?").²¹¹ The research detailed below found that usually the learning process extended well beyond the recorded encounter, yet there is no reason to deny that indicators of earlier phases of the learning process are present. The recorded incidents were the inceptional triggering events that one would expect to find in light of learning theory.

Commensurate with transformative learning, Jesus most often sparks the learning process by asking questions that jar the disciples' assumptions. Jesus is either challenging their perspectives or fostering their labor of constructing meaning from his miracles, his actions, and his words. These were not quizzes on content. His questions include: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?";²¹² "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one who is at the table? But I am among you as one who serves";²¹³ "Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for

²⁰⁸ Luke 9:44-46; Matthew 16:8-10; Luke 18:33-35.

²⁰⁹ Mark 6:52.

²¹⁰ Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8.

²¹¹ Matthew 15:16.

²¹² Matthew 12:48.

²¹³ Luke 22:27.

the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?,”²¹⁴ “‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’”,²¹⁵ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin.”²¹⁶ “If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”²¹⁷

Jesus’ disciples are shown responding with vigorous discussion as they reflect. After his explanation of how hard it is for the rich to be saved, “The disciples were even more amazed, and said to each other, ‘Who then can be saved?’”²¹⁸ After Jesus calmed the storm, “They were terrified and asked each other, ‘Who is this? Even the wind and the waves obey him!’”²¹⁹ Evidence of discussions among themselves includes their approaching Jesus jointly with an inquiry. The Olivet Discourse begins with the disciples coming to Jesus in light of his earlier announcement that the temple would be destroyed. Matthew records: “As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. ‘Tell us,’ they said, ‘when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?’”²²⁰ Similarly as Jesus was praying, they came to him with a request, “Teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples.”²²¹ Other questions the disciples raised included: “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”²²² “Peter answered him, ‘We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for

²¹⁴ Matthew 16:9.

²¹⁵ Matthew 16:15.

²¹⁶ Matthew 7:4.

²¹⁷ Luke 11:13.

²¹⁸ Mark 10:26.

²¹⁹ Mark 4:41. Cf. Matthew 16:7; John 4:33; Mark 6:35-38.

²²⁰ Matthew 24:3.

²²¹ Luke 11:1.

²²² Matthew 18:1.

us?”²²³ On another occasion, Peter asked Jesus, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?”²²⁴ The disciples also asked Jesus, “Who is greatest in the Kingdom of heaven?”²²⁵

The disciples’ questions reveal more than underlying anxiety, foolishness, misunderstanding, or confusion. *Their questions reveal their best and worst efforts to grapple individually and as a group with the challenges that Jesus presented to them.* That Peter often spoke for the group, or that the Gospels present the disciples collectively expressing alarm,²²⁶ astonishment,²²⁷ fear,²²⁸ or joy²²⁹ to Jesus reveals that they were functioning together as a learning community in response to Jesus’ words and actions.

Reflection could result in taking a stab at making sense—literally! Consider Peter’s vain attempt to slash Malchus’ head during Jesus’ arrest, and having to settle for an ear.²³⁰ Necessary turmoil and the anxiety of contradiction are part of the journey to a transforming moment, but Peter ultimately responds with faith and commitment when Jesus directly or through the Spirit bestows insight and understanding upon him. Such insight involves a shift in perspective rather than a leap forward. The movement within the experience is transpositional, so that Peter’s ego-centered frame of reference becomes Christ-centered. The effect is transcendent; God’s initiative has drawn Peter closer to himself. Peter then acts on this revised understanding with new spiritual energy and re-orders his life.

²²³ Matthew 19:27.

²²⁴ Matthew 18:21.

²²⁵ Matthew 18:1.

²²⁶ Mark 10:26.

²²⁷ Mark 10:32.

²²⁸ Mark 4:40.

²²⁹ Luke 10:17.

²³⁰ Luke 22:49-52; John 18:10-11.

At the conclusion of most discipling events, Peter is left to make sense of his experience. Subsequent reflection and discourse with other disciples is one attempt to do so. Sooner or later— in some cases years later— Peter had learned deeply, and so had the other disciples. The evidence is that they taught and preached these events as well as recording them for the sake of discipling others. They took these steps in the belief that that Christ was as much at work through his word and by his Spirit as he had been when present at the original events.

Adult learning theorists have found that the initial internal conflict that triggers the learning process may be a single incident or a gradual realization that comes to the individual as the accumulated impact of a series of experiences. What one would expect to find then, in the exchanges between Jesus and Peter, are individual encounters in which the entire learning process is in play, and sets of encounters through which the language of transformation is embedded across time. The transforming impact of other encounters may not be evident at all within the Gospel record, but may become apparent later in Acts or much later still, in Peter's epistles. Indeed, an examination turned up examples of each of these scenarios in the New Testament. The grammar of transformation, whether compressed or extended, is routinely embedded within or across encounters between Peter and Jesus.

The Calling of Peter: Transformation in a Single Event

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.²³¹

Matthew, Mark, and Luke record Jesus calling Peter at water’s edge to be his disciple. Luke’s account is the most detailed. He records how Jesus, seeking a better position from which to teach the crowd, got into Peter’s boat and asked him to “put out a little from the shore.” Jesus already knew Peter. Peter had welcomed him in his home where the rabbi had healed his mother-in-law, so there was nothing presumptuous in Jesus’ action or request. But when he directed Peter to put out into deep water and cast out his net to catch fish, it seemed he would make Peter out to be a fool. Only out of personal respect for Jesus—“Because you say so...”—did Peter obey. Almost immediately, Peter was confronted with a jarring contradiction. In broad daylight, the least opportune time for fishing, where earlier he had caught nothing, his nets began to fill with fish. He and his partners filled their two boats with the catch until their craft began to sink. Elation had turned to panic. “When Simon saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, ‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’”

Here was Peter’s disorienting dilemma and resulting response. His reflection, or scanning, was brief but substantial. From the testimony of John the Baptist, the miracles

²³¹ Luke 5:1-11.

he had witnessed at Jesus' hands, and his personal knowledge of Jesus and his message, Peter already knew that he was a God-anointed man with a prophetic ministry. Nevertheless, if the remarkable catch of fish was shocking to Peter, the realization that Jesus was behind it was even more shocking. Jesus was more extraordinary than the miracle itself and more extraordinary than Peter had imagined. He had heard Jesus preach that the kingdom of God, with all its power, was at hand. Jesus now possessed that power, power from the holy God.²³²

Was Peter ready for this kingdom to come in power and righteousness, or was he like the nets in his boat, unable to withstand what such power and righteousness could do to him? Jesus could tear him apart. Peter was shaken. He could not escape from Jesus; there was no hiding himself or his heart from that man. Instead he would ask Jesus to leave him because he was unworthy of him: "Depart from me, Lord. I'm a sinful man." This was not a confession of sin, but Peter's attempt to cope with his fear of Jesus by putting distance between them. He did not want another experience of Jesus' power; he was too vulnerable. The imperative, "Depart from me," carries the primary thought of Peter's words.

Understood this way, Jesus' response may be seen as providing Peter with the insight that transformed his perspective. "Don't be afraid. From now on you will catch men."²³³ Jesus not only knew that he was afraid—any person could see that—but Jesus knew why.²³⁴ By his words Jesus reassured Peter that he was "gentle and humble of

²³² Simon J. Kistemaker, *The Conversations of Jesus: Learning from His Encounters* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 131-132.

²³³ In ten separate sayings, Jesus reassured his disciples with, "Don't be afraid." Matthew 10:26, 28, 31; 14:27; 17:7; 28:10; Mark 5:36; Luke 5:11; 12:32; John 14:27.

²³⁴ John 16:30, 21:17.

heart” and that he would not ruin or expose Peter.²³⁵ Jesus already knew what Peter was, yet he was calling him even in that condition to be his disciple. In that convictional moment, Peter began to learn faith, that he could trust Jesus. Though Jesus possessed the power of the holy God that could totally ruin Peter, that was not the end for which he would use it. Jesus would *keep him safe. Here was a man sent by God who truly wanted Peter with him*; “So they pulled their boats upon shore, left everything and followed him.”²³⁶

Here was evidence of the release of energy that Loder wrote about, followed by the reintegration of Peter’s life, along with his brother and partners—Andrew, James, and John. Peter had fished all night and just endured a wrenching physical and emotional trial, leaving him a spent man. Yet he followed Jesus as a man with renewed vitality. Peter’s Confession at Caesarea Philippi: A Pivotal Event in Transformational Learning

To treat each of Peter’s transformational experiences in isolation is to overlook their relationship to one another. Where the subject (Peter), relational context (Jesus, or Jesus and the disciples), and the topic coincide, the experiences can be studied chronologically for the sake of noting the learning process under way in the disciples. This approach coincides with the principles of biblical theology, recognizing progression of thought and development in ideas through the course of divine revelation. Graeme Goldsworthy observes that “biblical theology is concerned with how the revelation of God was understood in its time, and what the total picture is that was built up over the whole historical process.”²³⁷ The study of Peter upholds each of these elements but

²³⁵ Matthew 11:29.

²³⁶ Luke 5:11.

²³⁷ Graeme Goldsworthy, *Preaching the Whole Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 26.

narrows the scope from “the whole historical process” to one man’s life and focuses on the transformational impact of God’s revelation.

Cassidy, drawing from narrative criticism, approaches the Petrine passages in a way that is more literary than theological, yet he also recognizes relationships and progression among them. He challenges readers of scripture to become “paradigmatic readers,” who recognize how the Evangelists used literary structure to link stories together.²³⁸ Cassidy’s study assumes that each Gospel author wrote his narrative for a particular audience with the intention of developing themes that recur and build.²³⁹

When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?”

They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?”

Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.”²⁴⁰

When Jesus pronounced Peter blessed as the recipient of truth revealed to him by God, he was not referring to a dream or vision but to the accumulated impact of Jesus’ own words and deeds on Peter’s understanding—in other words, to what Peter had learned so far. The entire process of being exposed to Jesus, hearing him and speaking with him, reflecting and questioning, resolving and concluding—this was how the Father revealed his Son to Peter.

²³⁸ Cassidy, 7.

²³⁹ Ibid., 8-9.

²⁴⁰ Matthew 16:13-17.

Peter still had much further to go as the following verses in Matthew attest. His subsequent confused, insolent rebuke of Jesus for disclosing the necessity of his suffering confirms that he was a disciple in the midst of learning rather than a mystic who directly apprehended truth from God.

Exegetes agree that in Matthew and Mark especially, the confession of Jesus as the Christ marked the turning point in Jesus' ministry. R. T. France characterizes it this way:

Peter's declaration in v. 16 marks the climax of the gradual recognition of the Messiah by his disciples during the Galilean period. And the new note of suffering, death, and resurrection as the messianic mission which is first sounded in 16:21 will set the tone for the rest of the narrative. Galilee with its enthusiastic crowds has been left behind, and Jerusalem with its hostile religious authorities lies ahead.²⁴¹

From Jesus' baptism to Peter's confession, the central question raised by Jesus' words and deeds had been, "Who is this man?" This was just as true for Jesus' disciples as it was for others. From Caesarea forward, the chief question for the disciples centered on the necessity of Jesus' suffering. As he faced growing antagonism from authorities the closer he drew to Jerusalem, Jesus also faced growing tension and resistance from his disciples. Peter's confession at Caesarea proved to be a turning point in Jesus' relationship to his disciples as well as to the world. In both cases, the turning point centered on the necessity of his suffering.

From Galilee to Caesarea Philippi: The Learning Process Across Events

From the beginning of his public life, Jesus ministered as God's anointed, the Messiah or Christ. Everywhere he went, people from all quarters were left wondering who he was. John's disciples asked, "Are you the Coming One or do we look for

²⁴¹ France, 612.

another?” The crowds asked, “Could this be the Son of David?” Herod feared Jesus was John the Baptist come back from the dead. The Pharisees claimed that he cast demons out by Satan. Yet it was Jesus’ own disciples who put the matter most squarely: “Who is this man?”

Jesus would not allow this consideration to remain a theoretical concern. He called people to believe in him as God’s anointed, to place their trust in him. Before healing two blind men he asked, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?”²⁴² In the case of the Roman centurion, Jesus commended him for his faith, saying, “Let it be done for you as you have believed.”²⁴³ After healing a woman who touched him he declared, “Your faith healed you.”²⁴⁴ On more than one occasion he rebuked his disciples, addressing them as “You of little faith.”²⁴⁵

In the midst of the confusion – the conjectures, slander, questioning, and superstition – that resulted from the collision between people’s expectations and Jesus’ words and actions, it was extraordinary that Peter could say so clearly and unequivocally, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

The learning process was in play in every encounter between Jesus and his disciples, but two appear so directly linked to Peter’s confession at Caesarea as to warrant special attention. The first event is in Matthew 8: 23-27, the account of Jesus’ stilling of the storm. The second, in Matthew 14:22-33, recounts Jesus’ walking on water and Peter’s attempt to do the same. Marked progression is evident in the disciples’ understanding of who Jesus is.

²⁴² Matthew 9:28.

²⁴³ Matthew 8:13.

²⁴⁴ Matthew 9:22.

²⁴⁵ Matthew 6:30, 8:26, 14:31, 16:8.

In Matthew 8, Jesus and his disciples board a boat to cross the Sea of Galilee. A fierce storm ensues “without warning.” Waves crash over the boat while Jesus remains asleep in the stern. The disciples wake him up, crying out in fear and indignation, “Lord, save us! We’re gong to drown!”²⁴⁶ In response Jesus first rebukes the disciples, asking, “You of little faith, why are you so afraid?” Then he “rebuked the winds and the waves, and it was completely calm.”²⁴⁷ The disciples are terrified by the suddenness and viciousness of the storm, and their fears are compounded by Jesus’ apparent lack of concern. These elements are the setting for a more profound shock in which their fear of death is challenged (the void) by the presence of Jesus (the Holy). The trigger event begins with Jesus’ rebuke: His disciples should have known better than to fear the chaos of the storm, because he was with them and could be trusted to keep them from death. Then Jesus calms nature’s rage by the simplest command. By preceding his miracle with a rebuke, Jesus forestalls a response of accolades from the disciples; instead they are left to ponder, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!”²⁴⁸

In Matthew 14:22-33, Jesus has just miraculously feed more than 5,000 people. He separates his disciples from the crowd, many of whom intend to take him by force and make him their king.²⁴⁹ At Jesus’ insistence, the disciples get in their boat and shove off for the other side of the lake, but their progress is stopped by fierce winds. Again they face waves that threaten to swamp their boat.²⁵⁰ A trip that should have lasted less than

²⁴⁶ Matthew 8:25. Cf. Mark 4:38: “Teacher, don’t you care if we drown?”

²⁴⁷ Matthew 8:26.

²⁴⁸ Matthew 8:27.

²⁴⁹ John 6:15 provides this contextual statement that Matthew omits.

²⁵⁰ Matthew tells us waves “buffeted” them. Mark 6:48 says us the disciples “strained” at the oars. The two English terms are the same Greek term that is also used of torture or torment. The disciples were suffering; it was all they could do to keep their boat turned into the wind so it did not flood or capsize.

two hours has turned desperate and is still underway eight hours later in the fourth watch of the night—between three and five o'clock in the morning.²⁵¹

Then in the darkness the disciples make out a form walking on the water. They scream in terror because they assume they are looking at a disembodied spirit. Then Jesus says, “Take courage! It is I. don’t be afraid.”²⁵² Matthew then adds a detail that John omits: “‘Lord, if it’s you’, Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to you on the water.’”²⁵³ After Jesus tells him to come, Peter gets out of the boat and walks on the water toward Jesus—until he becomes aware of the wind. As he sinks, he repeats the cry uttered in Matthew 8, “Lord save me!”²⁵⁴ Jesus immediately catches Peter, and again repeats his earlier rebuke: “‘You of little faith,’ he said, ‘why did you doubt?’”²⁵⁵ As soon as the two enter the boat the wind settles down. The response of the disciples has shifted. Rather than wondering, “Who is this man?,” they “worshiped him, saying, ‘Truly, you are the Son of God.’”²⁵⁶

The disciples had two successive disorienting dilemmas. Their reflection on the first event has led them to cross off one choice from their list of possible answers. Jesus is not a mere man. His relationship to God marks him off as his Son, as somehow divine. But this is not the end of the learning process. The disciples have not reached the point of convictional knowing that Loder writes about. They are still well short; they have not been transformed. Jesus is calling for a faith that they do not yet possess. This is evident from how quickly Peter gives in to fear when his attention is diverted to the wind and waves, and how Jesus then rebukes him with, “You of little faith, why do you doubt?”

²⁵¹ Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 381.

²⁵² Matthew 14:27.

²⁵³ Matthew 14:28.

²⁵⁴ Matthew 14:30.

²⁵⁵ Matthew 14:31.

²⁵⁶ Matthew 14:33.

“You” is in the plural indicating that Jesus is addressing the entire band of disciples.

Jesus had already told them, not to be afraid that he was a ghost, or to fear that the waves and winds might destroy them. The deeper challenge was to not be afraid to trust him.

This he now brings to the fore in his use of “doubt,” a verb that also translates as waver.

As with English, so, too, in Greek, “waver” is a form of “wave.” Peter was more affected by his circumstances than by the near presence of the Lord.²⁵⁷

When Jesus rebukes his disciples for having little faith, the question is little as compared with what? His use of the term “doubt” confirms that the smallness of their faith was in comparison with Jesus’ trustworthiness and the depth of his love and devotion to his disciples. Though the disciples had a correct (if incomplete) notion of who Jesus was, Jesus was calling for more—a commitment to the truth of his identity as Savior and Lord. It would take some time, but it would eventually happen because of events like this.

Later the apostles took to heart the lesson that Jesus began teaching them that day and preserved the incident. What did they learn? It is not trusting Jesus as the Christ that makes a person vulnerable to evil. Rather, it is doubt. It was not faith but doubt that caused Peter to begin sinking into the waves, yet Jesus rescued him still. After decades of reflection and further experience, Peter’s conviction would drive his message to churches in the grip of severe persecution:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. *This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.* In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that the proven

²⁵⁷ France, 570-571.

genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.²⁵⁸

Here Peter underscores that faith guards believers through trials on earth for the salvation that is guarded for them in heaven. Christians in the face of dangerous uncertainties have every reason to continue believing and no reason to doubt.

For Peter, the hard lesson of his failed attempt to walk on water would be underscored again shortly after his confession at Caesarea and again on the night of Jesus' betrayal. His doubt would thrust him into the role of Satan and lead him on a course not far removed from Judas the traitor.

As noted above, Peter's confession marked the turning point in Jesus' ministry both among his disciples and among the populace and antagonistic religious establishment. Given Peter's confession and Jesus' promise to build his church (the new Israel from the remnant of the old Israel) on Peter, and to invest authority in the other disciples as well, one might expect less tension and greater unanimity between Jesus and his disciples. Because Jesus shifted attention from establishing his identity to revealing his mission, the opposite occurred.

From Caesarea Philippi to Jerusalem: The Learning Process Extended

From that time on Jesus began to *explain* to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.²⁵⁹

"Explain" in the NIV is most often translated "show" as when Jesus told the leper he healed to go and "show" himself to the priest.²⁶⁰ Jesus' repeated efforts to show his

²⁵⁸ 1 Peter 1:3-7; emphasis added.

²⁵⁹ Matthew 16:21; emphasis added.

²⁶⁰ Matthew 8:4.

disciples the necessity of his suffering are not described, yet the term suggests they were pointed and explicit.²⁶¹ For Peter and the others, this proved to be the most threatening of all the truths Jesus taught them. Learner resistance peaked for them at this point, as Peter's rebuke makes clear. Jesus' swift response—"Get behind me Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men"²⁶²—showed that his death and resurrection were the irreducible core of his message and his mission.

Although this exchange occurred subsequent to Peter's confession and presumably at a different location, Matthew directly linked the two incidents. He placed one immediately after the other in his gospel account. He minimized the time gap between them with the introductory phrase, "from that time." Matthew then focused exclusively on dialogue with no reference to contextual details. Thus, the second set of dialogue is presented as a continuation of the first. At Caesarea, Jesus warned his disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Christ, presumably because without understanding his mission, their testimony would only add to the messianic confusion of the time and reinforce the mistaken notion that the Messiah would be a political deliverer. The sharpness of Jesus' subsequent rebuke (with its ironic description of Peter as a stumbling stone) confirms that unless Peter accepted what Jesus had come to do, Peter had not accepted Jesus for who he actually was, and was not truly transformed.

In rebuking Peter, Jesus exposed the deeper issue—that Peter found the idea of a suffering and dying Messiah to be shameful, embarrassing or indefensible. Peter was a stumbling block because he did "not have in mind the things of God but the things of

²⁶¹ Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), s.v. "deiknumi," by Heinrich Schlier.

²⁶² Matthew 16:23.

men.” The deeper issue centered on glory. Jesus, the man who did miracles, who exposed the hypocrisy of self-righteous authorities and announced the coming of the kingdom of God, could quite easily be followed for the sake of obtaining glory for oneself. To be in the vanguard of God’s kingdom on earth was high company indeed. But Jesus dashed all vainglory by announcing his pending suffering, rejection and death. To make matters worse, it would all take place in Jerusalem, the very heart of Israel and the center of God’s kingdom on earth.

Jesus then impaled the hidden predilection for personal glory: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.... For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.”²⁶³ The glory of this world counts for nothing and seeking it results in unimaginable loss. On the other hand, nothing is more certain than God’s glory, and living for that results in unimaginable gain. Jesus concludes with a cryptic announcement: “Truly I tell you, some who are standing here will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”²⁶⁴ Some would witness the divine glory Jesus had just spoken about.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke proceed directly to the transfiguration of Jesus, to the only recorded instance where the disciples actually see Jesus in his glory, either before or after his resurrection. For this reason, Bultmann held that the transfiguration was a resurrection myth carelessly included before the resurrection.²⁶⁵ From the perspective of learning theory, the experience is consistent with Jesus’ intent of

²⁶³ Matthew 16:24-25, 27.

²⁶⁴ Matthew 16:28.

²⁶⁵ Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 437.

helping Peter learn the necessity of his suffering and fits well as a next step in that process.

The three Evangelists were explicit in naming the short time that elapsed—“six days” or “about eight days”—between Peter’s confession at Caesarea and the transfiguration.²⁶⁶ Jesus’ words had implied that the revelation would be partial or temporary rather than the permanent consummation, for he said, “some of you standing here will not taste death” before experiencing the revelation. Their mortal condition would continue; the present age of sin and death would not end with the revelation. The transfiguration, then, is the resumption of the learning encounter that had ended with Jesus’ promise that some would see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.

Jesus brought Peter, James and John up with him on a mountain to pray. The three Evangelists describe the subsequent transfiguration of Jesus in terms of a brilliant blinding light and the appearance of Moses and Elijah. Luke tells us that Moses and Elijah also appeared in glorious splendor as they conversed with Jesus’ about his coming “departure” in Jerusalem.²⁶⁷ The disciples’ response was terror, not interest.²⁶⁸ The words of Peter are often translated as a statement—“Lord, it is good for us to be here”—but may be better understood as a question: “Lord, is it good for us to be here?”²⁶⁹ Peter then offers Jesus, “If you wish I will make three tabernacles here, one for you, and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” This incident bears deep similarities to the revelation of God’s glory on Sinai.²⁷⁰ Peter’s offer is best understood in light of that history, when in

²⁶⁶ Matthew 17:1ff; Mark 9:1ff; Luke 9:28ff.

²⁶⁷ Luke 9:30.

²⁶⁸ Randall E. Otto, “The Fear Motivation in Peter’s Offer to Build Treis Skenes,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 59, no. 1 (1997): 104-106.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 107.

²⁷⁰ France, 644-645.

response to the people's appeal to have no more direct encounters with God, the Lord commanded the construction of a tabernacle for himself in which his glory might reside. The shelter was erected not for God's protection, but for the people's safety.²⁷¹

Once again, Peter is deeply wrong. Mark tells us, "He did not know what to say, they were so frightened."²⁷² The foolishness in Peter's offer is often understood as an implicit willingness to regard Moses, Elijah, and Jesus as three distinct deities. The text underscores that there is a more immediate issue. Peter does not recognize the absolute authority of Jesus in relation to them, or of his words in relation to theirs—the Law as delivered by Moses or the prophecies of Elijah. Moses and Elijah are present with Jesus as the lesser with the greater, as predecessors with their successor, as prophets before the fulfillment of their prophecy.²⁷³ In response to such error, the cloud of God's glory envelops them, and God speaks exclusively of Jesus, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!"²⁷⁴ Six days after taking Jesus aside to rebuke him for announcing the necessity of his suffering, Peter witnesses a revelation of God's glory that surpasses the burning bush on Sinai. This glory appeared not to reveal some new word, but to confirm the word of Jesus—"Listen to him!" This command comes to Peter in an astonishing affirmation of his earlier confession that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Jesus warned his disciples not tell anyone what they had seen until after "the Son of Man" was raised from the dead. They would not understand the meaning of the

²⁷¹ Otto, 101, 106-112.

²⁷² Mark 9:6.

²⁷³ Chris Hollingshurst, "The Transfiguration and the Church's Worship," *Anvil* 16, no. 2 (1999), 109.

²⁷⁴ Matthew 17:5.

transfiguration before that. Their eyewitness testimony to what had occurred must wait for the realization that would come later.

Beyond the Gospels, few events from Jesus' life are referred to directly in the remainder of the New Testament, aside from his suffering, death and resurrection. The transfiguration is the principle exception to which Peter bore witness shortly before his death. (Note that this assertion accepts the historic orthodoxy of Petrine authorship, contrary to much contemporary scholarship.²⁷⁵) Setting aside debates concerning authorship, the text itself evidences prolonged reflection on the transfiguration, and the convictional knowing that results from deep learning—the sort of thing one would expect to emerge from the mind of an eyewitness:

For we did not follow cleverly devised tales when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty. For when He received honor and glory from God the Father, such an utterance as this was made to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son with whom I am well-pleased"—and we ourselves heard this utterance made from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain. So we have the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts.²⁷⁶

The author had come to see that the transfiguration had as much to do with the relationship between Jesus and the prophets as it did about his glory. To listen to Jesus and believe in him was to honor and heed his predecessors who had done the same thing. Peter's experience left him in no doubt that the prophetic words of Moses and Elijah, and by implication all the prophets, pointed to Jesus and the necessity of his suffering, death and resurrection—"So we have the prophetic word made more sure." Not only had Peter

²⁷⁵ Terence V. Smith, *Petrine Controversies in Early Christianity: Attitudes Towards Peter in Christian Writings of the First Two Centuries* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1985), 214.

²⁷⁶ II Peter 1:16- 19 (NASB).

not followed cleverly devised tales about Jesus, he had not invented cleverly devised interpretations of the prophets.

In the same way, near the opening of I Peter, one finds another statement of prophetic validation for the message of salvation:

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.²⁷⁷

Peter declares that the prophets had a profound personal interest in knowing when and how their prophecies concerning Christ would be fulfilled. Furthermore, prompted by what they spoke and wrote, the prophets searched further until “it was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you....” How did Peter know this though it was not part of the prophecies? The answer may reside in learning that resulted from the transfiguration. Peter, James and John experienced the transfiguration as an event in the present, yet the persons, relationships and exchange displayed there transcended time. Peter had witnessed that the association of the prophets with Jesus was more explicit and personal than the prophecies themselves had disclosed. He had seen Moses and Elijah in discussion with Jesus concerning the timing and circumstances of Jesus’ fulfillment of their prophecies. Luke wrote, “They spoke about his departure (literally “exodus” in Greek) which he was about to bring to fulfillment at Jerusalem.”²⁷⁸ The account in I Peter provides remarkable support for how an experience decades earlier had reshaped Peter’s perspective on the prophets in relation to Christ.

²⁷⁷ I Peter 1:10-12.

²⁷⁸ Luke 9:31.

Descending from the mountain after the transfiguration, Jesus gave his disciples the same instruction about this new revelation that he had given after Peter confessed him to be the Christ: Tell no one. These were inceptional, compounding learning experiences that required time, additional experiences, and considerable reflection before the intended transformation would occur. Jesus then concluded by using his answer to a question about Elijah's coming to return to the necessity of his suffering.²⁷⁹ The question became whether they now in fact would listen to him as God had told them so plainly to do six days after Peter's refusal at Caesarea.

Throughout the journey from the Mount of Transfiguration to Jerusalem, Jesus engaged in intense, private ministry to his disciples. The result at the time was growing tension between them and their rabbi. God had told Peter, James and John, "Listen to him!" Now Jesus commanded their attention with challenging words intended to pry them away from a worldview that he had earlier characterized as "of man" rather than "of God." That worldview was completely at odds with Jesus' prophecy of his suffering and his related command that his disciples must also lay down their lives.

Jesus underscored the certainty of his suffering, death and resurrection to the disciples; and began to speak of his betrayal as well. In the first instance, Matthew tells us the disciples were grieved. Mark noted that they "did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it."²⁸⁰ In the second instance recounted by Matthew, there is no record of any reaction from the disciples.²⁸¹

With great irony, on the heels of each pronouncement of Jesus' coming suffering, the Evangelists record the disciples' ongoing debate over which of them is greatest in the

²⁷⁹ Matthew 17:12.

²⁸⁰ Matthew 17:22-23; Mark 9:32.

²⁸¹ Matthew 20:17-19.

kingdom of God, a debate that includes intercession before Jesus on behalf of James and John by their mother.²⁸² They utterly fail to make the connection between the trajectory of Jesus' selflessness and what he is similarly requiring of them.

This failure is especially evident in the disciples' reactions to Jesus' stepped-up instruction on the ethical implications of his command to deny themselves. Because Jesus' instruction is so percussive throughout this portion of Matthew, R.T. France entitled his commentary section on Matthew 19-20, "The Revolutionary Values of the Kingdom of Heaven: Re-Education for the Disciples."²⁸³

After Jesus instructed the disciples on the necessity of forgiving others, Peter asked him, "How many times?"²⁸⁴ After Jesus prohibited divorce "except for marital unfaithfulness," they protested, "It is better not to marry!"²⁸⁵ After Jesus proclaimed children to be paradigmatic candidates for the kingdom, the disciples rebuke parents for bringing little ones to Jesus.²⁸⁶ After Jesus called on the rich young ruler to sell all he had, give to the poor and then follow him, "they were greatly astonished and asked, 'Who then can be saved?'"²⁸⁷ And Jesus assurance that what is impossible with man is possible for God was not good enough for them. "Peter answered him, 'We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?'"²⁸⁸

In each instance Jesus is teaching his disciples more than to lay down their lives for others, or to put others first. Jesus is teaching the disciples to put him first by heeding his word. His instruction is not about repentance from specific sins but radical obedience.

²⁸² Matthew 18:1-5, 20:20-28.

²⁸³ France, 710.

²⁸⁴ Matthew 18:21.

²⁸⁵ Matthew 19:10.

²⁸⁶ Matthew 18:1-5; 19:13.

²⁸⁷ Matthew 19:25.

²⁸⁸ Matthew 19:27.

Jesus is calling his disciples to a profoundly different orientation toward life, one that goes well beyond turning away from evil or following the law, at least in a conventional sense. He is calling them to turn away from what is good and forego conventional liberties for his sake and for the kingdom. Loss for the sake of gain has immediate practical implications. The disciples recoil because they have yet to learn which are the lesser goods and which are the greater, but Jesus has provoked in them the dilemmas necessary for learning.

The Passion: Final Preparation for Peter's Transformation

Jesus' passion—his betrayal, the mockery of a trial, his torture and crucifixion—was the apex of his mission. He had come, “not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”²⁸⁹ The apex of his mission was also the apex of his discipling ministry. John introduces his passion narrative by commenting: “It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.”²⁹⁰

The Evangelist proceeds to underscore how Jesus continued to teach his disciples by symbol (e.g. the washing of his disciples' feet) and by word (e.g. “A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”²⁹¹)

The other Evangelists similarly convey how Jesus loved his disciples through his instruction to them in the breaking of the bread and passing of the cup. Beyond the symbols and words Jesus used, the ordeal of his suffering served to bring Peter (and by implication the other disciples) to that transforming moment when his confusion and resistance gave way to the deepest possible realization and adoration.

²⁸⁹ Matthew 20:28.

²⁹⁰ John 13:1.

²⁹¹ John 13:34-35.

Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.

But he replied, “Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death.”

Jesus answered, “I tell you, Peter, before the rooster crows today, you will deny three times that you know me.”²⁹²

Jesus’ opening words to Peter, in which he predicted his denial, are strikingly reminiscent of the opening of Job, when Satan came before the Lord seeking permission to destroy Job’s faith by ruining his life. He was granted permission to destroy Job’s world so completely that his prior perspective on life and the ways of God was rendered useless to repair the rupture he experienced. Jesus knew that Peter was about to have the same experience. Only in coming to the end of himself would he, like Job, be ripe for that transposition of perspective that would change him forever.

Learning theorists agree that all deep learning begins with a realization in the individual—often painful—that he or she has a deeply flawed perspective on the nature of self, of life, or of what is ultimately significant. This realization leads to a search for meaning until a compelling insight brings the learner to a reordered worldview and a new commitment to the truth that he or she has realized. The distinction in coming to knowledge of God is that the disorienting dilemma that initiates the process involves a confrontation with what Loder calls “the void.” The void essentially represents death in one or more of its biblical manifestations—physical chaos, moral chaos, dying, isolation, the destruction of self or other by sin, moral blindness, condemnation for sin.

People live with an inherent fear of the void, of becoming nothing or being regarded as nothing, or of having what one has done count for nothing. Worse is the fear

²⁹² Luke 22:31-34.

of being actively rejected, condemned, and punished. As a result people develop walls to protect themselves from their worst fears. The world that becomes “their world” is limited, characterized by evasion, denial, and other avoidance of death.

Peter’s sharp resistance to Jesus’ announcements concerning his own death—and calling his disciples to subject themselves to the same—is understandable as the response of a man whose defenses are being breached. On the night of Jesus’ betrayal, Peter’s walls are shattered. God destroys his idolatrous confidence and false understanding that had precluded him from believing the truth about Jesus.

Each time Jesus warned him that the hour of his passion was approaching, Peter’s ego-centered, misplaced confidence made it impossible to accept. As he so often before questioned, resisted, or even rebuked Jesus, Peter responded with protest to Jesus’ reassurance that he has prayed that God will sustain Peter despite his faltering.

This is not only the night of Jesus’ trial, but also of Peter’s trial. The four Evangelists, especially Mark, juxtapose Jesus’ interrogation inside the house of the high priest with Peter’s interrogation in the courtyard.²⁹³ Jesus remains the faithful and true witness; Peter denies Jesus three times. With each denial, Peter becomes more adamant until at the last, Mark reports that he called down curses on himself if he was lying.²⁹⁴ These are not the responses of a cowardly man—it was, after all, Peter alone who had leapt to Jesus’ defense, sword in hand, before the armed guard that had come to arrest him—but of a defeated, despairing man. Matthew 26:58 reads literally that Peter sat down in the courtyard “to see the end.” He is defeated; his world is shattered; he is immersed in darkness. Only Jesus staring straight at him jars him from the fog of sorrow

²⁹³ France, 1017.

²⁹⁴ Mark 14:71.

enough to realize that he has just done what he had deemed unthinkable and impossible. He had denied his Lord and friend three times. He failed irreparably and absolutely. In the process he even managed to curse and condemn himself. Peter's ego-centered understanding of himself and of Jesus had to die, and that night, before Jesus' crucifixion, it did.

Though the Evangelists make no note of a particular instant when Peter realized Jesus' crucifixion was in fulfillment of his words concerning the bread and cup at the Last Supper, Luke does record the instant when Peter realizes that he has fulfilled Jesus' words concerning his denial.²⁹⁵ When Jesus looked at him after his third denial, "the effect was shattering."²⁹⁶ Peter goes out and weeps bitterly. Jesus told him earlier that although Satan demanded to sift him as wheat, he had prayed for him "that your faith may not fail." But for Jesus' prayers, Peter's monumental failure might be expected to lead to deadly sorrow and regret. With that bitter weeping, the revolutionary transformation in Peter's understanding begins.

To this point, Peter regarded Jesus the Messiah as God's deliverer of Israel and healer of the oppressed who, as God's Son, also had the authority to forgive sins. Never had he imagined Jesus to be Redeemer of the justly condemned, the pathetically faithless, the failed follower; neither had he considered himself as a man in need of such grace. Now that the dam of his resistance had broken, Peter had been fully prepared so that he himself would be raised from death to life by the full truth about Jesus. He had already begun to realize that Jesus had spoken the truth about everything. He was prepared to embrace the essential truth that was incomprehensible to him such a short time before,

²⁹⁵ Matthew 26:75; Luke 22:62.

²⁹⁶ Morris, *The Gospel According to St Luke*, 316.

when Jesus had said, “This is my body given *for you*.... This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out *for you*.”²⁹⁷

Just how profound Peter’s learning was became evident as early as Pentecost when he “stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd.” Many in the crowd would have been visitors to Jerusalem, innocents in relation to Jesus’ execution. Yet Peter would directly address those who had played a role in crucifying Jesus. Peter, the man who three times had denied Jesus, would especially appeal to those who three times had demanded before Pilate, “Crucify him!”²⁹⁸ He would identify fully with them and their need for Jesus’ forgiveness.²⁹⁹ This interpretation is supported by Peter’s second sermon to his countrymen in the temple courts. In characterizing their sin and need for Christ, he twice used the same term to describe their failure as was used to describe his own:

The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and *denied* in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. But you *denied* the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you....³⁰⁰

Peter then called them “brothers” and consoled them: “I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders.”³⁰¹ Peter’s deep empathy demonstrated his complete reorientation to Jesus, to himself, and to Jesus’ enemies. Peter preaches as a man convinced by the Holy Spirit that Jesus will forgive them just as he himself had been forgiven.

²⁹⁷ Luke 22:19, 20; emphasis added.

²⁹⁸ Richard S. Ascough, “Rejection and Repentance: Peter and the People in Luke’s Passion Narrative,” *Biblica* 74, no. 3 (1993): 351, 357.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 358-359.

³⁰⁰ Acts 3:13-14 (ESV); emphasis added.

³⁰¹ Acts 3:17.

Transformational learning is permanent. It is reflected throughout the rest of one's life. Peter's experience of being sifted by Satan and then graciously restored permanently shaped his counsel within the church as well as his witness to outsiders. At the end of I Peter, he wrote to a suffering church:

Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that the family of believers throughout the world is undergoing the same kind of sufferings.

And the God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast. To him be the power for ever and ever. Amen.³⁰²

This counsel does not include a recitation of Peter's prior experience – as one might expect from a pseudo author. Rather the text bears the marks of Peter's mature reflection and its underlying contours are autobiographical. The assurance he gives is grounded in his own experience. Having been sifted by Satan and subsequently turned back in answer to Jesus' prayer, Peter here strengthens his brothers.

In his opening statement —“Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour”—Peter draws from the opening of Job as Jesus had done in speaking with him at the Last Supper. In Job, Satan said he had returned “from roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it.”³⁰³ The apostle then exhorts his readers, “Resist him, standing firm in the faith.” He insists that their suffering is not exceptional but common to believers because their enemy is the devil. Suffering does not signal that the Gospel is untrue or that the promise represented in Christ is unreliable. This was the truth Peter had failed to hold on to. He then testifies in words that could have been lifted from a page in his own autobiography, “And the God of all grace, who

³⁰² I Peter 5:8-11.

³⁰³ Job 1:7.

called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”

As Jesus had come so personally to restore and strengthen him, Peter directs believers to the same expectation. The unspoken assumption is that they may not prove so faithful as they had expected in their own hour of darkness. Yet God remains “the God of all grace,” and “to him be the power” to make believers firm and steadfast forever. Here Peter condescends in advance, as Jesus once had for him, to wash the feet of his brothers. David Gill observed in *Peter the Rock* that the epistles of Peter serve to “illuminate and complete Peter’s story of Christian discipleship.”³⁰⁴ This aspect of the epistles’ significance is evident in Peter’s counsel to persecuted believers.

Resurrection and Transformation

No time in Peter’s life was more significant as regards his transformation than the period between Jesus’ crucifixion and Pentecost. The man who took his stand to proclaim Christ at Pentecost was profoundly different from the man who had denied Jesus just over fifty days earlier. Embedded in the Gospel accounts and confirmed throughout Acts and the epistles is the testimony that three days after he was crucified, dead and buried, Jesus rose from the dead. If transformative learning theory is true, then the astonishing nature of this singular event with its supernatural character is not sufficient to explain the change in Peter. Given the extent of Peter’s transformation, one would expect the period from Jesus’ resurrection to Pentecost to be characterized by continued, even intensified, discipleship by Jesus. The Evangelists’ accounts notably confirm this to be the case.

³⁰⁴ David W. Gill, *Peter the Rock: Extraordinary Insights from an Ordinary Man* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 184.

Jesus' priority after rising from the dead was to resume his discipling ministry. He presented himself to his disciples alive, not to others. In possession of the facts of his death and his resurrection, Jesus instructed them focusing on Old Testament. It was because they had been "slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken" that they would not accept the necessity of Jesus death before it occurred or the truth of his resurrection after it had taken place, though the witnesses for each—Jesus in the first instance and other disciples in the second, beginning with the women who ventured to the tomb—were completely reliable.

According to Luke, Jesus asked the two disciples on the Emmaus road, "Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" Luke then reports, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets he [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself." The two disciples would later marvel, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"³⁰⁵

Luke then describes Jesus' first appearance to the Eleven. After persuading them he was truly present and alive by eating some broiled fish, Jesus' began instructing them: "'This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms.' Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."³⁰⁶ In light of how Jesus had opened the minds of the two disciples earlier by careful explanation, there is good reason to assume that he opened the minds of the Eleven by similarly teaching them.

³⁰⁵ Luke 24:26-27, 32.

³⁰⁶ Luke 24:44-45.

In the opening of the book of Acts, Luke notes that Jesus “appeared to them [the disciples] over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.” Given that prayer and worship must have been a prominent part of daily life, it is noteworthy that Luke instead characterizes the period as a continuation of Jesus’ discipling ministry.

Neither Jesus’ death nor his resurrection was self-interpreting. Even with Jesus risen and alive before them, the disciples did not come to truth apart from the learning process that Jesus facilitated. The context from which he taught was the kingdom of God. So when he told his disciples that they were to be baptized with the Holy Spirit “in a few days,” they responded with a kingdom-centered question: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” Jesus could so easily have said no and gone onto explain the Gentile mission and emergence of the church from within Judaism. Clearly, from the subsequent, turbulent history, he did not. The disciples knew there was to be a Gentile mission, but they had no idea “how to conduct it when the Jews were forbidden by law to associate with Gentiles.”³⁰⁷ That Jesus did not regard this as an omission indicates that his discipling intention during this crucial period was indeed transformational rather than informational. This assertion is corroborated by the most extensive record of a resurrection appearance by Jesus, that being his restoration of Peter in John 21.

Mark, Luke-Acts and John, in varying degrees, give special attention to Peter after the resurrection. Paul names Peter as the first apostle to whom Jesus appeared, and Luke affirms it.³⁰⁸ None of the authors record an instant when Peter suddenly crossed over from his old self to his new, because it didn’t happen that way. Peter’s

³⁰⁷ Wells, 401.

³⁰⁸ I Corinthians 15:5; Luke 24:34.

transformation was progressive, less like a flash of lightening than a dawning, less a shock than an awakening.³⁰⁹ When Jesus issued his call to discipleship, he gave the assurance that he was “gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls.” These words are especially relevant to contexts of failure when restoration is needed. John records how that earlier assurance came alive in Jesus’ reaffirmation, or restoration, of Simon as Peter.

There are marked similarities between the calling of Peter recorded in Luke 5:1-11 and Jesus’ restoration of Peter in John. The setting is the same, along the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberius as per John). The circumstance is also the same, another fruitless night of fishing. Jesus’ direction to cast out the net yet again, the resulting miraculous catch of fish, and Jesus’ receiving Peter on the shore are all similar. One result in critical scholarship has been conjecture that both accounts are creative derivatives from one original story. From the perspective of learning theory, John 21 is a remarkable example of a teacher building on an earlier learning event to cause further learning. Jesus in effect reproduced conditions in which he had first called Peter to discipleship with the promise, “Do not fear, from now on you will be catching men.”³¹⁰

Even if Peter had felt restored personally to Jesus before the account in John 21, it did not necessarily follow that he felt restored in his calling to be Jesus’ rock for his church. Was Jesus still willing to entrust to him such a pivotal role? Like a faithless wife whose husband has received her back, Peter had to wonder—if Jesus had to call Peter as his disciple all over again, would he do it? By reproducing the circumstances in which he had first engaged Peter, and then re-commissioning him there, Jesus removes all doubt by

³⁰⁹ Gill, 123-130.

³¹⁰ Luke 5:10.

answering with a resounding, “Yes!” That Jesus deliberately shifts the metaphor of calling from fishing for men to feeding his sheep, though the context was suited to the former, was doubly affirming.³¹¹ John, who recounted the details of this event, had earlier included Jesus’ extended teaching on the good shepherd. The good shepherd is not a hireling who abandons the sheep in the face of danger, but the one who lays down his life for his sheep.³¹² Jesus now conveys his confidence that Peter will be a shepherd and not a hireling in spite of his past.³¹³ Jesus confirms this interpretation by proceeding immediately to prophesy Peter’s death as a martyr. Peter would indeed lay down his life for the sheep.

As Peter comes to shore, he finds that Jesus has prepared a charcoal fire. Jesus has bread and is cooking fish, preparing to share a meal with the seven fishermen. This is like the old days—except for Jesus’ resurrection. What is proper etiquette for eating with a man raised from the dead? Jesus invites them to come and eat, but the disciples feel awkward, so he comes and hands food to them.³¹⁴ The last (and only) time that John recorded Peter standing before a “charcoal fire” was the night he denied Jesus.³¹⁵ Jesus reproduced for this occasion the dominant feature of that scene—the light, warmth, smells and sounds of a charcoal fire—to be the setting in which he extends fellowship to his disciple. Here was love and acceptance expressed in a setting that brought Peter’s shame to the foreground, in order to restore him from that shame. It was part of Peter’s re-commissioning.

³¹¹ John 21:15-17.

³¹² John 10:11-15.

³¹³ Kistemaker, 146.

³¹⁴ John 21:12-13.

³¹⁵ John 18:18, 21:9 (ESV).

Jesus follows the meal by taking Peter for a walk and a private conversation.³¹⁶

Three times he asks if Peter loves him, not because he cannot get over Peter denying him, but because Peter himself cannot get over denying Jesus. In this way Jesus gently re-opens the wound in Peter's soul. That Peter had such a wound is evident from the grief he pours out in response to Jesus' third question. The painful association between his threefold denial and Jesus' threefold questioning was immediate.³¹⁷ Peter had professed his love for Jesus twice. In so doing, this changing man had appealed not to his personal loyalty, but instead to Jesus' knowledge. Now for the third time Peter affirms the same thing once again, more strongly asserting, "Lord, you know all things!"³¹⁸ Jesus, for the third time, gives virtually the same response, "Feed my sheep...."

It was Jesus' questions that had so affected Peter because they reminded him of his failure. Peter had not gotten past it, but Jesus had, and his responses communicated his forgiveness. The transforming moment came for Peter when Jesus' responses spoke to him more loudly than his questions, and he realized that Jesus had accepted his answers. The transformation came as Peter's perspective shifted from himself and his faithlessness to Jesus and his faithful word. Proleptically, Jesus had given Simon the name Peter, the rock on which he would build his church. Again proleptically, when he had told Simon of his denial, he had added, "But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. When you have turned back, strengthen your brothers." Now in the command to "Feed my sheep," he affirms Simon as the Rock, whose time has come to strengthen his brothers. All that Jesus asked of his disciple was to love him.

³¹⁶ John 21:20.

³¹⁷ Hodder, 296-297.

³¹⁸ John 21:18.

Earlier, Jesus had taught that those have been forgiven much, love much, using the example of the prostitute who washed his feet with her hair and her tears.³¹⁹ Perhaps failure, then, was as necessary to qualify Peter (and the others) for apostleship as having been with Jesus in his ministry and seeing him after the resurrection.³²⁰ Only from the deepest love for Jesus could Peter live and then die for him as he did. Peter, no less than that murderous persecutor Saul, demonstrated that experiencing grace transcends all other learning experiences in its impact, because it establishes the individual in an eternal relationship with God. Great energy is released in restoration, providing the energy necessary to love. It springs from the realization that neither sin nor death can be the last word on a believer's life. After the latest sin has been committed, the risen Lord is still present and more committed to the sinner than the sinner was to his or her sin. Christ's determination to forgive extends beyond mere pronouncement to personally conveying it so that the individual is not only recovered, but further transformed by grace. Such deep learning fosters transformation in others.

Decades later, Peter's experience of restoration would be mirrored in his counsel: "The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."³²¹ Peter is deeply concerned, as he expressed in 1 Peter 5, that God's people are under attack. In these last days, the devil is prowling. Peter wants the believers to pray for themselves and one another, because prayer is shielding and strengthening. But that is not the end of the matter. What of the believer who stumbles? "Above all," they are to love each other deeply because "love covers a multitude of sins." Peter, champion of the atoning sacrifice

³¹⁹ Luke 7:36-47.

³²⁰ Acts 1:21-22.

³²¹ 1 Peter 4:7-8.

of Christ, is certainly not saying that Christians by their love can atone for sin. Rather, the love believers are called to practice is Jesus' own love that forgives and restores rather than exposing faults and failings. This love enables brothers and sisters to leave the crippling shame of their sin behind and move ahead in their lives.

A dozen verses later Peter exhorts church elders to faithfulness, thereby reflecting again the transforming impact of his earlier restoration. He makes his "appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."³²² Only a person who had himself been deeply affected by this message could express it with such simple, convincing eloquence.

Pentecost

When "Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd" on Pentecost, he was in many respects a different person.³²³ Gone were the ambivalence, competitiveness, brashness, and fearfulness that had so often characterized him. Confidence, clarity, humility, and faith had largely taken their place. Nonetheless, Peter's personality had not been obliterated. Rather, it had shifted from centering on his ego to centering on Christ. In becoming Christ-centered, Peter found his true self. Jesus had said

³²² I Peter 5:1-4.

³²³ Acts 2:14.

that, “he who loses his life for my sake finds it,”³²⁴ and that transformational truth was very evident in Peter at Pentecost.

The reintegration of Peter’s life around Jesus was clear when he declared, “Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”³²⁵ Jesus taught that from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.³²⁶ At Pentecost the power of God poured out of Peter as freely as God had poured it into him, because there was no longer any objection in him to the message of the Spirit. It had taken three years, but Jesus had transformed Peter into a vessel through whom the Spirit might be poured.

Pentecost is celebrated as the fulfillment of the Jesus’ promise to his disciples that they would be “clothed with power from on high,” and that they would “receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will be my witnesses....”³²⁷ The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is understood in missional terms, as empowerment for the apostles to fulfill the work that Christ had appointed them to do. As a result, the church has taught that the Holy Spirit fills Christians to face challenges that lie ahead of them. Who can argue with this? Yet the significance of Pentecost is not exhausted by the missional perspective. From the perspective of transformative learning, the Holy Spirit enabled Peter and the apostles to respond to a new truth that was transforming them, so that they could put it into practice. The infusion of power into Peter and the others was part of their learning process.

³²⁴ Matthew 10:39.

³²⁵ Acts 2:36.

³²⁶ Matthew 15:17-20.

³²⁷ Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8.

Taking as one's frame of reference the period from the Gospels through Acts, Loder's five stages of transformational learning find striking correspondence to the history that unfolded. From Jesus' baptism to his crucifixion, he subjected his disciples continuously to "inner conflict," frequently challenging and contradicting their view of the Messiah, the world, and themselves. This ongoing confusion led to their "scanning" for some resolution to the contradictions they felt, but their strategies repeatedly failed. "Transforming moments," the third stage of the learning process, were comparatively few. When they did occur, as when Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ at Caesarea, Jesus then set up the next conflict.

Tension within the disciples became expressed as tension with Jesus himself, and this built up to the time of his crucifixion. The period from Jesus' crucifixion to his ascension can be characterized as a period transformation—the "transforming moment"—when the disciples underwent the profound changes in perspective that Jesus had prepared them for. Their "convictional knowing" lay in the realization that by suffering crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope; he had accomplished his messianic mission. In raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicated him completely. This "moment" was neither instantaneous nor the immediate result of the resurrection, but occurred progressively over the course of forty days. The result was a profound commitment to a new truth.

The last two stages in Loder's learning process are embedded in the Book of Acts. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost corresponds to Loder's fourth stage, the "release of energy" that follows a transforming moment. Individuals who have come to a new realization experience new vitality as a result. This serves to refocus them outside

themselves and on the truth they have come to know. They then express it and become champions of that truth.

This release of energy is as much a gift as the convictional knowing that precedes it. As a matter of common grace this dynamic of a transforming moment followed by a release of energy is evident and may be extraordinarily so, as when Handel sat down and in twenty-four days composed *The Messiah*. There seems to be a special grace granted to testify to the truth of God by the empowering of the Spirit. On the fiftieth day following Jesus' resurrection, Peter took his stand before a potentially murderous crowd. He testified with freedom and clarity that Jesus Christ is Lord, with the result that this fisher of men netted some three thousand.

The last stage in the learning process is what Loder called "interpretation," when individuals work out the implications of their new commitment for their lives and seek to influence the world around them. This stage characterizes the remainder of the Book of Acts beyond the short period of Pentecost as the church emerged and expanded through the preaching of Christ.

Loder's stages of learning correspond to the history recorded in the Gospels and Acts because the entire revelation of Jesus was fundamentally a learning event that centered on the necessity of his messianic suffering, death and resurrection. This necessity is the transforming truth that gave rise to further learning in the church. It is not unusual within a single event, to discern more than one learning process at work in the character's lives.

On five occasions subsequent to Pentecost in Acts, Luke uses Spirit-related language to report or imply that the Holy Spirit filled the church with renewed power.

Each report followed a significant transformation in perspective and growth in the church's faith. These reports are found: 1) After the church united in its determination to proclaim Christ in spite of persecution; 2) After the church accepted Paul, the converted persecutor; 3) After newly minted Gentile believers at Pisidian Antioch determined to hold onto Christ in spite of Jewish repudiations of him as their Messiah; 4) After the church determined that Gentiles did not have to become Jews (e.g. submitting to circumcision) in order for Christ to save them; 5) After Gentile believers in Ephesus determined to cut ties with their pagan roots and burn their books of sorcery.³²⁸ In each instance, a release of power followed a transforming moment. The entire process, rather than a single stage, was the work of God's Spirit.

The Conversion of Cornelius

The history of the early church may be aptly described as a history of transformative learning designed by God to create a people for himself. This is evident from the perspective of historic overview and deeply evident in particular events that occurred. One such event is described in Luke's account of the conversion of Cornelius and Peter's report to the church. At sixty-six verses, it is the longest, most detailed account of any incident involving Peter in either the Gospels or in Acts. Luke frames the story as a transformational learning experience for Peter as he was influenced by the Holy Spirit.

Just as the account of Jonah going to Nineveh was more about the need for a conversion in Jonah than among the Ninevites, the conversion of Cornelius is more about Peter's "conversion" than the Roman centurion's.³²⁹ Claude Tassin underscored the

³²⁸ Acts 4:31, 9:31, 13:49-50, 15:30-35, 19:20.

³²⁹ Lorraine Royer, "The God Who Surprises," *The Bible Today* 33, no. 5 (1995): 298-302.

conversion motif in his monograph, “Conversion de Corneille et Conversion De Pierre.”³³⁰ Robert Wall, drawing from C.S.C. Williams’ 1957 work, *The Acts of the Apostles*, enumerated the remarkable parallels between the story of God calling Jonah to go to Gentile Nineveh and his calling Peter to take the Gospel to the Gentile centurion. He argued there are “parallel and sequential catchwords that go beyond mere coincidence.”³³¹ The difference between the two figures was that Peter learned through his experience, but Jonah did not. The result in Jonah’s case was that Israel - the nation God had formed to bless other nations - continued to degrade, whereas in Peter’s case, the church went on to flourish under the Spirit’s power. There are obvious practical implications for ministry that is openhearted and welcoming.³³²

Although Peter had already witnessed the Holy Spirit’s saving work among the Samaritans,³³³ he had yet to cross the bridge of learning necessary for the evangelization of the Gentiles. The story begins with a vision given to Cornelius, and a second, corresponding vision given to Peter. Cornelius immediately sent his servant to Joppa to find a Jew “named Simon who is called Peter” in response to his vision.

In sharp contrast, Peter stubbornly rejected the message of his vision three times. It came to him as he was in prayer while a meal was being prepared for him. He saw a large sheet being lowered from heaven with all sorts of animals, including the ceremonially unclean. A voice accompanied the vision saying, “Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.” ‘Surely not, Lord!’ Peter replied. ‘I have never eaten anything impure or

³³⁰ Claude Tassin, “Conversion De Corneille Et Conversion De Pierre,” *Spiritus* 141 (1995): 465-475.

³³¹ Robert W. Wall, “Peter, ‘Son’ of Jonah: The Conversion of Cornelius in the Context of Canon,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 29 (1987), 79-80.

³³² Royer, 298-302.

³³³ Acts 8:14-25.

unclean.”³³⁴ His vision was cause for a major inner conflict. “Peter was still thinking about the vision” when the Spirit spoke plainly that he was to go meet three men who had just arrived and go with them.³³⁵ After the Gentiles introduced themselves and conveyed the vision that had launched them on their way, Peter invited them in and shared his hospitality, thus contradicting Jewish law. In the midst of trying to make sense of a vision that graphically called for him to disregard the distinction between clean and unclean animals, Peter was called upon to welcome Gentiles into his home as men sent from God, and then to accompany them back to Caesarea. The juxtaposition of the two visions and their impact on Peter shows that “Luke is narrating two conversions, not one.”³³⁶

Over the course of that day and the next, Peter came to a profound realization as he traveled to Joppa that was only the beginning of the transformation he would experience. Upon entering Cornelius’ home and being introduced to him, Peter responded, “You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with a Gentile or visit him. But *God has shown me* that I should not call any man impure or unclean. So when I was sent for, I came without raising any objection.”³³⁷ The vision had not explicitly conveyed this idea to Peter.³³⁸ Only after it was juxtaposed with the arrival of the visitors and he had time to reflect, did Peter come to understand the vision’s meaning. “God has shown me” referred to what Peter had learned under the influence of the Spirit.

³³⁴ Acts 10:14.

³³⁵ Acts 10:19-20.

³³⁶ David Lertis Matson and Warren S. Brown, “Turning the Faith: The Cornelius Story in Resonance Perspective,” *Journal of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion*, no. 4 (2006): 454.

³³⁷ Acts 10:28-29; emphasis added.

³³⁸ Chris A. Miller, “Did Peter’s Vision in Acts 10 Pertain to Men or Menu?,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 159, (July-September 2002): 301-317.

Cornelius informs Peter that he sent for him in response to an angelic vision, “to hear everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us.” Peter is deeply moved. “*I now realize* how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.”³³⁹ He begins preaching the news about Jesus and the Holy Spirit is poured out on the assembled Gentiles so that they speak in tongues, just as the first disciples had at Pentecost. “The circumcised believers” who were with Peter “were astonished.” Peter responded with a challenge that shows how complete his perspective transformation has become: “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water.... So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.”³⁴⁰

Through the experience of being led to Cornelius’ home, hearing the centurion’s vision, preaching Christ, and witnessing the Spirit’s acceptance of their faith, Peter was transformed once again. Luke attests to this in the three quotes from Peter just cited: his statement that God had shown him that he is to regard no man as unclean; his statement that he now realized that God does not show favoritism to one nation over another; and his insistence that no obstacle be placed in the way of baptizing the new Gentile believers in the name of Jesus Christ. Peter was moved from regarding Gentiles in derogatory terms to recognizing Gentiles as equally desirable to God, and to openly embracing Gentiles as Christian brothers and sisters.

Upon his return to the Jerusalem church, Peter immediately encountered criticism for entering the home of Gentiles and eating with them. His critics have the same frame of mind that Peter himself had only days before. He then “began and explained

³³⁹ Acts 10:34-35; emphasis added.

³⁴⁰ Acts 10:44-47.

everything to them exactly as it happened.”³⁴¹ The text may as well have added “as it happened *to him*,” for Peter relates the experience in the first person through the lens of his own transformation. He recounts his vision, his reception of the Gentile visitors, his journey to Cornelius, and his witnessing the Spirit’s outpouring on the centurion’s household. Peter concluded by giving the same challenge he had laid before the six Jewish believers who had traveled with him, yet in a more pointed fashion: “So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?”³⁴² In response, Luke reports, “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God, saying, ‘So then, God has granted even the Gentiles repentance unto life.’”³⁴³

Peter’s transformation and subsequent report led to a protracted conflict among believers over the terms by which the largely Jewish Christian church would recognize and accept Gentile believers. Must they undergo circumcision and become Jews? The historic controversy described by Luke and Paul confirms what a profound learning challenge the church faced. Short of embracing Jesus as their Lord and Savior, the acceptance of Gentile believers on equal footing with Jewish believers was the greatest perspective transformation that the Jewish members of the church underwent. This subsequent history underscores how remarkable Peter’s learning achievement was and how significant, for “Peter’s transformation led to the transformation of the perspective of the Jewish Christian leadership in Jerusalem.”³⁴⁴ His transformation became the disorienting dilemma that launched the church into its own learning process. Luke

³⁴¹ Acts 11:4.

³⁴² Acts 11:17.

³⁴³ Acts 11:28.

³⁴⁴ Andrew E. Arterbury, “The Ancient Custom of Hospitality, the Greek Novels, and Acts 10:1-11:18,” *Journal of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion* 29, no. 1 (2002): 72.

underscores the dual significance of Peter's experience with a literary device labeled "functional redundancy," by which he repeated over and over the key elements of Peter's story—as they occurred, as Peter reported them to the household of Cornelius, and as he reported the whole sequence to the church leaders in Jerusalem, passing on to them the challenge to baptize Gentile believers in Jesus' name.³⁴⁵

The Jerusalem Council would follow some time later to settle the question of including Gentile believers in the church. Deep learning would be evident in the shift recorded by Luke in Acts 15. "As chief speakers to the Gentiles, both Peter (15:7-11) and James (15:13-21) move the basis for Gentile inclusion from experiential theology mediated by narrative to reflective theology mediated by tradition and Scripture."³⁴⁶ Peter used his speech to refocus the issue from his experience in witnessing the Spirit's work to the essential nature of the Gospel, concluding, "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."³⁴⁷ The essential issue was grace. The last speech was given by James who turned to the prophets to ground the acceptance of Gentiles on equal footing with Jews in the church. He argued from Amos that the prophetic hope included the inclusion of the Gentiles in the people of God when Messiah came.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁵ Ronald D. Witherup, "Cornelius over and over and over Again: 'Functional Redundancy' in the Acts of the Apostles," *Journal for the Study of the new Testament* 49 (1993), 47.

³⁴⁶ Matson, 461.

³⁴⁷ Acts 15:11.

³⁴⁸ Acts 15:16-18, citing Amos 9:11-12.

Peter's Legacy of Learning

The legacy of Peter's learning would be great. Luke presents the conversion of Cornelius as the "centerpiece in legitimating the Gentile mission."³⁴⁹ The extent of the church's struggle to be faithful in the face of fierce opposition from Jewish segments within the church is apparent in Peter's own withdrawal from eating with Gentile believers at Antioch when "certain men from James" arrived from Jerusalem.³⁵⁰ In that instance Peter avoided the very situation he had entered into with Cornelius, even with Christians with whom he had already been enjoying fellowship!³⁵¹ If this was indeed the occasion that precipitated the Jerusalem Council, Peter was quick to accept Paul's rebuke, recover his courage, and feed Jesus' lambs once more.³⁵²

Without question, however, the greater legacy from Peter's learning relates to the formulation of the Gospel itself. If resistance to Jesus' instruction and prophecy is the measure of transformational challenge, and if a matter's significance may be measured by how frequently Jesus brought it up, then the Gospels suggest that Peter's greatest and most significant perspective transformation centered on Jesus and the necessity of his suffering as the Messiah. Cullman argues from his study of the Gospels and Acts that Peter's understanding of Jesus' crucifixion resulted in the Gospel as it has been handed down to us.

There was a universalism in Peter's theology. It has a still deeper *theological* anchor. This was the understanding he achieved that Christ's death was the atoning death. Perhaps he was the first one to grasp this after the resurrection.... Peter certainly never received the rabbinical training of a Paul. But I do not believe that Paul was the first one to understand the death of Jesus as an atoning

³⁴⁹ Joseph B. Tyson, "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner: Peter and Cornelius in Acts 10:1-11:18," *Forum* 3, no. 1 (1999):185.

³⁵⁰ Galatians 2:1-10.

³⁵¹ Tyson, 192.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 192.

death for the forgiveness of sins. On the contrary, I am inclined to ascribe to Peter this particular and fundamental insight.³⁵³

Cullman grounds his thesis in the observation that the “earliest Christological explanation” for Jesus is provided by Peter in Acts. Where he had earlier called Jesus “the Christ,” he now calls him the Lord’s “servant” in the context of his suffering and death.³⁵⁴ In his second recorded sermon, Peter proclaimed Christ to those who witnessed his healing of the beggar at the Temple. Twice he referred to Jesus as God’s servant:

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, *has glorified his servant Jesus*. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go... When God raised up *his servant*, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways.³⁵⁵

Cullman notes that the phrase “has glorified his servant Jesus,” is a direct allusion to Isaiah 53:13, the opening verse in Isaiah’s arresting prophecy of the suffering servant: “See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.”³⁵⁶

Temple officials arrested Peter and John, and the following day demanded to know, “By what power or what name did you do this [healing]?” Peter again preached Jesus as the Messiah rejected by men but accepted by God, quoting from Psalm 118:2: “The stone you builder rejected, which has become the capstone.” Upon their release the two joined other believers to rejoice and pray. Their praises included another double reference to Jesus as the Lord’s servant:

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against *your holy servant Jesus*, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen....

³⁵³ Cullmann, 66.

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 67.

³⁵⁵ Acts 3:13, 26; emphasis added.

³⁵⁶ Cullmann, 67.

Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of *your holy servant Jesus*.³⁵⁷

Again, Cullman comments on the significance of the use of “servant.” “*Pais* [servant] is used almost as a fixed term; it is tending to become a proper name, just as occurred in the case of the word Christ. This confirms the existence of a very early Christology on the basis of which Jesus was called *ebed* [servant in Hebrew] Yahweh. It will disappear in the following period....”³⁵⁸

With whom, then, did the Christology of Jesus as the Lord’s suffering servant originate, if not with Peter, the disciple tasked by Jesus to strengthen his brothers after he turned by feeding his sheep? The first direct citation of Isaiah 53 is found in Acts 8:32. The Ethiopian eunuch was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 when Philip approached him:

He was led like a sheep to the slaughter and as a lamb before the shearer is silent, so he did not open his mouth. In his humiliation he was deprived of justice. Who can speak of his descendants? For his life was taken from the earth.

Luke then reports, “Phillip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.”³⁵⁹ Well before Paul’s emergence as an apostle, even before his conversion, Isaiah’s Servant of the Lord was embraced as the interpretive key to the meaning of Jesus’ death. It had been an atoning sacrifice for sin. Writers throughout the New Testament upheld and expounded it. Paul especially elaborated it in his exposition and defense of justification by faith. Its widespread and unhesitating acceptance by the church confirms how foundational this truth was. How fitting that it came from the one Jesus had called to be the rock. Peter, “the very one who at Caesarea Philippi showed so

³⁵⁷ Acts 4:26-27, 30; emphasis added.

³⁵⁸ Cullmann, 67.

³⁵⁹ Acts 8:35.

little understanding of the necessity for Jesus to suffer...was also the first to preach the actual necessity of the suffering and death of the Lord.”³⁶⁰

Second Literature Area Summary: A Biblical Case Study of Peter

An exegetical study of scripture relative to transformational learning theory comprised the second literature area for this dissertation. The life of the Apostle Peter was studied in relation to Jesus as a case study in transformational learning. The approach was grounded in an understanding that the cultural mandate God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 was also a learning commission, as evidenced in Genesis 2. God fostered profound learning in Adam as he named the creatures. This event is the precedent for learning throughout scripture.

In the New Testament Jesus was both the master learner and the master teacher. Before his death and resurrection, he called people to be his disciples (learners). After rising from the dead, he commissioned his disciples to “go and make disciples.” As revealed in Jesus, learning is God’s means to the end of a deep knowing that transforms and perfects. The learning process Jesus intended for his disciples continues in the church, under the name sanctification. Paul framed sanctification as a learning challenge in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Apart from Jesus, Peter is the most well developed character in the Gospels. His life unfolds before the reader as the principal disciple. The heart of many scenes is the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. The relationship between them is characterized by deep devotion and growing tension, particularly from Caesarea to Jerusalem, from the

³⁶⁰ Cullmann, 67-68.

point when Jesus names him Peter, to his threefold denial of Jesus outside the house of the chief priest. The tension results from the disorienting dilemmas that Jesus provokes in Peter and Peter's sometimes tumultuous resistance.

Two dilemmas in particular stand out. The first revolves around the question of Jesus' identity as the Messiah. The subsequent dilemma revolves around Jesus' role as the Messiah. The passages where the two men are engaged, studied in sequential order, reveal the learning process to which Jesus subjected Peter. Peter's life experiences recorded in the Gospels and Acts are learning experiences. Whether instigated directly by Jesus or through the Holy Spirit, they are discipling events.

Often Jesus says or does something that contradicts Peter's fundamental understanding of Jesus, of himself, or the world as he knows it. For Jesus' words and actions are not of the world but of the kingdom of God. The resulting inner conflict leaves Peter disoriented, trying to make sense of his experience of Jesus. In the process he questions Jesus further. He talks with the other disciples. He protests, objects, and even rebukes Jesus. In the end he comes to a new realization about Jesus that Jesus at one point characterized as coming from the Father rather than from flesh and blood. In this way Peter learns that Jesus is the Christ, and that Jesus must suffer, die and rise for him.

The events themselves often trigger or build on the dilemmas that Peter feels. He is left to find the meaning of what he has witnessed. Occasionally he comes to a new realization in the same passage as the triggering event, as in Luke 5:1-11. More often the learning process is extended across time and embedded through a succession of passages. Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi is a case in point. This episode was the culmination of a series of experiences with Jesus that left Peter

wondering who Jesus is. These experiences had included two particular encounters between Jesus and his disciples on the Sea of Galilee—when Jesus stilled the storm in Matthew 8 and subsequently walked on water in Matthew 14. The disciples’ understanding of who Jesus is shows marked progression as they go from wondering, “What kind of man is this?” to worshipping him and saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”³⁶¹

After Peter’s confession of him as the Christ, Jesus shifted their attention from his identity to his mission of suffering, dying, and rising again. Uncertainty and wondering turns to resistance and antagonism in Peter. In return Peter faced Jesus’ fierce rebukes as “Satan” and as a “stumbling block.” Jesus names and exposes the hidden desire for personal glory that makes it impossible for the disciples to embrace the necessity of his suffering. He brings his disciples to the Mount of Transfiguration where Peter hears the Father’s admonition to “listen” to Jesus, even as Jesus is being attended to by Moses and Elijah.

As Jesus draws nearer to Jerusalem, he intensifies his private ministry to his disciples. He challenges their worldview with the contradictory demands of the kingdom of God in relation to forgiveness, divorce, and finances. He is demanding the same selflessness from them that he personally embraces to accomplish his messianic mission. In doing so, he provokes the dilemmas that will lead his disciples to learn the necessity of radical obedience.

The apex of Jesus’ mission is going to the cross; it is also the apex of his discipling ministry. During the Last Supper Jesus continues to disciple the Twelve by symbol and word as the expression of his love for them. This discipleship includes his

³⁶¹ Matthew 8:27, 14:33.

warning of Peter's threefold denial after Peter protests his willingness to die for Jesus, and Jesus' assurance that his prayers for him will lead to Peter's turning back. Finally, Peter's failure to risk suffering for Jesus in the midst of Jesus' faithfulness to suffer for him destroys his ego-centered and misplaced confidence. When that happens, Peter's confusion and resistance give way to the deepest possible knowledge and to his adoration of Jesus.

The evangelists, particularly Luke, confirm that in the period from Jesus' resurrection to his ascension, his priority was to continue his discipling ministry. The resurrection was not self-interpreting. Learning was required. Jesus brought that to pass for his disciples as he expounded Old Testament scripture and taught the kingdom of God. In the one account of a conversation of any length between Jesus and a disciple after the resurrection (John 21), Jesus engages Peter in profound learning that restores him. The grammar of transformation is evident throughout the encounter. The impact of that transformation continued to reverberate in Peter decades later as he wrote his first recorded epistle. The enduring impact of the Transfiguration is seen in both epistles attributed to him.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is an experience of celebrative joy for the disciples. For Peter and the others, it is another step in the learning process. As a result they are able to put into practice the new truth that was transforming them.

The entire history recorded in the Gospels and Acts corresponds to Loder's five stages of transformational learning. From Jesus' baptism to his crucifixion, he subjects his disciples continuously to "inner conflict," frequently challenging and contradicting their view of the Messiah, the world, and themselves. This ongoing confusion leads to

their “scanning” for some resolution to the contradictions they felt, but their strategies repeatedly fail. “Transforming moments,” the third stage of the learning process, are comparatively few in the Gospels. The period from Jesus’ crucifixion to his ascension can be characterized as the principal period of transformation when the disciples undergo the profound changes in perspective that Jesus had prepared them for. Their “convictional knowing” lay in the realization that by suffering crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope and accomplished his messianic mission. In raising Jesus from the dead, God was vindicating him. The last two stages in Loder’s learning process are embedded in the Book of Acts. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost corresponds to Loder’s fourth stage, the “release of energy” that follows from convictional knowing. The last stage, interpretation, then unfolds as the disciples work out the implications of their new commitment and seek to influence the world around them. This correspondence exists because the entire revelation of Jesus was fundamentally an extended learning event that centered on the necessity of his messianic suffering, death and resurrection. It involved multiple experiences of convictional knowing.

The history of the early church in Acts may be aptly described as a history of transformative learning designed by God to create a people for himself. Multiple examples are recorded beginning with the church’s determination to proclaim Christ in spite of persecution. Most significant of all is Peter’s learning experience with Cornelius, which led to the inclusion of Gentile believers in the church on an equal standing with Jewish believers. This episode is the most extensive and detailed account of an event that centered on Peter. From first to last it is recorded in terms of transformational learning.

The greatest legacy of Peter's learning relates to the formulation of the Gospel. The disciple who so strongly resisted the necessity of Jesus' suffering, death and resurrection became the first to understand the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for sins and to ground this truth plainly in the prophets. Beginning with his second recorded sermon, Peter proclaimed Jesus as Isaiah's Servant of the Lord who suffered for sin and whom God glorified. Peter made what he had learned the foundation of the church's faith and message. In so doing, he fulfilled Jesus' promise; Peter was the Rock on whom he built his church.

Third Literature Area: Transformative Learning Theory in Ministry Settings

Introduction

The third literature area for this dissertation focused on research to extend transformative learning into the ecclesial setting of pastoral ministry. This focus is warranted in light of the significance that context plays in fostering or prohibiting transformative learning. However, an extensive literature search and review yielded little direct research.

This lack of prior research is due in part to the cross disciplinary nature of this dissertation. Transformative learning theory developed within the field of adult education, and in spite of claims to the contrary, its application remains largely confined there. In the most recent major book on the theory, *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education* (2009), Jack Mezirow and colleague Edward W. Taylor preface their edited volume by hailing the extent to which transformative learning theory is gaining ground across disciplines.

It is no longer just an adult education teaching construct. Rather, it is becoming a standard of practice in a variety of disciplines and educational

settings: higher education, professional education, organizational development, international education, and community education.³⁶²

In fact their list of expanded arenas for transformative learning that remains narrow. While the application of transformative learning theory extends beyond degree programs in universities, the immediate setting in most cases remains a classroom with a teacher and students, whether they are gathered in a community setting or workplace environment. Since the inception of his theory, Mezirow has been committed to advance the social and economic wellbeing of adults. Adherents are drawn largely from educators who share Mezirow's passion; therefore, continuing or supplemental education is the natural focus of research.

As has been noted, Mezirow and his associates assume there are no fixed truths and view transformative learning as a means of liberation from traditional dogma. Where attention is paid to spirituality, the framework is humanistic, and the focus is on individual experience.

Given these considerations, directing studies in transformative learning to confessional church settings is counterintuitive. Nevertheless, the few existing essays or studies related to faith-based contexts were considered. Also considered was the series of latest findings from within adult education contained in Mezirow's 2009 volume.

James Loder developed his theory of convictional knowing in the context of the seminary, which, as compared to the university, gives scant attention to qualitative research. Loder's last published book, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in*

³⁶² Jack Mezirow, Edward W. Taylor, and Associates, *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), xi.

Theological Perspective, came out in 1998.³⁶³ Influenced by Soren Kierkegaard, Carl Jung and others, Loder re-conceptualized human development from infancy through adulthood in relation to the Spirit. *The Logic of the Spirit* is an achievement in thought, but it did not spur qualitative research into his grammar of transformation. In 2004, three years after Loder's death, Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel edited a volume of essays in his honor, *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology*.³⁶⁴ That volume does include significant reflections and one case study on the integration of Loder's theory in ecclesial settings. Consideration was given to that research.

Findings From Within Faith-Based Contexts

Shifting Goals and Practices from Informational to Transformational Learning

Studies that apply the principles of transformative learning to seminary education are relevant because teachers in seminary settings who foster deep learning serve as role models for their students who then enter the ministry.³⁶⁵ Joyce Ann Mercer examined the impact of replacing the traditional "field education" requirement for seminarians, emphasizing the practice of ministry skills, with a "congregational studies" course that focused on student observation, reflection, and discourse over how ministry is contextualized in a local church setting. As a result the seminarians experienced transformative learning. They saw that effective ministerial practice does not exclusively depend on the proficiency of one's knowledge or skills. At least as important is the commitment to understand the life of the local congregation. At the conclusion of the

³⁶³ James E. Loder, *Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

³⁶⁴ Wright.

³⁶⁵ Mary-Ann Winkelmes, "The Classroom as a Place of Formation: Purposefully Creating a Transformative Environment for Today's Diverse Seminary Population," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 7, no. 4 (2004), 220.

congregational studies course, the students “expressed disillusionment with the transmissive teaching processes they had experienced in the church, and frustration with the gap between church and seminary forms of teacher-learning.”³⁶⁶ Upon entering the ministry, while respecting the learning expectations of their congregations, the students are expected to foster transformative learning.

Mary-Ann Winkelmes wrote an essay for the Lexington Seminar on Theological Teaching for the Church’s Ministries, sponsored by the Lilly Endowment, Inc. She addressed the challenge of “creating a transformative environment for today’s diverse seminary population.” After reviewing phases of intellectual development, learning styles and the neurophysiology of learning, she concluded that the challenge of deep learning is greater than ever because seminary populations are increasingly diverse and typically commute to campus rather than live residentially in community. Compounding those challenges is the emphasis on content-rich instruction to the exclusion of integration, application and practice. The result is cognitive stress evidenced in a breakdown in the ability to retain information. Winkelmes argues from neuroscience that “efficient learning of content comes with processing and integrating that content as soon as it is encountered.”³⁶⁷ To move toward a resolution of the problem, the author recommends that course content be reframed so that students are given both auditory and visual explanations, both at the beginning and end of class meetings, of the practical purpose of the content and how it fits in with the students’ goals for taking the class. She urges that time be devoted to integrating content through case studies and cooperative problem solving. She concludes: “By making pedagogical goals and methods transparent to

³⁶⁶ Joyce Ann Mercer, “Teaching the Bible in Congregations: A Congregational Studies Pedagogy for Contextual Education,” *Religious Education* 100, no. 3 (2005), 288.

³⁶⁷ Winkelmes, 218.

students and by valuing students as junior colleagues and experts on their own learning experiences, seminary instructors can create a classroom environment that encourages the kind of integration essential to formation.” The optimal environment involves a “symbiosis of teaching and learning,” in which the teacher “enables learners to educate themselves.”³⁶⁸ This knowledge is necessary for the seminarian both as a learner and subsequently as a minister who teaches others. Putting it into practice requires a deliberate shift in teaching style to foster transformative learning.

Writing from a Roman Catholic perspective, Richard Shields addressed the loss of conviction among Catholics in relation to the moral teachings of the church. In the past moral precepts were taught in an authoritarian manner that assumed insistent instruction is sufficient for obedience. The crisis Shields addressed is the subsequent failure of many Catholics to internalize the authoritative teachings of the church. On the contrary, they reject them as a form of authoritarianism. Shields’ essay is less research than a proposal to “reconnect” Catholics to the moral teaching of the church through transformative learning. The use of reflection and discourse as means of considering moral truth provides a context apart from the “command-obey structure” that has generated such resistance.³⁶⁹

A confirmation of the value of shifting teaching strategies is found in the results of short-term missions trips abroad in which the principles of transformational learning are routinely used to help students debrief on their experiences. Transformation is a key component of adaptation in cross cultural settings, so deep learning is routinely fostered as a goal. A careful study of eleven British teacher education students and four staff over

³⁶⁸ Ibid., 220.

³⁶⁹ Richard Shields, “Attaining Moral Knowledge in the Church and Models of Adult Learning,” *Catholic Education: A Journal of Inquiry and Practice* 12, no. 3 (2009): 339-359.

the course of an eighteen-day “educational study visit” to India confirmed this to be a transformative learning experience. The “opportunity to stand outside their customary assumptions and perceptions” constituted the disorienting dilemma from which “structured conversations and periods of reflection” followed. The students were debriefed daily as a group. They were encouraged to raise questions about their experience and further investigate the places and people of India. As they did, the initial negative, reactive terms with which they described India gave way to more thoughtful and positive terms. They discovered the power of hope and inspiration as they assisted those caught up in suffering. The researchers concluded that “deep learning” had taken place.³⁷⁰

Lisa Grant similarly found that mentoring was a key element in deep learning for a group of mid-life adults from a Jewish congregation who visited Israel.³⁷¹ In her conclusion she wrote, “My role as a mentor who asked questions and encouraged people to make meaning out of their answers appeared to have influenced the degree of critical reflection in a number of cases.”³⁷²

Fostering Learning Congregations To Support Personal Transformation

Transformative learning leads to a permanent shift in perspective that serves to reshape one’s life. A frequent shortcoming in the research is the extent to which researchers rely on the initial intensity of participants’ responses after a learning experience as a reliable indicator of deep change. Few studies follow up on participants to determine whether lasting change occurred. As Taylor and Jarecke observe in

³⁷⁰ Stephen and Jonathan Barnes Scoffham, “Transformational Experiences and Deep Learning: The Impact of an Intercultural Study Visit to India on UK Initial Teacher Education Students,” *Journal of Education for Teaching* 35, no. 3 (2009): 257-270.

³⁷¹ Lisa D. Grant, “The Role of Mentoring in Enhancing Experience of a Congregational Israel Trip,” *Journal of Jewish Education* 67, no. 1/2 (Spring/Summer 2001): 46-60.

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 56.

Transformative Learning in Practice, “Although we can set the stage for potential transformation to occur, we cannot always know what the actual impact of the learning process has been on our learners.”³⁷³

In this respect, Roberta Clare’s research was exceptional. She studied the impact of a workshop to teach participants to work for social change within the framework of their Christian faith.³⁷⁴ The workshop was structured with transformative principles in mind and guided by Freirean pedagogy.³⁷⁵ The underlying goal of the “Ethical Choices Workshop” was to advocate universal health care. It was designed to engage participants in reflecting on their own experiences in health care in light of their faith commitments. The results were mixed. The majority did not subsequently take action on their values.³⁷⁶ By applying transformative learning principles for the sake of integrating faith and action, Clare concluded that the effort “offered the *possibility* for changed perspectives and active response.”³⁷⁷

Barbara J. Fleischer of Loyola University found the same issue of limited individual responses to Christian religious education in the church. “Participants gather for reflection, but are sent individually for action in the world. Yet the complexities of issues that Christians are called to address as agents of effective social transformation increasingly require models of communal or corporate praxis in which communities

³⁷³ Edward W. Taylor and Jodi Jarecke, “Looking Forward by Looking Back: Reflections on the Practice of Transformative Learning,” in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow, Edward Taylor and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 278.

³⁷⁴ Roberta C. Clare, “Putting Faith into Action: A Model for the North American Middle Class,” *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006).

³⁷⁵ Ibid.

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 378.

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 381(emphasis added).

engage together in action as well as reflection.”³⁷⁸ Individual transformation leading to personal action is problematic for persons acting alone, but becomes more likely as part of a deliberate congregational response. Fleisher appealed to the success of liberation-oriented “comunidades de base” (basic communities) in Latin America.³⁷⁹ She constructed a transformational model for congregational life based on the insights of Peter Senge in *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*.³⁸⁰ Under her model, the entire congregation becomes a learning organization as “theological reflection” is made a component of every gathering and work time, “team learning” predominates, and a shared vision for mission unites the parts.³⁸¹ Fleisher identifies a point of resistance in the organizational structure of churches in which education is programmed as a separate part of the church’s ministry.³⁸² For the transformation of an organization to occur, the “religious educator” must first undergo his or her own transformation so as to be no longer “primarily focused on transmitting the faith to individuals nor on forming faith-sharing communities, but rather on helping congregations actualize their shared vision of mission by learning and increasing their capacity for wise, intentional, and biblically informed action.”³⁸³

Elizabeth Box Price at Phillips Theological Seminary also has written of congregations as learning organizations based on Senge’s ideas, and of the strategic role that leaders play in the transformation. She raises the question: “Does this mean that to function as a learning congregation most of the membership will require the cognitive

³⁷⁸ Barbara J. Fleischer, “From Individual to Corporate Praxis: A Systemic Re-Imagining of Religious Education,” *Religious Education* 99, no. 3 (2004): 316.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 321.

³⁸⁰ Senge.

³⁸¹ Fleischer, 325-327.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 323.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 329.

sophistication that constructs complex systems?”³⁸⁴ If so, the effort cannot succeed. Price’s conclusion, after appealing to James Loder, Robert Kegan, James Fowler and others, is that “cognitive complexity is not necessary for the membership as a whole of a learning congregation... What is needed is some critical mass of flexible thinkers. It may be that only a few persons who are in leadership need to have this kind of reflective analytical ability to engage a congregation in this manner. This could be a pastor and a few well-trained lay leaders who lead the way and set the tone so that the group learns to proceed in this manner.”³⁸⁵ Adding her voice to others, Price underscores the need to foster learning organizations for lasting transformation, and points to the strategic role of the minister in doing so.

Focusing on the Impact of the Pastor-Teacher

George Huff, Michael Sherr and Mary Curran undertook a study on behalf of the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. Their research focused on students’ experiences with Christian faculty in order to describe what kind of instructors have the most positive impact on their integration of faith and learning (IFL). IFL curricula are designed to foster development and deep learning in students. Student feedback led the researchers to propose a “Christian vocation model” for educators that underscores four priorities for effectiveness: relationship with God, relationship with students, the classroom setting, and IFL curriculum coverage.³⁸⁶ The four summary phrases correspond to the needs for competence in one’s subject area, for the cultivation of a

³⁸⁴ Elizabeth Box Price, “Cognitive Complexity and the Learning Congregation,” *Religious Education* 99, no. 4 (2004): 363.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 368.

³⁸⁶ George Huff, Sherr Michael, and Mary Curran, “Student Perceptions of Salient Indicators of Integration of Faith and Learning: The Christian Vocation Model,” *Journal of Research on Christian Education* 16, no. (2007), 15-33.

learning community, for personal commitment by the teacher to the students, and for the teacher's own commitment to undergo the transformation experience of a disciple's relationship to Christ.

The authors' Christian vocation model is directly relevant to the pastoral setting. To effectively foster transformation within the congregation, pastors need to be authorities on the Bible and theology, but not authoritarian in relation to the members. On the contrary they will cultivate a safe learning environment in which members are free to raise questions and explore answers in a network of mutually supportive relationships. They will love their members by listening as well as teaching, and by coming alongside them to provide reassurance, counsel, practical help, and gentle correction. They will lead in transformational learning as the expression of their personal passion to know Christ.

Carolyn Walker Hopp reached similar conclusions in "Research Note: Transcendent Experiences and Teacher Transformation."³⁸⁷ She found that teachers' ability to foster transformative learning in the Christian faith requires not only competence but a strong personal commitment to deep learning coupled with a commitment to care personally for those they are seeking to lead. This especially includes teachers' willingness to share their own journeys of spiritual transformation with others and their determination to foster a group culture characterized by belonging, acceptance and commitment. In so doing, students gain competence and confidence in understanding and interpreting their own faith journeys.

³⁸⁷ Carolyn Walker Hopp, "Research Note: Transcendent Experiences and Teacher Transformation," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 16, no. 3 (2001), 273-276.

Relevant Findings From Outside the Faith-Based Context

Mezirow and Taylor edited *Transformative Learning in Practice* in an effort to clarify how the theory actually works in the educational setting. After nearly thirty years, many questions of practice remain unaddressed. Mezirow writes:

The practice of fostering transformative learning is illusive and an ever-shifting approach to teaching, and much about it remains unknown or poorly understood. Like any other educational approach, it is rooted in ideals, and when the realities of practice are explored, it becomes difficult to get a handle on how it plays out in the classroom. It is also laced with contradictions and oversights.³⁸⁸

The challenge remains to translate the theory into effective practice. The heart of the volume is twenty-one articles by educators who seek to foster transformative learning in their classrooms. These articles were taken from “the conference proceedings of seven International Transformative Learning Conferences conducted from 1998-2007, along with a review of published journal articles on fostering transformative learning.”³⁸⁹

The articles contained in the volume are described as research. Nonetheless, they are largely the reflections of the authors on their personal experiences as educators. Standing on their own, these accounts would not necessarily qualify as qualitative research. However, they are followed by a lengthy analysis of their contents by Edward Taylor and Jodi Jarecke. They describe their work as “a messy and iterative process.” In essence, Taylor’s and Jarecke’s chapter of analysis toward the end of the volume is a qualitative analysis of the experiences of the contributing educators. Their findings identify

³⁸⁸Edward W. Taylor, “Fostering Transformative Learning,” in *Transformative Learning in Practice: Insights from Community, Workplace, and Higher Education*, ed. Jack Mezirow, Edward W. Taylor, and Associates (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 3.

³⁸⁹Ibid., 12.

six major themes in transformative learning that transcend context.³⁹⁰ These findings are worth consideration for applicability to ministry.

First, transformative learning requires that the teacher purposefully teach for change. He or she structures the learning process in terms of problem solving.³⁹¹ Because the problem challenges one's assumptions and beliefs, the teacher faces the inner tension between developing trust with students by being open with them, and being less than forthcoming about the nature of the learning task in order to avoid student resistance.³⁹²

Second, transformative learning requires "an acute awareness of power and its relationship to culture difference."³⁹³ The teacher's commitment to confront power and address differences is necessary for transformation.

Third, transformative learning is an imaginative process. While Mezirow approaches transformative learning as a cognitive exercise, he has yielded to the chorus of educators who insist that imagination is vital to transformation. This includes nonconscious as well as conscious activity, and the spiritual dimension of human beings.³⁹⁴

Fourth, transformative learning leads learners to the "learning edge." This refers to the edge of their comfort zone where they are faced with a disorienting dilemma. As a result the teacher faces the tension between establishing an

³⁹⁰ Taylor, "Looking Forward by Looking Back: Reflections on the Practice of Transformative Learning," 276.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 277.

³⁹² Ibid., 278.

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Ibid., 280.

environment that is safe for the learner to express and discuss beliefs and values, yet provocative.³⁹⁵

Fifth, reflection and critical self-reflection are central to transformative learning, so the learner brings past understanding to bear on the present challenge. Reflection requires “a supportive environment,” “opportunities for action and doing,” and “exposure to alternative perspectives.” Strategies that promote reflection include “working in groups or cohorts,” “writing and journaling,” and “arts-based activities.” While naming reflection as the central factor in transformative learning, Taylor and Jarecke conclude from their review that “it is still an illusive concept, often poorly defined, and used with much discrepancy to capture an array of concepts and practices.”³⁹⁶

Sixth, and more important than any other factor in transformative learning, is the commitment of educators to model this kind of learning in their own lives. To be effective, educators must share how transformative learning has occurred in their own lives and how they personally reflect on course materials for the sake of deeper learning. “Critical humility” also is necessary in teachers, meaning that they are not only committed and confident in their knowledge, but open to change.³⁹⁷

Applying Loder’s Theory to Ministerial Practice and Life

Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology, the volume written in honor of James Loder’s life and learning theory, is divided into three sections. The first two, on “ecclesial praxis” and “practical theology,” relate directly to ministerial practice; the last

³⁹⁵ Ibid., 283.

³⁹⁶ Ibid., 286.

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 286-287.

focuses on “redemptive transformation *beyond* practical theology” and is philosophical and esoteric. From the first two sections, then, come several useful integrative essays.

Preaching for Transformation

In the first section, “Redemptive Transformation *within* Ecclesial Praxis,” John S. McClure wrote an article on preaching which begins where Loder ended. Toward the conclusion of *The Transforming Moment*, Loder raised the question of “why this [Spirit-caused] transformation of [natural human] transformation is to take place.” His answer was, “for love’s sake.”³⁹⁸ Loder was not only referring to God’s love, but to people’s “primal need to give love” that is “deeply and enduringly rooted in our nature.” The problem is that people “must inevitably live in an ego-oriented social order that either denies those roots or else subordinates them to incidental expression in and around the supposed ‘real business of life’; namely, ego survival and satisfaction.”³⁹⁹ The grammar of transformation serves to “de-center” those “ego mechanisms that are destroying our ability to give love.” McClure notes that “these de-centerings open up a space in which this original, ontological longing to ‘give love’ can flourish.”⁴⁰⁰

McClure then makes Loder’s last point his first homiletic point—the goal in homiletics is to enable love to flourish. Drawing from Walter Brueggemann and Emmanuel Levinas, he argues that the de-centering necessary to recover the primal need to love requires a constructive act of imagination in the hearer. To this end, preaching is to be an act of the imagination in which the preacher offers an image of life and reality through which the hearer’s perception, experience and faith are transformed. The hearer’s resulting knowledge is profoundly esthetic; it elicits the longing to love and overpowers

³⁹⁸ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 179.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 182, 184.

⁴⁰⁰ McClure, 96.

influences that have suppressed it. The preacher, then, is engaged in the “creative redescription of reality.”⁴⁰¹

However, homiletics must not be reduced to a mere technique of “world-switching.”⁴⁰² Rather, as Loder taught, the Holy Spirit “transforms all transformations of the human spirit.”⁴⁰³ In homiletics this transformation must first take place in preachers if they are to become agents of transformation in others. Their calling is not to present hearers with an alternative way of viewing reality, but to stand “as a ‘witness of the Infinite,’ reduced to the ‘here I am’ in preaching.”⁴⁰⁴ Preachers must provide “testimonial speech” that bears the logic of transformation. They do not just “provide a rhetorical re-scripting of reality,” but in themselves point to the “way of love.” The way of love is the result of a re-grounding of self in the knowledge of the Holy One who has accomplished the death of death for love’s sake. The preacher is not merely telling his hearers these things but is testifying to their truthfulness, “face-to-face in the deepest and most profound sense.”⁴⁰⁵ As an act of imagination, sermons are not woven from threads of fancy but from that reality (the holy) which transcends and determines the human experience of self, the lived-in world, and the void.

Finding the Transformational Message in the Text

Margaret A. Krych contributed an essay, “Transformational Narrative in a Non-Transformational Tradition,” that urges the use of Loder’s grammar of transformation in structuring narratives to convey the revelation of Christ in the Gospel as well as the

⁴⁰¹ Ibid., 99.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 101-102.

⁴⁰³ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 92.

⁴⁰⁴ McClure, 108.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid., 114.

meaning of scripture texts.⁴⁰⁶ According to Krych, this approach does not to bring an alien rubric to revelation. On the contrary, the grammar of transformation is grounded in the way the Spirit works. As Loder asserted, “At the heart of convictional knowing is a radical figure-ground shift that is not merely perceptual but existential, in which the truth of Christ’s revelation transforms the subject from a knower into one who is fully known and comprehended by what he or she first knew.”⁴⁰⁷

The transformation of the individual from the knower to the known is the work of the Spirit, and this work is at the heart of the Gospel. As a result the individual knows and becomes known by Christ. The logic of transformation—conflict, interlude for scanning, constructive act of the imagination, release of energy, and interpretation into one’s life—provides an ideal structure for understanding the Gospel and scripture.

Krych sees Loder’s grammar mirrored in the Gospel’s emphasis on sin (conflict followed by scanning), on the crucifixion of Christ (the constructive act of the imagination), on justification (release of energy), and on sanctification (interpretation).⁴⁰⁸ These, then, are the responses ministers should seek to foster in individuals. Krych also commends the grammar of transformation to interpret biblical stories:

Many biblical and other faith stories can be similarly structured, and remain true to the original biblical narrative. In each one, it will be Jesus, crucified and risen, who is the mediator (semantic and theological) who brings about the transformation, so that the agent who began the episode in conflict and void finally becomes the one lifted up onto a high plane through the work of Christ.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁶ Margaret A. Krych, “Transformational Narrative in a Non-Transformational Tradition,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 279-297.

⁴⁰⁷ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 122-123.

⁴⁰⁸ Krych, 286-294.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 285.

Although she did no substantial work in the scriptures, Krych makes a case for incorporating Loder's logic as a hermeneutical principle that shows the impact of Jesus on others.

Another contributor to the volume, Daniel S. Schipani, attempted the converse—to use the grammar of transformation to show the impact of an individual on Jesus.⁴¹⁰ His study is from Matthew 15:21-28, in which Jesus expresses initial reluctance to heal the daughter of a Canaanite woman who comes asking him for help. After identifying himself as being sent to “the lost sheep of the house of Israel,” he adds, “It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.” “‘Yes it is, Lord,’ she said. ‘Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.’”⁴¹¹ In response, Jesus commends her faith and heals her daughter. Schipani argues that this passage shows how Jesus himself was transformed in his understanding of his mission by the encounter with a persistent, believing gentile. His contention may be a cautionary tale against misapplying Loder. The text presents Jesus as sparring with the woman, arguably to test her faith, which he then commends. Loder made no attempt to apply his logic to Jesus in the way Schipani did.

Experiencing “Serendipitous” Transformation

The extensive literature review that accompanied this research turned up one case study of congregational transformation, undertaken by Robert K. Martin and reported in the volume honoring Loder. The significance of his contribution is in showing how the transformational model may apply to an entire group. The case involved Auburn United

⁴¹⁰ Schipani, 116-132.

⁴¹¹ Matthew 15:24, 26-27.

Methodist Church in Auburn, Nebraska. The precipitating crisis centered on a serious eye injury to a mid-life pastor shortly after he had been installed as the new pastor of the congregation. For many weeks he had to remain in a dark room, motionless. He became depressed. The pastor “was afraid the congregation would not want an invalid for a pastor.”⁴¹² The congregation feared “their new pastor would want a fresh start somewhere else.” The pastor joined the church for a Christmas Eve service in which the sanctuary was darkened. According to Martin, “Anxiety was palpable, each fearing abandonment by the other.” At the conclusion congregants came up to him to embrace him, and he embraced them. “That moment of mutual regard and love was a point of contagion, ‘a tipping point,’ when a seemingly small action has great effect upon the system as a whole. They became more of a family, more of a caring community, more of the body of Christ.”⁴¹³

Here was a triumph of human spirit over the ego whose principal purpose is to “adapt to the physical, social and cultural environment so as to maximize satisfaction and ensure survival.”⁴¹⁴ In analyzing the case through Loder’s four dimensions of life (self, world, void, and holy) and through the five states of transformation, Martin “demonstrates the applicability of the model to both individual and organizational life.”⁴¹⁵ He shows how a mutual exchange of love in the midst of vulnerability became a transcendent experience of God’s love. This in turn strengthened the congregation’s conviction “that life is truly upheld by God, that ultimately nothing can separate us from

⁴¹² Robert K. Martin, “Leadership and Serendipitous Discipleship: A Case Study of Congregational Transformation,” in *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology: Essays in Honor of James E. Loder, Jr.*, ed. Dana R. Wright and John D. Kuentzel (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2004), 138.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 139.

⁴¹⁴ Loder, *Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective*, 72.

⁴¹⁵ Martin, 147.

the love of God,” for in the mutual encounter of pastor and congregation, each faced “that which most threatened” them and was met with God’s presence.⁴¹⁶ Martin concludes his study on the cautionary note that “it still remains unclear how and to what extent the congregation will live into its discovery of greater communion with Christ.”⁴¹⁷

Third Literature Area Summary: Transformative Learning Theory in Ministry Settings

The third literature area for this dissertation focused on research to extend transformative learning into the ecclesial setting of pastoral ministry. An extensive literature search and review yielded little direct research. Therefore, the reviewed literature was broadened to include research on transformative learning in faith-based contexts (fourteen studies), and findings from research papers that reportedly apply to transformational learning regardless of context.

Five studies from within faith-based contexts underscore the need to shift teaching goals from informational to transformational learning. The shift should begin at the level of seminary training so that students not only experience deep learning on their way to becoming ministers, but have examples to draw from as they embark on their ministries. The shift applies also to ministerial internship experiences; the goal is not to practice skills as much as it is to observe, with reflection and dialogue, the life of the church community and the relationship between pastoral ministry and the community. In the context of ministry practice, pastors who advance transformational learning rather than settle for transmissional styles of teaching reduce the possibility of their congregations rejecting doctrine outright as authoritarian. Most importantly, they increase the depth of learning that occurs through their ministries. The benefits of fostering

⁴¹⁶ Ibid., 144.

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 147.

transformational learning are seen in the deep changes that occur in team members on short term missions trips after being mentored to discuss dilemmas, journal their reflections, dialogue together, come to new perspectives, and act on them.

Three studies emphasize the need to foster learning congregations in support of individual transformation. In learning congregations, instead of relegating learning to a separate church program, every ministry is developed with an objective of transformational learning. Organizational emphasis is placed on ministry teams that not only work together, but learn together. Just as significant, individuals are not left on their own to act on new perspectives in the broader community, because their efforts tend to be frustrated. Inasmuch as transformational learning includes working out the implications of a perspective, leaving members to act unilaterally impedes their growth. In learning congregations members respond corporately to the truth they receive. They join together in ministry. For learning congregations to develop, leaders must share the commitment to transformational learning for themselves and others.

Two separate studies underscore the essential role of teachers in transformational learning. The findings in each study match point for point. Teachers must know their subjects well, but they also must have a strong personal commitment to transformational learning, love their students, and cultivate a safe environment in which students are free to raise questions and explore meanings.

Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology, a volume compiled in honor of James Loder's life and learning theory, addresses several aspects of ministerial practice. From the perspective of transformational learning, the role of preaching is to free people from ego-centeredness and reawaken the "primal need to give love." This

transformation requires an act of imagination on the part of hearers by which they see reality in terms of God's love for them. The knowledge that results is profoundly aesthetic as well as cognitively satisfying. To this end pastors preach "face to face" as witnesses who have themselves been transformed by the knowledge of God's love. They do not merely describe or explain God's revelation, but testify to its truthfulness. Hearers receive their testimony as knowledge through the work of the Spirit.

The grammar of transformation provides an ideal structure for understanding and conveying the significance of biblical narratives. This is because the Spirit's work of transformation is at the heart of the Gospel, and the Gospel is resident throughout scripture. The grammar of transformation is not imposed on passages but discerned in them. It serves as a hermeneutic principle. *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology* also includes a case study that shows how the grammar of transformation may provide a useful rubric for understanding the corporate experience of a congregation.

Jack Mezirow and Edward Taylor recently published a collection of twenty-one research papers on the practice transformative learning in *Transformative Learning in Practice*. The volume includes a set of six conclusions about transformational learning drawn from a qualitative analysis of all twenty-one papers prepared by Edward Taylor and Jodi Jarecke. According to them, the distinguishing feature of these conclusions is that they apply to transformative learning regardless of context. Presumably, then, they apply to the ministerial setting. These largely confirm the findings reported in other research. Transformative learning requires that teachers intentionally teach for change, and that they guard against the abuse of power in the learning setting. Transformative learning requires the use of imagination as well as cognition. It requires a context that is

both safe and provocative so learners are faced with disorienting dilemmas. Reflection and critical self-reflection are essential to the process. Most important, educators must model transformative learning for their students, beginning with the way they interact with the material they teach to others.

CHAPTER THREE: PROJECT METHODOLOGY

The Study Purpose, Method, and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to describe pastors' understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries. The research method used to accomplish this was qualitative research. Just as transformative learning theory seeks to explain how people create meaning from their experiences, qualitative research is able to observe that phenomenon. Sharon B. Merriam, professor of adult and continuing education at the University of Georgia, is author of *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*.⁴¹⁸ According to Merriam, qualitative research "focuses on meaning in context."⁴¹⁹ It assumes "that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds."⁴²⁰ This approach to research "requires a data collection instrument that is sensitive to underlying meaning when gathering and interpreting data." That "data collection instrument" is the human researcher who interviews, observes, and then analyzes others from within a given social world.⁴²¹ By means of qualitative research, the researcher is able to understand and describe how, within a given social context, people create meaning from their experience.

Qualitative research is characterized as interpretive or inductive research, because the researcher seeks to interpret the meaning of the process under study.⁴²² It does not

⁴¹⁸ Sharan B. Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

⁴²⁰ Merriam, *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*, 6.

⁴²¹ Ibid., 2.

⁴²² Ibid., 4-5.

involve the testing of a theory but rather the development of theory (“grounded theory”) that is specific to the context and practice within that context.⁴²³ Transformative learning theory was the “disciplinary orientation” that guided the design of this research.⁴²⁴ Its most obvious influence was on the research questions that were asked.⁴²⁵ The goal was not to prove or disprove a theory but to generate grounded theory in the area of ministry practice that awaits further testing.

With both the potentialities and limitations of qualitative research in mind, three research questions were identified to guide the research:

RQ 1: What is transformational learning?

RQ 2: How does transformational learning occur?

RQ 3: What role do ministers play in fostering transformational learning?

The Study Design

The study was designed in response to the lack of ministerial understanding of transformative learning theory. The research was intended as a first step in closing this gap by describing ministers’ perspectives on how deep change comes to their congregants and their own role, or roles, in this transformation. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to describe pastors’ understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries. Qualitative research was well suited to the emphasis on pastors’ perspectives, because a “key concern [in qualitative research] is understanding the phenomenon of interest from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s.”⁴²⁶ This insider, or emic perspective was reached through confidential, in depth, person-to-person

⁴²³ Ibid., 17.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 45.

⁴²⁵ Ibid., 44.

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 6.

interviews with nine ministers. This interview method is the most common technique in qualitative research because it allows the researcher to find out what individuals really think or feel about the subject under study. It also allows the researcher access to the impact of past as well as present experiences on the participants.⁴²⁷

Sampling Criteria

Because the requirements of qualitative research include focused attention on individuals for an extensive period, interview samples tend to be “nonrandom, purposeful, and small.”⁴²⁸ By carefully qualifying the participants and restricting their number, the researcher is in the best position to gain a deep understanding of the process under study.⁴²⁹ This research followed that paradigm.

The sampling criterion was first of all, *typical*. That is, participants were selected because they represent the “average person” who is competent in pastoral ministry.⁴³⁰ This comports with the study’s purpose of describing ministers’ understanding of transformative learning with a view toward the eventual design of education opportunities to benefit them. To identify “competent” ministers, the researcher identified solo or senior ministers who have at least a Master of Divinity degree and ten years or more of experience in ministry; who are well regarded by their congregations, peers, and community; and who were accessible to the researcher. With sixteen years of pastoral and community experience in a populous area with many churches, the researcher relied on his knowledge of ministers within the Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C., to recruit participants for the study. Denominational affiliation, gender, and theological orientation

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 71-72.

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 8.

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁴³⁰ Ibid., 63.

were not among selection criteria, but the researcher, by virtue of his network of relationships, recruited male ministers from evangelical churches.

Participants were recruited using the phone and e-mail. The researcher explained the nature of the research study and the interview process. This explanation included an assurance of confidentiality and the requirement of signed consent from the participant. A range of dates for the interview was presented. A letter repeating the request and conditions either preceded or followed each recruitment conversation. A date for the interview was confirmed with positive respondents, and an interview followed.

Data Collection

The process of data collection proved to be, as described by Merriam, “emergent and flexible, responsive to changing conditions of the study in progress.” This flexibility was achieved through the use of semi-structured interviews as distinguished from fully structured or non-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview is more open-ended than the structured interview and recognizes that “individual respondents define the world in unique ways.”⁴³¹ The semi-structured approach was most suitable to learning ministers’ varying perspectives on transformative learning based on ministry in different churches. The researcher had flexibility in the midst of an interview to reword, eliminate, or add questions based on a participant’s responses.⁴³²

An initial interview protocol was developed and tested in a pilot interview. Changes in the protocol were then made based on the clarity and usefulness of the questions in eliciting the participant’s understanding of how transformative learning

⁴³¹ Ibid., 74.

⁴³² Ibid., 73-74.

occurs among adults in his ministry. The result was the interview protocol (included below), which served as a general template for subsequent interviews.

The researcher conducted and digitally recorded each interview mindful of ethical restraints to serve neither as “a judge nor a therapist,” but rather, to show respect and empathy in the course of participant responses.⁴³³ The recordings were promptly transcribed into an interview log for subsequent analysis. Before each interview, the following written explanation was provided to participants:

Participant Preview

Prepared by Curt Young

Thank you so much for considering participation in my doctoral research.

Learning has often been described in terms of transmission; that is, students receiving information from teachers so that they understand, remember, and apply it. This research is focused on learning at a deeper level in the context of pastoral ministry.

In Romans 12:2, the Apostle Paul said, “Do not be conformed to this world any longer, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” This research seeks to understand ministers’ understandings of how deep learning occurs among adults in their ministries.

You will be asked questions about learning that leads to profound changes in people. These can be changes in one’s most basic perspectives on life, faith, values, commitments, or behavior.

In one segment, you will be asked to relate an experience in which you personally, or a church member to whom you have ministered, underwent a deep learning experience that changed you or the member. Please be prepared to relate a personal experience, or an experience from your ministry.

Your interview will be digitally recorded for transcription. In the transcription a pseudonym will be used rather than your name. No identifying information will be included in the report of findings.

⁴³³ Ibid., 85-87, 214.

In compliance with standards for qualitative research, the researcher will provide each participant with two copies of a statement at the time of the interview that includes the assurance of confidentiality and permission to publish responses. After the researcher and the participant have signed them, one copy goes to each party.

If requested, the researcher will provide each participant with a summary of his doctoral findings. These findings will be presented with regard for the initial training of ministers as well as their continuing education.

Again, thank you for your participation!

Interview Protocol

Opening question: We've all heard that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, that adults don't really change. How do you feel about that old adage? So what leads you to that conclusion?

Story question, repeated one to three times per interview: I'm going to ask you to tell me a story. Can you tell me about a time when someone you ministered to went through a deep learning experience that really changed him or her?

Follow-Up Probes

- General: Tell me more about.... What is that? How did you know...?
- Sensory: What did that look (sound) like? What was [name] doing...?
- Domain related: What do you think she was [thinking, feeling, valuing, believing, desiring, deciding, hoping for, sure of, driven by]?

Follow-Up Questions Based on RQ 1

- On the deepest level, what was shifting or changing in this person?
- How do you know when someone has changed on a deep level?
- How did [name] express the change that had come over him/her?

Follow Up Questions Based on RQ 2

- What had to happen internally for that change to occur?
- What do you think was driving [name] to change on a deep level?

Follow-Up Questions Based on RQ 3

- What are some ways God was using you in [name's] life?
- What roles do you think [name] would say you played in his/ her change?

Late Interview Question: You have seen deep change over time in many people. The issues, circumstances and personalities differ. If you were to summarize underlying similarities or a pattern that seemed to be repeated, how would you do that?

Late Interview Question: Do you have moments when you sit down and ask, “Am I making any difference at all?” What role do you play that you are at peace with?

Late Interview Question: If you could make something happen so that your congregation learns more deeply, what would that be?

Late Interview Question: If you were invited to address a class of seminarians, what would you tell them they have to understand if God is going to use them to change the lives of others?

Data Analysis Procedures

The data from the interviews was analyzed using the constant comparative method. Merriam describes it this way:

Basically the constant comparative method involves comparing one segment of data with another to determine similarities and differences.... Data are grouped together on a similar dimension. This dimension is tentatively given a name; it then becomes a category. The overall object of this analysis is to seek patterns in the data. These patterns are arranged in relationship to each other in the building of a grounded theory.”⁴³⁴

This method enables the researcher to move from the particulars of his or her data to observations, conclusions, or theory that are more general in nature, expressed in terminology that is broader than the specific variables of single instances. These higher level comments are then subject to evaluation for their “explanatory power” and “logical consistency.”⁴³⁵ The constant comparative method in this research involved multiple reviews of the original transcripts as the analysis was developed. These data reviews fueled revisions of the analysis and multiple drafts of findings until they were evaluated as ready for inclusion in the dissertation.

⁴³⁴ Ibid., 18.

⁴³⁵ Ibid., 191-192.

Research Limitations of the Study

The purpose of this study was “to describe pastors’ understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries.” The immediate applicability of the results is limited to the ministerial context. The research sample was small (nine ministers) and came from the city where the researcher makes his home. They were predominantly evangelical and male. The extent to which the data may be generalized to ministers in other denominational, regional, and social contexts may be debated along with the extent to which they apply to women in pastoral positions.

The questions were relatively few, and interviews were limited to about sixty minutes each. The researcher’s findings and conclusions were limited by these constraints and by his relative inexperience in conducting qualitative research.

Researcher Position

The researcher is a minister with a strong personal commitment to ministry practice that fosters transformative learning among the members of his congregation. He has, then, a point of view that may impede his ability to recognize weaknesses of the theory in ministry practice, or the strengths of perspectives on transformation through ministry that cannot be reconciled with the theory. However, he shares the commitment to regard transformative learning as “a theory in progress” which requires critique and refinement. Or, in the words of the theory itself, transformation calls for continual reflection and revisions in perspective. This commitment is a significant curb against the researcher’s bias.

The researcher has a Christian worldview informed by scripture; therefore, if faced with a choice in interpretation or in constructing meaning from the data, he would

choose the course that is affirmed by his understanding of what the Bible teaches. If, as he believes, the Bible reveals truth and describes reality, then his worldview may contribute to an analysis of data that is brighter and more helpful than were he antagonistic or indifferent to scripture.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

“The Bread and Butter of the Church’s Mission and Ministry”

The purpose of this study was to describe pastors’ understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in the context of ministry. This knowledge is necessary for the design of ministry training that closes the gap between ministerial knowledge and insights from transformative learning theory. To that end this study addressed three research questions (RQs):

1. What is transformational learning?
2. How does transformational learning occur?
3. What role do ministers play in transformational learning?

The data for the study was collected from interviews with nine solo or senior ministers serving in Maryland. Eight serve in the Silver Spring area, and one serves in Baltimore. The nine ministers identify themselves with five distinct ecclesial backgrounds—one Baptist, one Independent Bible, one Lutheran, four Presbyterian and one Reformed church.

Each interview lasted about an hour. Transcripts from the digital recordings ran 127 pages. A substantial portion of each interview consisted of the ministers providing accounts of one or more people to whom they have ministered, and who had undergone, or were presently undergoing, deep learning experiences that were profoundly life-changing. Altogether they provided twenty distinct accounts of transformation. As they did, the ministers weren’t simply telling stories but in some sense were reliving them.

This was evident as they punctuated their accounts with laughter, sighs, tears, silences full of emotion, words slowly and painfully spoken, and smiles of satisfaction, relief, and joy. Upon concluding the multi-year story that began with a young man named Tommy who showed up one day at his church looking for work, Pastor Waters added, “I’ve seen more than I wanted to see. I’ve experienced more heartache than you want to experience. Where else do you get prison, crime, cancer, death, and young romance? It was really just a wild experience.” All of them might have said something similar.

The researcher followed up with participants by asking probing questions that reflected the RQs. Most of the stories, true to life, were such a complex tapestry of emotions, circumstances, struggles, and inspiration that any attempt to categorize them—a bad marriage, addiction recovery, healing from abuse, conversion—would reduce them to a superficial caricature that misses how the individuals experienced transformational learning. The focus of this analysis was on understanding the process of change rather than the breadth of change.

With two exceptions the interviews began with story telling and probes that comprised the bulk of the participants’ time. The researcher then asked participants to summarize or generalize more specifically the phenomenon and process of deep learning, along with the pastors’ roles in fostering transformation. Their vivid memories recalled early on in the interviews served to sharpen and deepen their insights when asked to name them in the latter part of the interviews.

These pastors regarded the research topic as highly significant. They indicated this sentiment in several ways. First, they were highly responsive to the request for an interview. To secure nine participants, the researcher only needed to contact eleven

pastors. Only one declined directly. Second, participants commented on the significance of the questions they were being asked during the course of the interviews. One pastor paused, “I hope I am saying something clearly. You are asking me these huge, huge questions.” Another, when invited to critique his interview experience, said with deliberate seriousness, “No, I think these are good questions. You are asking me things I’m already thinking about and need to continue thinking about.” Still another interjected, “This experience, this transformation, is the reason that we stay in the trenches with our boots on, and we talk about the budget and the cost of the paper, or whatever. All of that prepares us to be ready for the bread and butter of the church’s mission and ministry. And that is transformation.”

A final comment is in order concerning the reporting of the stories. All the names used in this analysis are pseudonyms. Italicized words and phrases in the quotations were added by the researcher to underscore their significance to this study. When a character is first mentioned, something of his or her story is often related as an orientation for the multiple references that followed.

RQ 1: What is Transformational Learning?

Transformational learning is a change in the whole person that is initiated by a crisis that prepares individuals to learn a new perspective. That change in perspective is so compelling that they commit themselves to it and grow as a result. This research showed that there are three components in transformational learning: a crisis point, a transforming perspective, and growth.

The Crisis Point and Affliction: “Nobody Ever Died From Pain”

All nine pastors in these interviews were asked “what it takes” for transformation to occur. Without exception, they were quite persuaded that transformational learning often begins with affliction.

When asked for examples of profound change, Pastor Long responded, “Most of the examples I can think of are born of out suffering.” Pastor Gregory observed, “I’ve found that God is not hesitant to cause pain.” He went on to relate a conversation in which he asked a friend who works in pediatric surgery, “Doesn’t it disturb you to cut on little kids like that?” He replied, “They’ll never remember it.” The surgeon then added, “And remember this, that nobody ever died from pain.” Pastor Waters wryly commented, “Unfortunately, some of the best learning takes place in some of the most difficult moments, so if God really, really loves you, it probably means you’re going to have lots of difficult moments.” After the researcher noted that Pastor Simmons’ two examples of transformational learning began with pain and suffering, the pastor responded, “God is really good at that. We don’t need to manufacture our own suffering. Those are trials that he brings.”

Seventeen of the twenty accounts of transformational learning began as stories of overwhelming failure, loss, or suffering. Pastor Waters said, “We all want to share the moments of victory, but a lot of the greatest learning comes from the moments of great suffering.” In support he then paraphrased from the biblical book of James: “James says it, doesn’t he, that you take the trials, and add perseverance to suffering. These are the things that bear fruit in you.” He then mused as to the reason. “Why is that? Is that the human condition? Is that the choice we made in the Garden of Eden that we would never

take the easy way of just responding? We've chosen the hard way; we've chosen to sin and fall into suffering the consequences, and that turns us back to God—maybe that's it."

Pastor Waters readily drew attention to the fallen nature of the world and human rebelliousness. The majority of pastors routinely used the terms "broken" and "brokenness" to describe the human condition. People learn in order to gain relief from that brokenness.

Most of the pastors had to be pressed to come up with other origins for deep change. When asked, "Do you think other things, other conditions, can serve that same role as affliction?," Pastor Long paused at length before he finally replied, "Probably not as well. But I think that to some degree, opportunities can, too." When asked the same question, Pastor Clover, said, "That's a good question. My instinctive answer is yes, there are other things besides suffering." But rather than offer a specific example, he spoke in theoretical terms: "On a theological level I think we would say the work of the Holy Spirit includes awakening appetites and desires we didn't have before that we now hunger for." He then quoted Augustine's famous reference to the God-shaped vacuum in every person; however, compared to the graphic tale he had just related of a woman named Melinda, who had lived in isolation for years, Pastor Clover's response suggested that he was relatively unfamiliar with the possibility raised by his theology.

The Crisis Point and Longing to Thrive: "They Want To Know"

In more dramatic examples of transformational learning, deep suffering often was the precursor that led to change. Yet, another key factor did emerge. Deep learning not only springs from deep pain, but from a deep yearning to grow and flourish as a human being.

Although suffering may be the default position that leads to deep change, and this may be grounded in human brokenness, several pastors did recognize that another driver is the possibility of greater life rather than death, or “the void” in Loder’s parlance. This second, underlying factor is like bedrock below soil. Though easily submerged under debris, it remains. It does not spring as a consequence of sin but traces its origin to creation in God’s image. It is inherent in life; it is the longing to grow.

Evidence of this longing was embedded in stories of change that involved great suffering. It first surfaced, however, in pastors’ broader observations about some of their people.

The opening icebreaker for each interview was a question as to whether pastors agreed with the adage, “you can’t teach an old dog new tricks,” which suggests that adults can’t really change. Pastor Helms reasoned, “I think that’s often the case unless there’s a crisis in somebody’s life, unless they have a desire to know truth. Some people are wired, *they want to know*.” He noted that many members appear complacent after “they gain a certain level of learning,” but others are not. He concluded by distinguishing two origins for deep learning: “I think crisis leads to change. Some people have a hunger for truth – that also leads to change.” Not everyone scrambles merely to survive; some seek to thrive.

Though Pastor Bird related stories of deep suffering in his interview, he also answered the icebreaker by identifying this very significant, if less obvious driver of longing to grow. He related the story of his mentor who had ministered to one congregation for over forty years. “I don’t ever want to stop learning,” he had told the younger minister.

Pastor Waters responded to the old dog question by pointing to examples among the charter members of his sixty-two-year-old church and how they were continually learning. “I look at those folks, and they are the people I would say are characterized by the trait of being open to lifetime learning.” A point of crisis came in their lives when they realized that they are not where they could be as persons, so they learn in order to grow.

When pressed on whether deep change can come apart from deep suffering, Pastor Foster spoke decisively, “We’re not all just walking wounded. I think tremendous blessing can do it, too, if you see it as blessing.” Among all the pastors, Pastor Foster was most keyed in to a desire for growth as a motivator for change. He emphasized how frequently he observed the longing to thrive in people who were going through life transitions. He characterized his church’s mission as “being there” for people as they move through the stages of life. He spoke of birth, marriage, the mid-life “empty nest” when children leave home, retirement, and bereavement, all of which are key features in the landscape of American lives. “These are the times when people come to church, or come back to church,” he observed. For some, the transition they face “becomes a catalyst for a new commitment to grow spiritually that wasn’t there before, or had been left behind years earlier.” He referred to his recent experience of sending his child off to college. “What makes people open to change in these kinds of circumstances? Loss. Even when the gift comes, something else is taken away at the same time.”

For Pastor Foster the longing to grow is more than a desire to compensate for loss. It’s a wake-up call to move ahead. Loss coupled with new opportunities to grow feeds the

longing to grow. He later articulated the desire to flourish in relation to God as the irreducible, underlying factor in all deep change:

When everything else is taken away, the only thing that can last in the end is my relationship with God. It's the only thing that, if it's there, cannot be destroyed. Everything else can be destroyed. *I think that somewhere is that hunger for the realization that there's got to be something that is more meaningful and purposeful than what's happening to me, whether it's good or bad. And that is something that is beyond this world. And you see people capturing that.*

Pastor Hollister also is entering the empty nest phase of midlife, and spoke similarly of how loss and opportunity become a point of crisis. "Well, raising children is largely done. What are the new opportunities? What kind of shape will our new life take now, both individually and together? And I think that is a real opportunity for that kind of transformation, for that kind of deep learning." When probed further, he linked the longing to grow with the willingness to take risks. The question then becomes one of what risks to take. Therein lies the crisis point. "My life has had this shape all along, but I'm looking for something a little different, something new. I think God is calling me to something else here, something different. I kind of like adventure. I'm willing to put myself out there at least a little bit." When probed still further, Pastor Hollister, like Pastor Foster, grounded the longing that he and others feel to the desire to flourish in relation to God.

Might it be a risk, a willingness, a desire to grow? Maybe that's it. The desire is not to now take things lightly for the next thirty, forty, or fifty years, but instead to grow. It is a desire to maybe be stretched. I would say that though most of us would not be able to articulate it, it's a desire to experience more of God's wonder in creation—in people, in the arts, in all sorts of things.

Pastor Hollister articulated a deeply rooted desire to grow that is fueled by the sense that in experiencing the wonder of creation, one experiences the wonder of God. In

the end the desire to thrive may be seen as transcendent because it brings people to risk their natural priorities for safety and survival in exchange for the opportunity to grow.

The Transforming Perspective: “A New Way of Seeing”

The crisis point is not a trigger, but rather a precursor to a transforming perspective, an insight that reshapes one’s view of everything. It involves, as Pastor Helms put it, “a new allegiance.” This new insight may come suddenly or as the culmination of a series of lesser insights.

“A Kind of Aha! Moment”

After recounting lengthy stories of change in the lives of people whom he serves in his urban congregation, Pastor Bird was asked, “What do you think it takes for people to change?” He replied, “As I think about our experience here, and even for myself, I think there’s a kind of ‘Aha!’ moment that people have. Like, ‘Ahhh, now I see something I didn’t see before.’ But to get brought to that, I guess sometimes it might happen from a lesson or teaching, but a lot of times it is through pain.”

This “Aha!” realization has a revelatory impact on an individual’s life. Pastor Simmons leads a thriving suburban congregation where challenges are not as commonly brutal as in the urban setting. He drew from II Corinthians 4 in comparing the revelatory impact of a transforming perspective to God creating light where there was once darkness:

But for them to get that, ‘Aha!’ and understand—I don’t think it is anything different than what Paul wrote about the Gospel. Paul wrote in II Corinthians 4 that God needs to speak because we are dark in our own sin nature. *God needs to bring that enlightenment, and “Let there be light!”—“Ahhh!” The new insight affects how the individual sees everything.*

The new insight is not self-generated by a conscious act. Rather, it comes to individuals. As Pastor Gregory put it in describing what he observed in a restaurateur named Chad, “The light switch came on.”

Pastor Helms is an effective church planter whose congregation represents people from a wide array of backgrounds and attendant challenges. When asked to name what he saw as the common, essential feature of “deep change” in people, he responded, “I would say, to quote some Francis Schaeffer title, it’s *A New Way of Seeing*. They see themselves differently. They see life differently. Something has caused that to change.”

The language of “seeing” is the language of perspective. In transformational learning, the individual views life in a new light that has come to them. Some new perspective compels a reinterpretation of life. As a result, the “Aha!” moment or “Let there be light” experience serves to redirect the course of the person’s life. Without it, this redirection does not occur; with it, it may.

“Connecting the Dots”

Although a transforming perspective may come in an instant, it often results from an accumulation of lesser realizations that finally coalesce to form a comprehensive new understanding. This does not diminish its revelatory impact. Pastor Foster explained how this happened in the case of Samuel, a Jewish man who announced after two years of attending church and building relationships with Christians, “I’ve finally connected the dots.”

All of a sudden he would realize that we call Jesus the Lamb of God because it connects us back to the Passover Lamb whose blood brought people from death to life. “*Oh yeah, I get it now*. Jesus is the new Lamb, and it’s his blood, so I don’t have to sacrifice lambs any more. *Oh, I get that*. Jesus is the Lamb.” And so, *that happened in his life over and over* until he said, “What emerged for me in *connecting the dots* is the picture of Christ as the promised Messiah.”

In just this way, Pastor Clover explained that he has been counseling an isolated, troubled woman since her return to church after staying away for years. Melinda knows the doctrines of the faith, but she fears God cannot accept her. He said, “I use with her the illustration of the jigsaw puzzle. She has lots and lots of pieces, and she’s trying to figure out how to put the pieces together, to figure out the bigger picture.” Connecting the dots, putting the pieces together, the bigger picture—these are the kinds of phrases pastors use to describe the insight needed for deep learning to occur.

Growth: “A Very Different Trajectory”

Deep learning changes how one views self, God, the world, and others. A transforming perspective is convictional. It gains the allegiance of the learners so they commit themselves to live by it. As a result life becomes different, and individuals change.

Pastor Bird explained, “I think there’s both a head and a heart movement which translates into a behavior change. It’s not necessarily because they’re trying to make a behavior change, but there’s something inside.” Pastor Hollister spoke of the impact of a transforming perspective as inward change leading to outward change, as a “change in motivation, attitude and actions.”

Pastor Waters, after telling the story of Tommy, observed that this man’s transformational experience led to “a completely different trajectory” for his life. Pastor Gregory used identical language to describe the impact of Chad’s conversion. “That set him on a very different trajectory....”

That trajectory followed on for years, which is not to say automatically, but as a result of the irreversible change within him. Chad expressed his experience in these

terms: “Something has happened in me *that has changed my life forever*. Because even though I’ve always been a Christian, this is the first time it has ever meant anything to me.” Just as the transforming perspective is not self-generated, neither is its compelling effect.

Summary: What is Transformational Learning?

In this analysis the nature of transformational learning was described in terms of three components that exist in logical and chronological relation to each other. *A crisis point* is reached in an individual’s life. Most often it involves affliction—“Nobody ever died from pain.” Alternatively, this crisis point may be a positive experience, such as a life transition that spurs one on to further growth and development—“We’re not all just walking wounded.” Either way, the crisis point generates a deep sense of threat, a longing to grow, or both.

The crisis point is internal as well as external to individuals, and prepares them for *a transforming perspective*—“a new way of seeing.” This is a realization that alters their view of themselves, their world, others, and God. It may suddenly come to people in an “Aha!” moment, or dawn on them over a longer period of time after “connecting the dots.” Regardless, they believe it and commit themselves to it. This new belief commitment affects their motivations, attitudes, and actions. As a consequence, the course of their lives takes “a very different trajectory” that is best described as growth.

RQ 2: How Does Transformational Learning Occur?

These three elements—the crisis point followed by a new perspective and finally growth—constitute the framework for transformational learning. This framework is not an invented rubric for understanding deep change, but a recognition of how change

occurs. It is, by God's design, how life is. Pastor Hollister, with twenty-five years of ministry experience behind him, expressed this idea simply and potently when asked if he saw a pattern repeated in the lives of those who undergo deep change:

Maybe that is one of the reasons I love a good novel. Because a good novel often follows something. There's this situation—the crisis—and there's some kind of resolution. It seems to me that almost every story of that kind of transformation, that kind of deep learning, follows *something of that pattern. Things are okay. Things get broken. Things resolve.* Never fully on this side of heaven, but I'd say that *God brings some kind of resolution.*

Pastor Hollister regarded the transformational framework as a natural pattern woven into the fabric of life. For him this is the result of, if not evidence for, God's design, because the result is redemptive. The individual is a better person after the experience, not merely better able to survive. The transcendent experience spiritually elevates the individual. As he continued, Pastor Hollister grounded both the experience and its effects in the notion of creation:

Because in a sense, that's the story of creation, it seems to me. You have this creation in God's image, and it is doing that for which God created it. Then there is this crisis in our fallenness and in all the ways that fallenness manifests itself. Into that crisis, the resolution comes in Jesus Christ. He is making all things new, and finally will completely make all things new in the new heavens and new earth...."

After identifying the three components in transformational learning, significant questions remained about the actual process. How is the pattern executed? Given the transformational framework consisting of crisis point, transforming perspective, and growth, what is the individual going through at each of these points? How are they interrelated? By what process is the crisis point linked to the transforming perspective, and the transforming perspective to growth? The next section of the analysis sought to contribute to the answers.

The Dynamics of Crisis as Trial: “Tired of Being Tired Of All You Do”

When asked what factors impede change, Pastor Bird said, “With a lot of things in our community, people will say, ‘This is just the way it is.’” A crisis point is reached when a person becomes aware that “the way it is” must change. His or her life cannot remain the same. As has already been noted, this point can be precipitated by a traumatic event such as desertion by a spouse or other loss. It may occur after life consequences have become so overwhelming that strategies of denial, blame shifting, or escape no longer work.

Pastor Waters described the crisis point in Tommy’s life: “He was just dead tired, you know, tired of being tired of all he did.” He was like others Pastor Waters has known. “They’re looking for a chance to start over. They feel like their mistakes hunt them down.”

Recognizing the need for personal change comes at the price of admitting personal failure. It is a recognition that not only has one’s conduct has been flawed, but that one’s perspective has been flawed. The regard one has had for self has been unrealistic. Why is this awakening so often long in coming and quite painful? Pastor Simmons attributed the delay to pride. “We are convinced that the way we have processed life and understand ourselves and God and everything else is the right way, the best way. Along with that is selfishness. We are self-centered and it is hard to see beyond our little worldviews that we construct.” Crisis loosens the individual’s commitment to the perspective that has sustained beliefs, values, and commitments—in short, all the things that have shaped one’s life.

The pastors observed that the realization of need for change humbles people. This humility is expressed not merely as personal insufficiency, but as failure or brokenness. Pastor Helms explained that at the crisis point, people “realize they’re inadequate, or they don’t have the tools in their toolbox to deal with this.” Pastor Long described the plight of a man named Aiden, who was “chasing the American dream” with his wife until she decided that she could better achieve it without him. “There was an awakening and awareness of his own need for help beyond himself, whether from others in the church or from God himself. There was real humility there, a brokenness.”

The Dynamics of Crisis as Despair: “A Chink of Light Shown Through”

Just as pride subverts longing, despair suppresses it. One’s perspective may be as distorted by despair as it is corrupted by hubris. The suffering can be just as great. This research project found that an experience that awakens hope rather than exposes failure can become the crisis point.

Pastor Clover spoke at length of Melinda who had dropped out of church as part of a broader social isolation. She had “been off here in a very marginalized position for a long time, had given up hope.” A change in her work schedule prompted her to visit his church for a Friday evening meal and Bible study. The pastor had a casual conversation with her that made a lasting impression:

I talked with Melinda about how pleased I was to see her there, and she told me a little bit about her job. I expressed an interest. She said she was looking for a different apartment. I remarked, ‘It sounds like you’ve got some plans for the future.’ This woman had been in a situation where the future seemed hopeless, and she had not even perceived what she was envisaging as a plan for the future. *She perceived herself as someone who couldn’t even have a plan for the future. So she was rather provoked in a very positive way by the question, but was also intrigued that I should even have expressed an interest.*

Melinda was provoked and intrigued by hope, by the possibility that life could be better than she had envisioned. Pastor Clover responded, “I think for someone who was establishing a posture of withdrawal, *a chink of light shown through* where she recognized there’s a person out there who in some way I can relate to. She caught a glimmer of what a personal relationship might be like.” That light was hope.

When asked why Melinda responded as strongly as she did, he commented, “It may be something to do with truth being present in a way that relates to a felt need, where someone is being confronted with something that they might have dismissed or not thought of.” Pastor Clover described the possibility of relationship for Melinda as “the hook” that caused her think, “Okay, there is something here I’ve not realized. There’s an angle that I have not thought of or explored.” This is the experience of being intrigued by hope. Hope invites exploration.

Other pastors confirmed that hope is a “hook” for the hopeless. Pastor Helms told the story of Barbara, a woman who enjoyed financial success in business but whose private life included substance abuse and adultery. He commented how, when she “was so messed up,” she became “fascinated” with scripture. Scripture revealed the possibility of unity, clarity, and order for her life.

In reality crises that lead to deep change are not easily categorized either as failure or as despair. They often involve both, so that both humility and possibility are in play. Tommy, the young man who was “tired of being tired” of all he had done, was given work at Pastor Waters’ church. After getting drunk with a friend, the two broke into the office of the associate pastor. Pastor Waters laughed as he told how Tommy had

“botched” the burglary. “It was obvious,” he said, “who did it.” The associate pastor took Tommy aside and shared his testimony:

He had once killed a man in a traffic accident. Because his company tried to hide its liability, he was charged with manslaughter. So he knew what it was to be accused and to have it written up on the papers. He shared that with Tommy and how we get second chances—the associate pastor had no intention of going into the ministry until that had happened.... He perceived that God was beginning the process of calling him into vocational ministry. *The second chance motif obviously was enormous.* I think that was the first thing.... And to really reaffirm that it wasn’t just two chances he’d been given, but three or four. We had all needed and received multiple chances to begin again, and we were willing to do that for him, and to extend grace. That was huge.

The associate pastor’s testimony convinced Tommy that second chances were possible, and that was what he was longing for. Though he had made a ruin of his life for years, this was his crisis point. When asked to explain Tommy’s crisis point, Pastor Waters said, “I think he was looking for love, for hope.” His associate had “cast that vision for what life can be,” and this compelled Tommy to pursue his own “journey.”

“You Can’t Fill A Cup That Thinks It’s Already Full”

When affliction or despair is involved, the crisis point involves a profound sense of inadequacy, depletion, fatigue, failure, grief, and regret. At that point, individuals feel their emptiness. They yearn and hunger for something that makes them new, that revives and redirects their lives. Pastor Gregory fleshed out these dynamics of crisis in terms of Jesus’ beatitudes. “It is grief and hatred of our sin kind of stuff. Blessed are the poor, those who mourn, the meek. You are put in a position that humbles you, to get you ready to be *hungry for a righteousness outside yourself*, an alien righteousness.”

In addition, analysis of the interview data showed that the longing to thrive can bring an individual to a crisis point apart from prolonged suffering or a bout of despair. This longing generally involves discontent and the recognition that as good as life’s gifts

may be, possessing them is no substitute for personal growth. The gifts confer no higher meaning on the owner's life. When they become the focus, they diminish meaning. Pastor Foster spoke to how either condition can lead to a crisis point and a spiritual longing. His extended comment merits full citation:

It's the old deal where *you can't fill up a cup that already thinks it is full*. So I think there is *a recognition of emptiness* that comes through loss and trial. Somewhere in there—and it doesn't happen the same way for every person—people come to realize that what lasts in the end is not my stuff, not my trophies, my house, my cars. It's not even my relationships. When everything else is taken away, the only thing that can last in the end is my relationship with God. It's the only thing that if it's there cannot be destroyed. Everything else can be destroyed. I don't know that it comes across the way I just said it, but I think that somewhere is that *hunger for the realization that there's got to be something that is more meaningful and purposeful* than what's happening to me, *whether what is happening is good or bad*. And that is the thing that is beyond this world.

People often reach points in life when they feel compelled to change their thinking and behavior in order to adapt and survive. The results are often mundane, and any change is limited in duration or degree. In transformational learning, the result is far more profound. Pastor Foster's comments identified that in transformational learning, the goal has shifted. The objective is no longer merely to adapt and survive. Individuals connect their suffering and loss, their transitions, or their eroding satisfaction with their mortality. They are existentially confronted with the void and experience the knowledge that they cannot save themselves from it. Neither can anything they have nor anyone they know. This awakens in them a longing after God, whether they acknowledge him or even realize it. This longing is essential to the crisis point. In the end it is spiritual crisis that compels people along to the transforming moment when the new perspective comes.

From Crisis to Transforming Perspective: A Journey of Desperate Hope

The crisis point awakens a strong, persistent longing. Pastor Long described Aiden as “willing to try to do anything” to save his disintegrating marriage. Chad, the upscale restaurateur introduced above, was a drug addict, and that vice had cost him dearly. As a result of his recklessness, his wife left him, and his daughters were estranged from him. He had alienated his entire extended family. His businesses failed. After yet another relapse, “he took some sleeping pills, drank a liter of vodka, taped a plastic bag around his head and taped it shut.” He was shocked to wake up in an ICU. He should have died. At that moment he realized, “God still had me on this planet for a reason,” and he had to know why. The next day, for the first time, he took the initiative and came to a Bible study at the treatment center. He kept returning. When he left the center, he visited the church where the Bible study leader served as the minister. Pastor Gregory was initially unaware that he had begun attending.

Hitting the Pause Button

Pastor Clover drew an analogy from Exodus to describe how a crisis point serves to redirect an individual:

I think of Moses’ words and the burning bush: “I will turn aside and see this great sight.” Here is Moses out in the desert and it’s like, “Huh, I’ve never seen that before.” Instead of going on his way with his sheep, he stops and decides he is going to take another look. I think sometimes God breaks in on us so that we stop and say, *I think I need to stop and think some more about this.*

The crisis point prompts a search for meaning, and that involves reflection, imagination, and discourse. It requires energy and often means putting other pursuits on hold. Pastor Foster expressed similar insight. When asked about the process that brings a person from the point of crisis to a transforming perspective, he characterized the

individual's response as "hitting the pause button" in order to find the meaning of what has happened. He characterized the search to find that meaning as not just a journey (a term used by Pastor Waters and others), but "a hunt." His entire response, rich with content, unfolded as follows:

So, something happens. It's good or it's bad, or it is a combination of good and bad. So I got a loss. Or, I hit the jackpot. Or, my kid left me to go to college. Something happens that causes people to *hit the pause button* and say, "Why? What is the meaning of this? What's the purpose of this?" I believe the change happens when they discover the answer to that question. I would say God is behind that. Jesus is behind that.

Having said that, it may come across to you in a thousand different ways: I understand why this happened. Or, I understand the meaning of it. Part of what I try to say to this congregation is when something happens to you, whether it's good or bad, or whether it's a combination of good and bad, start looking for where God is in this. *Just get into the hunt. Go on a treasure hunt* until you find it. What God desires is blessing for you and hope for your life. Don't be passive. Go look for it.... Then the good news will come.

The search for meaning occurs consciously and subconsciously. The journey most often is not simple or direct. People generally don't regard the journey as a "treasure hunt" apart from a faith commitment and even then, they see the experience in that light only in retrospect. Many encouragements are needed along the way. As the quote above demonstrates, Pastor Foster provides encouragement in the way he communicates with his congregation.

Daring to Hope

When the crisis point involves grief and loss, the journey to a transforming moment includes the stages of grief—denial, anger, bargaining and depression. Pastor Gregory described these as part of Andrea's journey after she discovered that her husband had treacherously betrayed and rejected her. After nearly thirty years of marriage, he came to her to say there was something she needed to know about him. The

pastor would only say it was “a horrific secret.” The husband told her only because it had been necessary for him to disclose the information to federal officers as part of qualifying for high security clearance work. Those officers were soon to interview her.

She was “absolutely devastated.” She would visit the pastor “and weep and weep and weep.” The pastor persuaded her to sign a covenant that she would not commit suicide. She would call him and say she was thinking about breaking that covenant. One day the pastor found her in the sanctuary with a straight razor cutting herself. “She thought that her husband looked at her one way, but realized, ‘He sees me this way instead.’ And she was buying into that—I’m worthless, he never loved me.”

As they met weekly, Pastor Gregory shared the scriptures that spoke about how God regarded her, loved and accepted her. “She’d come back and quote me, which was me quoting scripture, nothing I could take any credit for—‘Okay, this is what you’re saying right?’” After affirming her understanding, he would respond, ‘This is how you feel about yourself, but this is what God’s word has to say about you. Which one is more true?’ It was that kind of stuff for a long time.” A great deal of testing occurred as she looked for reassurance. What kept Andrea from self-destruction was daring to hope she might not be what she thought she was. That daring to hope was the outward expression of the longing that compelled her. This was more than a longing to escape from pain, but rather, to know a better, more powerful truth about herself, and Pastor Gregory did all he could to reinforce that hope.

Confirming Hope

In the course Pastor Clover's ministry to Melinda, she has been emerging from deep isolation and doubts about her faith. In the process, Pastor Clover often says to her, "You believe more than you realize." He reported:

That intrigues her, and she will say, 'What do you mean by that?' I'll say, 'Your visceral response to this or to that shows me that you have an understanding that you may not be able to articulate into words but....'

Melinda's journey is sustained with affirmation of the longing she feels.

Pastor Hollister underscored the role of worship, the word and sacraments in sustaining Gary. Gary is a physically imposing, highly competent member of his church with a high-level government security position. While he was on assignment overseas, his wife informed him that their marriage was over. His fundamental background had taught him that divorce is a deep shame, not only for the couple, but for their respective families. On the inside he was "reduced to a pile of hurt." Pastor Hollister explained the transforming perspective that he hopes will come: "To know God's grace... to experience and feel himself to be a sinner saved by grace... to recognize who he is before God."

The evidence of his journey toward a transforming perspective is seen in his regular attendance at his church's small Sunday evening worship service. Compared with Sunday morning worship, the evening service is less formal with a stronger sense of gathering for fellowship and prayer for one another. Pastor Hollister explained the connection between worship and Gary's journey:

There is no question about it. Even if he may not be able to articulate it at this point, there's this hope that here the Spirit and the body of Christ will meet him and he will be able to minister to them in his own way, and they will be able to minister to him. And that together, they will be able to move forward, that he is going to find something here that he can't get sitting at home right now. *There's this hope that worship will be a meaningful time to help him keep going, to give him some hope that the whole world hasn't just gone to hell.*

When deductive reasoning from wrong assumptions proves inadequate, individuals broaden their focus and become receptive to new truth and other ways of knowing. Unable to find meaning in a crisis by applying past assumptions, individuals' closed thinking can give way to a new openness to find the answer in God. For those in rebellion against him, the journey can deteriorate into petty bargaining and further crises. Nonetheless, even this journey can lead to deep transformation, but it requires confrontation.

Confrontation as Hope

Pastor Simmons reported a remarkable example of the role that church discipline played in a journey to transformation. David, married with three children, was studying to become an oral surgeon when he began an affair with a classmate. The pastor had been discipling him and now had to discipline him. After months of confrontations and false promises to change, David announced he "broke off the relationship with the other woman," but would still divorce his wife and pursue his career. Two months later, he wrote, "I am miserable. I never imagined what it would be like to actually feel being cut off from God. But I feel it. It hurts, and I'm breaking." Over the next six months he occasionally called Pastor Simmons to ask, "If I were to do something, what would I need to do?" Then one day he called the pastor and defiantly proclaimed, "My career is my god now, and I'm going to pursue that god." Several months later, he spoke again with the pastor: "I don't want that god. I want my God, the true God." This pastor reported what happened next:

I told him, "This is a big decision. You've got to say, 'I am going to give up dentistry, totally give it up.'" David asked, "Then what am I going to do?" That was the big battle. I said, "I don't know what you're going to

do, but you're going to pursue God." And so, finally, I think eight months or so later, he said, "I will do whatever it takes to get back with my wife." He was broken.

David gave up his career as an oral surgeon. He and his wife entered counseling. Over the next year his marriage and faith relationship with Christ were restored. His marital infidelity was an unmistakable expression of his spiritual defection in order to make his career his "god." David had mired himself in an irreconcilable conflict. He tried to pull away from Christ only to discover that this increased rather than relieved his torment. In the grammar of transformation, his crisis point was the realization that he was now without God. Deeply conflicted, he lacked the resolve necessary to pursue restoration. Pastor Simmons' confrontations proved to be lifelines of assurance that David's experience of suffering was a testimony of God's continued love for him. He was being disciplined. In rebuke, David found hope. He would later return to the church and publicly acknowledge God's mercy in the role that Pastor Simmons and the church had played.

The Dynamics of a Transforming Perspective

When the transforming perspective comes, the result is, in Loder's terms, "convictional knowing." Research conducted for this project underscored that it involves a twofold process. The individual receives the transforming perspective as a new truth with revelatory impact. The new truth in turn elicits a deep personal commitment. These related actions, the impact of the perspective and response of commitment, are integral to the experience of transformational learning.

A New Truth with Revelatory Impact

When the realization comes, it comes as truth, not merely as true. That is, it is not felt to describe reality in a secondary sense, but to determine or shape reality in a primary sense. The realization is inescapable. It is new to the person, not new in itself. It has been true all along, but the individual did not see it. Coming to this realization, then, is a transcendent experience. The individual does not feel as though he or she has generated the new truth; it is not a conclusion derived from an orderly cognitive process.

The individual has scrambled to escape the conflict and contradiction of an earlier crisis. That journey ends because the new perspective has intervened. It is not embraced as a personal triumph of discovery but received with relief as a rescue from the futility of trying to make sense on one's own.

When Pastor Gregory was asked to describe the impact of the Gospel message on Chad, he said, "I think his basic motivation was, 'This is what I was missing. This is why I was going down a road that would lead to death inevitably. Now I don't have to because this is true. This is truer than anything I have ever done.'" The realization redefines one's sense of reality, and opens up the possibility of a new life.

When asked to describe the experience further, Pastor Gregory explained that transformational experiences not only describe conversion but sanctification, Christian growth:

It is also a description as to how we grow as Christians. Which gets us back to Tim Keller, who got this from Jack Miller—the "Oh no!" and the "Oh my!"—the two steps to Christian growth. There's the "Oh no!"—I'm worse off than I thought I was. That might be a crisis in your life. That might be the Holy Spirit smiting your conscience. It might be feedback from another means of growing in grace, like fellowship with another believer who confronts you. It might be you in prayer. It might be the sacrament—"Oh no! I'm so much more unworthy to come to the table than I thought." But then comes the "Oh my!" Again, it's the Spirit's

work. “God’s grace is so much greater than I dared hope it to be.” Often I see a typical pattern.

Individuals are humbled in receiving the new perspective, because as Pastor Gregory described, it is experienced as both needed and unearned. Pastor Bird noted that humbling is also the result when the new perspective is received as correction. He leads an urban congregation that encourages young adults to come into the city and serve as part of the neighborhood. They arrive full of ideals, but within a year or two, the majority have left. Those who stay, he said, have experienced a transforming moment.

Well there’s kind of an “Aha!” moment where they see that there is mutual brokenness. Because when they originally come, they think the neighborhood is broken and we’re coming to fix it. Even I thought that. That’s why I came. But then when you’re here, you see your own sin, your own brokenness, your own racism and classicism through relationships with other people in the way you react, in the things that come out of you when you are here. The people who stay are the people who decide they are going to fight through that. A lot of times when people see that, they leave. They’re offended by what they see in themselves. The people who stay are people who go beyond that. There’s a kind of ownership of the vision. But again, there’s a point where they realize they’re not coming—I don’t mean to be derogatory—as a missionary, but they see themselves more like a neighbor.

For these young urban workers, the point of crisis is the recognition of their own brokenness in attitudes, speech and reactions that contradict their high sense of self and calling. The transforming perspective is the realization that God has called them to live as broken sinners saved by grace alongside other broken sinners in need of grace. Both the crisis and transformation come as unexpected surprises.

Pastor Bird went on to describe a case that was then unfolding. A husband and wife had recently moved into the community only to have the husband’s bike stolen. The wife came to the pastor in tears. “We came to serve. How come this is happening?” In response, he said, “Maybe God has some things to teach you while you are here, more so

than he's going to use you to teach other people while you are here." Whether that encounter leads to a transforming perspective remains to be seen.

Transformational learning occurs in the midst of blessing as well as hardship. Either way reality is reframed. Pastor Foster spoke of the perspective that came to his friend, Fred, as he cultivated his garden:

I had a friend twenty-five years ago who worked his tail off to plant this garden in his backyard. I mean he was this amateur landscaper—trees, bushes, flowers. I mean, the place was like Thomas Kinkade. I was standing with him on his porch—he is a German guy—and he says, "Look at the beautiful garden God gave me." I'm thinking, "Well, God didn't give it to you. You planted it, and you've been working it. You've worked like a dog on it!" But he sees it as a gift from God. *So his whole life has been reframed. I think that part of our job in ministry is to reframe life experiences around God. You can do it in the context of trial, but you can also do it in the context of blessing.*

When individuals receive new truth, it has a revelatory impact on them.

Transcendent realizations come with compelling authority. To receive them is to willingly surrender and submit to them. Receiving new truths involves recognizing and accepting their authority. It can be very much like a lover's embrace.

Pastor Gregory reported how Andrea expressed the impact that the Servant Song of Isaiah 52:13-53:12 had on her. After suffering so much from her husband's treachery and struggling to regard herself as someone worthy of love, she heard her pastor preach the passage during Advent. Afterward she told him, "I wouldn't have ever wanted to survive what I've had to survive these last two years. But I can tell you one thing that's come out of it: It's in going through this that those words *are true for me*." Andrea used subjective language to describe the personal impact of a transcendent experience. Her realization from the Servant Song that she was truly "an object of God's affection" profoundly changed her.

Given that this research focused on Christian congregations, Pastor Waters was asked whether people who are suddenly transformed by a truth of the Bible after years of exposure either “didn’t really believe it before or if they did accept it as true, didn’t really grasp it.” He responded, “Now that’s the sixty-four dollar question about everything, isn’t it? People wake up and realize they really do love their wife. This really does matter to me, this thing, this person, this relationship.” What is new is a deep loyalty to truth because for the first time, it had revelatory impact. It hit home. Pastor Gregory provided a concrete instance of this. He was taking candidates for church office through a study of Mike Williams’ book, *Far as the Curse is Found*. Afterward, “one of the guys who is an elder candidate—he’s been a Christian forever —said, ‘I never understood this part of the Old Testament narrative, and now that it has clicked, it has *assured me at a depth I have never had before*.’”

A Deep Personal Commitment

When probed to explain why new truth affects permanent change in people, Pastor Helms replied, “The answer I would give is they give allegiance to a new authority as opposed to the world’s wisdom.” When new truth comes with revelatory impact, it elicits a new commitment. The two are inextricably related. Chad, Andrea, and all the individuals described in this research expressed their allegiance and commitment to conform their lives to what they learned was true. The evidence was seen in changes in life course, the “new trajectory” described earlier and analyzed in the following sections.

Even as the transforming perspective takes hold, Pastor Long noted that commitment is seen in the “willingness to take some risks.” Pastor Hollister spoke of the willingness “to risk affliction.” The ministers also spoke of the commitment in terms of

love and gratitude rather than duty and obligation. Pastor Gregory quoted Galatians 2:20 to say that the Apostle Paul responded to the revelation of Christ in terms of love: “It is no longer I who live but Christ lives in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” He then commented, “I tell my people that biblical obedience can be defined in four words—“I love you, too.” Pastor Foster also spoke of commitment in response to the realization of grace from God as love and gratitude:

I think that part of our job in ministry is to *reframe the life experience* around God. You can do it in the context of trial, but you can also do it in the context of blessing. Then life becomes a kind of stewardship of blessings. *My response to blessings, to grace, is thankfulness.* So if I see what I have that is good is a blessing from God who is good, that’s grace. *And the response to grace is to love the person who gave me the grace.* And then my whole life just got different.

Pastor Foster’s comments linking love with gratitude underscore that the commitment to new truth is not only personal, but also interpersonal—an expression of love in an I-Thou relationship between the individual and Source of truth.

From Transforming Perspective to Growth: The Burst of Life

This research was completed at the end of winter as trees remained dormant and the ground lay shrouded in snow. When growth resumes in this Maryland region, the evidence will appear simultaneously among the trees and ground cover. It will be growth after all, rather than methodical construction. Its effects will be widespread rather than limited. Growth results from an infusion of life-renewing energy that diffuses through living things causing them to flourish.

New Vitality for Individuals

Transformational learning similarly produces a burst of vitality in the individual. To explain this as a freeing up of energy that was bound up with the previous crisis fails

to take account of the fact that the result is growth, not mere change. The effect is neither chaotic nor destructive, so this is not raw energy. Nor does it produce more of the same kind of living. This is energy for growth. People experience metamorphosis, a personal transformation that leaves them better able to deal with life because they are thriving to a degree they had not before.

The language of enthusiasm and inspiration has been passed down from antiquity to describe this growth. Terms that acknowledge the influence of the life-giving God seem more thoughtful and true than the superficial language of feelings and drive to describe the impact of a transforming perspective. The older language acknowledges that the impact of a transforming perspective is not self-generated but generative. It is experienced as life-giving and life-guiding. The multiplicity of effects is not a manic display that in the end is self-nullifying; rather, those effects constitute personal growth.

Pastor Waters reported this phenomenon in Tommy. Tommy's life had been chaotic since childhood. He lived on the streets, abused drugs, and was routinely in trouble with the law. He had taken up with a troubled young woman. He was as angry and unstable on the inside as he was on the outside. Tommy's transforming moment came during a Promise Keepers event that named racism as a sin. He was blindsided. He felt helplessly exposed. That is when he realized that Christ was the Savior he needed. He embraced Christ through faith and was baptized. The pastor laughed as he told how this very rough young man then approached him about his girlfriend and his desire "to make an honest woman of her." Counseling and marriage followed as one of many changes in his life. Pastor Waters noted, "I think all of it flowed out of [Tommy's transforming perspective on Christ]. *And it's not that unusual of an experience, that after conversion*

there is a whirlwind, a tremendous burst of spiritual energy. You can't get enough of that."

The "burst of spiritual energy" that Pastor Waters named was described by Pastor Foster as an "overflow" of vitality that occurs repeatedly as members of his church have learned more deeply of Christ.

In my experience, people who get involved and who invest are people who profit a great deal. So there is a kind of cycle that as they taste and see the goodness of the Lord, there comes a kind of overflow where they find ways to give. With it there is a stretching and growth in faith where people have a sense of what is possible with God's blessing.

Pastor Helms described the effect of transformational learning on Gene, a man who became a Christian under the influence of a member of his rock band. After Gene and his wife started coming to Pastor Helms' church, they explained why they kept returning. "Yeah, this is simple, but it reaches down into us." The pastor's wife noted that Gene's wife said that she "sees a big difference in him as far as leading the house now." Pastor Helms responded that Gene "is inwardly driven." When asked later what accounts for Gene's growth, Pastor Helms replied, "It's the scriptures that have implanted an inward desire in Gene." Exposure to new truths from scripture "reach down into" Gene, fueling an "inward drive" and "inward desire" that are then expressed in growth.

Revival for Others

In *The Transforming Moment*, James Loder described the "release of energy" that comes with the transformational moment as celebrative, because celebration is often the first way in which new vitality is expressed. In the Christian tradition regeneration is celebrated corporately in baptism, and God's acts of deliverance are often celebrated corporately through testimony. Especially when forgiveness and freedom from sin are in

view, these celebrations are outward expressions of the inward experience of these gifts. In describing celebrations of new birth and repentance, pastors reported that the new vitality that impacts one individual can deeply affect others with the result that the process of transformational learning begins in them. This phenomenon was described as distinct from the typical group expressions of happiness or gratitude in behalf of someone.

Pastor Simmons told the story of the aspiring oral surgeon, David, who committed adultery and referred to his career as “my god,” but then was brought to brokenness and repentance. After being reconciled to his wife and family, moving out of state, and entering a less prestigious career, he felt compelled to return to the church and publicly testify to his transformation and the grace of God in his life. An extraordinary sense of necessity must have gripped David, because to share “what God had done” required him to share how he failed.

Pastor Simmons explained, “When he started out you could tell there was fear, humility, an openness and vulnerability. But as he started to see people’s responses and was embraced afterwards, you could sense his peace, a relief, and joy.” But that was not the end of the congregation’s response. Pastor Simmons became quite emotional as he related what happened next.

It had an effect on the whole body of Christ here. We started hearing comments afterwards about, “we need to take sin seriously.” A few other people said, “There are things in my life that I need to get right.” The friends that had connections with others really began to understand this pursuit of accountability and love. There were a few others who said, “I see something happening in this friend’s life. I’m going to go confront them in love.” And they did. Boy, when David came back and shared, that was a day of celebration, I will tell you. The whole congregation was cheering and applauding!

Some people were probably moved only momentarily. Others realized that their perspective on their own spiritual condition was wrong because David's testimony became a crisis point for them. Still others came away with the resolve necessary for a new obedience. They were transformed by a perspective that had been made new to them again.

In the same way, there was more to Pastor Waters' story of Tommy who came to Christ and then married his girlfriend. The same week he first arrived looking for work, he also committed a serious crime. Some time after Tommy had become a Christian, the police caught up with him and arrested him.

I watched him get arrested and at first try to evade and avoid. He eventually came in, met with me, prayed, and then met with his lawyer. When he went before the judge, he said, "I want you to know that I did it. But that was a different me." He really laid out his story, and when he was sentenced to prison, he took it like a man. It was tremendous. *There were people here who were touched to their core in all kinds of different ways. I mean, some people who thought they were better than him realized this kid is pretty special in his own way. They recognized that there were elements that could challenge their own [faith] when they faced any kind of similar, difficult circumstance.*

One individual's transformation challenges the perspective of another by confirming the possibility of a better, truer life. With that confirmation comes inner conflict between the previous perspective and the evidence in another person of a greater possibility. The journey to real transformation may be virtually instantaneous or drawn out. Analogies from the disciplines of health (contagion), psychology (suggestion or hysteria), or sociology (permission) are of limited help in describing the phenomenon reported by pastors. An analogy from physics may be of some help. Sources of light affect nearby objects so that they in turn emit light. Energy emitted from the source affects objects in its path. So, too, the spiritual vitality in one person affects others. In

fact, any analogy must fall short because the phenomenon is not material but spiritual. Neither is the experience objective or subjective, but interpersonal and transcendent.

Growth: Personal Transformation from the Inside Out

Growth is not a result of the learning process, but part of it. Many studies dissect and describe the dynamics of personal growth. The present analysis focused more narrowly on growth that follows a transforming perspective. After embracing the new perspective, the resulting infusion of vitality is expressed in profound life change.

The Guiding Impact of the Big Picture

In the pastors' words, the embrace of a transforming perspective provides individuals with a "big picture" or "bigger picture" of life that launches them on "a new trajectory" in their own lives. Asked how the two ideas relate, Pastor Helms referred to the change he observed in Barbara. "I think what changed Barbara is having more of a conviction of the *big picture*. There is a real *need to change*." Transformation produces a new conformity; people's lives are transformed so they conform to the big picture. Pastor Helms described in personal terms how this works out. "The *bigger picture* is that I need to love my wife and give her the benefit of the doubt and not be so petty about things. That's the big picture. But if there's some little thing that gets under my skin, I want to deal with that petty nuisance right now. I lose my regard for the big picture."

Pastor Gregory similarly explained why Chad happily exchanged life as an upscale restaurateur for life as a county employee overseeing thousands of meals daily for the homebound and mentally ill. "It was better than living for himself. *He had bigger things to do than feed his own appetites*." He had bigger things to do because he was in the grip of a much bigger picture of his life, a life lived in eternal relation to God.

The big picture redefines the individual's sense of self. Because the center of the person has been affected, the impact is comprehensive. To the degree that the transforming perspective touches one's faith and beliefs, values and priorities, behavior and ways of relating, change occurs in all these areas. The transformation in understanding transforms everything else.

Particularly in its early stages, growth can be seen as the individual begins testing the reliability of the new perspective. Their confidence builds incrementally. The value in what seems a tentative process is in the possibilities it opens up for further growth. Pastor Gregory spoke of early growth in Andrea, the woman who was devastated after discovering her husband's betrayal:

She came from, "I don't know anything any more. I hate myself. I can't believe I let myself be fooled that way. I wish I was dead," to "Okay, I'm really hurting a lot still, but it's more bearable. I haven't died, and I know that Jesus loves me in a way that I haven't realized in my whole life" Again, the understanding that she's an object of God's affection is the root of her healing. She is building from there, and being realistic about her new life situation. Her new perspective allows her to say, "Okay, I'm not really that attractive in this way. I can live with that. I can be pretty lonely because I live on my own now. Okay, I'm struggling financially because I have to make my own way and never thought I'd have to do that. But I'm not going to cut myself. Okay. My ex-husband sees me this way. I don't see myself that way any more."

To call these "changes" in Andrea's mindset is to say too little. These new attitudes were the result of the new vitality that Andrea experienced. They were expressions of growth. In Andrea's case this growth was especially evident because she had been at the point of self-destruction. For her growth began as a return to life.

Diffusion: "And Buds Appear on Unexpected Branches"

Some transformation is expected and deliberate since it applies directly back to the original crisis, as in the case of a troubled marriage. Transformation can also occur as

a welcome surprise. The individual becomes sensitive to issues that were not obvious before, feels the resolve to act, and then does so. As Pastor Clover put it, “Buds appear on unexpected branches.” If a transforming perspective comes with an infusion of transcendent vitality, then growth occurs as a result of the diffusion of that vitality through the whole person.

Chad not only recovered from his addictions, he embraced a position of little prestige in order to serve others. He then reconciled with his estranged daughters, and established a respectful and caring relationship with his ex-wife. He also made a commitment to serve his new church family and became a deacon.

Barbara not only gave up her addiction and adulterous relationship, she became devoted as a wife and mother. Pastor Helms said, “She sought the help of other women to learn how to better care for her children and husband. They now enjoy a family life together.” He told of how, after reading Paul’s exhortation to wives to respect their husbands, she concluded that she loved but did not respect her husband. “Just because I’m the one who works doesn’t mean I should be arranging all the family outings or social things apart from conferring with my husband.” Barbara began watching how Pastor Helms’ wife respected him even when she disagreed with him. Barbara watched, read, and acted, all because she had “more of a conviction of the big picture.”

Pastor Helms noted the phenomenon of diffused growth in Allison, a woman in his congregation who, after entering an adulterous relationship, embraced a bigger picture for her life that included the grace of God. Though she remains grieved that her husband has yet to forgive her, she lives in response to her knowledge of God’s mercy.

She is more attentive to her kids. She homeschools one of her children. She is less materialistic. She is more reliable and more thoughtful. She used to be only

concerned about herself. When she said she was going to do something, she wouldn't do it. She is more appreciative of what others do for her and her children. She tries to give back now. She used to be more of a taker. Now she is more of a giver. And she's a little more organized in her life.

The changes in Allison constitute personal, spiritual growth. The result has not been a return to life as it was before her crisis, but progression to life on a higher moral and spiritual plane. She has matured. The same may be said of Barbara, Chad, or anyone who goes through a transformative experience. As they grow, they mature.

New Commitments: For Growth's Sake

In the growth phase of deep learning, individuals seek mentors, make commitments, and accept accountability. Pastor Bird confirmed these characteristics of the growth phase with two dramatic examples. The first was Cassie, a woman who had "basically prostituted herself when she was younger to make money. She was fighting and just doing all kinds of wild stuff." A transforming perspective on Christ's love for her and the value he places on her changed the way she was living and responding to life in a tough urban setting. Cassie has determined "to save herself again for marriage. She has two kids already, but now she wants to remain celibate until she gets married. So there's some concrete behavioral stuff and a heart change that is behind that." For the sake of growth, Cassie made a costly commitment that includes celibacy and accountability.

Pastor Bird's second example was Terrance, an angry young Muslim man who converted to Christianity. After several years as a believer, he fathered a child out of wedlock. The pastor explained what happened:

One of the things he did was come to me and one of the elders. He asked if we could meet, and he confessed his sin to us. He said, "I want to make a public profession in a church service. I want to confess my sin, what I did." In this community, that's like (laughter)... Everybody shuts up. It's not a big deal at

all. Even among Christian people, it is not a big deal. But for him, he was convicted by that and made a public profession.

Terrance's decision was rooted in deep learning that transcended the norms and knowledge of his community. According to Pastor Bird, "His confession was profound. It was powerful. Some people asked, why does he need to do that? But it was a big thing for him to come and submit to discipline. We admonished him, but in a sense he was the one who admonished himself. That is just very different from the way things are around here." The strength of Terrance's commitment to live under the influence of the big picture was seen in his determination to sacrifice his privacy, acknowledge his sin, and seek discipline. He has continued to grow and currently serves as an elder in his church.

Strong Determination: To Hold On and Not Let Go

Honesty, sacrifice, and risk are descriptors that apply to all the examples of transformation that the pastors related. These commitments were grounded in people's determination to keep growing rather than lose the life they had gained or go back to what they were before. When asked what motivated Chad to grow spiritually, Pastor Gregory said, "I would say that would change from time to time. But I would say that *the biggest was for this not to go away—this change*. For this change to be real and lasting—which is why he began reading his Bible, got involved in diaconal ministry, and would stand up and give testimony." Pastor Waters spoke of a similar motivation in Tommy's life, the young man who had been in such trouble with the law. "*For Tommy to hear that God is at work and he could join him—I think that was all he needed to hear*. I think that was the key to him moving on from his conversion."

The growth principle is inherent in life and by no means limited to the physiological realm. The Christian perspective holds that in a creation in which spiritual

life is the highest order, growth is expressed first and foremost in relation to the spiritual and then extends to the physiological. Growth is not self-sustaining, however. Pastor Waters observed that spiritual growth involves “a number of moments of conversion” for individuals after they have come to Christ. These are moments when implications of the big picture become clear, bright, and compelling so that the cycle of transformational learning begins again. Genuine spiritual growth is caused by God, no less than the growth of green plants is caused by the sun. The material mirrors the spiritual and directs the soul toward God.

Summary: How Does Transformational Learning Occur?

The above analysis of the data described how the cycle of transformational learning occurs. The examination included the dynamics of deep learning inherent in each of its three components (crisis point, transforming perspective, and growth) and the bridges between them (“the journey” from crisis to transforming perspective and the “burst of life” that follows the transforming perspective and leads to growth).

The crisis point may come in a humbling trial that drains away pride and awakens the need for help beyond oneself. Alternatively, it may come as the possibility of hope to an individual in the midst of despair. Or it may come as a longing to thrive that leaves individuals dissatisfied with their lives. The common theme in these scenarios is an acute awareness of personal emptiness and a spiritual longing that cannot be met by adaptation or survival. This longing compels people toward the transforming moment.

The journey from crisis to transforming perspective was described as “a journey of desperate hope.” The crisis causes individuals to “hit the pause button” on routine ways of thinking and living. It prompts a search for meaning. For some this means “a

hunt” in which they deliberately seek some resolution to the crisis they feel. This “hunt” can occur both consciously and subconsciously. For others it is more like looking for help while flailing. Regardless, the driver is hope, and confirmations of hope sustain them through the process even when they take the form of confrontation and rebuke.

The transformational perspective produces “convictional knowing.” In a transcendent experience that is not self-generated, individuals receive the perspective as new truth. The immediate effect is to humble them. The new perspective reframes their understanding of reality. It comes with compelling authority and has revelatory impact. In response individuals submit to this new truth, and become deeply committed to it.

The phrase “burst of life” was used to describe the bridge between transforming perspective and growth. This short interval is marked by the presence of a remarkable new vitality that is highly generative. This vitality is expressed first and foremost as joy in celebration, but there is an inward component as well that was described as an inward drive and desire to grow in relation to the new perspective. As a result one’s life begins to reflect and conform to the new perspective. This is growth. Significantly, new vitality in one individual can affect others in ways that go beyond joining in the celebrant’s happiness; they may be so impacted that they also undergo transformational learning. In the Christian context, “conversion” is used to describe the transforming perspective that brings an individual to trust in Christ. Sanctification describes the effects of deep learning on the believer as the learning process is repeated many times. Similarly, “revival” may describe the impact of deep learning on others.

Growth follows when the transforming perspective serves to reshape individuals’ lives. This new “big picture” redefines their sense of self. Initially growth occurs as they

test their new understanding and gain confidence in it. As vitality diffuses through the whole person, change not only occurs at the point of the original crisis, but in other aspects of life as well. Individuals are willing to take risks, make sacrifices and become accountable because growth itself has become a new priority. As a result they mature, and the cycle of transformational learning is repeated.

RQ #3: What Role Do Ministers Play in Fostering Transformational Learning?

The pastors in this research expressed a strong desire to foster change among church members as well as frustration in not seeing more widespread growth within their congregations. Integrally linked to their sense of calling, transformation in others is a sustaining influence behind these pastors' commitment to continue in ministry. Both by virtue of conviction and experience, they regarded their own role in fostering transformation as significant, yet limited.

Transformation as a Pastoral Priority: "Not Just Transferring Information"

Pastor Foster described transformation as "the bread and butter of the church's mission and ministry." Pastor Helms explained, "What we want to do is teach the scripture, but *not just transfer information. We want to show that the intention of scripture is to change us.*"

The strength of the pastors' desire was evident in their reports of intense disappointment during periods when they see little change in others. When asked if they ever wonder whether they are really making a difference in people's lives, nearly every pastor broke out in laughter, because those moments are common. These periods where little growth is apparent can trigger crises for a pastor in which he questions his calling.

The intense desire to make a difference was also evident in the confirmation they feel when they see people go through transformational learning. Witnessing transformational learning is the most rewarding part of the ministry, the subject of celebration at the time and recollection later. Pastor Foster said that in periods when he sees little growth among his people, he reminds himself of prior growth periods:

What I do is go back to those moments where I really did see the Gospel make its impact on somebody's life or in the community. I think it's important to recapture those moments. Those moments bring a unique awareness of the presence of God at some point in somebody's life, whether it's a moment of transition, loss, crisis, joy, or whatever. I try to savor those things when they come, because that helps me to remember who I am and what I'm all about —what the purpose of my life is.

His commitment to “recapture” and “savor” moments when he saw members experience transformation confirms how significant those moments are for him.

Pastors realistically acknowledged that deep change is often the exception rather than the rule. “It's true that change can be slow going and difficult, but it is possible,” said one. “I think it's hard,” said another. “I've seen change. I've also seen lots of non-change,” said a third. Nonetheless, they regarded deep change as essential because the spiritual challenges within their congregations require it. One described the principal challenge in his church as “spiritual apathy or complacency.” A second said, “If only you could zap people with the hunger for the Word, even an incredibly low level of hunger but a consistent hunger!” Still another looked to transformation to heighten his congregation's “zeal for Christ and his church.”

Transformation as God's Work: “The Spirit Blows Where He Will”

As much as they desire to see transformation in their people, the pastors were keenly aware that they are not the architects of deep change—God is. Too many factors

are involved that are well beyond their control. The pastors regard themselves as one factor among many that God sovereignly uses in transforming an individual.

Pastor Waters said, “Very rarely do I think I am the key person in somebody’s life. I assume that there’s a chain of events, and I’m here at the time when God has broken through to them. That is the work of the Spirit. I think it is important to cultivate an awareness *that the Holy Spirit is like the wind. He blows where he will*, and stuff happens in unexpected ways. And buds appear on unexpected branches.”

Pastor Gregory made the same point when commenting on how a young Chinese woman came to Christ under his preaching even as “there are other people who are smug, and who are not seeing much growth or change.” When asked to explain it, he said, “I’m not sure, because they’re getting exactly the same thing [from his preaching ministry]. *So the Spirit blows where it will.*” Like the others, he ascribed his ministry and its results entirely to God’s providence: “Honestly, as I tell my kids, the ultimate answer to every question in the world is providence. God’s governance.” He has grown skeptical of programs for change and growth based on what “successful” churches have done. Having planted a church in a difficult location, he said, “Well, okay, praise God. But it was done in such a way that I couldn’t take credit even if I wanted to.”

According to Pastor Clover, the pivotal role of God’s providence in transformation not only explains why transformations occur, but also why they do not. Either way, God’s commitment to transform his people is still very much in play:

One thing I am learning to do is not to panic when things don’t go as I think they should. That calls for *a certain humility in realizing that I didn’t have a perfect master plan, and God has a better plan than I have*. As I think of situations where things have gone wrong and there is some level of tension or conflict, I come back to Ken Sande’s book *The Peacemaker*. God uses situations that seem to have miscarried to teach us new lessons. Because sometimes we think, this is what I

need to learn, or what this person needs to learn, or what the congregation needs to learn, when in actual fact what needs to be learned is something different. So when our plans go awry then that may be the opportunity to take stock and say, “Okay. Well, maybe there is a different lesson for us to learn here.”

After twenty years of pastoral ministry in one church, Pastor Clover has personally experienced transformational learning. When the anticipated changes don’t occur, Pastor Clover has come to see a bigger picture in which God is at work accomplishing a greater plan.

Pastors live with the tension between their desire to see transformation occur and the realization that they cannot cause it to happen. Tension as great as this can lead to crisis and failure. It can also lead to crisis and transformation when pastors truly embrace God’s sovereignty in these matters. The threat of sliding into fatalism is then replaced by a humbling acceptance that as surely as God has called them to be ministers, he will use them. But he will use them on his terms. The timing will be his, and he will determine who will be affected. Upon reflection—and repeated, prayerful reflection is required—what could be better?

Fostering Transformation: A Humbling & Courageous Call to Patience, Love & Prayer

Reaching the point of convictional knowing that transformation is God’s work, not theirs, involves deep learning for pastors. It humbles them and transforms their sense of identity. From there, the results are complex. In the language of these research findings, a diffusion of growth follows. They feel somewhat absolved of direct responsibility when change does not occur and are slower to take it personally. When asked what life lesson he would bring to seminarians for the sake of fostering change in others, Pastor Long replied, “In one sentence? It doesn’t all depend on you. If it all

depends on us, then we are going to be bitterly disappointed, and we are not going to see the kinds of change that we'd like to see."

The impact of accepting God's sovereignty serves also as an inducement to patience. Patience is reinforced by experience. As he recalled his multi-year ministry to a woman who had been sexually abused, Pastor Hollister smiled at points, even as he wept. When asked to describe what impact that experience had on him, he said:

I think one of the things that was really impressed on me is the need to come alongside people who are hurting like that. There is also the need to both hold out the invitation and claims of the Gospel, including forgiveness, but also to be willing to understand that the Spirit works in various ways. And people respond to the work of the Spirit in different ways and over varying periods of time—*so I learned just to be patient. To be patient, and to be willing to take joy in little steps of progress.* The world generally is not transformed in an instant. People's lives generally are not transformed in an instant. *God's patience is nearly infinite.* I have to be more patient, and to walk with them....

Pastor Hollister underscored that patience is more than a matter of waiting on God or on the people he ministers to. It is a matter of becoming more like God in character and demeanor, which aids him in fulfilling his role in other people's transformation.

The same growth dynamic evident in relation to patience is at work in relation to love. Pastors grow in their commitment to minister to people by loving them, because this is what God does in Christ. Pastor Hollister was especially clear as he linked the idea of love to patience.

I think the second thing, then, is to be a friend. It seems to me that one of *my roles is to imitate God in my persistence with that person.* That is to say, for me for instance, to hear Tamara say some pretty terrible things that she had done in her own hurt, sensing that maybe this was her way of pushing me away, and sticking with her, and saying "You're not going to be surprised, Tamara, when I tell you that this stuff troubles me greatly, but you're not going to push me away." *To be like God, to be Christ-like in one sense means that nothing that you do or say can finally separate you from my love.* I understand that I'm not God, but for people like Tamara and so many others, the sense is that God is totally gone. God is on vacation, or God is angry, or any number of things. I'm going to show you, in my

role as your pastor and your Christian friend, that although you may think God has gone on a holiday, *I'm going to be right here as God's representative.*

Pastor Hollister recognized that as a minister, he was not only called to wait for God to act, or even to follow God in the way he acts, but to represent God to the person he is ministering to.

Just as deep knowledge of God's sovereignty in transformation produces the fruits of humility, patience and love, Pastor Hollister spoke God's sovereignty also leading to prayer. The nine pastors together named prayer thirty-four times as part of their role. They also said prayer was part of their congregations' role in the transformation of others.

I think my chief role is intercessor. I have always believed very strongly that only the Spirit can finally change us. It seems, then, that my role is to intercede in places where Tamara and others cannot intercede for themselves, to lay them before the throne of God, as much as I am able—in short, to pray for them.

Pastor Hollister described his role in terms that speak of true intercession, doing for others in partnership with God what often they cannot do for themselves. He provided a vivid example of this in his ministry to Tamara. After growing up in a home where she was horrifically abused by her two brothers, could Tamara forgive them? The progression of her story is now described, because it provides a remarkably clear portrait of how a pastor's ministry works in conjunction with the transcendent work of God's Spirit in bringing an individual to a new perspective and growth.

Fostering Transformation: Case Study of Pastor Hollister's Ministry to Tamara

Tamara's inner crisis was the irresolvable tension between seeing her brothers as perpetrators and Jesus' call to forgive. "Part of her inward struggle was that she knew that God was calling her all along to forgive these people, but she just wasn't able to do it."

Pastor Hollister met with Tamara over the course of two years with this premise: “We’re going to have to focus on what I know, which is God’s presence in this.”

Because of “her deep hurt and anger,” Tamara viewed Jesus’ hard teachings on forgiveness “as sort of optional,” because she had been “treated horrendously.”

Nonetheless, Pastor Hollister focused on forgiveness. It served both to confirm her crisis and encourage her in her journey. As he did so, he saw how Tamara became persuaded “that God, the hound of heaven, was chasing her heart.” Pastor Hollister explained how this happened:

She had some dreams about it in which she began to see most vividly that typical pattern of abuse, that most abusers have been abused themselves. I think that her brothers’ plight just continued to dog her—their pain, their struggles.... I think that through dreams, through our visits together, and through our talking together about those brothers and God’s place in that situation, that she came to a very gradual realization that went beyond forgiveness in general to the need for her to forgive, too.

The new realization she received about her brothers, and about the bigger picture of what had taken place in their lives, produced in her what Pastor Hollister called “a Christian empathy.”

She came to recognize that her tormentors had been tormented themselves. There was no excuse on earth for what they had done to her, but there were some things that helped her begin to understand their hurt and their anger.

At the same time she also was helped in her journey by reading devotional literature, because it seemed that God was speaking to her through those words:

In her devotions, she would pick up on things about the need to forgive, and they would ring a significant bell in her life. It was as if God kept nudging her, tugging her—whatever word you want to use. So I think it really was the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit and her understanding of it that really moved her from empathy to, “I have to do this. I don’t really have any choice.”

So what was the transforming perspective that Tamara received? Pastor Hollister explained what happened in her heart over time:

Not only did her understanding of her brothers and her perception of them change, but I also think her understanding of the scriptures changed. She began to more fully internalize the expectations— frankly the demands—that scripture placed on her as a Christian.

Tamara's new perspective ultimately strengthened her to forgive her brothers.

Pastor Hollister described what happened:

I think she forgave the brother who was broken first. They were at some family function and both ended up in the kitchen. She basically told me that she told him, "I don't want to talk about this at all. But it's okay."

The impact of that brief exchange was huge. Tamara told Pastor Hollister that it "felt like a thirty year weight had been lifted off her shoulders. Literally, this crushing, crushing weight had been picked up off her shoulders." When asked what he observed, the pastor said, "It has been a while, but as I remember, she even walked straighter. She stood straighter. Her face will always be lined by her ghastly experiences, but her face lit." Tamara experienced vitality she had not previously known in her entire life. Her encounter with her brother served to complete the transforming realization that changed her life. In addition to seeing her brothers differently and the scriptures in a new way, she realized how truly free she could be. The vitality she experienced was celebrative and would lead to much growth in her life.

This growth was initially evident when she approached her second brother. He had been especially cruel and remained "calloused." Nonetheless, she told her pastor, "I felt like I had finally done something that I needed to do." She went on to reestablish relationships with her relatives. Tamara's experience also "freed her to be more present to her husband and to her children, who had all been scarred by this." In the process she

came forward to confess her involvement in an adulterous relationship. Pastor Hollister explained the interrelationship of these factors:

So the freedom that came with her being able to forgive her brothers, I think, then freed her to come face-to-face with her own guilt in this adulterous relationship. It freed her to come face-to-face with her own inability to relate to her children at some basic level. *So her transformation rolled out in just a renewed godliness and a renewed obedience.* She came to terms with the fact that her brothers had abused her, but she had also been unfaithful and was in need of God's forgiveness and the forgiveness of her husband.

Growth is wonderfully diffused in the wake of deep transformation. When it came to dealing with Tamara's adultery, Pastor Hollister continued to minister to her.

I was there when she told the other person that the relationship had to end. She couldn't do it face to face. She did it over the phone. I was also there when she told her husband. His response was, "Tamara, I've known this for a long time."

Pastor Hollister concluded his account by saying, "That was probably the most radical transformation I've ever seen in my own personal ministry."

Tamara's brief case study shows the role that a pastor played in fostering the transformation of another individual through the entire cycle of deep learning: initial crisis, journey, transforming perspective, the infusion of new vitality, and finally, growth. It was a ministry of humility, patience, love, and prayer. It included confrontation and encouragement around the truths of scripture. Yet Pastor Hollister was quick to say, "I think it really was the Word of God through the work of the Holy Spirit and her understanding of it that really moved her." Pastor Hollister's ministry to Tamara embodies the calling, the reward, the suffering, and the glory of faithful pastoral ministry.

Fostering Transformation: A Matter of Costly Faithfulness

According to the pastors, the qualification most needed to foster transformation is faithfulness over time. Pastor Gregory explained, "I tell my people, 'You need to *see*

yourself as a farmer. God causes the growth, but what you can do is to provide the environment that is most conducive to growth.” When asked about the role he had played in Chad’s remarkable transformation, he replied, “Basically, *I showed up*. I cared for him as a human being made in God’s image. And I tried to declare God’s Word as faithfully as I could.” When asked about his role in transforming others, Pastor Clover similarly remarked, “*Just being there* is one element.” Pastor Simmons’ comments summed up the sense of all the pastors:

The bedrock is always, “Am I being completely faithful to Jesus and what he has called me to?” If I can answer that with a yes, then it doesn’t matter what I see happening around me. I know that he’s at work even though I can’t always see what he is doing. If I go through the checklist and say, “I’m doing everything that Jesus has called me to, and yet, it’s just not happening with this person or this group,” I say, “Well, I’m not the first one.” [Then he laughed.] I think of Jeremiah, and how people responded to him. Yet that was part of God’s call, and God was still at work there.

There is no passivity in showing up, just being there, or faithfulness. Courage is required to preach the truth of scripture before a congregation struggling with its brokenness. Courage is even more necessary to confront people personally. Yet these are means God uses to bring people to a crisis point. Courage is needed because people can resist and resent the confronter in response. What softens one person may harden another. Pastor Simmons seemed surprised after being commended for his courage in repeatedly confronting David, the aspiring oral surgeon, in the midst of his defiance.

I see it as an issue of faithfulness. It is first faithfulness to Jesus because that is what he calls us to do. It is faithfulness to a sheep, too. That’s all it is. It isn’t anything more than that.

But that kind of faithfulness is costly.

When asked what he would tell seminarians they must know if God is going to use them to change the lives of others, Pastor Gregory responded that he had actually provided that instruction:

I told them, "You need to prepare yourself for something that is surprising, which is that part of what you are supposed to do, part of your calling, is to confront people. It's that prophetic part of our ministry. It's telling someone, 'I love you too much not to get in your face and tell you to stop sleeping with someone else's wife.' It's standing in the pulpit and coming to a point where you have to wonder, *"If I am really going to be faithful to this text, are they going to run me out of town on a rail or not?"* There's a call for continual repentance, continually turning from sin, continually turning to Christ. There's so much of our job that has to do with that. I told them, "Frankly, *if I'd known* how much confrontation I would have to do, *I don't know if I'd have had the guts* to sign up."

For pastors, confrontation involves multiple conflicts: Conflict or potential conflict with others, and conflicts within oneself. As Pastor Gregory underscored, the inner conflict may be between the duty to tell the truth and the desire to preserve one's livelihood. Conflict also pits the desire for an ongoing pastoral relationship against the risk of losing it for the sake of the truth. Pastor Gregory is faithful because he keenly feels a greater desire to love:

But then, you really have to give a rip about these people. That means you have to really experience their pain. And, what are you going to do with your own fallenness, your own pain? How are you going to deal with that? You have to find resources within yourself. If you don't, you are so dead.

Inner conflict means crisis, and just like for everyone else, crisis can lead to avoidance or personal transformation for pastors too. For a time, the pastor may just gut it out. That is not a strategy for long-term survival. The transforming perspective that comes in the midst of crises concerning pastoral faithfulness centers on the far greater faithfulness of God to achieve his purposes for his Word, to deliver his servants, and to work in his children. But those realities are only so many words until assurance comes.

When assurance does come, pastors are freed to shed more of their insecurity and to enjoy a greater freedom to love, even when that love requires confrontation.

Faithfulness in fostering transformation comes with a price that can be described as pain. Pastors often feel pain when they see small results in the midst of their best efforts, but greater pain may come as they become deeply involved in the suffering of others as they steady them, help them journey to the point where they receive the new insight needed, and then help them grow. During the interviews for this research, pastors repeatedly paused to blink away tears. Several freely spoke of personal crises in ministry. Pastor Gregory related how, after conferring with an elder about the troubled people in his church, the physician responded,

Can I get up now, so I can go to my office, put on my lab coat, [and] go into the exam room, so I can tell people they are going to die from a terminal illness? Frankly, that's so much easier than what we're dealing with right now.

Pastor Gregory explained, "The lab coat is symbol of, 'I don't sit and weep with those who weep.' The difference is with people in your church, you have to love them."

The Necessity of Fostering Transformation in Yourself

When asked what he would tell seminarians they must know if God is going to use them to change others, Pastor Bird summed up his message as, "There's got to be a mission that fuels the mission."

Well I think that *you the pastor are going to have to change*. There's going to be *change that God brings about in you*. A lot of times that comes through suffering or hard things. *There's got to be a mission that fuels the mission*. We were talking about this a few weeks ago, where Paul says in Philippians 3, "Whatever was to my profit, I consider to my loss.... Now I want to know Christ." *That's got to be the mission that fuels the mission*. Because what happens is you judge a lot of situations by the results. You know that verse, "Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power." Well, you're going to see that that needs to be true. And get ready for a ride.

Pastor Bird underscored the need for pastors to foster in themselves the change they seek to foster in others, because the immediate priority of every Christian is “to know Christ.” When that priority is maintained, not only are pastors sustained in ministry, they are better able to foster transformation in others.

Pastor Long expressed a similar conviction in relation to sharing to the Gospel:

We need to be experiencing God’s grace personally and experientially in our own lives... We need to experience God’s grace afresh, to experience the Gospel as good news – *to the extent the Gospel is changing us, others should be able to see that*, and it will give us more enthusiasm in sharing it with others.

When asked the first principle he would instill in seminarians for the Lord to use them in changing others, Pastor Foster responded:

Well, one thing I would tell them, and this is important—ministry is not simply an intellectual exercise. These are the things of the Spirit. I would say, “You’ve really got to invest whatever it is that you need to invest, not to excel in your Greek and Hebrew classes, but to understand yourself as a spiritual person. *Because the more you can do that, the more you can help somebody else do that.* You’ve got to get comfortable with Jesus and where you are and comfortable with the fact that people are going to be in all kinds of different places on the faith journey. You’ve got to figure out how to meet them wherever they are in that journey. And then, lead them gently, lovingly to where they can be. So, it’s not about how well you know the liturgy, or how well you can chant. It’s not even about how well you know the scriptures. If you look into the Gospels, that’s the way Jesus did it. *He said, “Follow me,” not “Read my book.”* So that would be on the top of my list.

Pastor Foster spoke to more than the need for spiritual authenticity in order to be credible.

He also addressed the crucial role pastors play in sharing their personal transformation with others. What’s more, pastors must understand how transformation occurs in their own lives if they are to be effective in assessing where others are in the deep transformation learning cycle and how to come alongside them for the sake of true discipleship.

Fostering Transformation by Fostering a Transformational Congregation

As significant as their role of “coming alongside” others is, all the pastors in this research underscored the necessity of their entire congregations sharing in this same role. The ministers felt deeply responsible to make their congregants aware of this need and to equip them in order to meet it. They regard their equipping function as an essential component of their role in fostering transformation. The professional literature on transformational learning stresses the role of community in support of individuals. Yet the writing is largely theoretical because the social context most accessible to educators is the classroom. Associations with students are limited to short class periods over a relatively brief span of weeks or months. The ministers in this research very practically embraced the idea of their congregations as engines of transformation. They returned to this theme of the transformational community repeatedly in almost every line of questioning.

Pastor Bird related a number of stories in which the change in people was remarkable. Asked how Terrance was so remarkably transformed from an angry Muslim with a felony record to an elder in his church, Pastor Bird credited Terrance with the naming the key that turned his life around. He called it “the teabag effect.”

What he describes is how he was impacted through *the teabag effect* of being around Christians and seeing their lives. Also, they were patient with him. He’d have a lot of questions or a lot of things that he would say—“I don’t believe this; I don’t believe that.” But when he actually looked into the text and saw things for himself, he said to himself, “Wow, I didn’t know....” His teachers were patient and persistent with him, and their behavior matched what they were telling him. So they were teaching him the Word, plus he was watching their lives. Those things matched up.

Terrance had always valued community and he cared about what others thought of him. The difference was that he had a new community with “different mentors.” The

“teabag effect” is the impact of seeing how mature believers live life and deal with adversity. As Pastor Bird put it, “So maybe you’re taught something, but you also see it lived out in somebody’s life.” This is modeling, which Pastor Helms also embraced as essential for spiritual growth.

People realize they have to deal with their problems and look at life according to scripture. But it’s abstract often times. The scripture is often abstract, but when they see other people living it out.... For example, in our church we talk a lot about family worship. You can talk about that forever, but when others see a family where the kids are polite, joyful, respectful and attentive, some of them will say, “I need to do that.” They’ll watch somebody else in the church and say, “How do you do that?”

Pastor Foster joined Pastor Helms and others in underscoring the remarkable impact that a congregation can have on someone:

You ask anybody, “Can you list three or four people who had a real influence in your life?” Usually they are individuals who had something that the other person wanted. I’m talking about character, some evidence of God in their life.

If this role rested solely with the pastor, churches could not thrive. What pastors can do is connect individuals with others whose personal example will deeply influence them. Pastor Waters also confirmed the essential role of the congregation as a community:

Community is huge. None of us here has all the answers, and it is not my job to provide the answers for anyone who comes to me. But if a member has invested in relationships, *there are people to whom God will give the right word at the right moment; sometimes that word comes from likely sources and sometimes and sometimes from unlikely sources.* But someone can only give that needed word if the other person has shared so that people know your vulnerability and your need.

Pastor Simmons described the vital congregation as the ideal “context” in which people experience deep learning. Though there is no “magic pill” to cause transformation, the congregation has a very large influence.

I think in ministry especially, we are always looking for that *magic pill*, that switch to throw, to suddenly bring someone to enlightenment. I don't believe that's within our power. What we are responsible for, because we are shepherds, is to shepherd people, to *lead them to a place* where God is certainly present and where they can experience God's grace. We can lead them to a place where we are modeling for them in our own life, and speaking to them with our words. We are placing around them within the context needed to show them the mercies of God, to show them what God has called them to from the beginning. *That's the beauty of the body of Christ*; we help bring people to the right place.

Pastor Clover called the congregation "a catalyst for change." He added that fostering a transformational culture within the congregation "brings about a very rich kind of change because it also strengthens the body; the body sees it has a role in ministering to new people who are coming in or to people who are needy."

The pastors provided multiple examples of how people turned to others to support them through the stages of transformational learning. People commonly seek out others who have experienced the crisis that they are presently in. Pastor Foster underscored that pastors foster individual transformation by linking their own ministry to the broader ministry of the church:

What we are responsible to do is shepherd them to the right places when God is bringing them through those trials. At the same time, *we place people around them in the pasture who are able to speak about and show what life in Christ is like*—whether it is by testimony or by their personal involvement in that community. Then those watching may say, "I want what they have," whether it pertains to marriage, or "I want kids like that," or "I want peace like that," or "I want to care like that." Those things aren't really the goal. The goal is to be like Jesus. But those are the things that can pull someone toward Jesus.

When they recognize that God's plan revolves around his glory rather than their gifts or power, pastors serve the process of transformation rather than presume to lead it. They serve the process by developing their congregations into places that are conducive to transformation and growth.

Fostering Transformation as a Minister before the Congregation

Pastor Foster, reflecting his liturgical tradition, characterized the minister's role as both priestly and pastoral, where the priestly role refers to the official public ministry (e.g. worship, preaching, and sacraments), and the pastoral role refers to ministries that are personal and informal. Pastor Gregory used analogous terminology, subdividing the work of the pastor into "ministerial and declarative" spheres. No one regarded the division as rigid. Previous analysis in this paper has already shown, as Pastor Clover put it, that pastors "need to not only believe the message they are preaching, they need to model it." Pastor Waters underscored modeling as the major life lesson that he would pass on to seminarians:

Is the life that I am inviting people to experience in Christ the life that I am currently living? That's been the blessing and the bane of my existence [he laughed]. I think as a young pastor, that's where I failed miserably. I thought it was about preaching and teaching. And of course I heard all the warnings, but I really thought the guys who were emphasizing the other stuff were guys who were called to be pastors. I believed I was really called to be a proclaimer, that my giftedness was different than theirs. I just think it was a completely inadequate understanding of pastoral ministry. If you're going to be a pastor, you have to love people, and be with people, and invite them to share the life with God that you have come to experience.

As powerful a statement as Pastor Waters and others made about the priority of living a transformed life, they remain deeply devoted to preaching and the official aspects of their ministry. The ministries of worship, the sacraments, and the Word are at the center of the congregation as a transformational community. Worship is the transcendent context where the community meets with God and God meets with them. The sacraments and the Word are essential to worship. The Spirit works through these elements to draw people to Christ, and transformational learning describes how the Spirit does this. On Sunday morning, the congregants not only represent the entire spiritual spectrum from

unbelief to mature, joyful faith; they fall out along all the phases of transformational learning, irrespective of spiritual maturity. The worship of the church together is the preeminent setting in which people are made to feel and acknowledge their spiritual crisis, journey forward in hope, come to a transforming perspective, celebrate the grace of new life in sacrament and testimony, and grow in their relationship with God.

The pastors were particularly aware of the transformational nature of worship in relation to preaching. Pastor Helms explained his purpose in putting sermons together. “I want to teach the scripture, but not just transfer information; I want to show the intention of scripture is to change us. So I show them the scripture and then how it applies to our lives. And that has *a lot of leverage over the heart of a person*.” Pastor Helms contrasted this approach with what he called “therapeutic” preaching that provides practical advice on important matters such as marriage, yet neglects scripture as authoritative revelation.

Remarkably, those pastors who spoke about the purpose of preaching used the terminology of transforming perspectives to do so. Pastor Waters spoke of helping people *interpret their life experiences* as a principle objective of his preaching. Pastor Foster said, “I think that part of our job in ministry is to *reframe the life experience* around God.” In counseling but especially in preaching, Pastor Clover spoke of his role as helping people *reinterpret reality* in light of scripture. He appealed to the example of Jesus’ use of parables “to represent reality in ways that cause people to see things they didn’t see before, and to understand things they did not understand before.” He pointed out that Jesus relied on imagery and imagination, not just cognition, to convey truth. He also provided multiple examples from his preaching in which he helped his people relate to characters in scripture, to see in those stories the challenges of their own lives, and to

think about how God graciously deals with people. Pastor Hollister characterized the challenge of preaching as helping his people translate life through the scriptural rubric of crisis resulting from our fallenness followed by resolution through the grace found in Christ. Pastor Gregory spoke of helping people *reconceptualize* their experiences by comparing and contrasting the scriptures with their interpretations of their lives.

Though the pastors readily admitted they do not always see transformation as a result of their preaching, they ascribed to themselves a transformational role in preaching. Their conviction about their role translates practically into their commitment to bring the perspective of scripture to bear on understanding reality and human experience.

Summary: What Role Do Ministers Play in Fostering Transformational Learning?

Pastors long to see deep change in their congregations. They view their role in fostering transformation as limited, yet integral to their calling. They are deeply committed to facilitating transformation and hold that it is essential for their churches. From beginning to end, transformation is the work of the sovereign God who works by his Word and Spirit. Pastors are humbled by this conviction (which is confirmed by experience), so that they regard themselves as being called to patience, love and prayer.

As the case study of Pastor Hollister's ministry to Tamara showed, pastors can play a role in fostering transformation through every phase of the learning process: from crisis, through the journey leading to a transforming perspective, through the experience of fresh vitality, and finally, to growth. The challenge for the pastor is to "show up" and pay the costs of faithfulness as seen in the risks of confrontation and the willingness to enter into the suffering of others.

Pastors' perseverance as well their effectiveness rests on fostering transformation in themselves. This is the "mission that fuels the mission," and it revolves around knowing Christ. Their own transformation not only makes them credible, but capable as they care for others.

In addition the pastors' role in fostering transformation is expressed in equipping and networking their congregations to "come alongside" one another and those new to the church. The result is "the teabag effect" in which members deeply influence each other by fostering mutual transformation through mentoring and modeling. The congregation is the primary "catalyst for change" at the pastor's disposal.

The minister's role in fostering transformation extends to the public and official side of ministry as well as to the private and pastoral side. Worship is the transcendent context where the church meets with God and God meets with his people. The entire cycle of transformation is fostered in this experience through the work of the Holy Spirit. Especially in preaching, pastors challenge their congregations to embrace the perspective that scripture conveys of reality. Pastors "reframe" and "reinterpret" life experience in light of the revelation God has given of himself and the world. In preaching this reframing involves the use of imagination; in worship, it involves the use of symbols.

Recognizing that God's plan revolves around his glory rather than their gifts or power, pastors serve the process of transformation rather than presume to lead it. This recognition involves both a humbling and exhilarating realization that God is using them.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary and Findings

The purpose of this study was to describe pastors' understanding of how transformative learning occurs among adults in their ministries. The study was motivated by a series of realizations: First, that transformative learning theory has extended the knowledge of how people change at a deep level; Second, that deep transformation is the kind of change pastors feel called to foster in their ministries; Third, that very few pastors are familiar with transformative learning theory; Fourth, in order to bring the beneficial insights of transformative learning theory to pastors, it is necessary to understand how they perceive deep learning to occur within their ministries.

Pastors are not theoreticians of change but practitioners. Their insights into how deep learning occurs are invaluable. When it comes to their congregations, they are the subject matter experts. By understanding their knowledge and perspectives on deep learning as well as the language they use to describe it, colleagues and mentors can partner with pastors to thoroughly integrate the beneficial insights of transformational learning theory into the understanding and practice of ministry. Colleagues and mentors can serve pastors in their ministry goals.

For this integrative chapter of the dissertation, both the information gathered through the three literature searches and the analysis of interviews with ministers are regarded as data. Therefore, a summary of findings from the literature searches is provided first. The three areas of focus were transformational learning theories as

developed by Jack Mezirow and James E. Loder, a biblical case study in transformational learning from the life of the apostle Peter, and studies that extend transformational learning theory into ministerial settings.

Next follows a summary of findings from the analysis of interviews with the pastors. These interviews were designed to answer three primary research questions:

1. What is transformational learning?
2. How does transformational learning occur?
3. What role do ministers play in fostering transformational learning?

The two summaries are followed by a discussion of findings within a framework of recommendations to integrate transformational learning principles into the understanding and practice of ministry. The outline dovetails with pastors' prior knowledge, desires, and efforts to foster deep change through ministry. The recommendations call for encouragement and reinforcement as well as augmentation and enhancement. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and a question to ponder.

Summary of Literature Searches

First Literature Area: Transformative Learning Theory

Transformative learning theory seeks to understand how adults learn on a deep level. From the field of education, Jack Mezirow is the originator and principal architect of the theory. Transformative learning theory focuses on the process of learning rather than on the content. By assigning primary significance to the process, the theory recalls the high regard for learning present in antiquity, and embraced by Christian thinkers ever since—the idea that learning is a sacred act and work of God in the individual.

The theory holds that adults bring to their life experiences a perspective shaped by knowledge accumulated over a lifetime. Their perspective includes their worldview, beliefs, and values, as well as their views of themselves and others. All of these things form their frame of reference. With this frame of reference they understand and interpret both their subjective and objective experiences.

When an experience occurs that their perspective cannot explain, they are left with a disorienting dilemma. They live with a distressing contradiction between their most basic view of reality and their experience. Their core assumptions are inadequate. In some respect they are wrong. Self-examination and self-reflection follow. So does reflection on their assumptions and life circumstances. Discourse with other people is essential to this process so that their perspectives also are considered. This process leads to a truer and better understanding of reality. This understanding becomes their new perspective, and individuals make the commitments necessary to change accordingly. These commitments include planning, acquiring new skills, testing new roles and relationships, building competence and confidence, and living a more functional, integrated life. As a result, individuals are better adapted to their circumstances and achieve a fuller expression of their human potential.

Mezirow originally proposed that transformative learning consists of ten phases. He has since endorsed other formulations that are simpler and less rationalistic. Patricia Cranton has popularized the theory by writing about four facets of transformation, which she describes as reacting to a disorienting event, critical reflection and self-reflection, discourse, and a revision of habits of mind. By habits of mind, she means the ways individuals interpret reality and make meaning from their experiences.

Mezirow describes transformative learning theory as “a theory in progress,” and welcomes modifications to improve it. Principal among these modifications is the need for a supportive community to provide individuals with security, encouragement, and freedom to raise awkward questions and be honest with themselves and others. Democratic values are essential in this community so that due consideration is given to many perspectives. For this social context to develop, the community’s leaders (e.g. teachers) must model transformational learning in their own lives and restrain the impulse to use power to inhibit or control others.

Transformative learning theory assumes that individuals acquire knowledge by constructing it. The theory is grounded in the assumption that “there are no fixed truths or totally definitive knowledge.” In this respect Mezirow’s theory is relativistic.

From the field of practical theology, James E. Loder developed another transformational learning theory described as “convictional knowing.” His theory centers on the notion of “the transforming moment,” in which individuals feel themselves to have received a new insight or perspective that leads to profound personal change. The individual is regarded as the recipient rather than the source of insight. Loder sought to integrate findings from the human sciences and theology to develop a theoretical framework for recognizing and describing authentic experiences with God. The core concept in Loder’s theory is “transformation.” Transformation is a recognized and accepted concept in all the human sciences because all things are the result of “the creative and loving activity of God.”⁴³⁶ Transformation is integral to God’s design and purposes for his creation.

⁴³⁶ Loder, *The Transforming Moment: Understanding Convictional Experiences*, 38.

Just as Mezirow's theory describes transformative learning in terms of ten phases or four facets, Loder described "the logic" or "grammar" of transformation in terms of five steps: an internal conflict, an interlude for scanning, a constructive act of the imagination, the release of energy, and interpretation. The first two steps are virtually indistinguishable from the disorienting dilemma and reflection phases in Cranton's formulation. Loder includes the need for dialogue under scanning. He also writes of the importance of social support. Loder's theory is distinguished in its attempt to pinpoint the inner dynamic that occurs as an individual embraces a new perspective and the release of energy that immediately follows. Mezirow's attention is focused more on those actions leading to and following from a "perspective transformation." The fifth step in Loder's grammar, interpretation, extends to responsible action that includes individuals' reinterpretation of their past and future.

Loder exceeds Mezirow in his understanding of transformational learning in relation to the Spirit of God. Mezirow's assumptions will not allow him to acknowledge the Spirit's role in transformational learning. God created humankind in such a way that all learning comes as a gift from him. As a result of sin and death, human beings have become ego-centered. The grammar of transformation still functions, but it easily breaks down under the weight of ego-centeredness. Insight and perspective are limited to the self and the "lived-in world." Referring to the threat of annihilation and consequences of mortality as "the void," Loder cast the void as the barrier to further knowledge. People evade and deny it wherever it is expressed in their experience. The void hems them in, and their knowledge cannot penetrate beyond it.

God's Spirit works redemptively to bring about "the transformation of transformation," by which he restores the learning process to its original purpose. Using the grammar of transformation, God engages individuals in deep learning that brings them to "convictional knowing." They live with knowledge of the three dimensions of human existence: the self, the lived-in world, and the void. Through the work of the Spirit, they acquire knowledge of the *fourth dimension*. This dimension is called "the Holy" and refers to God in his otherness. As a result they see their origin and destiny in God. Knowing God becomes the goal of all learning, regardless of the discipline. Transformational learning led by the Spirit describes the experience of Christian conversion, but is not limited to conversion; it also describes the process of sanctification.

The result of convictional experiences through the Spirit is new vitality that enables individuals not merely to adapt or survive on this side of the void, but to thrive and flourish as God's children in spite of the void. The Spirit nullifies the void for them. Individuals live in celebration of their freedom from ego-centeredness and deliverance from death through their reunion with God in Christ. Flourishing has always been God's purpose for people in their learning. Through the Spirit, learning once again serves the Creator with the result that individuals are permanently transformed.

Although Loder evidenced an extensive knowledge of theology in developing his theory, he referred infrequently to scripture. Loder noted this deficiency and encouraged others to explore scripture in relation to transformational learning.

Second Literature Area: A Biblical Case Study of Peter

An exegetical study of scripture relative to transformational learning theory comprised the second literature area for this dissertation. The life of the Apostle Peter

was studied in relation to Jesus as a case study in transformational learning. The approach was grounded in an understanding that the cultural mandate God gave to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1 was also a learning commission as evidenced in Genesis 2. God fostered profound learning in Adam as the first man named all of the other creatures. This event is the precedent for learning throughout scripture.

In the New Testament, Jesus was both the master learner and the master teacher. Before his death and resurrection, he called people to be his disciples (learners). After rising from the dead, he commissioned his disciples to “go and make disciples.” As revealed in Jesus, learning is God’s means to the end of deep knowing that transforms and perfects. The learning process Jesus intended for his disciples continues in the church under the name sanctification. Paul framed sanctification as a learning challenge in Romans 12:2: “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Apart from Jesus, Peter is the most well-developed character in the Gospels. His life unfolds before the reader as the principal disciple. The heart of many scenes is the dialogue between Jesus and Peter. The relationship between them is characterized by deep devotion and growing tension, particularly from the point when Jesus renames the disciple Peter to Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus outside the house of the chief priest. The tension results from the disorienting dilemmas that Jesus provokes in Peter and Peter’s sometimes tumultuous resistance.

Two dilemmas in particular stand out. The first revolves around the question of Jesus’ identity as the Messiah. The subsequent dilemma revolves around Jesus’ role as

the Messiah. The passages where the two men are engaged, studied in sequential order, reveal the learning process that Jesus subjected Peter to. Peter's life experiences recorded in the Gospels and Acts are learning experiences. Whether instigated directly by Jesus or through the Holy Spirit, these incidents are discipling events.

Jesus often says or does something that contradicts Peter's fundamental understanding of Jesus, Peter himself, or the world as he knows it. For Jesus and the things he speaks of are not of the world, but of the kingdom of God. The resulting inner conflict leaves Peter disoriented, trying to make sense of his experience of Jesus. In the process he questions Jesus further; he talks with the other disciples. He protests, objects, and even rebukes Jesus. In the end, Peter comes to a new realization about Jesus that Jesus at one point characterized as coming from the Father rather than from flesh and blood. In this way Peter learns that Jesus is the Christ, and that Jesus must suffer, die, and rise again.

The events themselves often trigger or build on the dilemmas that Peter feels. He is left to find the meaning of what he has witnessed. Occasionally Peter comes to a new realization in the same passage as the triggering event, as in Luke 5:1-11. More often the learning process is extended across time and embedded through a succession of passages. Peter's confession of Jesus as the Christ at Caesarea Philippi is a case in point. This incident was the culmination of a series of experiences with Jesus that left Peter wondering who Jesus is. These episodes included two particular encounters between Jesus and his disciples on the Sea of Galilee: when Jesus stilled the storm in Matthew 8 and subsequently walked on water in Matthew 14. The disciples' understanding of who

Jesus is shows marked progression as they go from wondering, “What kind of man is this?” to worshipping him and saying, “Truly, you are the Son of God.”⁴³⁷

After Peter’s confession of him as the Christ, Jesus shifted their attention from his identity to his mission of suffering, dying, and rising again. Uncertainty and wondering turns to resistance and antagonism in Peter. In return he faced Jesus’ fierce rebukes as “Satan” and a “stumbling block.” Jesus names and exposes the hidden desire for personal glory that makes it impossible for the disciples to embrace the necessity of his suffering. He brings his disciples to the Mount of Transfiguration where Peter hears the Father’s admonition to “listen” to Jesus, even as Jesus is being attended to by Moses and Elijah.

As Jesus draws nearer to Jerusalem, he intensifies his private ministry to his disciples. He challenges their worldview with the contradictory demands of the kingdom of God in relation to forgiveness, divorce, and finances. He is demanding the same selflessness from them that he personally embraces to accomplish his messianic mission. In doing so, Jesus provokes the dilemmas that will lead his disciples to learn the necessity of radical obedience.

The apex of Jesus’ mission is going to the cross; it is also the apex of his discipling ministry. During the last Supper Jesus continues to disciple the Twelve by symbol and word as the expression of his love for them. This discipleship includes his warning of Peter’s threefold denial after Peter protests his willingness to die for Jesus, along with Jesus’ assurance that his prayers will lead to Peter’s turning back. Finally Peter’s failure to risk suffering for Jesus in the midst of Jesus’ faithfulness to suffer for him destroys Peter’s ego-centered and misplaced confidence. Afterwards, Peter’s

⁴³⁷ Matthew 8:27, 14:33.

confusion and resistance give way to the deepest possible knowledge and adoration of Jesus.

The evangelists, particularly Luke, confirm that in the period from Jesus' resurrection to his ascension, his priority was to continue his discipling ministry. The resurrection was not self-interpreting; learning was required. Jesus brought that learning to pass for his disciples as he expounded Old Testament scripture and taught the kingdom of God. In John 21, the one account of a conversation of any length between Jesus and a disciple after the resurrection, Jesus engages Peter in profound learning that restores him. The grammar of transformation is evident throughout the encounter. The impact of his transformation continued to reverberate in Peter decades later as he wrote his first recorded epistle. The enduring impact of the Transfiguration is seen in both epistles attributed to Peter.

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is an experience of celebrative joy for the disciples. For Peter and the others, it is another step in the learning process. As a result they are able to put into practice the new truth that was transforming them.

The entire history recorded in the Gospels and Acts corresponds to Loder's five stages of transformational learning. From Jesus' baptism to his crucifixion, he subjects his disciples continuously to "inner conflict," frequently challenging and contradicting their view of the Messiah, the world, and themselves. This ongoing confusion leads to their "scanning" for some resolution to the contradictions they felt, but their strategies repeatedly fail. "Transforming moments," the third stage of the learning process, are comparatively few in the Gospels. The period from Jesus' crucifixion to his ascension can be characterized as the principal period of transformation when the disciples undergo

the profound changes in perspective that Jesus had prepared them for. The disciples' "convictional knowing" lay in the realization that by suffering crucifixion, Jesus fulfilled the prophetic hope and accomplished his messianic mission. In raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicated him.

The last two stages in Loder's learning process are embedded in the book of Acts. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost corresponds to Loder's fourth stage, the "release of energy" that follows from convictional knowing. The last stage, interpretation, then unfolds as the disciples work out the implications of their new commitment and seek to influence the world around them. This correspondence exists because the entire revelation of Jesus was fundamentally an extended learning event that centered on the necessity of his messianic suffering, death, and resurrection. The revelation involved multiple experiences of convictional knowing.

The history of the early church in Acts may be aptly described as a history of transformative learning designed by God to create a people for himself. Multiple examples are recorded, beginning with the church's determination to proclaim Christ in spite of persecution. Most significant of all is Peter's learning experience with Cornelius, which leads to the inclusion of Gentile believers in the church on equal footing with Jewish believers. The calling of Cornelius into God's people is the most extensive and detailed account of an event that centered on Peter. From first to last it is recorded in terms of transformational learning.

The greatest legacy of Peter's learning relates to the formulation of the Gospel. The disciple who so resisted the necessity of Jesus suffering, death, and resurrection became the first to understand the death of Jesus as an atoning sacrifice for sins and to

ground this truth plainly in the prophets. From his second recorded sermon, Peter proclaimed Jesus as Isaiah's Servant of the Lord who suffered for sin and whom God glorified. Peter made what he had learned the foundation of the church's faith and message. In so doing, he fulfilled Jesus' promise; Peter was the Rock on whom Jesus built his church.

Third Literature Area: Transformative Learning Theory in Ministry Settings

The third literature area for this dissertation focused on research to extend transformative learning into the ecclesial setting of pastoral ministry. An extensive literature search and review yielded little direct research. Therefore, the reviewed literature was broadened to include research on transformative learning in faith-based contexts (fourteen studies), and findings from research papers that purportedly apply to transformational learning regardless of context.

Five studies from within faith-based contexts underscore the need to shift teaching goals from informational to transformational learning. The shift should begin at the level of seminary training. The goal is for students to not only experience deep learning on their way to becoming ministers, but to provide them examples from which to draw as they embark on their ministries. The shift applies also to ministerial internship experiences so that the objective is not to practice skills as much as it is to observe, reflect and dialogue about the life of the church community and the relationship between pastoral ministry and the community.

In the context of ministry practice, pastors who advance transformational learning rather than settle for transmissional styles of teaching reduce the possibility of their congregations rejecting doctrine outright as authoritarian. Most importantly, these pastors

increase the depth of learning that occurs through their ministries. The benefits of fostering transformational learning are seen in the deep changes that occur in team members on short-term missions trips after. Mentors facilitate transformational learning by having team members discuss dilemmas, journal their reflections, and dialogue together. These activities encourage team members to adopt new perspectives and act on them.

Three studies emphasize the need to foster learning congregations in order to support individual transformation. In learning congregations, instead of relegating learning to a separate church program, every ministry is developed with an objective of transformational learning. Organizational emphasis is placed on ministry teams that not only work together, but also learn together. Just as significant, individuals are not left on their own to act on new perspectives in the broader community, because their individual efforts tend to be frustrated. Inasmuch as transformational learning includes working out the implications of a perspective, leaving members to act unilaterally impedes their growth. In learning congregations, members respond corporately to the truth they receive. They join together in ministry. For learning congregations to develop, leaders must share the commitment to transformational learning for themselves and others.

Two separate studies underscore the essential role of teachers in transformational learning. The findings in each study match point for point. Teachers must know their subjects well, but they also must have a strong personal commitment to transformational learning, love their students, and cultivate a safe environment in which students are free to raise questions and explore meanings.

Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology, a volume compiled in honor of James Loder's life and learning theory, addresses several aspects of ministerial practice. From the perspective of transformational learning, the role of preaching is to free people from ego-centeredness and reawaken the "primal need to give love." This reawakening requires an act of imagination on the part of hearers by which they see reality in terms of God's love for them. The knowledge that results is both aesthetically and cognitively satisfying. To this end pastors preach "face-to-face" as witnesses who have themselves been transformed by the knowledge of God's love. They do not merely describe or explain God's revelation, but testify to its truthfulness. Hearers receive their pastor's testimony as knowledge through the work of the Spirit.

The grammar of transformation provides an ideal structure for understanding and conveying the significance of biblical narratives. This is because the Spirit's work of transformation is at the heart of the Gospel, and the Gospel is resident throughout scripture. The grammar of transformation is not imposed on passages but discerned in them; it serves as a hermeneutic principle. *Redemptive Transformation in Practical Theology* includes a case study that shows how the grammar of transformation may be a useful rubric for understanding the corporate experience of a congregation.

Jack Mezirow and Edward Taylor recently published a collection of twenty-one research papers on the practice transformative learning in *Transformative Learning in Practice*. The volume includes six conclusions about transformational learning drawn from a qualitative analysis of all twenty-one papers. According to co-authors Edward Taylor and Jodi Jarecke, the distinguishing feature of their conclusions is that they apply to transformative learning regardless of context. Presumably, then, they apply to the

ministerial setting as well. These conclusions largely confirm the findings reported in other research. Transformative learning requires that teachers intentionally teach for change and that they guard against the abuse of power in the learning setting.

Transformative learning requires the use of imagination as well as cognition. It requires a context that is both safe and provocative for learners so they are faced with disorienting dilemmas. Reflection and critical self-reflection are essential to the process. Most important, educators must model transformative learning before their students, beginning with the way they engage the material they teach to others.

Summary from Analysis of Interviews with Pastors

RQ 1: What is Transformational Learning?

The pastors described transformational learning in terms of three components that exist in logical and chronological relation to each other. *A crisis point* is reached in an individual's life. Most often it involves affliction, but as one pastor said, "Nobody ever died from pain." Alternatively, the crisis point may be a positive experience such as a life transition that spurs one on to further growth and development; in the words of another pastor, "We're not all just walking wounded." Either way, the crisis point generates a deep sense of threat, a longing to grow, or both. The crisis is internal as well as external to individuals and prepares them for *a transforming perspective* — "A new way of seeing." This is a realization that alters their view of themselves, their world, others, and God. The realization may suddenly come to people in an "Aha!" moment, or dawn on them over a longer period of time after "connecting the dots." Regardless, they believe this new perspective is true and commit themselves to it. This new commitment affects

their motivations, attitudes, and actions. In consequence the course of their lives takes “a very different trajectory” that is best described as growth.

RQ 2: How Does Transformational Learning Occur?

The analysis of the data described how the cycle of transformational learning occurs. It examined the dynamics of deep learning inherent in each of the three components (crisis point, transforming perspective, and growth) and the bridges between them (“the journey” from crisis to transforming perspective and the “burst of life” that follows the transforming perspective and leads to growth).

The crisis point may come in a humbling trial that drains away pride and awakens the need for help beyond oneself. It may come as the possibility of hope to an individual in the midst of despair. Or it may come as a longing to thrive that leaves individuals dissatisfied with their lives. The common theme in these scenarios is an acute awareness of personal emptiness and a spiritual longing that cannot be met by adaptation or mere survival. This dissatisfaction compels people toward the transforming moment.

The journey from crisis to transforming perspective was described as “a journey of desperate hope.” The crisis causes individuals to “hit the pause button” on routine ways of thinking and living. It prompts a search for meaning. For some this search means “a hunt” in which they deliberately seek some resolution to the crisis they feel. This hunt can occur both consciously and subconsciously. For others, the search is more like looking for help while flailing. Regardless, the driver is hope, and confirmations of hope sustain them. These confirmations may even take the form of confrontation and rebuke.

The transformational perspective produces “convictional knowing.” In a transcendent experience that is not self-generated, individuals receive the perspective as

new truth. The immediate affect of the new truth is to humble them as it reframes their understanding of reality. The new truth comes with compelling authority and has revelatory impact. In response individuals submit to this new truth, and become deeply committed to it.

The phrase “burst of life” was used to describe the bridge between transforming perspective and growth. This short interval is marked by the presence of a remarkable new vitality that is highly generative. This vitality is expressed first and foremost as joy in celebration, but there is an inward component as well that was described as an inward drive and desire to grow in relation to the new perspective. As a result, one’s life begins to reflect and conform to the new perspective. This is growth. Significantly, new vitality in one individual can affect others in ways that go beyond joining in the celebrant’s happiness; they may be so impacted that they also undergo transformational learning. In the Christian context, “conversion” is used to describe the transforming perspective that brings an individual to trust in Christ. Sanctification describes the effects of deep learning on the believer as the learning process is repeated many times. Similarly “revival” may describe the impact of deep learning on others.

Growth follows in which the transforming perspective serves to reshape individuals’ lives. Initially growth occurs as they test their new understanding and gain confidence in it. Eventually, this reorienting “big picture” redefines their sense of self. As vitality diffuses through the whole person, change occurs not only at the point of the original crisis, but in other aspects of life too. Individuals are willing to take risks, make sacrifices, and become accountable because growth itself has become a new priority. As a result they mature, and the cycle of transformational learning is repeated.

RQ 3: What Role Do Ministers Play in Fostering Transformational Learning?

Pastors long to see deep change in their congregations. They view their role in fostering transformation as limited, yet integral to their calling. They are deeply committed to facilitating transformation and hold that transformation is essential for their churches. From beginning to end, transformation is the work of the sovereign God who works by his Word and Spirit. Pastors are humbled by this conviction (which is confirmed by experience), so that they regard themselves as being called to patience, love and prayer.

As the case study of Pastor Hollister's ministry to Tamara showed, pastors can play a role in fostering transformation through every phase of the learning process: from crisis, through the journey leading to a transforming perspective, through the experience of fresh vitality, and finally, to growth. The challenge for the pastor is to "show up" and pay the costs of faithfulness as seen in the risks of confrontation and the willingness to enter into the suffering of others.

Pastors' perseverance and effectiveness rest on fostering transformation in themselves. This is the "mission that fuels the mission," and it revolves around knowing Christ. Their own transformation not only makes them credible, but capable as they care for others.

In addition, the pastors' role in fostering transformation is expressed in equipping and networking their congregations to "come alongside" one another and those new to the church. The result is "the teabag effect," in which members deeply influence each other by fostering mutual transformation through mentoring and modeling. The congregation is the primary "catalyst for change" at the pastor's disposal.

The minister's role in fostering transformation extends to the public and official side of ministry as well as to the private and pastoral side. Worship is the transcendent context where the church meets with God and God meets with his people. The entire cycle of transformation is fostered in this experience through the work of the Holy Spirit. Especially in preaching, pastors challenge their congregations to embrace the perspective that scripture conveys of reality. Pastors "reframe" and "reinterpret" life experience in light of the revelation God has given of himself and the world. In preaching, this reinterpretation involves the use of imagination just as in worship it involves the use of symbols.

Recognizing that God's plan revolves around his glory rather than their gifts or power, pastors serve the process of transformation rather than presume to lead it. This recognition involves both a humbling and exhilarating realization that God is using them.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study are presented in a framework of recommendations to integrate transformational learning principles into the understanding and practice of pastoral ministry. The recommendations are supported by conclusions drawn from the data. These findings are intended for colleagues in pastoral ministry, seminary professors, denominational leaders, and professionals who provide continuing education to pastors. Hopefully, the framework of recommendations will be useful in working out the implications of this research.

Endorse Transformational Learning as a Ministry Paradigm

Transformational learning explains how people change at a deep level. They change through a particular learning process. The "grammar of transformation" which

explains the process not only describes how people learn, but how the Holy Spirit works in people so they do learn and are transformed. By way of analogy, the biblical case study of Peter has shown that transformational learning describes how he learned and how Jesus caused him to learn.

Among pastors, there is widespread frustration over the lack of transformation among their congregants, over how to sustain and strengthen the faith of emerging adults, and over how to bring people to Christ. In response to these challenges, transformational learning provides corrective, pivotal insight. Transformational learning theory can provide pastors with clear, reliable guidance on how they can grow in providing personal ministry; in developing the corporate life of the church; in preaching, teaching, and leading worship. All the research agrees that the first priority for transformational learning to occur is that pastors be committed to transformational learning for themselves.

The endorsement of transformational learning is not a call to import extra-biblical priorities into ecclesial instruction, but to recover discipleship as it is observed in scripture. The focus in discipleship is not on teaching per se, but on learning. It is as important for teachers to understand how people learn as it is to understand the material they teach. When transformation is the goal in teaching, the teacher's role is not to transmit information, but to use content to engage students in the learning process.

When the goal of transformation is in place, teaching events will no longer consist of the pastor or other teacher delivering an overload of content followed by suggestions or informal quizzing related to its application. The use of technologies such as PowerPoint to compress the delivery of content in the shortest possible timeframe can

add to the problem of content overload. Even if content were cut by 80 percent so it could be memorable, transformational learning could not occur because the jump from content to application circumvents the learning process. There is no opportunity for people to identify and feel the contradiction between the truth and their own perspectives, to reflect on the reasons for their perspective and on the implications of what they have heard, and to journey in dialogue with others as they work through the learning challenge. Without these elements, transforming moments and a new perspective are unlikely. The celebrative joy and vitality needed to respond and make new commitments do not follow. So in the end, growth does not follow, and atrophy becomes the rule. Knowledge puffs up; love builds up. Learners are left to conclude there really is nothing more of value to learn. In their minds the essential relationship between learning and growth no longer exists. Whether as emerging adults or mid-life adults, they begin dropping out of church, and why not, when the work of the Spirit has been quenched.

In their bewilderment, many pastors have adopted a therapeutic model of ministry in the hope that they will be more effective in fostering change. The problem is that without significant education and supervised practice, they are not able to practice therapy. It will be far better to recover the essence of discipleship and foster transformational learning through ministry. This requires that pastors come to a new perspective of their own in which they see transformational learning as a Spirit-led dimension of their ministries. The commitment will then follow to change priorities to foster that learning. In a social context where time for reflection and non-adversarial discourse is so limited, this humane shift in ministry emphasis will be embraced as

people experience the joy of learning. But a shift in priority is necessary, and patience will be required.

Affirm Pastors in Their Desire to Foster Transformational Learning

This research has shown that pastors have a deep desire to foster transformation within their churches. While the metrics of the church matter as indicators of success (attendance, finances, etc), solid numbers do not begin to bring the satisfaction that transformation does. For pastors, then, fostering transformation is a core motivation. Because that is the case, pastors especially feel the discrepancy between their hopes to see transformation and their experience when it does not. When they regard this discrepancy as a contradiction of God's promises in calling them, it becomes an inner crisis.

Pastors need the affirmation of knowing that their heart's desire is right and that God's promises are true. Their perspective on the ministry is what God would have it be. They are not to retreat for safety and assume the role of a functionary in the church. Rather than minimize or dismiss the discrepancy they feel as the inevitable result of human frailty, mentors can help pastors address this issue until they acknowledge the crisis and embrace it as God's calling them to journey in faith toward a deeper understanding of God's work. The crisis, in other words, is the first step in an experience of transformational learning for pastors.

By affirming pastors' desire to see transformation in their flocks, the mentor is not holding out a vain hope but acknowledging that God desires his servants to flourish in their lives and ministries. The pastors in this research far more easily recognized that God calls people to suffer than to flourish. They had more firsthand experience with the

former. When pastors have a greater awareness of the realities of sin and suffering than of restoration and transformation, their expectations for themselves, their ministries and their churches are negatively affected. The inherent longing to thrive can be relegated to a pipe dream rather than acted on in faith. The priority of fostering transformation can slip away. Negativity and pessimism are easily masked behind dogma. Pastors need their *desires and longings to be affirmed as from God.*

Support Pastors in Their Conviction that Adults Do Change

All the pastors in this research affirmed that adults do change and provided profound examples of this. They also were persuaded that at any given time in their churches, transformation is the exception rather than the rule. This perception was based on how people present themselves and overlooked the fact that the underlying dynamics of transformational learning are constantly in play in the lives of adults. Adult development fosters these dynamics, and in the church, we believe that the Holy Spirit comes alongside and causes transformation to result.

From young adulthood through mid-life to old age, adults are continuously changing as they face developmental challenges related to their age and stage of life. These challenges involve relationships, personal achievement, the acceptance of loss, and the prospect of death, and often lead to crises in perspective. When adults successfully learn through them, the result is the higher level of functioning that they desire for themselves. The challenges and transitions of adulthood, then, are especially conducive to transformational learning because they produce spiritual openness.

Pastors can become so absorbed in addressing individual, transitory crises among church members that they overlook the universal, transitional crises that are integral to

life experience. Transitory crises most often involve affliction that demands immediate attention. If little attention is paid to the developmental crises of life, few objections are likely to be raised by the church. Yet in fostering transformational learning through these typical life situations, pastors may find their greatest satisfaction because they have their greatest impact in fostering growth.

Pastors may not know how right they are. Adults do change, and they are in the process of changing throughout the course of their lives. Pastors have the opportunity to foster deep change in every adult as they name the challenges that adults are facing and foster transformational learning around the crises that accompany those.

Commend Pastors for Their Understanding of Transformational Learning

None of the pastors interviewed in this research had heard of transformational learning theory, but when asked to relate accounts of people who had undergone deep change in their churches, they underscored details that paralleled the theory precisely. They have a strong sense of how transformation occurs based on years of experience coupled with their faith that God is at work in the lives of his people.

The history of salvation moves through the phases of creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. This history in most respects serves as the pattern of salvation in people's experience. As they are living their lives, they are faced with their sin and helplessness before God. The Lord reveals himself to them as their Redeemer. They unite with him through faith and progressively flourish as they love and obey him. In retrospect they realize that their entire experience was by God's design to bring his grace to them. With these convictions and their experience, pastors understood that crisis exposes helplessness and need, that journeying follows, that God uses his Word to instill new

perspectives that elicit faith, and that individuals thus affected proceed to live and make commitments that express that faith. As a result, they grow.

What's more, the pastors understood the significance of coming alongside people to encourage, guide, confront and offer hope. They also recognized the importance of cultivating a supportive community that enfolds people with patient acceptance, steady encouragement, and deeply committed friendships.

The pastors' descriptions particularly reinforced Loder's theory of convictional knowing rather than Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation. This was evident in three respects. Loder's theory assigns great significance to the transforming moment as the turning point when new conviction is generated. Along with Loder, the pastors also regarded this as the work of God's Spirit. For Mezirow, perspective transformation is a conclusion reached at the end of a rational process. There is no revelation to receive or any other divine influence.

The pastors' reports also followed Loder in noting "the release of energy," or new vitality, that follows convictional knowing. Mezirow and his followers note that perspective transformation comes with a sense of relief and freedom. Emotional energy bound up in the previous crisis may now be redirected, but for Mezirow, this aspect does not rise in significance to the status of a phase or facet of transformation. Loder and the pastors regard vitality as inherent in the new truth and as integral to the learning process. Both the truth and attendant vitality to respond come from the Spirit and are highly significant.

Finally, the pastors regard the outward transformation that results from a new perspective in terms of growth rather than as the result of a rationalistic endeavor.

Mezirow's theory posits a reasonable series of steps that persons intentionally take to integrate a new perspective into their lives. This supposition does not take into account the diffuse and unanticipated changes that also occur in transformational learning. As reasonable as people are, and as much as acting on plans is an expression of growth, Mezirow's scheme remains problematic. His hypothesis has not been confirmed in practice; rather, it is his ideal formulation of what rational people ought to do.

One of the chief concerns from research into Mezirow's theory is the difficulty in determining whether individuals act on their new perspectives over time. Loder would say this problem is due to more than flaws in research design. Integration requires that individuals experience new vitality that frees them from ego-centeredness. This does not occur apart from the transcendent work of God's Spirit. The "transformation of transformation" by the Spirit is needed so that the learning process is no longer ego-centered but becomes God-focused. Otherwise, the learning process is prone to break down.

Clarify for Pastors What Transformational Learning Entails

Pastors' knowledge of transformational learning is largely practical and experiential. They understand the external, providential aspects of the learning process. Their evangelical convictions provide them with an understanding of the role of hardship and crisis, the need for a faith-generating perspective on Christ and scripture, and the subsequent growth that follows. Pastors have ample experience to convince them of the need for a supportive community; they are well aware of the role that friends play, as well as their own role in coming alongside the learner. Their knowledge is practical and theological. Pastors know these things work, but not necessarily why.

There was little consistency among the pastors in their understanding of the inner dynamics of transformational learning. When asked to explain, some expressed reluctance. This reluctance was partly due to internal factors being less obvious. As one pastor put it, “I’m not sure I can dissect it all.” More to the point was the sense that several expressed that answering the question would breach a sacred boundary. One pastor said, “I think it is dangerous to try and define that.” Questions aimed at understanding God’s providential working were not perceived as threatening, but those aimed at understanding the Spirit’s work within a person could be.

Everything God does involves impenetrable mystery, because he is the Holy One, the I AM. In coming to a greater knowledge of how he works, we should expect that our wonder and awe of God will not be compromised in any way, but magnified. The only forbidden inner sanctums are those he names. We need not create them. Understanding transformational learning as the means used by the Spirit to bring deep change to people opens up possibilities for a more informed and skilled ministry. Pastors will benefit from reassurance at this point. Moreover, they will benefit from clarification on the dynamics of transformational learning. These dynamics were described theoretically under the first literature area, “Transformative Learning Theory,” in Chapter Two, and fleshed out under the second research question, “How Does Transformational Learning Occur?” in Chapter Four. For the sake of understanding the process, pastors will be well served if four matters especially are addressed.

First, support for the journey from crisis to convictional knowing involves more than providing emotional support and holding out hope, as necessary as those things are. After thirty years, Mezirow and his associates are self-critical for not having developed a

clearer picture of what reflection and self-reflection entail. Nonetheless, they have made substantial progress in naming its critical components. I refer the reader to Chapter Two, and the material under the headings “From Disorienting Dilemma to Critical Reflection” and “Loder’s ‘Grammar’ of Transformation.” To foster reflection and self-reflection requires the engagement of learners by fellow learners in deep mutual disclosure; together they experience a camaraderie with others who desire to know the truth. The need for engagement applies both in relation to pastoral care and congregational support.

Second, although the basic longing to flourish may not be apparent in people because worries and suffering make other priorities more prominent, it can become a profound motivation and engine of transformation once it is identified and affirmed. Ministry consists not only of reacting to people’s immediate problems, but of awakening longings that God created them to feel. Reactive ministries are not designed to enable people to flourish but merely to survive. As a result, the ministries themselves do not flourish.

Third, people construct the knowledge that they have. This assumption underlies transformational learning and explains why transmissional approaches to teaching cannot produce permanent change. Individuals must work out for themselves the significance and meaning of ideas for their lives. The process operates on the conscious and subconscious levels; it requires cognition and imagination. Just giving the answers cannot serve transformation. Answers come toward the end of the process, as a realization by the learner. Providing people with time, opportunities for meaningful discourse, and guidance in the course of personal reflection do foster transformation. The pastors’ responses gave no indication that they were familiar with the concept of constructed

knowledge. Mezirow and his colleagues ground their commitment to constructed knowledge in the assumption that there is no absolute truth. This principle would not be acceptable to pastors. However, constructed knowledge may as readily be grounded in the conviction that revelation is the truth that God intends for our transformation. As a result, the purpose of revelation is not to circumvent our need for the learning process, but to engage us in it.

Fourth and finally, transformational learning theory is a reality-based model of how people learn on a level so profound that their lives change. The theory's description of the learning process is not the last word on the subject, but it is reliable. It corresponds to the social science research and to the testimony of scripture as we have seen from the case study of Peter. It comports with reality. To foster deep change, pastors are on solid ground in using transformational learning as a framework from which to spur development in their congregations, assess their congregants, and construct their ministries. The remainder of these findings focuses on targets for development.

Confirm Pastors in Their Role of Fostering Transformational Learning

In spite of disappointments, pastors tenaciously hold to the conviction that God has a role for them to play in fostering transformation in others. The research findings confirm this to be the case. Pastors are ideally suited to foster transformational learning because they engage adults in informal settings, which are more conducive to adult learning than formal settings. Further, they cultivate caring relationships with people over extended periods of time. Pastors share life with their congregations. One of the greatest frustrations of teachers committed to transformational learning is having so little time with students, because this kind of learning often requires years. Pastors are responsible

to be competent as teachers of scripture, to love their people, and to cultivate acceptance and love throughout their congregations. These qualities correspond to three of the four major characteristics needed in transformational leaders.

The fourth and most significant quality is that leaders must be committed to transformational learning for themselves. As a result, others not only see models of devotion to growth, but experience the impact of their pastors' transformation in ways that serve to transform *them*. The infusion of vitality that comes with truer perspectives on Christ and this world diffuses into others. This is why, in Pastor Bird's words, it is critical for ministers to pursue "the mission that fuels the mission." Commitment to personal growth and transformation not only is self-sustaining, but fosters transformation in others. This correlation is by God's design.

Guide Pastors in Cultivating a Transforming Community

Pastor Waters underscored that congregations long to know that God is at work and how they can join him in his work. This longing to know is not due to ignorance of what scripture says but to a right understanding of the Bible. What believers long for is a transforming perspective that enables them to see how the Spirit is at work in *their* context. Accordingly, pastors will both strengthen and focus their congregation's resolve to minister together if they educate their congregations in transformational learning. In this effort, scripture remains their first authority. We have seen how transformational learning is embedded in the narrative accounts of Peter with Jesus.

Pastors also can make good use of testimonies of personal transformation since we now see the remarkable impact this kind of testimony can have on others. Hearers will take encouragement for their own lives as well as for their ministry to others as they

recognize how the Spirit is at work. They will better understand how affliction and transitions serve God's purposes. They will feel confirmed to journey through crisis, because the Lord *really does* have something for them to learn; to embrace new perspectives, because God *really does* give them; to make new commitments, because God *really does* intend to use these commitments in their lives. By educating their congregations on transformational learning, pastors help them see that God's present work encompasses them. His work is not relegated to the past or to other churches.

Further, pastors are responsible to shape the congregation's understanding of itself— not Sunday morning activities, preaching or programs— as the primary catalyst for transformation in the church. As people embrace this understanding, cultivating transforming relationships becomes an intentional priority. Re-examination of the church as the body of Christ in light of transformational learning will reinforce Paul's focus on corporate transformation into Christ-like maturity rather than individual manifestations of Christ's power. His words take on urgent, new significance: "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."⁴³⁸

To become a transforming community, pastors should encourage their leaders to make transformational learning a priority in all their adult ministries including Sunday School, small groups, men's or women's meetings, and committee meetings. Fostering a culture of transformation begins with the tone that leaders set and the way they use their time. Leaders will value the life experience and understanding that adults bring to each setting and actively engage them. They will reject the role of the person who gives the

⁴³⁸ Ephesians 4:15-16.

most answers in order to be the person who asks the most questions. For the sake of their love for the Lord, for others, and for learning itself, they will be provocative.

In those meetings that are largely informational by nature, leaders will remain keenly alert to the dynamics of transformation among the group and take opportunities to engage others in deeper learning. In every setting, deep learning is always on the table. Keeping it there is a matter of faithfulness to one's calling. The task of working with leaders to achieve this change is not one pastors can delegate to others. Because it involves a foundational shift in values and priorities, the pastors must lead.

Train Pastors in Using Transformational Learning as an Assessment Principle

Pastors long to see transformation in their congregations, but how to foster it depends on where individuals are in the transformational cycle. Some parishioners need a disorienting dilemma, and confrontation often serves that purpose in persuading them that their lives cannot continue as they have. Others need counsel that offers hope and guidance as they journey from crisis to perspective transformation. Still others need encouragement to embrace the fact that God has given them a new perspective. Others need someone to celebrate with as they experience returning vitality and renewal in their lives. Finally, others are in a growth phase and need a mentor who steadily teaches them.

Without this kind of assessment, pastors may minister in ways that are of synch with their people. As an example, during the course of interviews, the nine pastors mentioned six different books they were using to help their leaders grow. In several instances, I was left with the impression that these books were being used in an attempt to jump-start a new commitment to lead. Granting the need for growth, it doesn't follow that training material that raises the bar on commitment or provides better ideas for ministry

meets leaders in their learning condition. Instructional books may be helpful for leaders when they are in a growth phase, but not when they are passive, exhausted, frustrated or discouraged.

Standard assessments of congregants answer questions about their status as relates to baptism, church membership, length of time as a believer, age and stage of life, history of service, regularity of attendance, and perceived maturity. For the purpose of fostering transformation, the insights of transformational learning will make for more useful assessments. Mature, mid-life believers may be in the midst of profound spiritual crises. Seniors can experience soaring vitality. New believers can atrophy from lack of crisis. Without a transformational assessment, pastors can assume the likelihood of growth or crisis where neither is occurring. By using a transformational assessment, pastors can be more on target in preaching, teaching, leading, and pastoral care. They can speak to people in each phase of learning and help frame the significance their life experience.

Train Pastors to Use the Grammar of Transformation as a Hermeneutical Principle

The biblical case study of the apostle Peter showed how deeply embedded transformational learning is in the accounts of his life. The study also showed that Jesus was responsible for provoking Peter to learn this way. Most significant for this recommendation, the biblical authors reflected Peter's experiences of transformational learning in their writing. As a result, the framework of transformation—crisis, journey, a new perspective, vitality with joy, and growth—is valid as a hermeneutical principle. By examining passages through this framework, the message of the actions and words along with their intended effects come into sharper focus with immediate homiletical benefit. The recommendations for further research will include the need for work in the scriptures

to validate this point, but reflection on the Petrine study leads this researcher to expect that a transformational hermeneutic applies to passages of law, prophecy, psalmody, apostolic instruction, and apocalypse, as well as to narratives.

Train Pastors to Use Transformational Learning as a Homiletical Principle

Congregants not only represent a spiritual spectrum from unbelief to mature, joyful faith, they also fall out along all the phases of transformational learning, irrespective of personal spiritual maturity. The worship of the church together is the preeminent setting in which people are made to feel their spiritual crisis, journey forward in hope, come to a transforming perspective, celebrate the grace of new life, and grow in their relationship to God. As they gain awareness that these elements describe the dynamic at work in their adults on Sunday mornings, pastors will be wise to craft sermons that intentionally foster this cycle for the sake of transformation.

The pastors interviewed for this study said that one major purpose in homiletics is to reframe reality in light of scripture for their congregations. This focus corresponds strongly with transformational learning. The pastors made little reference, however, to the use of imagination beyond the notion of sermon illustrations and application. Yet perspective transformation involves, in Loder's words, "a constructive act of the imagination," by which a person sees life in a new and truer way. This act of imagination is not prompted by an appeal to reason alone, but to the entire individual as a spiritual being with emotions, conscience, and a sense of aesthetics. The new truth not only explains, it also defines and determines reality. It is not only true, but good, and deeply satisfying. Receiving a new truth involves a transpositional change in perspective. This

change does not represent a horizontal progression in thought but a vertical shift in understanding. The gap between the old and new perspectives is bridged by imagination.

Understanding the need to engage the imagination, pastors would benefit from a challenge to think through the use of images in preaching rather than words alone.

Pastors use words to try and create images, so why not use images directly? This suggestion is not an endorsement for replacing verbal preaching with images, but rather for drawing attention to images when they convey truth more vividly than words and serve to ignite the imagination. Scripture uses words to paint scenes. There was no other practical medium for conveying images to masses of people in biblical times. Pastors today have powerful means and images at their disposal in readily accessible art. Examples include Peter Paul Ruben's remarkable painting, *Christ's Entry Into Jerusalem*, which conveys Jesus' militant determination to go to the cross. It also depicts the unnamed disciple attending to him with fierce devotion. The poignant image makes you want to be that disciple.

What of Rembrandt's depiction of *Christ's Deposition from the Cross*? No one can view the removal of Jesus' deathly pale, contorted corpse and not feel shocked by the vulgar reality and horror of his death. In Rembrandt's 1634 portrait of the Holy Family, Jesus sleeps chubby-cheeked against Mary's breast. While Joseph kneels over to gaze at Jesus, his hand clutching his heart in amazement, Mary is smiling as she studies his toes. Here every docetic tendency is quenched by the reality that Jesus was fully man and fully God.

Above all, preachers stand as witnesses to the truth, and as exhibits of its power to transform. For the sake of transformation in others, pastors preach as those caught up in the vitality of a revelation that has changed them and makes them hungry for more.

Recommendations for Further Research and a Question to Ponder

This dissertation has described transformational learning theory and how pastors describe transformational learning in their ministries. Many points of convergence have been identified as well as some notable gaps in understanding. Subsequent findings have been organized around ten recommendations for the understanding and practice of pastoral ministry. In addition the following seven recommendations are made for further research and reflection.

The first is that the findings be evaluated by colleagues in pastoral ministry, seminary professors, denominational leaders, and professionals who provide continuing education to pastors. Hopefully, their conversations will lead to the use and distribution of the findings through publishing and teaching. I have a more specific hope, however, that seminary leaders responsible for theology, homiletics, and practical theology will confer on how best to cooperate so that transformational learning is thoroughly integrated into the education of seminarians. Sending students into pastoral ministry without a clear understanding of transformational learning is a costly oversight.

The second recommendation is for further research that examines scripture in light of transformational learning theory. The study in this dissertation was largely limited to Gospel narratives. Other genres of scripture remain largely unexamined; these include law, prophecy, psalmody, apostolic instruction, and apocalypse.

The third recommendation is for a focused analysis of constructivism and its application within the faith-based context. To this point in time, the case for constructivism is largely grounded in relativism. It is ironic that such a remarkable theory of how people come to knowledge is grounded in the assumption that no truth exists. Constructivism needs a more reliable foundation if it's going to gain traction among pastors. Because constructivism is integral to transformational learning theory, a clearer, truer formulation will add support to the theory.

In addition, as a fourth recommendation, more work is needed on the nature of reflection and imagination as these relate to transformation. Mezirow and his colleagues acknowledge the dearth of understanding as regards reflection. Because reflection in the Christian context includes prayer, the Psalms deserve special attention. Preliminary study leads me to think that what passes for "meditation" in the Psalms is better described as reflective discourse with God. Research is needed, and it will have immediate usefulness for pastors in how best to foster transformation.

As a fifth recommendation, I hope this research marks the beginning of a conversation about the phenomenon Loder described as "a release of energy" following a transforming moment. This new vitality leads to individual spiritual growth that is as observable as physical growth in plants. What's more, it can deeply affect others. From an historical and theological perspective, did Jonathan Edwards observe the phenomenon Loder called "a release of energy in the Great Awakening? If so, how did he write about it? From the perspective of practical theology, how might this insight change pastors' understandings of the nature and role of testimonies in their churches?

The sixth recommendation is for study into the usefulness of transformational learning as a liturgical principle. Given that the grammar of transformation is embedded in the Gospel revelation, it surely applies to liturgy to the extent that liturgy recapitulates the story of redemption. Scripture can be read, or it can be spoken as a transforming affirmation of truth. Sins can be confessed with the polite “amen” of the congregation, or they can be exposed with raw emotion in prayer that leaves people shaken in crisis. A song may be sung as a musical act, or as an act of defiance against the world, the flesh and the devil. We don’t need theory as much as we need models of transformational liturgy.

The seventh and final recommendation is a question to ponder. The nature of human experience typically is subdivided into the subjective and the objective. Should there not be a third category of human experience, which we might call transcendence? I refer to the experience of God through his Spirit. If 99 percent of claims to such experiences were false, this is no justification for excluding the 1 percent that are genuine. To categorize such experiences as subjective is to deny them; to relegate them to providence is to minimize their distinctiveness. Theologians refer to the regeneration of individuals by the Spirit and to the illumination by the Spirit so people understand the Word of God. Are these not transcendent experiences? Christians’ experiences of God need validation, not just scrutiny. Were we not created for transcendence?

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