

MINISTERS ON THE MOVE: COACHING FOR SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY
FOR MINISTERS IN VOCATIONAL TRANSITION IN
THE BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA

by

David Norman Pepler, Sr.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty
of the James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology
at Mercer University
in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Atlanta, GA

2022

MINISTERS ON THE MOVE: COACHING FOR SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY
FOR MINISTERS IN VOCATIONAL TRANSITION IN
THE BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA

by

David Norman Pepler, Sr.

Approved:

_____ Date _____
Denise Massey, Ph.D.
Faculty Supervisor

_____ Date _____
Nancy Waldo
Spiritual Director

_____ Date _____
Robert N. Nash, Jr., Ph.D.
Associate Dean, D.Min. Degree Program, James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

_____ Date _____
C. Gregory DeLoach, D.Min.
Dean, James & Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

© 2022
David Norman Pepler, Sr.
All Rights Reserved

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my loving wife, my sons, and my mother. My wife has been most understanding and patient during my many years of education. My sons have cheered me on as they endured the countless hours I have had to commit to the effort. My Mother has been my lifelong prayer warrior who continuously lifted me into God's hands in all I do.

I also dedicate this to ministry leaders, particularly pastors. These men and women are often misunderstood in the positions they serve. They face ridicule, both fair and not. They often feel isolated and lonely. This causes strains, even in their relationship with God. It is because of my years of service and experiencing all of the above, and my new calling to help those in the fight, that any of this work is possible.

Most importantly, I dedicate this work to God. The Holy Spirit has been my faithful guide through my calling and educational endeavors. If not for the divine tug on my heart years ago, none of this would have happened. The love of God, as exemplified in Jesus Christ, has been the driving force to encourage me to see this work to its conclusion.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

God has provided me with a cloud of incredible witnesses who have helped in my formation into the man and minister I am today. These people have generously invested time in me, including guidance, suggestions, coaching, mentoring, prayerful support, gracious patience, and loving kindness. I give thanks to God for those who have poured into my calling, ministry, and life.

Rev. Gene Hill and Rev. Jim Palmer were the first to acknowledge God's call in my life. In spite of their roles in a church that did not affirm me, these men groomed me so I could best position myself to hear God's call and respond. This journey began because of their loving support.

Rev. Joseph (Jody) Griffin has been the most generous encourager anyone can know. He has helped me smile, cry, laugh, and above all, remain faithful to God's leadership, especially through the difficult times. His belief in me and the gifts given to me from God is unwavering. His encouragement gives me bold strength to carry on to this day.

Dr. Bob Dale, as he was to so many, has been a mentor, teacher, coach, advisor, partner, and friend. He was a father figure to me for the past twenty years. He served as my coach for this project, but sadly passed away prior to its completion. But I can still hear his voice of encouragement and wisdom echoing in the chambers of my mind as he cheers me on from above.

Many folks from the churches I have served have been strong advocates for my educational endeavors. These friends provided my family and me encouragement, support, and prayers through the years. I could never have completed this work without their support.

The faculty and staff of McAfee School of Theology have been incredible to work with. Dr. Denise Massey became my supervisor after Dr. Loyd Allen. Both were sources of great encouragement, with Dr. Massey lovingly encouraging me all the way to the finish line. Dr. Michelle Garber was extremely helpful by translating academic language to terms I could understand, helping me survive all of the technical aspects of thesis presentation. Dr. Nancy Penton is my editorial hero.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
CHAPTERS	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Description of the Ministerial Context	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Statement of the Project Goals.....	2
Limitations and Delimitations of the Proposed Project	3
Terms and Assumptions.....	3
LITERATURE REVIEW	4
Discernment	5
Faith Coaching	5
CARING™ Model for Coaching.....	6
Vocational Calling	6
Purpose of Coaching	7

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

CHAPTER 1 (Continued)

	Page
THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION.....	7
Scriptures and Theological Themes Relevant to Project Tasks and Goals.	7
What is at Stake?.....	9
Significance.....	9
PROJECT METHODOLOGY.....	9
Description of the Ministry Project.....	10
Rationale for the Process	11
Evaluation	11
Assessment.....	12
2. BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	14
BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	14
THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS.....	19
HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS	28
3. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY	40
DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTERIAL CONTEXT	40

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

CHAPTER 3 (Continued)

	Page
Statement of the Problem.....	41
METHODOLOGY	44
Description of the Thesis Research.....	44
Rationale for the Process	46
IRB Process.....	46
Plan for Evaluation	48
4. FINDINGS OF THE COACHING PROCESS.....	51
DEMOGRAPHICS.....	51
Demographic Information on Subjects	51
General Information Provided by Subjects.....	51
SESSION CONTENTS	52
Topics Addressed by Subjects in Coaching Sessions.....	52
PERSONAL TOPICS	52
SPIRITUAL TOPICS	54
Using the CARING™ Model	58

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

CHAPTER 4 (Continued)

	Page
Biblical References Raised by Subjects in Coaching Sessions	58
Theological Influences on Those Being Coached	60
OBSERVATIONS	61
Observations from the Coach.....	61
Observations from those Being Coached.....	63
EXIT INTERVIEWS	65
GENERAL INFORMATION RESPONSES.....	66
What worked best for you in our coaching conversations?	66
What area did you find least helpful?	67
Would you recommend this kind of coaching to others in discernment processes who could benefit from spiritual discovery?	68
How would you describe the coaching relationship in principle as compared to other disciplines such as mentoring, advising, counseling, etc.?	69
This thesis has centered on working with pastors anticipating vocational transitions. In what other settings do you believe coaching for spiritual discovery could be useful?.....	70

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

CHAPTER 4 (Continued)

	Page
How do you think your discernment process would have been different if you had not participated in this project?	72
PRACTICALITY RESPONSES	73
What observable changes do you believe you experienced as a result of this coaching process?.....	73
How will you continue to develop your spiritual practices moving forward?	75
THE COACHING EXPERIENCE RESPONSES	76
How would you describe the experience of being coached?	76
What benefits do you see this practice providing for ministry leaders? ...	78
How would you describe the effectiveness of these sessions for you as you have been involved in spiritual discovery for your potential vocational transition?.....	79
What remarks would you like to make about the overall project experience?	81

TABLE OF CONTENTS (CONTINUED)

CHAPTERS (Continued)

	Page
5. CONCLUSIONS.....	84
Spirituality Issues Pastors Encounter.....	84
Coaching for Spiritual Discovery’s Effectiveness.....	85
Theology of Subjects’ Importance.....	86
The CARING™ Model.....	87
The CARING™ Model’s Effectiveness.....	87
FUTURE ENDEAVORS.....	89
Future Study.....	89
Future Reporting and Publication.....	91
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	94
APPENDICES.....	99
A. IRB APPROVAL.....	100
B. INFORMED CONSENT.....	102
C. INVITATION TO BGAV PASTORS.....	106
D. DENISE MASSEY’S SIX STEPS OF CARING™.....	108
E. EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....	110

ABSTRACT

DAVID NORMAN PEPLER, SR.
MINISTERS ON THE MOVE: COACHING FOR SPIRITUAL DISCOVERY
FOR MINISTERS IN VOCATIONAL TRANSITION IN
THE BAPTIST GENERAL ASSOCIATION OF VIRGINIA
Under the direction of Denise Massey, Ph.D.

Eight ministry leaders from the Baptist General Association of Virginia participated in a six-session spirituality coaching relationship. All of these leaders were anticipating vocational transitions within the next six months of their ministry. The purpose was to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery in their transition discernment process.

The model used for these coaching conversations was Dr. Denise Massey's CARING™ model, designed to ensure the spiritual nature of pastoral conversations. Participants were given written and oral exit interviews upon concluding their six coaching sessions. Qualitative questions were used to determine the effectiveness of the coaching experience as subject matter varied with each participant.

The study shows the promising effects of coaching for spiritual discovery for ministers anticipating vocational transition. Participants explored their connectedness with the Holy Spirit throughout the process. The confidential and subjective topical approach provided participants with needed space to process God's leadership in light of the external circumstances encountered in their discernment process.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Pastors typically make several vocational transitions over the course of their ministry careers. Assistance is available for them concerning the technicalities of a transition, preparing good resumes and cover letters, networking with leaders and entities for credential distribution, and prayerful support from inner circles of friends. There are no resources available to coach pastors for spiritual discovery through the process of transition.

Description of the Ministerial Context

This thesis focused on a selected group of eight ministry leaders within the Baptist General Association of Virginia's (BGAV) 1400 churches who were expecting to transition from a vocational ministry position of Pastor/Senior Pastor to another ministry position of the same or similar title. Critical to the project were the criteria that participants were anticipating a ministerial transition within six months of the study and that each participant had not yet discerned God's clear direction for their move. As much as possible, the chosen participants varied in areas of gender, age, experience, numbers of ministerial transitions, congregational size and demographics, and socio-economic circumstances.

The BGAV has a ministry matching system in place like most denominations. Questionnaires are given to pastors and churches, seeking matches in areas of agreement such as theology and stances on women in ministry of both the candidate and congregation. This is an impersonal mechanism that does not address the spiritual needs of the pastor for the discernment process. This study sought to determine if coaching pastors through the transition process resulted in healthier decisions by the candidates as they felt led in a more spiritual manner.

Statement of the Problem

The average tenure for a pastor is 3.6 years.¹ This means that often people who serve as pastors experience several vocational transitions over the course of a career. Such transitions may have multiple and diverse causes, but all transitions may potentially challenge the leaders' spiritual health. Pastors experience different spiritual health challenges during three stages of vocational transitions: first, the prelude to transition that includes any number of causes from the stirring of the Holy Spirit to termination from a church. The second transition stage includes a resignation typically followed by a thirty-day period for goodbyes, preparations to relocate, house hunting in the new location, and preparing to enter the new venue. The third stage is a post-transition season known as the "honeymoon" period. The Pastor arrives at the new venue, and everyone works diligently to put their best foot forward for a good beginning. Pastors typically find themselves in a season of busyness, learning names, families, systems, roles, and their new community.

All three of these stages are worthy of study as any of them can negatively impact pastors' spiritual health. The first stage is what I chose to study for this project as it contains fewer variables of causes that could distract from this project's primary goals. Churches need to call leaders who are spiritually healthy and are clear in this calling transition.

Statement of the Project Goals

I studied the effectiveness coaching for spiritual discovery has on ministry leaders experiencing vocational transitions. I provided coaching using Denise Massey's CARING™

¹ Thomas Rainer, "Why Pastors Often Leave Their Church in the Third Year," <https://thomrainer.com/2015/04/why-pastors-often-leave-their-church-in-the-third-year-rainer-on-leadership-117/> (accessed October 10, 2021).

model for eight pastors in the first stage of vocational transition. Then I reviewed their experiences from the sessions and their exit interview remarks.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Proposed Project

The project's limitations included recruiting an adequate number of willing participants. I sent general invitations throughout the BGAV for confidential conversations about the project with me. Securing enough participants, including enough variety of persons within the recruiting process to generate a diverse group of participants, was another limitation. Finally, considering the qualitative section of the project anticipated the authenticity of respondents in coaching sessions and in exit interviews.

The delimitations of the project insisted that participants be members of the BGAV as identified by BGAV leaders. The project included criteria for selecting participants from the field of interested respondents. This delimitation was primarily concerned with securing diversity within the participant pool. The content of the coaching sessions and exit interviews was essential qualitative data that informed the project outcomes. Coaching sessions included some standardized questions but allowed additional questions to be asked based upon responses of the persons being coached.

Terms and Assumptions

Certain terms and assumptions required clarification for this project. The terms contain the specific nature of the parameters of the study, the participants' unique contexts, and the methodology's uniqueness. The assumptions relied on qualitative data researched as I explored individual spirituality.

- *Transitions* – changing ministerial vocation positions from one to another.

- *Spiritual Discernment* – the minister involved in transition is discerning between potential new opportunities to serve as well as God’s guidance in choosing which possibility to pursue.
- *Spiritual Discovery* – the minister’s connectedness with God in vocational discernment.
- *Coaching* – the dialogue between two individuals designed to help a coachee move forward in an area in their life where they feel stuck. The coach joins in the thought process by asking questions to help the coachee discover possibilities within themselves for this process of self-discovery. This process differentiates from counseling, mentoring, spiritual direction, and therapy.

Assumptions made for this process were that pastors in vocational transition were aware of their own spiritual discovery needs and were willing to act on them. I also assumed that pastors in vocational transition would put their trust in me to discuss their spiritual matters. Another assumption is that my personal bias on the effectiveness of coaching was accepted by the pastors participating.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While it is not necessarily the desired attribute, most who vocationally serve as pastors will experience transitions from one place of service to another. My research focused on the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery for ministers in transition. Five specific areas of literature were key to shaping this project of coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors in vocational transition: the discernment process, coaching from a faith perspective, the CARING™ model for coaching conversations, vocational calling, and the purpose of coaching.

Discernment

Joseph Tetlow's *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium* was the primary source for this section. Discernment is an emotional, spiritual, and cerebral exercise. Discernment happens when you bring together your faith, beliefs, and expressions to align yourself with God's work in the world as you observe it. It does not always lead to absolute certainty but is a sign of spiritual maturity. It is our way of seeking God's will for our lives as we allow the Holy Spirit to guide us.²

Faith Coaching

To coach a person is to become a thought partner with the person being coached (PBC), to help him or her deeply explore their own thoughts, expose their insights, and help them apply them to an area in life they feel stuck to initiate progress toward their desired next steps. *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith*, by Chad Hall, et al., informed how I took the basic principles of coaching and applied them to the Christian values of the PBCs. This built on theological foundations that helped with their spiritual discernment. These foundations helped the PBCs search for the will of God as experienced in their own souls for the insights needed to make sound vocational decisions.³

² Joseph A. Tetlow, *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2016).

³ Chad Hall, Bill Copper, Kathryn McElveen, *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith* (Hickory, NC: Coach Approach Ministries, 2009).

CARING™ Model for Coaching

I will draw from Denise Massey's *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations* model for these coaching conversations. The acronym describes the model.

C – Connect with God, self, and others

A – Attend to the journey and assess the need

R – Reach clarity about the realistic focus for this conversation

I – Inspire the development of a loving action plan

N – Navigate around obstacles to the plan

G – Generate commitment to a specific, loving action plan⁴

Coaching as a practice is a growing field that is used in many settings. This model was chosen for my project because of its distinct approach to coaching that includes a focus on spiritual conversations. The combination of these elements was crucial for the project.

Vocational Calling

It is essential to include a spiritual sense of God's calling in vocational transitions. Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation* explores vocation as an expression of one's life. God's vocational call is a gift. You accept it as an invitation from the Divine. This implies the importance of listening for God's voice within you. Palmer emphasizes various ways to discover vocation through observation of circumstances, gifts, and

⁴ Denise Massey, *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2019). Dr. Massey's book is a coaching model that incorporates basic principles of coaching with an added emphasis on the spiritual health of the person being coached. While the resource was written for pastoral care usage, its principles and approaches are also ideal for this project's purposes and goals.

understanding one's true nature. This spiritual, vocational emphasis is what pastors pursue precisely in transitions.⁵

Purpose of Coaching

Coaching for Performance: Growing Human Potential and Purpose, The Principles and Practices of Coaching and Leadership by John Whitmore further unpacks the importance of coaching in this project as he emphasizes discovering potential. The essence of coaching is to lead the PBC into action, and although his proposed GROW™ model differs from CARING™, he had much to add to the conversation about eliciting action from the PBC. This is the necessary final step required of a minister in vocational transition after discerning God's will, discovering their own spiritual insights, and deciding what steps to take next.

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

Scriptures and Theological Themes Relevant to Project Tasks and Goals

The assumption that Christian believers will admit to having room for improvement in their individual spiritual lives was essential to the integrity of the study's process. This was necessary for pastors and others serving in faith leadership roles as it applies to spiritual discernment. Christian leaders making important decisions in highly valued aspects of their lives should actively seek God's direction.

The coaching methodology relies on questions for discovery purposes for the person being coached (PBC). Self-proclaimed "questionologist" Warren Berger states that

⁵ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

“...questioning is a starting point of innovation.”⁶ Jesus was a great example of asking questions that caused his target audience to reflect toward new and inspired thinking. This forward-thinking strategy is directly related to coaching, as it is “...a relationship that gets you from where you are to where you want to be.”⁷ There is a deep connection between coaching with spiritual discernment as its goal and Jesus’ asking questions to achieve spiritual revelations (growth) in those he encountered.

Jesus modeled questioning others to advance their spiritual discovery many times. Scriptures reveal that Jesus asked 339 questions.⁸ One example is when he asked his disciples, “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”⁹ Another time he asked a blind beggar what he wanted Jesus to do for him (Mk 10:51, Lk 18:41). He used a question to ask the woman caught in adultery where her accusers had gone to indicate his lack of condemnation and desire for her to avoid sin moving forward (John 7:53-8:11). Many of Jesus’ questions invited people into deeper, and often new ways of thinking, clearly indicative of spiritual discernment.

⁶ Warren Berger, *The Book of Beautiful Questions: The Powerful Questions That Will Help You Decide, Create, Connect, and Lead* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 3.

⁷ Chad Hall, Bill Copper, Kathryn McElveen, *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith* (Hickory: Coach Approach Ministries, 2009), 15.

⁸ See the ebook compiled by Bob Tiede at <https://leadingwithquestions.com/wp-content/downloads/eng-P8VoLUagOIjvyerRXfmATLRDqIZ6qMG.pdf> (accessed October 10, 2021).

⁹ Matt 16:13, New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) with parallel accounts in Mark 8:27 and Luke 18:41. Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references following will be from the NRSV.

What is at Stake?

Pastors experiencing vocational transitions do not always pay close attention to their spiritual health. This can adversely affect their spiritual discernment process, as well as their vocational transition. A positive discernment reinforcement will greatly enhance pastors as they seek God's wisdom in determining the path forward from their current place of service to the next place they will serve. Pastors must maintain strong connectivity with God. If they do have this healthy connection, their discovery process will likely be positive. If they do not, the possibility exists that they may make poor vocational decisions and not fit well into their choice of congregations to serve. Further, if a pastor experiencing vocational transition has depleted spiritual health, even somewhat, their next congregation could experience less than the leader's best efforts and leadership capacity.

Significance

Coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors in transition could result in the production of a vital resource to benefit both pastors and the congregations called to serve together. The same coaching process and principles of spiritual health, which are useful for pastors, are equally important for those serving in other vocational ministry positions. This study helped me become an effective coach for pastors, churches, and other leaders seeking to encounter healthy spirituality in their experiences of new partnerships in kingdom work.

PROJECT METHODOLOGY

This project incorporated qualitative and ethnographic data. The vision of the project was to study a specific methodology using a singular model and exit interview to determine how viable coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors in vocational transition can be. Data were

collected and analyzed using field research from participants experiencing transitions to ensure the data's authenticity.

Description of the Ministry Project

Participants received coaching for spiritual discovery, followed by an exit interview. Each participant experienced six total coaching sessions, averaging twice monthly for three months. Due to extreme confidentiality issues, all coaching sessions were private, one-on-one conversations. I will omit personal data from publication and will destroy this data at the study's conclusion.

I coached ministry leaders experiencing vocational transitions using Denise Massey's CARING™ model.¹⁰ I evaluated the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discernment for ministry leaders transitioning from one vocational position to another using follow-up interviews. Subjects participated in six coaching sessions with me over a three-month period. Participants' experiences, however, were complex in nature. Therefore, each participant also participated in follow-up interviews with me to discuss ethnographic information that proved useful in the project's overall purposes and goals of determining the effects of coaching for spiritual discovery using the CARING™ model for pastors anticipating vocational transitions. In assessing coaching's effectiveness, the individual interviews incorporated the qualitative data needed for analysis. I conducted all coaching sessions and interviews via Zoom and recorded every session for the purposes of this study. All materials such as these recordings and personal notes taken by me in these encounters will be destroyed upon the project's completion.

¹⁰ Denise Massey, *CARING™*.

This project included eight participants. General announcements of the study were made within the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV) to all ministry leaders via statewide pastoral emails, as well as the electronic and print publications provided by the state (Appendix C). Because participant materials are highly confidential, these announcements included my personal contact information inviting them into confidential conversations about the project. My desire was to have as much diversity within this pool of volunteers as possible, but the nature of this study was limited by those comfortable enough to participate. The participants were in the discernment process of a vocational transition, something they had only divulged to a few people. The resources necessary for this project were a standard set of questions for the coaching sessions (keeping in mind that sessions can go in many directions) and exit interviews.

Rationale for the Process

Denise Massey's CARING™ model, in *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations*,¹¹ offers an ideal blending of coaching and spiritual discovery. Using that model to coach ministry leaders experiencing potential challenges to their spiritual discovery process in this time of discernment helped them best grasp God's guidance for their vocational decision-making.

Evaluation

Data collection used a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a combination of ethnographic data from interviews. I used Mary Clark Moschella's *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*, which offers fundamentals of gathering this type of information. These fundamentals included recruiting subjects who fit the first stage of vocational transition

¹¹ Denise Massey, *CARING™*.

parameters, using the CARING™ model for coaching sessions, recording the coaching sessions, and evaluating written and verbal exit interviews with predetermined questions designed to summarize participant learnings and experiences. The results of this project provided the seeds to start creating a resource for a broader audience seeking help in spiritual discovery matters by using coaching as a primary method to help them make these decisions.

I learned that coaching for spiritual discovery has a profound and positive effect on pastors in all three stages of vocational transition. I learned how impactful the CARING™ model can be for my future coaching endeavors, which will involve both clergy and non-clergy members of the Christian faith. Furthermore, I learned how to develop a resource that will strengthen the work of everyone involved in ministerial transitions as well as all spiritual discernment processes.

Assessment

A summary report and copy of my project will be delivered to the BGAV upon publication of my thesis, particularly to Ken Kessler, who is the Coaching Network Director, and John Upton, Executive Director of the BGAV. It is through them that I made connections to participants for this project. The project itself has important information directly related to some of the work they do in coaching.

I also intended for this project to become the basis of a book that could have far-reaching implications for the broad faith community in the United States and abroad. Helping pastors and other ministry leaders in these times of transition will enhance their work as leaders while also creating positive experiences for churches that are hiring healthier prospects. The content of this project is invaluable to the world of coaching for spiritual discovery as the practice continues to

develop. My research also serves as the basis for a career trajectory where I intend to use this as my practice of helping people of faith, particularly ministry leaders, to experience a growing sense of their own spiritual discovery.

CHAPTER 2

BIBLICAL, THEOLOGICAL, AND HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Foundations for coaching for spiritual discovery for ministers in vocational transitions have their roots biblically, theologically, and in the Baptist tradition. Specific call narratives indicate God's design to have individuals follow a path into vocational ministries. These ministries, however, are not always lived out in one setting. These changes lead the minister to enter a season of theological discernment and discovery.

Good materials exist to show a ministry leader how to navigate this journey. These biblical, theological, and historical foundations are further described in much literature. For this thesis project, I reviewed the broad areas of spiritual discernment, vocational calling, coaching within the parameters of coaching's purpose, the usefulness of coaching in faith matters, and a specific model to use for faith conversations with the participating pastors.

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Biblical foundations for spiritual discovery in God's ministerial call are found in the stories of Moses' call, God's communication with Moses and Paul, and Paul's encounters with God that provided clarity. Moses' encounter at the burning bush shows how God's call can be vocational in nature. The Divine sought to move Moses from being a shepherd to becoming a prophetic leader of God's people. The scene begins as an ordinary day for Moses. Terrence Fretheim notes,

There is no temple nearby where he might expect a divine appearance, no sign that this is a holy place. Unlike the owner of the sheep, Moses is not a priest or a prophet; it is an

ordinary, everyday journey for him with no ‘religious’ intentions. The setting is the wilderness, and Moses’ vocation is mundane indeed.¹

The appearance of a burning bush not being consumed by the fire draws Moses’ attention where the well-known conversation begins. From here, God calls Moses into an entirely different vocation. Brevard Childs contends, “What began as just another day doing the same old thing turned out to be an absolutely new experience for Moses. The old life of shepherding was ended; the new life of deliverer was beginning.”² It began with a simple exhortation from God, calling out Moses’ name (Exodus 3:4). Neil Alexander notes, “In one brief utterance, the grand intention of God has become a specific human responsibility, human obligation, and human vocation. It is Moses who will do what Yahweh said, and Moses who will run the risks that Yahweh seemed ready to take.”³

We see this bridge from God seeking humanity’s work for God’s purposes in multiple examples such as Noah, the Prophets, etc., some of whom seemingly received a call from a place of no religious background. Childs stresses, “Moses’ call recounts the deep disruptive seizure of a man for whom neither previous faith nor personal endowment played a role in preparing him for this vocation. However, it is also clear that the later prophetic office influenced the tradition of Moses’ call.”⁴ Moses’ call included a change in his vocation accompanied by a sign that

¹ Terence Fretheim, *Exodus. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991), 54.

² Brevard S. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary. The Old Testament Library, General Eds, Ackroyd, Barr, Bright, Wright*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), 72.

³ Neil Alexander, ed. *The New Interpreter’s Bible, Vol. 1*. (Nashville: Abington Press, 1994), 713.

⁴ Childs, *The Book of Exodus*, 56.

God's people would worship on this mountain. This sign was to serve as a verification of God's call, although scholarship has various opinions concerning the interpretation of this sign.⁵

Regardless, the vocational call of God for Moses is clear.

The nature of coaching leans on biblical examples. It significantly relies on asking thought-provoking questions so the coachee will examine the deeply internal thoughts they struggle to bring to the surface of their conscious thinking. In her book, *Great Questions God Asks: Questions that Unlock the Great Issues of Our Lives*, Kathy Call points out the role of questions God asks of those God calls to serve. Much like the practice of coaching itself, God's questions are not seeking information from the recipient for God's increased knowledge. She states, "Rather, his simple, non-threatening questions are designed precisely to enable the growth process and joy of each of the man or woman he continues to address."⁶ Conrad Gempf indicates this methodology continued with Jesus. He summarizes how Jesus asks many questions, "[b]ut he doesn't ask primarily because he wants to acquire knowledge, nor does he ask to help people realize they already have the knowledge. He asks to help people realize where they stand; he asks questions in order to give an occasion for a reply, in order to initiate a conversation."⁷ Coaches ask coaching questions *so that* the person being coached will search their own hearts,

⁵ Ibid., 56. Childs offers a form-critical analysis of verse 12 displaying an array of interpretations of how this sign will be manifested.

⁶ Kathy Call, *Great Questions God Asks: Questions that Unlock the Great Issues of Our Lives* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publications, 2017), 7.

⁷ Conrad Gempf, *Jesus Asked: What He Wanted to Know* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 144-45.

minds, and beliefs to discover what is deeper within them than they have previously been exploring.

An example of this experience is when God essentially asked Moses in Exodus 4:11, “Who made your mouth?” (NRSV)⁸ Moses immediately entered a time of self-doubt and dialogue with God about his insufficiencies. He did not feel qualified, worthy, or even desirous of the call he was receiving. Like many queries used in coaching regarding spirituality, this question addresses God’s sense of your adequacy over your own self-perceptions of the opposite.

Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-18:22) indicates the Holy Spirit altered Paul’s intention of strengthening the churches he had established earlier (Acts 13-14). In the vision of the man from Macedonia (Acts 16:9), Paul did not experience a dialogue with God, although a question is implied, with the invitation to leave where he was serving to go and serve in another location. Paul’s point to ponder was whether he would be obedient to God’s prompting to relocate.

The Holy Spirit interfered with Paul’s plans from each of his aspirations to continue strengthening the churches he had already begun. Luke Timothy Johnson notices, “They are ‘prevented’ by the Spirit from pursuing their own projects. Finally, just as Peter was drawn to the edge of Palestine before being shown that he was to preach to Gentiles, so is Paul given a vision of a ‘certain Macedonian man’ who implores him for help.”⁹

⁸ All scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles. Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 5* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 290.

This call from God to Paul did not include a change in vocations as Moses experienced. Paul's work was beneficial to the Kingdom, but God had a different task within the kingdom work in which Paul was involved. The use of an image in Paul's Macedonian vision is profound, and the message behind the words expresses God's heart. After receiving the message, Paul shares it with his ministry companions, and they immediately (v.10) begin the trek westward.

God's methodology of communicating with Paul was not unheard of but dramatically different from his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. Leander Keck writes, "The Holy Spirit is responsible for the plotline of church's mission, leading sometimes by divine speech and at other times by heavenly vision."¹⁰ The "Man from Macedonia" (Acts 16:9) seems real enough and speaks through a human voice, although it is likely a divine image and sound. Keck continues, "Paul's epiphany is of a human and not a heavenly figure. His actions of standing and begging stress the human urgency of the situation, thereby qualifying the prior emphasis on the Spirit's control of Paul's mission by showing the importance of people's receptivity to the gospel."¹¹

Pastors freely and frequently share their experiences of God's call to ministry. Some of these are dramatic events involving voices, visions, or obvious signs. Others indicate less symbolic or vivid imagery and share how they sensed God's clear direction in meditation and prayer. Regardless of God's method of communication to the called, the question of obedience is

¹⁰ Leander E. Keck, Ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. Ten.* (Nashville: Abington, 2002), 226.

¹¹ Keck, Ed., *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 10,* 227.

the first to be addressed. It is a call to vocation, a change from what one was doing to join in God's kingdom work in a deeply committed fashion.

God's call often does not stop there as these faithful servants move into their new role and search out where God would have them serve. With regularity, these ministers experience a transition in their vocational call concerning *where* they are serving God. This call experience can be equally dramatic with the original call to ministry or something less intense. Regardless of how it comes, God's call is vitally important for ministers to obey. The voice of the Lord makes these vocational transitions possible, and the discernment process endured by the minister is to where I now turn theologically.

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

In *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Thomas Merton defines contemplation in terms of spiritual vision involving both faith and reason. He further said it "...is also the response to a call: a call from Him Who has no voice, and yet Who speaks in everything that is, and Who, most of all, speaks in the depths of our own being: for we ourselves are words of His."¹²

The discernment process pastors experience in vocational transitions is a spiritual matter, no matter what circumstances are present in their transition. Contemplation is an integral part of this process as bringing oneself to God in complete humility is vital to listening for God's direction. It goes beyond the cerebral activity of intuition and hope. Merton states, "Contemplation does not arrive at reality after a process of deduction, but by an intuitive

¹² Thomas Merton, *New Seeds for Contemplation* (New York: New Directions Publishing, 1961), 3.

awakening in which our free and personal reality becomes fully alive to its own existential depths, which open out into the mystery of God.”¹³

Pastors in transition will almost exclusively say that they are seeking one thing, the will of God. Refusing to accept God’s will is something all seekers face as their understanding of it becomes clearer. If God shows us explicitly what God desires for us, obedience should be the automatic response. But if this clarifying act is not accepted or refused, then it is as if the recipient is submitting to a life where they will never become all they were meant to be.¹⁴

This process further emphasizes the need for humility before God. Part of the discernment process is directly tied to an entrance into complete humility to go before the Lord and purely ask, “Where is the path you want me to travel?” This journey can be filled with obstacles of our own preconceived notions. Merton adds, “And it is only when we pay no more attention to our own deeds and our own reputation and our own excellence that we are at last completely free to serve God in perfection for His own sake alone.”¹⁵

Contemplation is a journey into one’s own soul, an exploration of faith. Merton observes, “But above all, faith is the opening of an inward eye, the eye of the heart, to be filled with the presence of Divine light.”¹⁶ It is in this light that we experience the depths of God’s love. This illuminates for us an eye toward the will of God. Merton describes the journey of contemplation as a complete emptying of the person to discover fully the God who is within as if God were

¹³ Ibid., Merton, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., Merton, 58.

¹⁵ Ibid., Merton, 58.

¹⁶ Ibid., Merton, 130.

discovering Godself within you. “True mystical experience of God and supreme renunciation of everything outside of God coincide. They are two aspects of the same thing. For when our minds and wills are perfectly free from every created attachment, they are immediately filled with the gift of God’s love...”¹⁷

Wisdom results when this level of contemplation is achieved, precisely the hope of a pastor, or anyone else for that matter, seeking to be found in God’s will. True freedom or liberty results when the soul empties itself of all that could hinder a pure and full presence before God. It is this phenomenon that prevents one from making incorrect decisions. Merton adds, “Perfect spiritual freedom is a total inability to make any evil choice. When everything you desire is truly good, and every choice not only aspires to that good but attains it, then you are free because you do everything that you want, every act of your will ends in perfect fulfillment.”¹⁸ Spiritual freedom is an act of the will driven exclusively by the understanding of God’s clear will.

The decision-making process faced by pastors in transition can encounter temptations and obstacles. Search teams who solicit conversations with prospective pastors often choose persons to serve in those positions because they are the visionaries of the congregation. Often, these folks innocently paint a portrait of what the church can be and hopes to become without the perceptive depth of their current plight and reality. Pastoral candidates need to navigate these exchanges carefully to get to the truth of the situation while simultaneously seeking God’s guidance to know whether this possibility is God’s will. Those pastors centered authentically in God’s will learn exponentially more than those who fail to include more than a mere cerebral approach to

¹⁷ Ibid., Merton, 268.

¹⁸ Ibid., Merton, 199.

the transition process. Their prayers can become simple exhortations seeking God's blessing for whatever choice they personally make. Merton's hope for contemplation is far deeper, "If our will travels with His, it will reach the same end, rest in the same peace, and be filled with the same infinite happiness that is His."¹⁹ For a pastor seeking God's true will for her or his vocational transition, peace, and happiness result when found.

Ultimately, the transition process for pastors can become a battle of wills, the will of God vs. the will of the pastor. Those who follow their own path not only easily fall into the traps mentioned above, but they also can find themselves traveling down a pathway of consistent heartache and dissatisfaction. Merton goes on, "If you can never make up your mind what God wills for you, but are always veering from one opinion to another, from one practice to another, from one method to another, it may be an indication that you are trying to get around God's will and do your own with a quiet conscience."²⁰ His advice for pastors in such cyclical perils is simple, "So keep still, and let Him do some work."²¹

Ben Campbell Johnson's *Hearing God's Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy* takes an in-depth approach to the discovery process for those discerning God's will. In relationship to my project, it is essential for the searching pastor to know that God's call is an ongoing event. "God is always calling us. One distinctive, unforgettable moment comes when

¹⁹ Ibid., Merton, 200-201.

²⁰ Ibid., Merton, 260.

²¹ Ibid., Merton, 261.

you answer the call. But there will be other moments that will come again and again, marking your way and giving you the assurance that the God who called still calls.”²²

Johnson’s anatomy of a call experience (for anyone on any level) is as follows:

- It begins as an idea.
- The idea is clothed with images and emotions. These images can pull us in both directions of excitement and feelings of inadequacy. The more our positive emotions attach themselves to the idea, the more we are nudged forward toward feelings of comfort and confidence.
- The emotion-clothed idea initiates a dialogue. Often this begins as excuse-making conversation, which God’s call replies to with assurance. Inferiority is a common feeling when entering this stage as opposed to humility and confidence.
- We embrace the call. Johnson states, “Feelings don’t listen to reason, even when the information that reason supplies is accurate.”²³ This stage involves changing our attitudes and emotions in favor of welcoming God’s call by overcoming negative or insufficiency feelings.
- We take initial steps. This does not necessarily mean we jump immediately into service, but we begin investigating and exploring the possibilities. This often includes talking with church leaders and friends, sharing our vision.²⁴

²² Ben Campbell Johnson, *Hearing God’s Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 12.

²³ *Ibid.*, Johnson, 26.

²⁴ *Ibid.* Johnson, 31. These are summaries of a more extensive outline on pp. 21-27.

Johnson points out that God’s work in our calling should not always surprise us as something out of the blue. “The call of Christ isn’t separated from the other dimensions of our life – our history, our background, our training and experience. The call clothes itself with images and emotions drawn from our deep pool of memory.”²⁵ Saul had the opportunity to contemplate this for over three years. We can only set aside what time is available to us to do the same. Johnson advises that during this time, we should explore what we do well, enjoy doing, and what others identify as things we do well.²⁶

Much like Merton, Johnson describes a cerebral or rational approach to seeking God’s will as ill-advised. He highlights discernment’s scope, “Discernment requires a posture of receptivity rather than analysis; it seeks integration, not separation; it rests on subjective passion rather than external, objective data. The rational approach seeks to operate with detachment, and discernment calls for commitment to God’s direction.”²⁷

Another area of agreement with Merton comes from Johnson’s unpacking of Jacob’s biblical wrestling match. Pastors may struggle with projecting their own will onto God’s will, but this only leads to bad decision-making and potentially terrible consequences. It is best to submit to God’s will always. Johnson states, “Jacob prevailed – not by overturning God’s plan but by getting himself aligned with it.”²⁸ While Jacob’s struggle had lasting consequences, the results of him following God’s will become a legendary tale that still influences many strugglers today.

²⁵ Ibid., Johnson, 31.

²⁶ Ibid., Johnson, 34.

²⁷ Ibid., Johnson, 52.

²⁸ Ibid., Johnson, 67.

The culmination of following God's will is to follow God's plan in God's love. Johnson describes, "While it is true that both information and knowledge play essential roles in discernment, the final aim of discernment is obedience to God, making the intention of God concrete in history."²⁹ Within the context of coaching lies the hope that the person being coached, in this case, a pastor in transition, will act upon the path he or she has discerned to be God's will. This context starts within an individual coaching conversation itself and, when applicable, the larger issue that several coaching conversations have covered.

This thesis focuses on pinpointing the pastor who is moving from one church to another to serve in the same role. Johnson indicates the beginning of this process, "When she grows restless, she senses that her call to that particular church is ending. She begins seeking another call or resigns from her current position to await God's guidance. When the new call comes, she responds and begins to weave her life and energy around the new call."³⁰ The sense of detachment may have several causes, but it is essential not to eliminate it as possibly beginning with God. To linger in a previous call beyond when you sense to be God's will can be detrimental to the pastor and those she or he serves. It is critical for the pastor to be tuned in to God's leading. Johnson advises, "[W]hen you feel something inside you pushing you away from a particular ministry, listen to this inner voice. When you begin to think about doing something else, following a different pathway or beginning a new ministry, take heed. God may be working through these shifting interests and emotions."³¹

²⁹ Ibid., Johnson, 101.

³⁰ Ibid., Johnson, 134-35.

³¹ Ibid., Johnson, 143.

Johnson goes on, "...a ministry should end...when God gives us a vision for the next stage of the ministry."³² I apply this differently than stated for this thesis because it is rarely practical or possible for a pastor to simply walk away from a place of service without the next "job" secured. When God calls from one place to the next, it is a vision directly from God. This shows the need for coaching to help the one seeking to understand God's call. Pastors sensing God's leadership to move from one church to another can quickly lose patience as clarity is not always immediately known. Johnson states, "One of the most difficult disciplines in the period of transition is waiting for the new door to open."³³

When a transition from God's chosen church to God's 'next' church for that pastor occurs, Johnson rightly concludes, "I'm fully aware that God's timing seldom matches my desires, but I know that God's time is the right time."³⁴ A pastor who follows God's will knows, often in hindsight, that God's timing was perfect.

Johnson describes the biggest question pastors facing transitions experience, "[W]hen anyone deals with a call, the primary question is, 'How do I know this is God speaking to me?' Any person dealing with a call has not only the right but also the obligation to distinguish God's call from his or her own self-deception or secret longings."³⁵ I believe Merton and Johnson would agree in unison that this is the most important issue for pastors sensing God's call to change vocational stations. Acting outside of God's will, in any event, can be perilous and bring

³² Ibid., Johnson, 145.

³³ Ibid., Johnson, 146.

³⁴ Ibid., Johnson, 148.

³⁵ Ibid., Johnson, 171.

untold consequences that may last for a lifetime. The process of coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors facing vocational transitions is one way to help them discern God's path forward for their ministry. When found and followed, God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

Parker Palmer's *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation* unpacks how one's vocation is an expression of one's life, a crucial truth to note for those experiencing vocational ministry callings. In religious traditions, a calling is from an external source (God) who invites us to become something we are not yet, to improve or become someone different. "Today," he states, "I understand vocation quite differently – not as a goal to be achieved but as a gift to be received."³⁶ From this frame of understanding, the voice of God comes not as some form of external methodology but as an invitation from inside where God created you to be your best self. It is not a call to become someone else. It is a call to do something else.

This call implies the importance of listening to the voice of God within you. If we are careful enough to listen, we can hear God's call in a healthy way and respond in faith. It is not only important for one who decides to answer God's initial call into vocational ministry, but it applies in answering God's call to move from one area of service to another.

We can discover vocation through a clear opening of a path ahead or from observing what ways have closed to us along the journey. Palmer observes, "...there is as much guidance in what does not and cannot happen in my life as there is in what can and does—maybe more."³⁷ Ministers exploring the possibilities of vocational transitions often encounter this feeling from

³⁶ Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening to the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Palmer, 39.

differing directions. The circumstances of where and how they currently serve may be no longer satisfying or challenging, let alone the possibility of conflict or uneasiness. Instead, it could be like Paul's Macedonian vision that God is pulling one to a new venue. Whether it is the sensation of a door closing or a window opening, the minister will do well to explore the meaning and possibilities deeply.

Being true to the nature created within you is a theologically profound way to live. Believing that every individual is a unique creation of God means to believe that each unique creation has its own nature. Palmer declares, "One dwells with God by being faithful to one's nature. One crosses God by trying to be something one is not. Reality—including one's own—is divine, not to be defied but honored."³⁸ Jesus declared, "I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5). Being true to the nature that God created in you means to abide as Christ describes.

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

Jesus promised the coming of the Holy Spirit after his departure. This "advocate" would be the one to guide believers in their spiritual lives moving forward. These connections with the Holy Spirit have been the subject of many theories in the years since Jesus' ascension.

Biblically, Paul encouraged believers to pray consistently as a direct connection to the Divine (1 Thess. 5:17). The writer of Hebrews talks about faith being foundational to the life of the believer (Heb. 11:1-3). James states that this faith must be accompanied by actions (James 2:14-17).

³⁸ Ibid., Palmer, 51.

In post-biblical times, beginning with the Alexandrian school, Plotinus taught about transcendence that involved both the mind and the soul. “The salvation of humanity is the result of the purification of the mind or rational soul by an ascent through the emanations of the One to participation in the divine Mind....In the ascent, Plotinus teaches, there are four movements: purgation and the practice of the virtues, a rising above sense perception to thought, a reaching beyond thought to union, and an ecstatic absorption in the One.”³⁹ Plotinus’ teachings are important as a whole, but the last movement he describes are foundational to Christian spirituality.

The Cappadocian leader, Gregory of Nyssa, is sometimes referred to as the “father of Christian mysticism.” Gregory believed it is God’s goodness that comes into humankind’s goodness. Therefore, living a virtuous life is essential. Holmes said, “The spiritual life for Gregory is perpetual ascent. It begins in light and moves into the darkness. For the first time, the image of darkness takes on real meaning. God is utterly ineffable and so is present in the darkness of humanity’s mind.”⁴⁰ God’s love comes to the emptied, or purified, soul, which Gregory believes involves knowledge.

Macarius, or more likely pseudo-Macarius, believed that believers should practice constant prayer, not so much in continual verbiage, but to focus on Jesus. It was during his time that the Jesus prayer became popular. He was among the first to believe that sin and grace co-exist in the heart of humankind. According to Holmes, “What the pseudo-Macarius was saying is

³⁹ Urban T. Holmes, III, *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction*, 2^d ed. (Baltimore: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 25.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 33.

that humanity is at the same time sinner and justified, *simul peccator et justice*. The notion is not original with Luther.”⁴¹

Until Augustine, Western Christian spirituality was much the same as Eastern. Augustine felt his senses were in the way with their temptations, hindering him from seeing God. Holmes states, “Clearly he believed that the way to God is by repudiation of sensible reality through the inward journey within the self and then to the God who is *beyond* self.”⁴² His sense of mysticism points to a communal relationship through the Body of Christ to a personal God.

Gregory the Great is considered the father of Western spirituality for the Middle Ages.⁴³ Holmes reflected on Gregory the Great’s understanding of spirituality, “The word ‘contemplation’ in various uses, but always as an act of seeing, permeates his writings.”⁴⁴ He believes we are called to see God, who is light. He puts an “emphasis upon the vision of God, service (including pastoral care) as integral to the spiritual life, humility and guild, and the quest of detachment.”⁴⁵ His principal interpreter, Isidore, took Gregory’s teachings and developed “an ascetical practice that involved reading meditation, prayer, and intention—*lectio, meditation, oratio*, and *intentio*.”⁴⁶

⁴¹ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 36.

⁴² Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 43-44.

⁴³ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 49.

⁴⁴ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 50.

⁴⁵ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 50.

⁴⁶ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 50.

William of St. Thierry, much like Augustine, believed there was a natural love that drives a man toward God. Holmes concludes, “It is a statement of William’s belief that the exercise of memory, reason, and will leads us to contemplate God. Progress in the spiritual life comes through the sanctification of memory, reason or understanding, and will.”⁴⁷ We connect with God in mind and heart and all of our inner being.

In that same time frame lived Richard of St. Victor. Holmes said, “Richard’s four degrees of love were quoted widely for centuries afterward: love that wounds the soul, binds the soul, makes the soul languish, and causes it to swoon. At the height of contemplation, the soul penetrates the realm of wisdom; so it is the rational soul, as in Neo-Platonism, to which God gives understanding.”⁴⁸

Among the friars who also rose in this period, Francis of Assisi is the most fascinating even though little attention is given to him here. Holmes continued, “With Francis, medieval piety is summarized. It was concrete, particular, human, and moral. There was a profound devotion of the humanity of Jesus which, if it got out of hand, could (and later did) develop into sentimental pietism.”⁴⁹

The Spanish Priest Dominic founded a group of friars that battled against heresy. Their primary focus was on preaching, although they were the first to seriously train for spiritual direction, as “...spiritual direction was prescribed for everyone. Lay persons were often spiritual

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 59.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 63.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 66.

guides.”⁵⁰ Most famous among the Dominicans was Thomas Aquinas. Holmes explained, “For Aquinas, meditation is reason, a discursive deduction from the principles of truth. Contemplation is a simple, intuitive, vision of truth. Contemplation is motivated by love.”⁵¹

As pietism was declining, John Gerson developed the concept that the intellect is necessary for someone who claims to have had an experience with God. Feelings alone are not enough. Holmes asserts, “What Gerson wanted to do was join theology and piety. He believed that the renewal of the church required a deep spiritual awakening, and that could only come about through the interrelation of cognition and the interior life.”⁵² Gerson is said to have been influential for Calvin.

Holmes advanced into the Byzantine period by saying, “Byzantine spirituality was deeply monastic. The two great monastic centers at the height of the Byzantine Empire were the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai, where John Climacus was abbot, and the monastery at Constantinople, where Maximus lived.”⁵³ Their forms of monasticism differed. Simeon, the New Theologian, bridged their differences though it was not a popular choice. Holmes added, “He taught that the Holy Spirit comes as a sudden transforming experience”⁵⁴ as a gift of grace. But the “consciousness of the Spirit was accompanied by obedience to the commandments.”⁵⁵

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 68.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 68-69.

⁵² *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 86.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 90.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 90.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, *History*, Holmes, 90.

At the same time, Gregory Palamas taught that our thoughts are stored in our hearts. He was an advocate for the Jesus Prayer. He was controversial in arguing that we see “uncreated light” and not God’s essence. Holmes inserted, “This light is the same light that Peter, James, and John saw on Mt. Tabor at the Transfiguration of Jesus, so the Eastern Church calls it Taboric light.”⁵⁶

People in the Byzantine period often used iconography as a spiritual practice of connection with God, who would then inspire them to do pious deeds. These icons included artwork, jewelry, figurines, and crosses, to name a few. Brigitte Pitarakis writes in her article *Objects of Devotion and Protection*, “Consideration of the objects and their iconography yields insight into the devotional lives of the persons who used them, providing perspective on the motivations for a range of pious practices in Byzantine society.”⁵⁷

The practice of *Lectio Divina* has roots in pre-Christian Judaism but became renewed in a form in the twelfth century as it was understood to follow the stages of reading, meditation, prayer, and contemplation. Gregory J. Polan writes,

Early Christians remarked that in the prayerful reading of the Scriptures, ‘Spirit speaks to Spirit.’ When the sacred texts are read, the Spirit present in the texts speaks to the Spirit present in the one who reads. In the practice of *lectio divina*, the guidance of the Spirit opens the individual to hear the voice of God; from this flows prayers, the human response to the divine initiative. This is communion, the goal of *lectio divina*.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 91.

⁵⁷ Derek Kreuger, Ed., *Byzantine Christianity*, A People’s History of Christianity, Vol. 3. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006, 164.

⁵⁸ Bernice M. Kaczynski, Ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism*. Oxford: University Press, 2020, 646.

Practicing *Lectio Divina* is still highly regarded today as an exercise in deep connection with an individual's spirit and the Holy Spirit.

Urban Holmes describes the modern period as beginning in the sixteenth century to today. He focuses on the Spanish, French, Italian, and English "schools." It is during the early years of this period that he sees an expected turn to reason.

We become obsessed with logic, analysis, and explanation. This brings many gifts and loses us much. As a consequence, however, we get *the first science of the spiritual life*, beginning with three great Spanish spiritual masters: Ignatius Loyola..., Teresa of Avila..., and John of the Cross....Scientific spirituality means a systematic analysis of the totality of the spiritual experience with the intention of describing both the means and ends of that experience in such a way that it can be taught and followed, as well as compared with other systems.⁵⁹

In France, meditation practices were being developed by Frances de Sales', Miguel De Molinos, and John Eudes, to name a few.

Anglican spirituality is the primary focus of the English school presented for two reasons. Holmes added, "First, it is rooted in the liturgy....The second thing to note is that it celebrates the Creation."⁶⁰ While the Anglican approach tends to lean heavily toward meditation, it remains confused in some circles with Bible study.⁶¹

When studying Protestantism historically, it is best to focus on Martin Luther and John Calvin. Concerning spirituality, Luther is known more for his theology but certainly had roots in

⁵⁹ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 93.

⁶⁰ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 113.

⁶¹ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 113.

German monastic tradition. Holmes explained, “The whole concept of the individual’s experience of salvation by grace through faith is in the mystical tradition of the German Dominicans....The remedy, by which we can accept God’s *imputed righteousness*, is in faith that is an *inward* discovery.”⁶² Even though Luther continued to move away from mysticism with time, he did leave important contributions to Christian spirituality. Holmes said, “Luther uses very vivid images to speak of our being joined now to Christ, and this does in fact necessitate a way of attending to what presence (ascetical theology) and an accounting of the signs that we are in that presence (mystical theology).”⁶³

John Calvin was more closely tied to intellectualism. Holmes said, “For Calvin taught a kind of disciples that led to a *fruito divina*, an anticipation of eternal beatitude, assuring one that one is elect.”⁶⁴ Calvin was no fan of ascetical practices who believed love is rational. Holmes continued, “Calvin was a rationalist who rejected pilgrimages, fasting, almsgiving, and other ascetical practices. His sense of spirituality can be found in piety.”⁶⁵ Holmes described Calvin’s intellectual approach to piety when he said, “Piety is grounded in a sense of dependence and reveals itself in service and worship. The pious person is obedient to God’s law and loves his fellows. He is dutiful in meditation and prayer.”⁶⁶

⁶² Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 124.

⁶³ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 125.

⁶⁴ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 126.

⁶⁵ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 126.

⁶⁶ Ibid., *History*, Holmes, 127.

In the Reformation period, with the laity's exposure to a new way of experiencing religion on a personal level, enthusiasm escalated. In the introduction to *Reformation Christianity* as part of *A People's History of Christianity*, Editor Peter Matheson says,

Indeed, the stirring of spirits was so extraordinary that to make sense of it, people reached back not only to dimly remembered events in their corporate memory but to texts from prophetic and visionary books from the Bible such as Joel and Revelation. The young would again see visions, and the old would dream dreams. Nothing seemed impossible anymore. A new age was dawning, and it was time to lasso the future.⁶⁷

From ancient biblical times and throughout the New Testament era, God has issued vocational calls and vocational transition calls to the faithful. The early church fathers have shared their encounters throughout the generations, as has been documented beyond the scope of this work. Men and women have sensed God's call to serve everywhere, from their local communities to places across the globe.

Today, spiritual discernment is something Christians encounter whenever facing decisions where they rely on the Holy Spirit to guide them. In *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium*, Joseph Tetlow states, "During most of the past century, we thought of it principally as a way to discover God's will, particularly about being a religious or a priest. We tended to think that the people facing those decisions were the ones who needed to do this discernment thing."⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Peter Matheson, ed. *Reformation Christianity*, *A People's History of Christianity*, Vol. 5, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007, 4.

⁶⁸ Joseph A. Tetlow, *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium* (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2016), xii.

Tetlow adds, “Simply put, the experience that we call discernment is living with an appreciative awareness of the constant interplay of complex human realities we refer to as head and heart and hands.”⁶⁹ Building on the thoughts of Pope Francis, Tetlow describes our head as the place of faith and understanding, our heart where our beliefs and love of God reside, and our hands as expressing our actions, all based on our faith within.⁷⁰

For Tetlow, discernment is an interrelationship among the head, heart, and hands. In our heads, we comprehend faith. In our hearts, we solidify our belief and make our commitment to Christ. With our hands, we act on this faith and belief.⁷¹ Tetlow reflects, “Most comprehensively, when we say that we are discerning, we mean that we have set ourselves to find God at work in the world and to unite ourselves to him.”⁷²

This commitment leads us to believe that discernment is a sign of spiritual maturity. All relationships have varying components, and individuals will have different levels of commitment. This principle is true for our relationship with God as well. Tetlow states, “By wanting simply ‘to do God’s will,’ we cement our relationship with God in holy intimacy.”⁷³

Our faith in God, who is constantly creating us, or as discipleship language would say, growing us, involves our decisions and our destiny, even when we view this through the lens of

⁶⁹ Ibid., Tetlow, 5.

⁷⁰ Ibid., Tetlow, 5.

⁷¹ Ibid., Tetlow, 13.

⁷² Ibid., Tetlow, 13.

⁷³ Ibid., Tetlow, 37.

our vocation. This discernment comes through reflection based upon our faith. According to Tetlow, “This first great discernment begins in our faith that God our Creator and Lord is calling us into being moment by moment and shaping us in the divine likeness as complete enfleshed spirits, as whole persons.”⁷⁴

Discernment is how we seek to do God’s will based upon our faith and observations of where we see God at work in the world around us. God’s continuing action is also evident in those who follow as part of an ever-living, growing, and ever-evolving reality. This seeking is best achieved by most through meditation and prayer. Tetlow continues, “Done quietly in God’s presence, we frame this prayerful consideration in our faith and hope in Christ and from it determine the next good thing to do. Then we offer our decision and our action to the Lord.”⁷⁵ This process shows us as moving from activity to activity and certainly contributes to the fuel behind pastoral transitions. Since God is creating in us constantly, we lean into God’s call when, sometimes, we are discerning that the next good thing God wants us to do is to be done other than where we currently serve.

In Baptist life today, pastors serve primarily as independent contractors. Since we historically respect the autonomy of the local church, congregations have followed the practice of hiring clergy via a standard practice of reviewing applicants, conducting interviews, and discerning which candidate is deemed to be the best match for the pastoral role. Baptist pastors seeking to relocate often prepare their credentials and send them to any number of churches to have their information reviewed in the hope of securing an interview. These engagements have

⁷⁴ Ibid., Tetlow, 50.

⁷⁵ Ibid., Tetlow, 68-69.

developed with the expansion of the advent of technology, but the basic practice has remained intact.

CHAPTER 3

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The context of this thesis has no specific or geographic parameters. Securing qualitative data and ethnographic information based upon individual conversations is likewise limiting. The methodology and analytical processes incorporated, however, provided sufficient material to formulate informed findings and conclusions related to the stated goal of evaluating the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery for ministry leaders experiencing vocational transitions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MINISTERIAL CONTEXT

Fourteen hundred cooperating churches comprise the Baptist General Association of Virginia (BGAV). Prior to the establishment of any national Baptist denomination, the BGAV was founded in 1823 for the purpose of assisting churches in issues of autonomy, affiliation with like-minded believers, and sending missionaries. They established the University of Richmond and other agencies such as the Women's Missionary Union of Virginia. They have worked to have a Baptist congregation in every Virginia town as the railroad industry grew. They own Eagle Eyrie and operate it as a retreat and renewal center where people come and connect with their God-given mission. They have partnership missions that expand the globe in addition to multiple resources that equip member congregations in their efforts to serve their communities and beyond.¹ Member churches vary in theological and ideological beliefs and practices and

¹ All information in this paragraph is found at <https://www.bgav.org/new-here> (accessed December 10, 2021).

affiliate with national denominational entities such as the Southern Baptist Convention, The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, and the Baptist World Alliance.

This thesis research focused on ministry leaders within the BGAV family who were anticipating or experiencing a transition from a vocational ministry position of Pastor/Senior Pastor to another ministry position of the same or similar title. Critical to the research study were the criteria that participants be within six months of the transition and that participants were in the process of discerning God's clear direction for their transition process. As much as was possible, participants varied in areas of gender, age, experience, numbers of ministerial transitions, congregational size and demographics, and socio-economic circumstances.

The BGAV has an online ministry matching system like many denominational entities. The matching of pastors and churches happens with corresponding responses to questionnaires in areas of agreement such as theology, stance on women in ministry, and denominational issues. This process is an impersonal mechanism that does not address the spiritual needs of the pastor for the discernment process. This study of the effectiveness of coaching pastors for spiritual discovery through the transition process resulted in healthier decisions by the candidates as they felt led in a more spiritual manner.

Statement of the Problem

The average tenure for a pastor today is 3.6 years.² This statistic means that people who serve as pastors will often experience several vocational transitions over the course of a career. Such transitions may have multiple and diverse causes, but all pastoral transitions may

² Thomas Rainer, "Why Pastors often Leave their Church in the Third Year," podcast episode 117 (April 21, 2015) <https://thomrainer.com/2015/04/why-pastors-often-leave-their-church-in-the-third-year-rainer-on-leadership-117/> (accessed September 30, 2021).

potentially challenge the leaders' spiritual health. Pastors experience different spiritual discernment challenges during three stages of vocational transitions I identify here: first, the prelude to transition that includes any number of causes from the stirring of the Holy Spirit to termination from a church. The pre-transition time is when the pastor is experiencing circumstances leading her or him to determine it is time to move from one pastorate to another. These reasons can include everything from sensing God's clear calling to having been fired and everything imaginable between the desires and necessities.

The second transition stage includes a time of tendering a resignation typically followed by a thirty-day period for preparations to relocate, house hunting in the new location, and preparing to enter the new venue. This transitional stage is the physical time of relocation, which includes the emotions involved with saying goodbye and then hello.

The third stage is a post-transition season known as the "honeymoon" period. The pastor arrives at the new venue, and everyone works diligently to put their best foot forward for a good beginning. Pastors typically find themselves in a season of busyness, learning names, families, systems, roles, and their new community.

All three of these stages are worthy of study as any of them can negatively impact pastors' spiritual health and discernment processing. The desire for this research was to target the first stage of vocational transitions. In this study, I coached eight ministers in this first transitional stage.

The BGAV had 177 churches with pastoral vacancies during the time of my research.³ With the help of Dr. Ken Kessler of the BGAV, I was able to send a blanket email invitation (Appendix C) to a strictly confidential conversation with pastors experiencing a vocational transition to the entire 1,400 church body. My personal contact information was included in the statewide email instead of the standard request to contact the BGAV office for further details to enhance the confidential nature of the potential participants. Pastors rarely divulge to anyone outside of their family or close confidants when they are in the process of searching for their next ministry position. The personal nature of the secretive topic prevented most interested parties from accepting the invitation, and the eight research participants were the only inquiries obtained.

My experience, calling, and training to qualify me to lead this study were threefold: as a pastor, as one who has experienced several vocational transitions, and as a trained coach. I served as a pastor for over 22 years, the last 20 of those in BGAV churches. That time span saw me serving seven churches making my average tenure just over three years. The last church I served closed its doors under my leadership, which helped me transition to pastoral retirement in June 2021.

I have been training as a personal coach for ten years, taking advantage of classes and opportunities offered through the BGAV. Sensing God's call to make coaching a new ministerial career, I have completed much training and obtained certifications through the BGAV⁴ as well as

³ Email, 7/21/2021. Information received from Dr. Ken Kessler, Empower Leadership Coaching of the BGAV leader, as obtained by the Support Services Department of the BGAV.

⁴ BGAV's coaching certification is an entry-level certification. No web resources were available as of 9/25/2021. The certification offered is Empower Coaching Leadership Certificate.

Coach Approach Ministries.⁵ By the time of my graduation, I will have earned my Associate Certified Coach (ACC) through the International Coaching Federation.⁶

METHODOLOGY

The thesis research incorporated qualitative and ethnographic data. The vision of the project was to study a specific methodology using a singular model and exit interview to determine how viable coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors in vocational transition can be. Data were collected and analyzed using field research from participants experiencing their own vocational transitions to ensure the data's authenticity.

The delimitations of the project insist that participants must be members of the BGAV as identified by BGAV leaders. The project included criteria for selecting participants from the field of interested respondents. This delimitation was primarily concerned with securing diversity within the participant pool if possible. The content of the coaching sessions and exit interviews provided essential qualitative data that informed the project outcomes.

Description of the Thesis Research

Participants received coaching for spiritual discovery, followed by an exit interview. Due to extreme confidentiality issues, all coaching sessions were private, 1-on-1 conversations. Personal data has been omitted from any publication and will also be destroyed at the study's conclusion.

⁵ My certification is Certified Christian Life Coach through Coach Approach Ministries. Information for that organization and certification is found at <https://coachapproachministries.org/cclc>.

⁶ Information about this agency and certification level is found at <https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/acc-paths>

I coached participating ministry leaders experiencing vocational transitions using Denise Massey's CARING™ model.⁷ Then I evaluated the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discernment for ministry leaders transitioning from one vocational position to another using follow-up interviews. Subjects participated in six coaching sessions with me over a three-month period. Participants' experiences were complex and varied in nature. Each participant also experienced a follow-up interview with me to discuss ethnographic information that proved useful in the project's overall purposes and goals of determining the effects of coaching for spiritual discovery using the CARING™ model for pastors anticipating vocational transitions. In assessing coaching's effectiveness, the individual interviews incorporated the qualitative data needed for analysis. I conducted all of the coaching sessions and interviews via the online platform, Zoom. Each session was recorded and stored on my personal computer to avoid cloud storage and potential data leakage. I will destroy all materials such as these recordings and personal notes I took in these sessions upon the project's completion.

The resources necessary for this research followed a standard set of questions for the coaching sessions (Appendix D) and exit interviews (Appendix E). Exit interviews were conducted via Zoom after the participants responded in writing to the exit interview questions. These conversations allowed participants to clarify any questions concerning their written answers and offer any elaborative material useful for ethnographic data collection.

The rationale for recording the Zoom sessions is twofold. First, in coaching conversations, the coach needs to be wholly engaged in the exchange, utilizing concentrated listening skills and forming questions based upon what they are hearing. To be taking copious

⁷ Denise Massey, *CARING™*. Appendix D.

notes for research purposes during this dialogue would be detrimental to the process. Second, I reviewed each session for analysis and comparison as I carefully searched for common themes and nuanced differences notable for data processing.

Rationale for the Process

Denise Massey's CARING™ model in *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations*⁸ is an ideal blending of coaching and spiritual discovery. The usage of this model helps participants grasp God's guidance for their vocational decision-making. Pastors experiencing these transitions often face challenges to their spiritual discovery process during this time of discernment.

Coaching conversations are unique as individuals offer insights into their thinking processes, feelings, experiences, ideas, and goals. The exchanges are based on the topic the person being coached wishes to pursue, making them highly subjective in nature. I set the parameters of spiritual discernment in the coaching sessions for this thesis research. The model for these conversations worked well with the subject matter as the participants stayed within the parameters with few exceptions.

IRB Process

Clear information was provided to participants indicating all aspects of this research, including the study's nature, procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality issues, as well as their role as volunteers. I was identified as the researcher who would conduct all personal interactions with the subjects. They were informed that this research was to study coaching for spiritual discovery's effectiveness for pastors experiencing vocational transition. Explanations

⁸ Ibid., Denise Massey, *CARING™*, Appendix D.

were offered for the collection, storage, usage, and destruction of the private conversations after I analyzed the data for ethnographic and qualitative information.

I informed participants of the research procedures involving six coaching conversations and an exit interview, and the information gathering guidelines. I explained the design of the process to help participants discover their own deep thoughts, feelings, and sense of God's guidance through the coaching process.

Risks and discomforts were briefly shared and agreed upon for the IRB process. The only possible discomfort anticipated for the study would be as participants engaged with God. The personal results of such encounters could be challenging to receive and accept as they potentially clashed with the participants' desires.

This explanation was followed by showing how the research could potentially benefit participants. Obtaining a clear sense of God's guidance was the hope for the coaching experience, which provides invaluable spiritual direction for participants to follow. I also explained an additional benefit of a written resource for all ministers in vocational transitions.

Chief to the IRB process was sharing information concerning confidentiality. It was made clear that all recordings of coaching sessions and any notes taken by the researcher would be destroyed upon the study's completion. Participants were assured that no personal information about them would be shared in any way, including in the written thesis. They were further assured that all participants would be referred to only in coded language for the writing, such as Subject A, Subject B, etc. The final confidentiality issue addressed concerned the video recordings storage on my computer and no cloud service and how those recordings would be destroyed upon the project's completion.

I explained to each subject that they were volunteering to participate. They were informed of being free to remove themselves from the process at any time. Their approval was required for the recording and collection of data, including the coaching sessions via Zoom. The compensation provided to the participants was the coaching sessions themselves at no charge. These sessions typically cost \$100 each. I distributed the contact information to each participant, including my contact information, my project supervisor, and Mercer University's IRB chairperson.

Plan for Evaluation

Data collection utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating a combination of ethnographic data from coaching sessions and exit interviews. I leaned into Mary Clark Moschella's *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction*, which offers fundamentals of gathering this type of information.

Recording all of the coaching and exit interview sessions through Zoom gave me two key benefits. First, I could be deeply present during the conversations without the distraction of taking notes or noting any visual clues from the participants as to their body language or levels of discomfort with the topics discussed. Second, all of that information was stored on my computer, so I could review and notate all visual cues given by participants as well as listen carefully for the information provided for deeper analysis. This sense of "presence" in coaching conversations is essential for both the coach and participant as the dialogue is deeply engaged by both parties without distractions. As Moschella states, "In order to hear the deeper stories,

pastoral ethnographers must ‘listen’ with all their senses, for what is communicated in words, tone of voice, silences, gestures, and actions.”⁹ This is critical for productive coaching sessions.

I reviewed all six of the coaching sessions with each of the eight participants and their exit interviews’ written and verbal responses. I found it most useful to record ethnographic information, primarily recording interpretive and literal findings, on a separate spreadsheet. When I concluded this review, I analyzed the collective data to determine patterns of similarities and differences the participants displayed. The size of this participant pool made tagging and coding of information unnecessary.

The timing of the exit interviews proved helpful in analysis. I sent participants an exit interview (See Appendix E) following our final session. I then scheduled an interview session with each participant to offer them an opportunity to elaborate or change any of their written responses. Moschella describes how this time between written and verbal exit interviews was important when she declares, “What someone says in an interview one day is likely to depend upon how he or she was feeling that day and on what else was going on in that person’s life.”¹⁰ Extra information gleaned from the verbal exit interviews is reported in chapter four. This combined exit interview data helped me identify patterns experienced by the participants in various areas, including theology, spiritual needs for their vocational transition process, and similarities in their reflections on the coaching for spiritual discovery process.¹¹

⁹ Mary Clark Moschella, *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction* (Cleveland, OH: The Pilgrim Press, 2008), 141.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Moschella, *Ethnography*, 177.

The results of this project provided the genesis to create a resource for a broader audience seeking help in spiritual discovery matters by using coaching as a primary method to help them make their decisions. I expected to learn how coaching for spiritual discovery may have a profound and positive effect for pastors in the stages of vocational transition. I also expected to learn how impactful the CARING™ model can be in a general sense for my future coaching endeavors, which will involve both clergy and non-clergy members of the Christian faith. Furthermore, I expected to learn how to develop a resource that will strengthen the work of everyone involved in ministerial transitions as well as all spiritual discernment processes.

¹¹ Ibid., Moschella, *Ethnography*, 178-79. Moschella cites an example of research showing thematic analysis by Swinton and Mowat that goes far deeper than my research, but indicates similar patterns of thematic identification.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS OF THE COACHING PROCESS

The coaching process produced distinct findings. All eight participants experienced strong impacts in many areas of the process, as indicated through several categories below. Individual subjects have been randomly assigned an alphabetic notation for confidentiality and quoting purposes.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographic Information on Subjects

This study was conducted with seven males and one female. Seven of the subjects were pastors, one of whom was also a denominational worker, and one subject was strictly a denominational worker. All eight subjects fit into my definition of stage one of the transition process, anticipating a vocational change. At the time of the study's conclusion, four subjects discerned God's leadership was to stay in their current role while remaining open to God's potential leadership to make a vocational transition at a future time.

General Information Provided by Subjects

Four of the eight subjects were seeking or had sought personal counseling at the time of the study. Those subjects who were not involved in counseling who showed signs of needing it were recommended by me to seek counsel for their emotional needs that went beyond the scope of coaching. Five subjects were actively serving in their present roles. Three were not currently serving vocationally, and of those three, two had been dismissed from their previous ministerial place of employment. Six of the eight subjects were actively seeking vocational transitions and had begun search processes. The other two subjects anticipated transitions but had not yet begun

active searches prior to our coaching sessions. One of those two was asked to resign their position during our coaching relationship.

SESSION CONTENTS

The PBC drives coaching conversation topics. This study used the framework of coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors anticipating vocational transitions. The contents of these subjective sessions varied widely but consistently approached the subject matter through the lens of spirituality and seeking God's direction. Below is not an exhaustive list of personal and spiritual topics raised by the subjects. Attention was given to topics shared by more than one and had the most significant impacts on the PBC processing.

Topics Addressed by Subjects in Coaching Sessions

It is necessary to separate the personal from spiritual topics presented during the coaching conversations. Distinguishing them helps better highlight the spiritual conversations while not ignoring the importance of the personal matters at hand. Some coaching sessions focused exclusively on personal matters, some only on spiritual matters, and most on a combination of where spiritual matters intersect with personal ones.

PERSONAL TOPICS

Five of the eight subjects dealt with the issue of forgiveness. Incomplete processing of past hurts caused by others in previous employment settings was a prominent but not exclusive theme. Forgiveness issues discussed exposed spiritual and emotional pain leftover from unresolved matters with individuals and groups. These conversations often included referrals to professional counseling where the line between coaching and counseling was evident.

Forgiveness issues emanated from the need to forgive others, the churches, and God. The subjects involved in these conversations felt they were being prevented from moving forward in their faith and discernment process because of this unresolved issue. All subjects involved in these conversations expressed a need for an intentional focus on forgiveness. Three of the subjects had been exposed to character attacks and rejection. One subject struggled with not knowing the reasoning behind the actions of some who had hurt him in a previous vocational setting. Forgiving those who had not sought it was troubling for him and others struggling with forgiveness issues. This subject expressed how his processing for forgiveness for these deep wounds in the past had been to simply write it off and move past it without actively processing forgiveness and working toward healing.

A common topic raised by most subjects was role identification. They struggled with overreaching job titles combined with vague expectations from those they served. Leadership identification was troublesome for those serving in leadership roles and those seeking those roles while not serving. Some of these topics were clearly related to issues of leadership during a global pandemic. Those with creative mindsets struggled with congregants who were anxious to have all functions of the church return to “normal,” the ways they used to be prior to COVID-19.

The topic of role identification also triggered internal issues. One subject struggled with what was described as feeling lazy because of pastoral functions not happening, such as pastoral home visits. Another subject struggled with internal leadership issues such as serving in humility and not pride, leading patiently without becoming a control freak, and developing a stronger sense of empathy to listen better and relate to people struggling. More than one subject expressed frustrations with a lack of volunteerism, including discipleship and leadership activities.

A third personal topic raised by subjects was a struggle with balancing ministry and home life. Some subjects expressed difficulty over a season of working from home. Some wrestling with this had workspace issues in their homes, clutter, disorganization, and distractions from surroundings and family members. Those working in their office were hampered by prioritizing goals and activities. Two subjects were frustrated trying to find a healthy rhythm of work and activities within their areas of service. Time management from fluid pandemic issues resulted in discouragement. This was further exacerbated because of spiritual discernment issues discussed in the next section.

Finally, relationship issues were discussed by several subjects. Some of these issues were affected by the pandemic, while others were caused by isolation that often comes when one is in a search process. There was a desire for community connections for personal and professional needs. Activities with family and friends were an example shared as well as lunches with peers. One expressed how the lack of joy coming from those activities was taking a toll emotionally. Another expressed frustration because they anticipated interviews and possible trial weekends with a church, but churches who had expressed interest were not meeting on the committee or congregational levels.

SPIRITUAL TOPICS

Every subject expressed a need for call discernment. Within the discerning process was learning God's call to a particular vocational setting. This discernment also included some questioning God's overall call in their lives. Some subjects confirmed doubts that God was still calling them to vocational ministry or pondered if God's call was to a different form of vocational ministry.

Three of the subjects exploring call discernment engaged the topic of call authenticity for distinct reasons. One subject questioned whether the service he was involved with was his way of being godly without experiencing a genuine call to the pastorate. The other two subjects confronted how their identity had become tangled with their activity in God's work. Their self-value had become tethered to their internal sense of adequate effort. In one such conversation, I posed this question to generate clarity, "How do you distinguish being a preacher and a beloved child of God who is called to preach?"

Three other subjects entrenched in call discernment issues wrestled with their level of ministry involvement moving forward. One wondered if they should remain in the pastorate or begin an independent ministry. Another was navigating how to limit availability due to family issues. The third was working on weaving together affirmation from outside that seemed to conflict with their true sense of calling.

A final discernment issue for subjects was when God's call began to be clarified. As they experienced this sense of direction, subjects desired a stronger sense of certainty before moving into the directions they were feeling called. They expressed a need for spiritual peace prior to finalizing vocational decisions.

This process led to a second common thread of topics raised by subjects: their relationship with God. Several subjects acknowledged a relationship with God that was good, but not to the level of closeness they desired, while other subjects described a fractured relationship. For one, closeness with Christ had become missing, and an absence of joy in the Lord was revealed. Another subject stated their relationship with God was purely in the head and not in the heart at that time. This individual was frustrated with God over past issues and a lack of clarity

moving forward. One subject shared a great distance from God and desired to incorporate some practices to regain that sense of God's loving embrace.

This topic naturally led most subjects to discuss spiritual disciplines. Some subjects admitted to a lack of quiet time and other spiritual practices. They worked hard to renew practices that were familiar to them as well as explore new possibilities. The desire to abide with God was strong while absorbing the feelings of guilt for neglecting these practices was evident. Most common among the subjects was a desire to better listen in prayer. Some confessed that their prayer lives had become list-making monologues where they would express their desires and frustrations and then cut off the conversation to move on to the day's chores.

Other subjects were lacking time spent in God's word and meditation. Without daily time spent with the scriptures, some felt an increased distance between themselves and God. Efforts were made to restore personal study and explore the reasoning behind its importance and relevancy to the subjects. One subject dealt with deeper issues related to incorporating spiritual disciplines while still experiencing a sense of sadness from their circumstances.

Another spiritual topic frequently addressed by subjects involved a desire to be actively serving God that was not currently realized. One had a deep desire to be discipling leaders who would then go disciple. Another wanted to gather like-minded leaders to explore ministry identity and visioning. Another was struggling to operate in faith in the absence of a particular vocational position. This individual and another subject were struggling to trust God's timing for their next steps forward.

Using the CARING™ Model

The CARING™ model provided helpful guidance for all coaching conversations. The model's framework enhanced the spiritual engagement of each topic addressed. Beginning every session with an intentional time of connection with God, others, and one's deepest self, enabled each PBC to gain a clear focus on the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Subjects then divulged topics for the conversations, usually an area where they felt stuck in their spiritual lives or a specific need to be addressed. Obstacles hindering their progress were addressed in this part of the sessions. The CARING™ model encourages this dialogue. It helped me work with the PBC to narrow the breadth of the topic(s) raised to a manageable parameter within the conversations. I was also able to use this time to remind subjects of the spiritual nature of our sessions.

The model next enabled the PBC and me to reach agreement as to the singular spiritual topic we would address for the remainder of the conversation. Mutually concurring on a single topic is a vital component to coaching conversations. This agreement gave me the necessary influence over the conversations when they began to stray into other topical interests. I asked the PBC if the wayward information was forming a new topic to agree upon. If not, I would remind them to stay in tune with our agreement.

The CARING™ model calls for the conversation to inspire the development of a loving action plan. I led each PBC through a time of exploring possibilities of things they could do to address the topic at hand. As options were explored and discussed, I helped the PBC to narrow the ideas to pursue to a manageable number of steps. When action plans were determined, time was spent delineating specific details to each plan.

Navigating obstacles to the plan is the next step in the CARING™ model. With loving action steps in place, I inquired with the PBC to determine what might interfere with them performing their chosen steps. In most of the conversation, I asked, “What might get in the way of your performing these steps until we talk again?” This step was always appreciated because it gave the PBC time to carefully think through the feasibility and potential pitfalls they might encounter in performing their chosen action steps. This occasionally led the PBC to reconsider if their action steps were practical or needed adjusting.

The final phase of the CARING™ suggests generating commitment from the PBC to their revised loving action steps. I was able to use this step to bring a natural conclusion to the coaching sessions. PBCs were always asked to what level they were willing to commit to following through with their action steps. I pushed back whenever a PBC would waver from anything less than a strong commitment. Only once did this result in revising the loving action steps that individual had chosen.

Biblical References Raised by Subjects in Coaching Sessions

It is often helpful in coaching for spiritual matters to ask PBC what biblical person or story they can relate to in describing their own situation. Each subject brought up specific biblical characters, stories, themes, or specific scripture passages. Paul was the most frequently referenced biblical character, although never for the same reason twice. Subjects citing Paul referred to the preparation time for ministry (Gal 1:17), the irony of being called to witness to the Gentiles (Gal 1:14-16), the thorn in his flesh (2 Cor 12:7). Additionally, how Paul praised God in all circumstances (Phil 4:12-13), calling out the hypocrites (Gal 2:11-13), and experiencing the Macedonian call (Acts 16:6-10). Elijah was the second most prominent name used by subjects

when compared to their circumstances. The scene most described concerning Elijah was after he had defeated the prophets of Baal but ran in fear after hearing Jezebel had threatened to kill him (1 Kgs 19:1-4). The character of Job was mentioned repeatedly by some subjects, although in general terms only, discussing the poor help his friends offered and his conversation with God where Job best understood his place before the Lord (Job 37:1-42:6). Other biblical people mentioned included Moses, Jonah, Isaiah, David, Gideon, Ezekiel, and Peter. All candidates discussed Jesus at various points in the coaching relationship concerning numerous aspects of his life and teaching.

Biblical stories were raised by subjects that focused more on the story than a particular character mainly were stories in the life of Jesus. The narratives explored included Jesus' instructions on fixing broken relationships (Matt 18:15-17), the parable of the sower (Matt 13:1-23, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15), the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), and his encounter with the religious leaders and the woman caught or trapped in adultery (John 8:2-11). The only story discussed outside of Jesus' life was about Joseph dealing with the issue of forgiving his brothers who had sold him into slavery (Gen 45:1-8).

Specific scriptural passages expressed were evenly divided between leadership definition role defenses and seeking comfort and connecting with God. Those used in defense of leadership roles included Ezek 1-3 (specifically Ezek 2:6, where it talks about not fearing your enemies). Also cited were Gal 2:11-13, where Paul called out the hypocritical actions of other apostles, and Acts 6:1-6, where the roles of the selected laity were clearly defined as assistants to the pastoral ministry. Scriptural passages used for seeking comfort or stronger connections with God included Psa 19 and its focus on meditation and communion with God. The Proverbs, in general,

were used with their references to wisdom and meditation, along with 2 Pet 3:8-9, where God's patience was described. The most referenced biblical passage was Prov 3:5-6, where a clear understanding of trusting God in all things was helpful for discernment.

Theological Influences on Those Being Coached

To get subjects thinking biblically, I asked them periodically how their story or issue in the current discussion reminded them of a story or character in the scriptures. Those self-identified as theologically conservative had somewhat different responses than those theologically non-conservatives (moderate, liberal, progressive). Both groups were comfortable with Hebrew Scriptures references, including Ezekiel, Job, Jonah, Isaiah, David, Gideon, and Moses. Most references to these characters were personal comparisons to the plights of the subjects.

New Testament character references varied by basic theological/political points of view. Most of the conservatives leaned heavily into the epistles of Paul and some of the narratives of Paul's life, as seen in the Acts of the Apostles. Two of them indicated a desire to better follow James' teachings, as well, by putting their faith in action. These conservative leaders desired a more disciplined approach to their connection with God.

The non-conservatives reflected more on strengthening their relationship with God. They were more inclined to reference Gospel narratives and the teachings of Jesus within them. Neither of these findings was exclusive to one side or another, but the evidence of the different approaches was obvious. These differing theological approaches led to positive revelations for everyone that applied to each subject's need in their situation.

OBSERVATIONS

I stated to each subject that a crisis in ministry usually causes ministers to question their overall call to ministry. In one conversation, a subject expressed their feeling of doubt alongside a sense of frustration of not trusting God enough. I said, “If doubt is where you are and trust is where you want to be, let’s go back and review your original call. Where did it happen? When? What exactly happened? How did you receive it? Then, bring it back to today and ask yourself if anything has happened since your call to indicate that God has changed it.” This study included several similar conversations where deep thoughts were considered by the PBC, resulting in a stronger sense of call affirmation in each subject. These insights led to positive experiences from the PBC toward aspects of the coaching process.

Observations from the Coach

Each subject demonstrated an ability to address both spiritual and practical matters through a spiritual conversation lens. The connections made between the two components were very strong in most cases. Most subjects showed strong bonds between everyday activities and spirituality understandings within them. For example, one subject stated that his spiritual connection with God, particularly in prayer, was completely a cerebral exercise. He worked hard on practical issues designed to strengthen a spiritual awareness of God’s presence and therefore gained a much stronger personal bond with God in the process.

Other subjects dealt with many practical issues such as work and home balance, relational issues with constituents, and skepticism in the interview process from having been treated dishonestly previously. Each conversation viewed these issues in spiritual capacities. For example, the work and home balance issues were approached through the lens of God’s call to

ministry coinciding with God's call to be a good family person. Relational issues with constituents were talked about in the language of a biblical shepherd, in particular the Good Shepherd. Skepticism from past deception in the interview process was discussed, considering trust issues with God and God's people.

Loving action steps are a key component to the coaching process using the CARING™ model. All subjects worked diligently to generate action steps that were specific in nature and more than simple chores. They all showed strong commitments to working in these areas for the purpose of moving their faith forward and gleaning a better understanding of God's call. The subjects often used the action steps as springboards into actions beyond what was discussed in our coaching sessions. In the few incidents when subjects struggled to implement their action steps, external events hindered them.

The action steps taken by subjects varied widely. Some explored scriptures for informational and formational reasons. Some subjects incorporated deliberate prayer practices, such as using the "Jesus prayer" as a breath prayer. Some worked on cleaning up office clutter which distracted them from times of meditation.

The results of subjects' efforts in their action steps were often profound. Subjects report deeper insights into their issues, stronger senses of God's presence and love, and measurable progress in actions such as spiritual disciplines or new habits being formed. All subjects expressed positive results from their work and helped each one move forward in their goal of seeking call clarity.

It is notable how quickly each subject related to me as a confidante in the coaching process. Every subject expressed comfort and relatability for two specific reasons. First, I am a

recently retired pastor who has been heavily involved in denominational work over the years. Some subjects stated their comfort with opening deep issues right away with me because they knew they were speaking with a peer. Others shared a strong comfort level due to the strength of our confidentiality agreement.

Observations from those Being Coached

All eight subjects indicated gaps in their desired connection with God and their realized connection with God. All of them also mentioned leaning on prayer for discernment in their possible vocational transitions. Still, each declared a lack of listening to hear what God might be saying to them directly in their quiet times. They all state that God speaks to them in many ways such as through Scriptures, worship, and other believers, but that they were not equating much of what they heard through these other channels as a word from God.

If “spiritual discovery” is defined as “aha moments,” sudden existential activities with profound insights or answers to their discernment process, then the study produced little positive results. This lack of positive results was not universally true as some such experiences were expressed, but this was not observed or reported with any regularity. What was more important to the subjects in our conversations was not to experience “aha” moments but rather focus on positioning themselves spiritually for the Holy Spirit to be best recognized when the “aha” moments would come. Their interests led them to prepare the soil of their hearts to be fertile ground for the Lord to till.

This preparation led subjects to address multiple topics depending upon their individual needs. Some topics addressed were practical matters like establishing a quiet time, increasing their time and priority management skills, developing coping mechanisms to manage better their

past hurts, improve their self-esteem, and generate better spousal communications. Other topics subjects raised were spiritual in nature, such as meditation practices, the content of their prayer lives, forgiveness for self, others, and God, learning to trust God more, and increasing their faith by overcoming doubts.

Each subject offered insights into the spiritual progress they made in this process. Subject A addressed a healthier sense of forgiveness while also understanding God's call for future ministry. "The clarity I have now is not set in stone, but I've got a better sense of what I'm capable of and what I want to do." Subject B stated they have a much stronger sense of God's presence through the Holy Spirit, increased sensitivity to self-care physically, emotionally, and spiritually, a desire to draw nearer to God daily, and the insight that God's call is to stay in their current ministry setting and not transition away. Subject C showed a clearer sense of God's call plus several improved Christian leadership attributes like humility, patience, seeking more providence than control, and exemplifying godly empathy.

Subject D sensed a profound clarity about God's call to remain in vocational ministry after pondering leaving it behind. They also sensed God's presence in new ways, including in mundane daily activities, and a renewed drive to serve the church while connecting better with the community. Subject E is still working on the "where" part of their call but is far clearer now on their role, sense of calling and purpose, and profound peace with God and self, resulting in confidence and gratitude. Subject F says their trust in God has increased exponentially. They understand God's clear path for vocational transition was to stay in the current place of service unless and until God gave clear directions otherwise. They also recognize how deepening their

relationship with God would increase the depth of their relationship with others such as their spouse, family, friends, and constituents.

Subject G's list of spiritual insights was extensive and included an increased awareness of God's presence and embrace during prayer times, experiencing forgiveness for deep hurts, understanding God's presence while walking through the valley, and seeking God's guidance when tempted to pursue their own paths. Subject G also experienced God's renewing power even through a season of non-ministry work, discovering identity in Christ and not in their vocation, praising God in the tense times, and the power of laying a fleece before the Lord in to be clear of God's will.

Subject H's spiritual insights were also many, including overcoming an enormous spiritual roadblock in their journey: forgiving those who hurt them in the past without needing to learn their reasoning. The insights involved improving their prayer life, gaining a sense of holy balancing in work and family life, decreasing defensive reactions to questions, and offering well-thought-out responses instead. The most significant spiritual insight Subject H experienced was learning to trust God again and trust God more. These insights resulted in an affirmation of their calling and readiness to move forward in their vocational journey.

EXIT INTERVIEWS

Following their final coaching session, I emailed exit interviews designed to address the major issues of this study. Upon completing and returning their written responses, the PBC and I held a final conversation to discuss their answers and clarify any uncertainties. Below are comprehensive summaries and quotes from each subject for each question. The questions are grouped into categories and do not precisely follow their order on the actual questionnaire.

GENERAL INFORMATION RESPONSES

What worked best for you in our coaching conversations?

- Subject A. “David’s style was somewhat informal but at the same time helpfully guiding in focus. There was a good balance of ‘nudging’ just enough while at the same time giving me the flexibility to explore and grow in my own way and at my own pace.”
- Subject B. “When Dave would ask probing or thought-provoking questions. Sometimes you can’t see the forest for the trees. This process allowed me, through these questions, to rise above the forest and be able to see the 30,000-foot view of my situation, which was tremendously helpful.”
- Subject C. “The best part of the coaching experience for me was having an opportunity to receive another perspective. It was also helpful to be able to talk to someone knowing that our conversations were confidential.”
- Subject D. “I appreciated the times when we processed through roadblocks and then discussed ways to overcome them. I particularly appreciated times when practical steps were offered to work on for the next week or two.”
- Subject E. “The routine pattern of questions and format.”
- Subject F. “I believe the aspect that worked best for me was the insightful prompts Pep would give to steer the coaching conversations. In addition, because I can easily be a meandering conversationalist, I appreciated Pep’s ability to gently steer the conversation back to the issues of that coaching session.”

- Subject G. “I really appreciated when David prayed for me at the beginning of each session and when David guided the conversation. Like many pastors, I have no problem talking and talking. I needed someone to redirect and focus me.”
- Subject H. “I would say the positive attitude and humor from the coach and allowing time to let me gather together my thoughts and think through the questions asked. I thought that the questions asked were really good and helped me think through some things.”

What area did you find least helpful?

- Subject A. “I can’t point to anything about the process that I would consider not helpful.”
- Subject B. “I thought everything we did was useful.”
- Subject C. “I found the entire experience very helpful, so I am going to answer this question by sharing what the most difficult part of the experience was for me. I like having an agenda and knowing exactly where we are planning to cover in each session. The hardest part for me was just winging it and talking whichever way the conversation led.”
- Subject D. “Least helpful would honestly be my own preparation for the coaching call. I, too, often came to the call unsure of what I wanted to discuss. Some of this was connected to my early feelings of general lostness in my calling, which made it hard to identify what to talk about.”
- Subject E. “Not applicable.”

- Subject F. “Well, if I need something here, I guess I would say the coaching didn’t write God’s will of occupational transition or not on a stone for my life.”
- Subject G. “The entire experience was helpful.”
- Subject H. “Honestly, I can’t think of anything that was not helpful.”

Would you recommend this kind of coaching to others in discernment processes who could benefit from spiritual discovery?

- Subject A. “Yes.”
- Subject B. “Absolutely.”
- Subject C. “Yes. I would recommend this to others, making sure that they understood that the coach is not going to give you the answers just lead you to them.”
- Subject D. “I think this kind of coaching would be helpful for someone going through a discernment process. It helped me gain a deeper sense of clarity in my current call.”
- Subject E. “Yes, it would be beneficial for anyone discerning a transition in ministry. God’s timing is different for every circumstance. It is encouraging to experience God’s presence in the here and now while anticipating and working toward finding the answer he will provide in God’s time.”
- Subject F. “Yes.”
- Subject G. “Absolutely!”
- Subject H. “Yes, I would definitely recommend it.”

How would you describe the coaching relationship in principle as compared to other disciplines such as mentoring, advising, counseling, etc.?

- Subject A. “Less directive and more curious joint exploration. He always appreciated the stressing of action steps, like when I would ask, ‘What is the next step?’”
- Subject B. “Coaching led me to think on my own, although maybe from a different perspective.”
- Subject C. “The coaching process is different from other mentoring processes. It is designed to ask questions and make the person being coached reflect on their own situation and direct the conversation. Counseling and mentoring are designed to give advice instead of just asking the person to reflect on their situation.”
- Subject D. “For me, coaching was focused more on developing steps to gain momentum. Mentoring often has been more encouragement driven and counseling is often reflective on root causes with little practical steps of engagement. I found great value in coaching as it is more action-oriented. We stayed focused on steps that are moving toward something. I appreciated statements made by the coach when he said, ‘let’s figure out what steps you need to take to move in this direction.’”
- Subject E. “The coaching relationship required me to think more critically and articulate what is going on. The other types allow me to take in information but not necessarily identify the issues or solutions. It kept the focus on God and what God was saying.”
- Subject F. “This is still hard for me, but I guess the coaching relationship focusses most on sifting through the myriads of thoughts, issues, and stresses weighing my

- mind, spirit, and emotions down and helping me get to the heart of what I need right now in my relationship with God.”
- Subject G. “I am currently in counseling and also routinely reach out to mentors. Coaching was more focused and deeper than mentoring and more focused on the holy spirit than counseling (this was great)! Also, David had more specialized knowledge of vocational ministry than a counselor, and he also had meaningful background knowledge in some of my areas of life challenge.”
 - Subject H. “I would say coaching helps you process through situations or problems that you are going through and helps you consider things that you may have not thought of. A coach allows you to think and decide what you want to do about a situation instead of telling you what you should do.”

This thesis has centered on working with pastors anticipating vocational transitions. In what other settings do you believe coaching for spiritual discovery could be useful?

- Subject A. “This process could be helpful at virtually any stage of a leader’s ministry. Church life can take a toll on a pastor’s spiritual life, and this coaching can help find the way through difficult situations. It can help re-energize in stagnant times, and it can help maintain focus when things are moving rapidly. I read this to ask, ‘Where is coaching valid?’ and I thought, ‘Where isn’t it?’”
- Subject B. “I believe this type of coaching would be excellent for Christian leaders in secular jobs.”
- Subject C. “I believe that the coaching experience would have benefits to pastors and staff members in all phases of their ministries. When they are beginning a new

- ministry, making changes to a ministry, or adding staff. Having someone to talk through the process and help you see a different perspective is always beneficial, in my opinion.”
- Subject D. “I think it could be helpful in addressing leadership challenges that one needs to work through. For anyone discerning a path of direction in work or life. It could be helpful in working through conflict or for developing a team to work through a process in a church/work setting.”
 - Subject E. “I think this would be applicable in small group discipleship settings or in family counseling situations.”
 - Subject F. “I believe coaching is helpful for any believer who has the responsibility of spiritually caring for others no matter their vocational walk of life. Coaching helps bring to the surface personal spiritual practices an individual may know but has lost their focus and/or new or more focused practices in light of what they already know, so they can continue growing toward the ‘fullness of God (from Ephesians 3:19).”
 - Subject G. “Dealing with conflict in the church seems to be a prevalent issue that many ministry leaders experience.”
 - Subject H. “I believe this could be beneficial for those who are currently in ministry that are not looking to transition as well as to those who have been through conflict with a church and have been terminated or forced to resign and are trying to process everything that has happened. I also believe that this can help lay people who feel that they are being called into the ministry, and I believe coaching can help them discern that call.”

How do you think your discernment process would have been different if you had not participated in this project?

- Subject A. “I’m not sure I would have dealt with the issues we faced without the intentionality of the process. At the very least, it would have been a much slower, more sporadic process.”
- Subject B. “I think I would probably still be trying to bulldoze my way through the issues I’m facing instead of analyzing the situation, talking with others, think broader about solutions, and arrive at a healthier solution. Now my experiences feel more like holy moments because I see more clearly the better choice of responding instead of reacting.”
- Subject C. “I believe my discernment process was continually encouraged to look outside myself to God’s direction from my coach. I believe that I would have seen some of the challenges and the opportunities on my own, but this process helped me to change my perspective and look at the larger picture instead of just the small details.”
- Subject D. “I think I would be much more frustrated in my calling and probably actively looking for a secular job with the intent of leaving ministry- or because I am stubborn just moved deeper into miserableness as I continued to stick it out.”
- Subject E. “In past discernment processes, I’ve been stuck along the way. This coaching has kept the process moving forward.”

- Subject F. “I would still be frantic about whether I should have an occupational transition or not. I still don’t know now, but again I’m experiencing greater peace and moving closer to God as I continue to learn to better trust Him.”
- Subject G. “I think a crucial component would have been missing in this (admittedly horrible) time of transition. David brought a focus and significantly a voice of support and encouragement. As a pastor, we need pastors. Most folks don’t realize how we cobble together resources that sort of substitute as a pastor, but we are the pastor. We don’t get to go to church. We don’t really have a pastor to turn to. You were a resource in that way.”
- Subject H. “I believe that I would still be stuck in a rut and would not know what to do. In fact, I may very well have been out of the ministry if it wasn’t for coaching.”

PRACTICALITY RESPONSES

What observable changes do you believe you experienced as a result of this coaching process?

- Subject A. “Renewed Bible reading, active focus on intentional forgiveness, clarity of future ministry involvement. I have been more intentional about my spirituality during this process.”
- Subject B. “I have developed a better understanding on how to manage and control my ability to bulldoze people.”
- Subject C. “I believe that this process has helped me to look at my situation more objectively and seeing that God is in control of my direction and not me. I have also seen some areas in my life that needed some attention and correction. I believe that

- this process has helped me to make those adjustments in my daily response to people and the way that I listen to people and to the Lord.”
- Subject D. “Through the coaching process, I have gained some clarity around call and some better practices to increase focus and productivity. Times where I feel unproductive increase my sense of lostness in my calling; I also gained some clarity around what my responsibility is to accomplish and that it is God’s responsibility to produce fruit. The difference between faithfulness and the ability to produce fruit is an important distinction. This means making myself available to the presence of the Holy Spirit in the moments and opportunities God provides.”
 - Subject E. “Your pattern of questions is embedded in my brain now! I’m more aware of God’s presence in the transition process and more intentional about looking for that presence.”
 - Subject F. “The coaching has helped me access greater personal/spiritual/emotional peace during this time of transitional contemplation. So, in a word, Peace. That was huge for me because I was feeling frantic, like I need to make a change now. I’m now at peace about waiting and seeing.”
 - Subject G. “David helped me remain focused on the guidance of the Holy Spirit. I appreciated your consistent asking how the Holy Spirit was leading me and how I was allowing the Holy Spirit to lead me. Changes include feelings of peace and acceptance.”

- Subject H. “I feel that a weight has been lifted off of my shoulders, and now I view things in a positive light. I feel more positive about the future. I feel like I’m in a better place and feel like there’s a better future for me.”

How will you continue to develop your spiritual practices moving forward?

- Subject A. “I will continue to focus on areas of progress to firm up the gains I have seen and to move forward from here.”
- Subject B. “I will continue to talk with a coach, develop deep accountability relationships.”
- Subject C. “One of the items that I am continuing to work on in my daily quiet time is listening during prayer, and I have been picking out a word from scripture that God lays on my heart each day and focusing on that word throughout the day. This continues to help me with direction, perspective, and listening.”
- Subject D. “I felt like more of our calls were geared towards practical improvements rather than spiritual practices. I will continue to try and outline my week and utilize a distraction pad to keep me on task. I also realize because we talked about this early on that I tend to think of productivity as not spiritual, but it is a part of our spiritual life because it is about ordering our day in a way that I can be utilized by God.”
- Subject E. “Asking the questions: How am I connecting with God? Where is God in this process? What do I need from God at this time?”
- Subject F. “I know this peace I mentioned above is a continual striving. I will only have this peace as I practice trusting God. As Pep put it, trust God in myself, trust God in my family members, trust God in others, trust God in my future. This

coaching has been an additional step toward my lifelong learning to trust God, but more it has helped me pinpoint this area of my spiritual walk, and I must continue practicing trust in God alone.”

- Subject G. “Continue utilizing spiritual practices I have known from the past and will remain open to new ones. In particular, reading scripture and devotional guides.”
- Subject H. “I will continue to have my quiet devotional time with God in reading the Bible, doing my devotions, and prayer. I will also take time each week for a Sabbath and spend that time meditating on a passage of Scripture.”

THE COACHING EXPERIENCE RESPONSES

How would you describe the experience of being coached?

- Subject A. “It was challenging but enjoyable. It was a non-threatening, safe way to explore spiritual growth in areas of my life that needed change in order to move on in the next chapter of ministry. I really enjoyed it because it was a less directive, more curious joint exploration, and the added value of actions steps promoted progress.”
- Subject B. “Humbling, exhilarating. It is humbling because the wisdom from this process is God-given. It is exhilarating because you have your issues unlocked in such a way that it dramatically impacts your ministry. It allows you the opportunity to get out of your own way and see things differently and with more clarity.”
- Subject C. “The coaching experience for me meant I must allow someone else to direct the conversation, ask the questions, and decide what is asked and the direction that process proceeds. The easy part about being coached was having a meeting where I didn’t have to have everything prepared, and I was not in charge.”

- Subject D. “I think the experience was helpful. I enjoyed having a place to process and then work on overcoming hang-ups. I think I personally need to prepare more for a coaching conversation to get the most out of it, but David did a great job of helping me focus in on what an underlying issue through exploring questions, and then we would focus on the issue that I felt like I needed to discuss. This process helped me realize that my call was affirmed in many ways and that God used our conversations to give me perspective on how frustrations in small areas of my life were contributing to my lost sense of call.”
- Subject E. “Conversations about finding God in the midst of life and ministry. It kept the focus on God and what God was saying. God’s timing is different for every circumstance. It was encouraging to experience God’s presence in the here and now while anticipating and working toward finding the answer he will provide in God’s time. Going through this process helped affirm my identity in Christ while assuring that my purpose comes out of that.”
- Subject F. “One word = comforting.”
- Subject G. “Someone who cares, someone who understands what you are going through, and someone who can encourage you to take concrete steps to help yourself.”
- Subject H. “I would describe it as a very positive experience for me. I looked forward to these sessions and to have the freedom to just talk through situations going on in my life was essential to me. This has convinced me to seek out a coach to meet with probably once a month at least.”

What benefits do you see this practice providing for ministry leaders?

- Subject A. “Ministry leaders will come out of this process with specific action steps for ongoing spiritual growth. It will jumpstart their process of discernment of God’s leadership.”
- Subject B. “I think this is particularly useful to pastors and leaders who are moving through church conflict.”
- Subject C. “I believe that the coaching experience could help ministry leaders by allowing them an opportunity to talk to someone else who has no vested interest in the outcome of the direction someone chooses. In many cases, ministry leaders feel alone and can feel very isolated; the coaching experience helps them know and understand that someone is there to help, listen, and give objective ideas.”
- Subject D. “I think it would help get a person unstuck who is stuck. It helps a person to explore places of discernment that one may overlook. There are sometimes issues that are part of the discernment process, but I personally cannot see them. Having a coach helps to explore those areas I would have ignored because of my inability to see them or my own reluctance to engage them.”
- Subject E. “Coaching offers perspective, accountability, and keeps you moving forward. In this process, I was dealing with the questions of, ‘What do I do?’ ‘What does God want me to do?’ and ‘What did God create me for?’ In this process, I was dealing with what I do and knowing there is a position out there for me. The peace that comes with this process is this, I know my identity is in Christ, and my purpose comes out of that.”

- Subject F. “Coaching can help ministry leaders learn to better care for themselves in their relationship with God, which will help them better care for those with whom God has given them stewardship. I can certainly say it has helped me be a better pastor, which is where God has me right now. Pastors are care-givers and will often give care to the neglect of themselves. This kind of coaching helped me recognize my own self-care needs and to do something about it. I can care for others more, and I can care for them better because I have cared for myself.”
- Subject G. “Ministry is an incredibly lonely and isolated experience. Pastors cannot be ‘real’ at their job. You can be real with David, he will accept you, and work with you where you at to help you discern where God is leading you, and then he will encourage you to ‘do the work’ to get there.”
- Subject H. “The benefits that I see include being able to talk to someone who will not judge you or tell you what to do but instead guide you to think through situations and questions in your life. Another benefit would be that a good coach will provide encouragement and sometimes appropriate humor to help a ministry leader feel comfortable in sharing what is going on in their life. The last benefit that I see is that it can provide accountability to follow through on something that the person being coached said that they would follow through on.”

How would you describe the effectiveness of these sessions for you as you have been involved in spiritual discovery for your potential vocational transition?

- Subject A. “These sessions have been very helpful in coming to an understanding of how to move forward and identification of some (expected) parameters of my future

- ministry. My clarity is not yet set in stone, but I've got a better sense of what I'm capable of and what I want to do."
- Subject B. "These have been very useful and have provided witness with the Holy Spirit that I am exactly where I am supposed to be at this time."
 - Subject C. "I would say that the coaching experience was very effective for me. I was asked some very directed questions that help me see this potential transition God's perspective as well as my own. I believe that this was helpful not just from a possible transition, but it also helped me understand how to ask questions as a coach as well."
 - Subject D. "I felt like more of our calls were geared towards practical improvements rather than spiritual practices. I will continue to try and outline my week and utilize a distraction pad to keep me on task. I also realize because we talked about this early on that I tend to think of productivity as not spiritual, but it is a part of our spiritual life because it is about ordering our day in a way that I can be utilized by God."
 - Subject E. "Knowing that I was meeting with you and providing an update, challenged me to be accountable for completing the next steps."
 - Subject F. "I did not know what to expect from coaching, but God made it very clear I was to enter this Coaching and 'Player' relationship with Pep. I thought God might use the Coaching to proverbially write His will on a stone for me, but deep down, I knew God rarely works that way because He wants me to see and trust Him through the journey. I am still on this transitional journey, but Coaching has been effective for me to better see and trust God through it. Pep's coaching and his own life's journey and experiences with which God has equipped him have helped me realize I don't

have to make any drastic transition right now. I still may have a transition later, but more importantly, I can trust God that He has me ‘in His strong right hand (from John 10:29).’”

- Subject G. “Very effective. Helpful in arriving at a sense of acceptance. I feel I can better trust God in my circumstances.”
- Subject H. “These sessions have been very effective. It has helped me uncover issues that I have not focused on and has helped me either resolve them or begin the process to resolve them. It has also helped me discover issues that I did not even know that I had or that I couldn’t articulate correctly. These sessions have definitely helped me remain focused on spiritual discovery.”

What remarks would you like to make about the overall project experience?

- Subject A. “Great job! Your passion for helping pastors in this way has been very clear. You were a definite help in my process of discernment.”
- Subject B. “This has been a great experience for me, and I will continue to talk to my coach and develop better ministry skills. I love how you ask thought-provoking and accountability questions.”
- Subject C. “The coaching experience was very productive and beneficial due to the questions of David Pepler. He was a great listener and guide through this process which was new to me. He genuinely cared about helping me find the direction that God would have me go. I would recommend the coaching experience to others. It was a powerful learning experience where I learned about God’s will, how I respond to it, and about myself.”

- Subject D. “I enjoyed getting to be part of the project. The time on the calls was always helpful. Even when I was unsure of what I wanted to focus on, I usually left the call feeling like I had discovered a blind spot that I was overlooking. I felt like I had greater clarity. Thank you for letting me be part of the process.”
- Subject E. “Thank you for inviting me to join you in this endeavor! It was helpful to me, and you did a great job!”
- Subject F. “I’m thankful for a former mentor who mentioned, in passing, he had a Life Coach, and it was at a point of transition in his life. This made me think that at some point, I may want to seek a coach as well. I’m thankful for Ken Kessler putting out an email about a coach working on his doctoral thesis and needing Pastors in possible transition to coach. This came at a time I was really stressing about the possibility of transition. I’m thankful Pep took time to speak with me initially and saw a ‘subject’ that might work for his thesis and then for all the time and effort he has given as my coach. I’m thankful to God for the way He works and weaves the threads of my life to prepare and keep me as I continue to journey toward being like my Savior Jesus. It has helped me better trust God to be God in my life. I don’t need to make any knee-jerk decisions because now I am more aware of God’s presence in this process.”
- Subject G. “Extremely helpful, David is great at coaching, and I think coaching is very helpful to ministry leaders.”
- Subject H. “I would like to say that this has been an awesome experience for me. It was great being coached by Pep, and I honestly feel like that I am in a better place

now than what I was at the beginning of this project. I would highly recommend Pep to anyone who is looking for a ministry coach.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

Spirituality Issues Pastors Encounter

Pastors experiencing potential vocational transitions encounter authentic spiritual issues. Their sense of personal connectedness with God is first among these issues. Some subjects in this study expressed a significant distance from God, while others felt very close but desired even deeper connections. Any number of issues can cause this perceived sense of distance. Ministry leaders easily recognize the distance but do not readily admit it. Spiritual work is necessary for these leaders to increase their capacity for spiritual discernment. Those not experiencing unhealthy distance expressed a desire to grow closer to God by closing the gap with increased activities involving spiritual disciplines.

Adverse events, attitudes, or environments ministry leaders encounter in the present or from their past require positive resolutions. Emotional damage from negative experiences often lingers in the minds of pastors. These can build into unhealthy attitudes toward individuals, groups, congregations, and overall ministry. Many pastors face power struggles, personal attacks, theological differences, and disgruntled parishioners. Leaving this emotional reality unhealed can significantly hinder a leader searching for God's will as they sense the need to move to another venue of ministry.

Lack of confidence and decreased self-esteem are other issues many pastors face. Some pastors feel inadequately prepared for ministry for several reasons. Some believe their seminary training did not provide insights into practical leadership issues such as the negative issues described above. Conflict resolution challenges a pastor's resolve to serve as a shepherd to the

congregation. A minister does not feel confident in balancing pastoral care and leadership due to a lack of training. Decreased self-esteem issues often result from conflicts. Ill-prepared ministry leaders experience this with personality issues such as shyness, the desire to please all constituents, or the fear of failure.

Trust in God for guidance is the key to call clarity for ministers. The negative issues described above contribute to a lack of trust in God. This lower level of trust is not prominent in most ministry leaders, but it stands out among those whose negative experiences have been profound. Conflict ensues when God's people work against what the pastor perceives as God's guidance. When the pastor finds that God's people cannot always be trusted, a natural tendency is to question God's call and leadership among the people the pastor is serving. The leader seeking vocational transition is likely to be more critical of potential places to serve and may not seek to closely follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit for making his or her decision.

Coaching for Spiritual Discovery's Effectiveness

Evidence supporting the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery is profound. The exit interview responses showed strong indications of positive spiritual experiences for all participants. Some of these experiences were dramatic, as indicated by those showing new divinely revealed directions or promising changes in outlook toward the future. The visual and auditory responses support this evidence as subjects expressed their insights from the experience and subsequent spiritual discoveries and growth because of the process.

Coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors anticipating vocational transitions is vital because it helps the minister deal with issues described above and many other spiritual and emotional issues I have not delineated in this paper. Assisting these leaders with their issues

paves the way for improved call clarity. This style of coaching is a powerful resource that enhances ministry leaders' capacity to understand and accept God's will for their circumstances. Spirituality coaching also provides a clear focus for the PBC on the steps required to follow God's will.

Each subject participating in this study showed improvement in their connection with God. They also indicated how coaching helped them overcome bothersome issues and healthy ways to overcome them. The subjects' indicated the coaching process to be a distinct path toward spiritual clarity. All of them recommend this process to other ministers in vocational transition. The process of coaching for spiritual discovery has the primary goal of positioning the PBC in their hearts to feel a stronger sense of God's presence and guidance. This study shows strong evidence that this coaching delivers that goal. Each subject experienced powerful spiritual experiences and insights, as Chapter Four illustrates.

Theology of Subjects' Importance

Evidence shows the importance of knowing the theological stance of persons being coached (PBC). This information is primarily for the one doing the coaching. Across the theological spectrum, there are different approaches to and interpretations of scriptures and leadership approaches. Those leaning in conservative directions tend to be more interested in disciplined approaches to God and issues. Those leaning in more liberal directions tend to focus more on the relationship sides of these issues. This conclusion is noteworthy but not vital, particularly for those who coach people involved in ministry.

The CARING™ Model

Denise Massey's model for these conversations proved effective. The consistency of an opening time of connection was most profound among subjects. This satisfies the "C" of the model's acronym. They all expressed appreciation for a time to frame the conversation in holy moments of their choosing. Most PBCs chose prayer as their preferred connection practice.

The "A" in the acronym is attending to the journey and assessing the need. The PBCs began conversations talking about their current issues related to their discernment process. This provided them a safe environment to broadly explain hopes and dilemmas. PBCs described in this phase the spaces between where they were and where they wanted to be in spiritual discernment matters.

The coaching conversations narrow the wide ranges of topics presented by PBCs and narrow them to a singular point of discussion for individual coaching sessions. Massey's model describes this as reaching clarity, the "R" in the CARING™ acronym. Subjects often struggle with this as it is not always easy to discern which issue needs the most or immediate attention. Here is where the coach needs to ask pointed questions to help the PBC zoom in on one topic for each session.

The "I" of the acronym is where action plans are developed as inspired by the PBCs. Once a singular topic was agreed upon by the coach and PBC, a time of brainstorming possible actions began. Subjects in this study were encouraged to think of multiple possibilities to determine potential actions to help them with their topic. These possible actions were narrowed to a few or sometimes a single action plan the PBC could commit to performing.

PBCs were then encouraged to ponder potential obstacles and anticipate how they would navigate around them, the “N” in the CARING™ acronym. This was a critical step for the subjects to explore as it provided opportunities for them to recognize what interferences or excuses could materialize as they implemented their action steps. They planned responses to these obstacles and remained focused on their actions.

Finally, each subject was encouraged to generate a high level of commitment to their action plan, the “G” of the acronym. They were initially asked how likely they were to follow through with their plans. When responses were low or mediocre, we revisited the action plan to discover any issues that further clarified their steps. All coaching conversations ended with strong commitments to their action plans.

Throughout each session, I revisited with the subjects how the conversation was related to their spiritual discernment process. It was essential to remain focused on the spiritual dynamics of every topic addressed. The continual influx of clarifying the Holy Spirit’s guidance in this process kept subjects engaged in the divinely inspired dialogue and outcomes of the coaching conversations.

The CARING™ Model’s Effectiveness

I observed earlier (p.63) that most of the coaching conversations did not include obvious “aha” moments of discovery by the PBCs. Using the CARING™ model created many defining moments in their overall spiritual discovery experience. These moments were more gradual in nature.

All spiritual discoveries made in this study were unique to each PBC. My observations indicated these discoveries frequently occurred over several coaching sessions. One PBC had a

breakthrough in “forgiveness.” A strong understanding was discovered in one of our sessions, but it took subsequent sessions to unpack more fully what the PBC needed to do to address forgiveness and where it needed to be applied.

Many PBCs experiences were similar. I describe the process as observing a spiritual flower bloom more than watching an isolated incident. These gradual arrivals to intense needs in the PBCs were equally impactful. Their discoveries all related to the vocational transitions they anticipated or experienced during the study. Utilizing the CARING™ model for these coaching sessions created a safe environment for deep spiritual openness between the PBCs and me. This framework for spiritual conversations provided fertile soil in which good seeds were planted, nurtured, and blossomed.

FUTURE ENDEAVORS

Future Study

There is a need for further study in two primary areas resulting from this work. First, with a clear implication of the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery in the first stage of vocational transitions, I recommend further study with stage two and stage three. I have indicated the second stage to be the transition time itself as when a leader accepts a new call and begins the process of exiting their current area of service. This second stage also includes the time of arrival at the new ministry position, which involves meeting new people, settling into a new work environment, and often acclimating to a new location in which they now reside.

The third stage is roughly a month after the actual move and continues for at least six months with new insights into the new place of service, its beliefs, rituals, and unseen practices not found in many interviewing encounters. These stages can also cause the ministry leader to

experience spiritually difficult times because of their busyness, emotional detachment from one set of constituents and introductions to new constituents, and the desire to make good impressions while typically over-functioning.

I included two other subjects in this study's parameters that provided clear evidence of this need for further study. Both subjects were in phase three of the transition process, having arrived at their current places of service within the last six months. I will not report here all the information as I did with those fitting the parameters of this study, but I find the following information useful for the studies that follow mine.

Subjects J and K's exit interview responses were nearly identical to the responses of those listed in this study. Both subjects sensed renewed closeness in their connection with God. They both highly recommend this type of coaching for other ministry leaders as well as believers in general. Both experienced profound spiritual insights for navigating their issues at hand.

Both subjects struggled with spiritual issues in their new environments, although their struggles differed from those in phase one of the transition process. The issues they faced varied only slightly from the subjects seeking transition. Subject J addressed how their discernment process might have been different if not coached by saying, "I would have been stuck with issues in the past for much longer had I not participated in this process. This process has allowed me to let things go and move forward." This subject has an intense negative experience in their previous ministry setting.

Both subjects elaborated on the isolation of ministry leaders. Subject K said, "Ministers have become so isolated that having the option to have a person to spend the time with to talk about situations from different angles and think about their spiritual implications would be

helpful not only for the health of the ministry but for the health of the minister.” Subject J added, “In the ministry, there is a lot of loneliness and very few people that can be trusted with sensitive personal information. Everyone needs someone to be a listener and an encourager.” Even though subject J’s new ministry setting was exponentially better than the previous one, they added in describing the overall experience, “For me, it was a positive experience that has helped me to move forward in my work and know that I am still called to vocational ministry.” Subject K added a new focus on keeping God at the forefront of every aspect of their new ministry context while acknowledging a renewed love for doing that in their personal life.

I would also like to see more studies done on the connection between spiritual and emotional issues. Subjects were coming to spiritual insights, conclusions, or realizations of deeper issues needing to be resolved, which often caused the subjects in this study to experience various emotional responses. These experiences usually brought pregnant pauses in the coaching conversations where the subjects were given the space to process what they were encountering. These emotional responses were not universal among the subjects, but those experiencing them usually fought back or allowed tears to flow. What is the connection between spiritually profound moments and emotional responses?

Future Reporting and Publication

I will deliver a summary report and copy of my project to the BGAV, particularly to Ken Kessler, the Coaching Network Director, and John Upton, Executive Director of the BGAV, upon final approval, defense, and completion of the thesis. It was through them that I was connected to participants for this project. The thesis itself has important information directly related to their work in coaching and minister relationships.

This completed work will become the basis of a book that could have far-reaching implications for the broad faith community in the United States and abroad. Helping pastors and other ministry leaders in times of vocational transition will enhance their work as leaders while also creating positive experiences through a helpful resource for churches that are hiring spiritually attuned prospects. The content of this project will be invaluable to the world of coaching for spiritual discovery as the practice continues to develop and grow.

This project will also serve as the basis for what I view as a career trajectory. I intend to use spirituality coaching as my practice of helping people of faith, particularly ministry leaders, to experience a growing sense of their own spiritual discovery. The unmistakable evidence of its need and effectiveness affirms my call.

Spiritual discovery is a crucial part of the spiritual discernment process. As a budding academic discipline, future researchers need to study and incorporate the methodology helpful for all people to enhance their spiritual health. Spirituality links your mental, physical, and emotional health.

We must recognize that spiritual growth is an ongoing, lifelong experience. In his work, *Spiritual Direction*, Henri Nouwen recognized that “[n]ew thoughts, feelings, emotions, and passions have arisen within me that are not all in line with my previous thoughts and feelings.”¹ Our spiritual growth and experiences continue to develop in our lifetimes. The calling from God to vocational ministry is active and not stagnant. It occasionally involves transitioning from one ministry position or setting to another. Coaching for spiritual discovery is a vital instrument to

¹ Henri J. Nouwen, *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith* (New York: Harper One, 2006), 151.

help those anticipating these transitions with the spirituality issues they face in the process.

Coaching for spiritual discovery increases the probability that the ministry leader will clearly comprehend God's will for his or her ministry transition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alexander, Neil, Ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. 1*. Nashville: Abington Press, 1994.
- Austin, Philip, Jessica Macdonald, and Roderick (Rod) MacLeod. "Measuring Spirituality and Religiosity in Clinical Settings: A Scoping Review of Available Instruments." *Religions* 9, no. 3 (March 2018): 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9030070>.
- Barton, Ruth Haley. *Strengthening the Soul of Your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008.
- Beck, Martha. *Finding Your Own North Star: Claiming the Life You Were Meant to Live*. New York, NY: Three Rivers Press, 2001.
- Bendroth, Norman B. Ed., *Transitional Ministry Today: Successful Strategies for Churches and Pastors*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015.
- Berger, Warren. *The Book of Beautiful Questions: The Powerful Questions That Will Help You Decide, Create, Connect, and Lead*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018.
- Burton, Valorie. *What's Really Holding You Back: Closing the Gap Between Where You Are and Where You Want to Be*. New York: Waterbrook Press, 2005.
- Calhoun, Adele Ahlberg. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook: Practices That Transform Us*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2005.
- Childs, Brevard S. *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary. The Old Testament Library, General Eds, Ackroyd, Barr, Bright, Wright*. Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974.
- Collins, Gary R. *Christian Coaching: Helping Others Turn Potential into Reality, 2^d Edition*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2009.
- Collins, Travis. *For Ministers About to Start...or About to Give Up*. Self-published, The Columbia Partnership, 2014.
- Dale, Bob, and Bill Wilson. *Weaving Strong Leaders: How Leaders Grow Down, Grow Up, and Grow Together*. Macon: Nurturing Faith, Inc., 2016.
- Dale, Robert D. *Growing Agile Leaders: Coaching Leaders to Move With Sure-Footedness in a Seismic World*. Coach Approach Ministries, 2011.

- Dreyer, Elizabeth A. and Mark S. Burrows, eds. *Minding the Spirit: The Study of Christian Spirituality*. Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 2005.
- “Duke University Religion Index (DUREL) | Measures Library.”
<https://elcentro.sonhs.miami.edu/research/measures-library/durel/index.html> (accessed May 25, 2020).
- Dwyer, Karen Kangas, and Edward M. Hogan. “Assessing a Program of Spiritual Formation Using Pre and Post Self-Report Measures.” *Theological Education* 48, no. 1 (2013): 25-34.
- Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth*. Rev. 1st ed. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988.
- Fretheim, Terence. *Exodus. Interpretation: A Biblical Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Louisville: John Knox Press, 1991.
- Gabriel, Andrew K. *The Lord Is the Spirit: The Holy Spirit and the Divine Attributes*. Havertown, United Kingdom: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2012.
- Groff, Kent Ira. *The Soul of Tomorrow’s Church: Weaving Spiritual Practices in Ministry Together*. Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2000.
- Guenther, Margaret. *At Home in the World: A Rule of Life for the Rest of Us*. New York: Seabury Books, 2006.
- Hall, Chad, Bill Copper, Kathryn McElveen. *Faith Coaching: A Conversational Approach to Helping Others Move Forward in Faith*. North Carolina: Coach Approach Ministries, 2009.
- Hall, Todd W, Steven P Reise, and Mark G Haviland. “An Item Response Theory Analysis of the Spiritual Assessment Inventory.” *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion* 17, no. 2 (2007): 157–78.
- Hinson, E. Glenn. *A Serious Call to a Contemplative Lifestyle*. Revised. Macon: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1993.
- Holmes III, Urban T. *A History of Christian Spirituality: An Analytical Introduction, 2^d Edition*. Harrisonburg, Morehouse Publishing, 2002.
- Johnson, Ben Campbell. *Hearing God’s Call: Ways of Discernment for Laity and Clergy*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

- Johnson, Luke Timothy. *The Acts of the Apostles. Sacra Pagina Series, Vol. 5.* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Kaczynski, Bernice M., Ed. *The Oxford Handbook of Christian Monasticism.* Oxford: University Press, 2020.
- Keck, Leander E., Ed. *The New Interpreter's Bible, Vol. Ten.* Nashville: Abington, 2002.
- Kreuger, Derek, Ed., *Byzantine Christianity, A People's History of Christianity, Vol. 3.* Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.
- Linhart, Terry. *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation.* Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.
- Massey, Denise. *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations.* Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2019.
- Matheson, Peter, ed. *Reformation Christianity, A People's History of Christianity, Vol. 5,* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.
- McClanahan, James. "Pastoral Self-Care: Developing a Burnout-Resistant Approach to Life and Ministry." D.Min. diss., Liberty University. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2018. 10788502.
- McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Spirituality: An Introduction.* Hoboken, United Kingdom: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 1999.
- Melander, Rochelle. *A Generous Presence: Spiritual Leadership and the Art of Coaching.* Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2006.
- Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation.* New York: New Directions Publishing, 1961.
- Miller, Linda J., and Chad W. Hall. *Coaching Christian Leaders: A Practical Guide.* St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007.
- Moschella, Mary Clark. *Ethnography as a Pastoral Practice: An Introduction.* Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2008.
- Mulholland, M. Robert. *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation.* Downers Grove, IL.: InterVarsity: Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993.
- Nelson, Kathy Harvey. "Small Church Pastors and the Future of the Church." D.Min. diss., Lancaster Theological Seminary. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2019. 13806719.

- Nouwen, Henri with Michael J. Christensen and Rebecca J. Laird. *Discernment: Reading the Signs of Daily Life*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2013.
- _____. *Spiritual Direction: Wisdom for the Long Walk of Faith*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006.
- _____. *Spiritual Formation: Following the Movements of the Spirit*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2010.
- Ogne, Steve and Tim Roehl. *Transformational Coaching: Empowering Leaders in a Changing Ministry World*. Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2008.
- Oswald, Roy M. *Clergy Self-Care: Finding a Balance for Effective Ministry*. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 1991.
- Palmer, Parker J. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward an Undivided Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004.
- _____. *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2000.
- Peterson, Eugene H. *Under the Unpredictable Plant: An Exploration for Vocational Holiness*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992.
- Sensing, Tim. *Qualitative Research: A Multi-Methods Approach to Projects for Doctor of Ministry Theses*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011.
- Sisk, Ronald D. *The Competent Pastor: Skills and Self-Knowledge for Serving Well*. Herndon, VA: Alban Institute, 2005.
- Tetlow, Joseph A., SJ. *Always Discerning: An Ignatian Spirituality for the New Millennium*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2016.
- Thompson, Marjorie J. *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life, 3^d Edition*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2014.
- Whitmore, John. *Coaching for Performance: GROWing Human Potential and Purpose – The Principles and Practice of Coaching and Leadership, 4th Ed*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2009.
- Willimon, William H. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Wilson, Dawn. "What Are the Names and Titles of the Holy Spirit?" Christianity.com.
<https://files.zotero.net/eyJleHBpcmVzIjoxNTkwNDE3MTk2LCJoYXNoIjoiMmUwOTk5OWQ4MzQzMGE5NmUzOThmYzRmYmExODVkMTiLCjB250ZW50VHlwZSI6InRleHRcL2h0bWwiLCJjaGFyc2V0IjoidXRmLTgiLCJmaWxlbmFtZSI6IldoYXQgQXJIIHRoZSBOYW1lcyBhbmQgVG10bGVzIG9mIHRoZSBIb2x5IFNwaXJpdC5odG1sIn0%3D/15e1bbaca6557fc099c0309e30aca2d198f85261cae0783a247a3644b5aea179/What%20Are%20the%20Names%20and%20Titles%20of%20the%20Holy%20Spirit.html>.
(accessed May 24, 2020).

Witt, Lance. *Replenish: Leading From a Healthy Soul*. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL



Monday, May 31, 2021

Mr. David Norman Pepler
3001 Mercer University Drive
Other
Atlanta, GA 30341

RE: Ministers on the Move: Coaching for Spiritual Discovery for Ministers in Vocational Transitions in the Baptist General Association of Virginia (H2105107)

Dear Mr. Pepler:

On behalf of Mercer University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects Research, your application submitted on 27-May-2021 for the above referenced protocol was reviewed in accordance with the 2018 Federal Regulations [21 CFR 56.110\(b\)](#) and [45 CFR 46.110\(b\)](#) (for expedited review) and was approved under category(ies) _6, _7 per 63 FR 60364.

Your application was approved for one year of study on 31-May-2021. The protocol expires on 30-May-2022. If the study continues beyond one year, it must be re-evaluated by the IRB Committee.

Item(s) Approved:

New application for student research on the effectiveness of spiritual coaching and discovery for ministers who are considering moving to another church.

NOTE: You **MUST** report to the committee when the protocol is initiated. Report to the Committee immediately any changes in the protocol or consent form and **ALL** accidents, injuries, and serious or unexpected adverse events that occur to your subjects as a result of this study.

We at the IRB and the Office of Research Compliance are dedicated to providing the best service to our research community. As one of our investigators, we value your feedback and ask that you please take a moment to complete our [Satisfaction Survey](#) and help us to improve the quality of our service.

It has been a pleasure working with you and we wish you much success with your project! If you need any further assistance, please feel free to contact our office.

Respectfully,

Ava Chambliss-Richardson, Ph.D., CIP, CIM.
Director of Research Compliance
Member
Institutional Review Board

"Mercer University has adopted and agrees to conduct its clinical research studies in accordance with the International Conference on Harmonization's (ICH) Guidelines for Good Clinical Practice."

Mercer University IRB & Office of Research Compliance
Phone: 478-301-4101 | Email: ORC_Mercer@Mercer.Edu | Fax: 478-301-2329
1501 Mercer University Drive, Macon, Georgia 31207-0001

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT



James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology

Ministers on the Move: Coaching for Spiritual Discovery for Ministers in Vocational Transition in the Baptist General Association of Virginia

Informed Consent

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you give your consent to volunteer, it is important that you read the following information and ask as many questions as necessary to be sure you understand what you will be asked to do.

Investigators

David Norman Peppler, Sr., DMIN, Mercer University, James and Carolyn McAfee School of Theology
3001 Mercer University Drive, Atlanta, GA 30341, (804) 338-3974

Purpose of the Research

This research study is designed to assess the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery for ministers in the discernment process while anticipating moving from one church to another.

The data from this research will be used to provide ethnographic and qualitative information indicating the level of effectiveness the coaching process has for ministers in vocational transitions.

This ethnographic and qualitative research will provide insights useful for establishing the coaching practice as a viable ministry for ministers experiencing vocational transitions.

Procedures

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in 6 coaching conversations via Zoom in the area of your own spiritual discernment process. This will help you discover your deep thoughts and feelings and sense of God’s guidance by responding to thought-provoking questions. Upon completion of the coaching sessions, you will participate in an exit interview to evaluate your experience with the coaching process and for my research purposes.

Your participation will take approximately 6 1-hour coaching sessions, spread out over a 3-month period, roughly 2 sessions per month. The exit interview is anticipated to be approximately 30-minutes..

Potential Risks or Discomforts

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts with this study.

The only possible foreseeable discomfort might be for you as you venture to discover and accept God’s clear guidance for you. If your own desires conflict with what you perceive to be God’s desires for you, discomfort may result.

Potential Benefits of the Research

The anticipated benefit for you participating in this research is a clear vision of God’s guidance for you in your transition process.

Mercer IRB
Approval Date 05/31/2021
Protocol
Expiration Date 05/30/2022

A benefit for members of clergy in general will result from this research as well as a book will likely result for anyone interested in discovering how this process can be helpful for all ministers exploring vocational transitions.

Confidentiality and Data Storage

You and I will sign a confidentiality document stating that the recordings of our conversations will be destroyed at the project’s conclusion as well as any notes I take during these conversations.

The written portion of my research will be recorded in my dissertation that will be published by Mercer University. There will be no personal information shared about those participating in the study. I will refer to participants in coded language such as Subject A, Subject B, etc.

The coaching conversations will be recorded via Zoom or whatever audio/video service is preferred. These conversations will be stored on my personal computer located in my home office and not on any cloud service. Upon the project’s completion, these recordings will be permanently deleted.

Participation and Withdrawal

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. As a participant, you may refuse to participate at any time. To withdraw from the study please contact me, David N. Pepler, Sr., at David.norman.pepler@live.mercer.edu, or my phone, (804) 338-3974.

You may withdraw from this study at any time prior to, during, or after data collection has occurred.

Questions about the Research

If you have any questions about the research, please speak with me, David N. Pepler, Sr., at David.norman.pepler@live.mercer.edu or (804) 338-3974, or my project supervisor, Dr. Denise Massey, email: massey_dm@mercer.edu, or (678) 547-6428.

In Case of Injury

It is unlikely that participation in this project will result in harm to subjects.

Incentives to Participate

You will not be charged for the coaching services involved in this study, typically \$100 per session minimum.

Audio or Video Taping

The necessary recording of the audio/visual of the coaching sessions will only be conducted with your approval.

Reasons for Exclusion from this Study

This study is for ministers serving as pastors currently in Baptist General Association of Virginia churches who are seeking to transition to another church to serve in the same role. It is intended for adult subjects only.

This project has been reviewed and approved by Mercer University’s IRB. If you believe there is any infringement upon your rights as a research subject, you may contact the IRB Chair, at (478) 301-4101.

You have been given the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered to your satisfaction. Your signature below indicates your voluntary agreement to participate in this research study.

Research Participant Name (Print)

Name of Person Obtaining Consent (Print)

Mercer IRB
Approval Date 05/31/2021
Protocol
Expiration Date 05/30/2022

Research Participant Signature

Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date

Date

APPENDIX C
INVITATION TO BGAV PASTORS

APPENDIX C

INVITATION TO BGAV PASTORS

Attention BGAV Pastors:

My name is David Pepler, Virginia Baptist Pastor for 20+ years and DMIN student at McAfee School of Theology. My project is studying the effectiveness of coaching for spiritual discovery for pastors in vocational transition. I am seeking 10 BGAV pastors who believe they will be transitioning from one ministry venue to another within the next 6 months. I want to coach these pastors in the early stages of their discernment process to study coaching's effectiveness in spiritual discovery. Obviously, even your inquiry will be held in the strictest form of confidentiality. I am a trained coach (ECLC3) and long-term pastor experienced in vocational transitions. For a private conversation about this process, please contact me at davidpeplersr@gmail.com or (804) 338-3974.

APPENDIX D

DENISE MASSEY'S SIX STEPS OF CARING™

APPENDIX D

DENISE MASSEY'S SIX STEPS OF CARING™

Denise Massey's *CARING™: Six Steps for Effective Pastoral Conversations* model acronym.

C – Connect with God, self, and others

A – Attend to the journey and assess the need

R – Reach clarity about the realistic focus for this conversation

I – Inspire the development of a loving action plan

N – Navigate around obstacles to the plan

G – Generate commitment to a specific, loving action plan

APPENDIX E
EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

APPENDIX E

EXIT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What observable changes do you believe you have experienced as a result of this coaching process?
2. How will you continue to develop your spiritual intelligence during the remainder of your discernment process?
3. Our coaching conversations have been based on Denise Massey's CARING model. How would you describe the effectiveness of these sessions for you as you have been involved in spiritual discovery for your potential vocational transition?
4. What worked best for you in our coaching conversations?
5. What area did you find least helpful?
6. How would you describe the coaching relationship in principle as compared to other disciplines such as mentoring, advising, etc.?
7. Would you recommend this kind of coaching to others in discernment processes who could benefit from spiritual discovery?
8. How do you feel your discernment process would have been different if you had not participated in this project?
9. What benefits did you experience from this practice?
10. What benefits do you see this practice providing for ministry leaders?
11. What other areas in spiritual development do you believe this practice could be useful for?
12. What remarks would you like to make about the overall project experience?