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A SPIRITUALLY-FOCUSED VOCATIONAL DISCERNMENT PROGRAM  
FOR BIBLE COLLEGE STUDENTS

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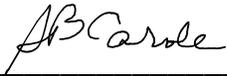
## Doctor of Ministry Dissertation Approval

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We, the undersigned, determined that this dissertation has met the academic requirements and standards of Nazarene Theological Seminary for the Doctor of Ministry program.



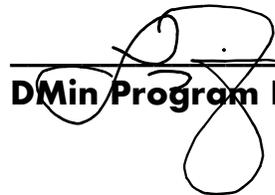
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## ABSTRACT

Brandon A. Bradley

### A Spiritually-Focused Vocational Discernment Program for Bible College Students

Today's college students often struggle in their quest for self-exploration. This struggle is intensified by the increasing demands of their electronic devices combined with the lack of direction in spiritually-formative practices and vocational discernment. Research into the characteristics of emerging adulthood, practices of spiritual formation and vocational discernment, and existing vocational guidance centers at other Christian institutions of higher education reveal a heavy reliance on career counseling, but a lack in spiritual discernment practices. A new curriculum that consists of classroom instruction, practical assignments, discipleship program engagement, and guidance from the Graduate Placement Service (GPS) during each year of a student's academic career at Central Christian College of the Bible (CCCB), has been developed to address this gap. The four-year curriculum includes spiritual practices of solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction for the purpose of training college students for a lifetime of vocational discernment.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABHE	Association of Biblical Higher Education
ALT	Academic Leadership Team
CCCB	Central Christian College of the Bible
EAs	Emerging Adults
GPS	Graduate Placement Service
NetVUE	Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education
VCD	Vocational and Career Discernment

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today's college students often struggle to discern their identity and vocation, or who they are and what they are created to do. Increased connection to electronic devices and social media, as well as a lack of training in spiritually-formative practices for vocational discernment, all increase these struggles. Research into the characteristics of emerging adulthood, various practices of spiritual formation and vocational discernment, and an exploration of existing vocational guidance centers at other Christian institutions of higher education reveals an absence in spiritual discernment practices for guiding students in the discernment process.

This proposal attempts to address this gap by way of a multifaceted curriculum that includes the pertinent elements of classroom instruction, practice in spiritual exercises, relationship-building through the campus-wide discipleship program, and spiritual guidance from the Graduate Placement Service (GPS) at Central Christian College of the Bible (CCCB). This four-year curriculum includes purposeful engagement in both solitude and community, combined with specific methods of biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten spiritual journaling, and spiritual direction. Each of these components work together to train students for a lifetime of vocational discernment.

#### **The Problem**

According to the Education Data Initiative, 90% of undergraduate students in the United States are between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four.<sup>1</sup> Jeffrey Arnett recently developed the

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<sup>1</sup> <https://educationdata.org/college-enrollment-statistics>

concept of a new phase of development regarding the onset of adulthood.<sup>2</sup> In previous generations, young people married and began their careers during their early twenties, but today, many emerging adults (EAs) are delaying marriage and career decisions until much later in life. Instead of rushing into such important life choices, EAs are spending their early twenties seeking to discern who they are. This quest is often frustrated by the fear of making the wrong decision among the many options that lay before them.<sup>3</sup> Students at Christian colleges often experience even more anxiety due to their desire to follow God’s calling on their lives.

In addition to the fear of making a wrong decision regarding their vocation, EAs also struggle with discernment due to their constant connection to electronic devices and social media. Multiple studies point to the negative effects of constant online engagement and social media on the mental and social health of EAs. According to the Pew Research Center, 48% of EAs say they are online or on some sort of electronic device “almost constantly.”<sup>4</sup> Constant online connection leaves them little time or room for listening, reflecting, and discerning who they are.

Related to the problem of constant digital connection is the vast array of information promoting false kingdoms and immoral lifestyles that is perpetuated online. These messages further add to identity confusion for Christian college students.<sup>5</sup> Constant negative messages

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<sup>2</sup> “Emerging Adults” are those between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine. See Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. *Emerging Adulthood: the Winding Road from the Late Teens through the Twenties* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 8-10.

<sup>3</sup> David P. Setran. *Spiritual Formation in Emerging Adulthood: a Practical Theology for College and Young Adult Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 126.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/03/26/about-three-in-ten-u-s-adults-say-they-are-almost-constantly-online/>

<sup>5</sup>Setran, 32.

divert their attention away from God and onto a wide variety of personal idols. EAs often have trouble ignoring this onslaught of messages.<sup>6</sup> Christian college students need training to learn how to identify these idols and false kingdoms, as well as how to hear God speaking to them regarding their identity and purpose.

EAs often feel adrift and in need of coaching through the process of listening to God. No longer can Bible colleges focus on simply teaching doctrine without spiritual formation training. While doctrinal statements define the tenets of a particular religion or faith tradition, EAs want to understand how this doctrine affects their own personal spiritual journey. Experimenting with various faith practices is the most common way EAs arrive at their own personal faith convictions.<sup>7</sup> When faith is presented as a set of abstract rules to follow, they struggle to see the connection to their own lives. Helping EAs find this connection to God is vital; therefore, training in spiritual formation is vital because many are at risk of losing their faith altogether.<sup>8</sup>

Many Christian colleges provide vocational guidance centers to help students discern next steps in seeking post-graduate employment. While these programs are strong in career counseling, many lack training in spiritual discernment. In addition to the acquisition of knowledge and training for their future career, students at Christian colleges also need training in skills to help them listen for the voice of God and to their own hearts as they seek to discern who God has created them to be.

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<sup>6</sup>Setran, 33.

<sup>7</sup>Brian Simmons. *Wandering in the Wilderness: Changes and Challenges to Emerging Adults Christian Faith* (Abilene, TX: Leafwood Publishers, 2011), 48-56.

<sup>8</sup> Simmons, 53

Bible Colleges, a specialized category of Christian Colleges which focus on biblical education and ministry preparation, have a heightened need for spiritually-focused vocational training to guide students in discerning the best path for ministry. Since spiritually-focused discernment training is a primary need for Bible colleges and many quality career counseling tools already exist, this study will be limited to the discussion of incorporating spiritual practices into a VCD program to help Bible college students discern the best option for them out of those presented through existing career counseling processes.

This researcher is not alone in the stance that vocational discernment is vital for Bible college. According to a joint research project between the Barna Group and the Association of Biblical Higher Education (ABHE), helping students discern their vocation is one of the most important focal areas for healthy Bible colleges and seminaries.<sup>9</sup> David Cunningham, the president of NetVUE,<sup>10</sup> says there is no better place for young adults to discern their vocation than during their undergraduate education.<sup>11</sup> The basis of Cunningham's statement is the fact that the college environment provides time and space, two vital ingredients for vocational discernment.<sup>12</sup>

During their undergraduate education, students are presented with opportunities to develop new skills, explore various career possibilities, and invest in new relationships. These

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<sup>9</sup> Barna Group. *What's next for Biblical Higher Education: How Bible Colleges Can Prepare for the Church's Future* (Ventura, CA: Barna Group, 2017).

<sup>10</sup> NetVUE (The Network for Vocation in Undergraduate Education) is a "nationwide network of colleges and universities formed to enrich the intellectual and theological exploration of vocation among undergraduate students. This initiative is administered by the Council of Independent Colleges (CIC) with generous support from Lilly Endowment Inc." <https://www.cic.edu/programs/NetVUE> (accessed August 28, 2021).

<sup>11</sup> David S. Cunningham. 2015. *At This Time and in This Place: Vocation and Higher Education* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

<sup>12</sup> Cunningham, 7.

processes usually take place within a safe space where students are free to engage in exploration. While an undergraduate degree provides a safe environment for such exploration,<sup>13</sup> students often become overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices offered to them, necessitating assistance in navigating the murky waters.<sup>14</sup>

The various characteristics, tendencies, distractions, and fears of EAs inhibit their ability to discern their calling. This difficulty is compounded for Christian college students who desire to live out God's calling on their lives. In light of this problem, Bible colleges must develop effective strategies that provide spiritually-focused VCD training and guidance. Prior to prescribing a VCD program for Bible colleges, it is important to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of several existing programs.

### **Evaluation of Other VCD Programs**

In preparation for constructing an effective, spiritually-focused VCD program for Bible colleges, several existing vocational programs at Christian colleges were evaluated to determine

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<sup>13</sup> Arnett, 139.

<sup>14</sup> Setran, 24.

their strengths and weaknesses. These programs include Seattle Pacific University,<sup>15</sup> Abilene Christian University,<sup>16</sup> and Wheaton College.<sup>17</sup><sup>18</sup>

### *Seattle Pacific University*

The vocational and career training program at Seattle Pacific (SPU) is driven by the core values of providing students with "Transformative and Holistic" experiences and helping them identify "Vital Christian Identity and Purpose."<sup>19</sup> SPU's Center for Career and Calling exists to "empower and equip all SPU students and alumni to courageously take hold of their agency to design meaningful lives and careers."<sup>20</sup> As part of their effort to live out this mission statement, the center uses quality career discernment tools such as PathwayU to help students determine the career path that is the best fit for them. Career counseling is easily the most successful portion of their VCD program.

In his dissertation on SPU's vocational program, Scott Campanario highlights the importance of their sophomore-level class that teaches vocational discernment through Ignatian

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<sup>15</sup> SPU is in Seattle, Washington. It was founded in 1891 by the Free-Methodist Church of North America. Currently, the university offers 69 majors and has an undergrad enrollment of just over 2,700 students. <https://spu.edu/about-spu/spu-facts> (accessed on 3/25/2021).

<sup>16</sup> ACU is in Abilene, Texas. It was founded in 1906 by members of the Church of Christ. Currently, the university offers 79 majors and has an undergrad enrollment of just under 3,500 students. <https://www.acu.edu/about> (accessed on 3/25/21).

<sup>17</sup> WC is in Wheaton, Illinois. It was founded in 1860 by Jonathan Blanchard, ordained Presbyterian minister. Currently, the college offers more than 40 majors and has an undergrad enrollment of over 2,400 students. <https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/> (accessed on 3/25/21).

<sup>18</sup> I am grateful to Scott Campanario and Lynette Bikos of SPU, Benjamin Reis of ACU, and Dee Pierce of WC. They each provided invaluable insight into their programs.

<sup>19</sup> <https://spu.edu/about-spu/mission> (accessed on 3/25/2021).

<sup>20</sup> <https://spu.edu/administration/center-career-calling> (accessed on 3/25/2021).

spiritual formation practices and communion with God.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Lynette Bikos, director of SPU's Center for Career and Calling says this portion of the VCD program has ended.<sup>22</sup> While she affirms the importance of spirituality in vocational discernment, classroom integration did not work at SPU because the professors were not part of the VCD program. While prayer is still mentioned on the website as a part of the program, much of the spiritual focus has been lost without the classes on Ignatian spiritual practices.

SPU's program was designed to be a four-year pathway to a career, fueled by the student's calling. While the program meshes well with their curriculum, field education, and spiritual development plan, the program is not required for all students. Success of a VCD program is only possible if it is supported and implemented at the institutional level. At present, only about 1% of the student body participates in SPU's program.<sup>23</sup> Even the best planned program will eventually fail with such a lack of participation. For maximum participation and effectiveness, such programs should be mandatory for all students.

#### *Abilene Christian University*

According to their website, Abilene Christian University (ACU) desires to “contribute to our students’ spiritual and intellectual growth in ways that encourage confidence and vocational formation.”<sup>24</sup> The university separated its vocational and career discernment training into two different departments. The Center for Vocational Formation handles vocational discernment,

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<sup>21</sup> Scott Campanario. “Ignatian Spirituality in Vocational Career Development: An Experimental Study of Emerging Adults” (Dissertation. *Seattle Pacific University*, 2018). 30.

<sup>22</sup> Lynette Bikos. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, March 17, 2021.

<sup>23</sup> Bikos, 2021 interview.

<sup>24</sup> <https://www.acu.edu/about/our-mission/> accessed on 3/25/21

while the Career Center provides a wide variety of career counseling resources for students and alumni.<sup>25</sup> While there are some areas of overlap between the two offices, communicate between the two is not always effective. Even so, Ben Ries, the director of the Center for Vocational Formation, believes this arrangement streamlines his work in vocational discernment, allowing the Career Counseling Center to focus on matching students to job openings and future careers.<sup>26</sup> While this division may streamline Ries' job, from the author's perspective, such a sharp division weakens the program by separating the two discernment skill sets.

### *Wheaton College*

Wheaton College's (WC) desire to cater a "Christian liberal arts education to the needs of contemporary society" is carried out, to some extent, through their vocational and career program.<sup>27</sup> WC provides a glimpse of what a 4-year VCD program could look like with required classes and related assignments throughout the degree program.<sup>28</sup> In the required freshman-level course, students are invited to consider their calling through the lenses of C.S. Lewis and Augustine. The senior-level course is a capstone class required of all senior students, and it involves much of the same material as the freshman orientation, but on a deeper, more

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<sup>25</sup> Benjamin Ries. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, February 23, 2021.

<sup>26</sup> Benjamin Ries. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, February 23, 2021.

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.wheaton.edu/about-wheaton/statement-of-faith-and-educational-purpose/> accessed on 3/25/21

<sup>28</sup> Dee Pierce. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, March 20, 2021.

personalized level.<sup>29</sup> Sophomore and junior engagement in the WC program is voluntary and is somewhat based on the student's course selection.<sup>30</sup>

WC accomplishes their VCD training by equipping the faculty to carry out more of the VCD advising and coaching than the program administrators, thus creating an extensive team to carry out the work rather than a single department. For this methodology to work, faculty members and other advisors need to be trained to utilize the VCD program resources.<sup>31</sup>

WC also demonstrates the power of allocating the necessary resources for industry-standard career discernment training. Wheaton's ample budget combined with institutional support enables them to access some of the best online career training tools on the market.<sup>32</sup> These tools allow faculty members to serve as vocational guides rather than requiring them to be VCD experts.

### *Synthesis of Evaluated Programs*

The VCD programs at both WC and SPU span the four years of an undergrad education. WC's guide harmonizes the curriculum and vocational assignments, features spiritual guidance exercises and other resources to enable faculty members to advise students, and provides an exciting introduction into VCD practices. They have also effectively championed institution-

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<sup>29</sup> Dee Pierce. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, March 20, 2021.

<sup>30</sup> Pierce, 2021 interview.

<sup>31</sup> Pierce, 2021 interview.

<sup>32</sup> Dee Pierce. *myStory* (Wheaton, IL: Wheaton University Press, 2021).  
<https://www.wheaton.edu/media/center-for-vocation-and-career/myStory-Full-Digital-Workbook-2020-2021.pdf>

wide support for their Center for Vocation and Career. Even though student participation in the program is voluntary, they engage more than 75% of the student body each semester.<sup>33</sup>

At first glance, SPU's program appears to be robust in the area of vocational discernment practices, but the program's robustness suffered from the inability to incorporate spiritual practices on a regular basis in the classroom. However, their printed student guide provides an excellent outline for vocational discernment training if the program ever receives the institutional and faculty support it deserves.

ACU's approach to VCD training leads to a confusing discussion of who is responsible for the training. The Center for Vocational Formation and the Career Counseling Center each provide important elements of VCD training, yet it is difficult to understand why the school is overlapping so many resources. The didactic faith formation effort incorporates vocational discernment training in a clear and efficient manner, but it seldom intersects with the career counseling center's career discernment training.

This brief analysis of existing programs reveals a strong emphasis in vocational discernment training, which is accomplished through various strategies. While each program has some aspect of spiritual practices, four-year integration, institutional support, and career tools, each of them is missing a different vital element for optimum effectiveness in helping EAs discern and respond to God's call.

The next topic to be explored following the analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of existing programs is the specific context for this current research.

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<sup>33</sup> Pierce, 2021 interview.

## Context of the Ministry Problem

Central Christian College of the Bible (CCCB) was founded in 1957 and is located in Moberly, Missouri, a small town between Kansas City and St. Louis. CCCB is affiliated with, and financially supported by, Stone-Campbell Movement churches, primarily the Independent Christian Church stream.<sup>34</sup> Theologically, the school has been very conservative and traditional since its inception.

I began teaching part-time in Central's online program in 2014 and then moved to full-time onsite employment in 2018. I serve as a practical ministries professor, the dean of professional studies, and the founder and director of the Graduate Placement Service (GPS) office. The mission of CCCB's GPS office is to help current students and graduates serve Jesus in the marketplace, ministry, and mission field. Assisting students with discerning their calling is a vital function in accomplishing the missions of both CCCB and the GPS office, so better tools are needed for this purpose.

The struggle for students to discern their calling is often more pronounced in a Bible college like CCCB because many of the students are preparing to engage in vocational Christian ministry in some manner. While this desire to please God and follow his leading motivates some students, others fear not living up to God's plan. According to Dr. Eric Stevens, who has served CCCB in various capacities since 1996, most Central students in past decades were eager to jump into ministry from the moment they arrived on campus.<sup>35</sup> However, most of today's

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<sup>34</sup> For more information on the Stone-Campbell Movement, see: Brandon A. Bradley. "Defining Spiritual Discernment for the Stone-Campbell Movement." Unpublished Manuscript, *NTS*, 2019.

<sup>35</sup> Dr. Eric Stevens, CCCB Dean of Student Success. In-person interview by author. Moberly, MO. August 17, 2019.

students are unsure as to the specific area of ministry to which God might be calling them, and they are often overwhelmed by the sheer number of choices before them.

Since 1957, CCCB's mission has been to train students to become "servant-leaders for the church."<sup>36</sup> In the early years of Central, this task primarily consisted of training preachers for the local church. Today, the role of servant-leader takes on many forms beyond preaching, including youth ministry, worship ministry, overseas missions, and more.

Most students come to Central with a desire to grow in a specific area of ministry, but their plans often change over the course of their academic career as they grow and mature. While some students arrive at Bible college with a chosen ministry field in mind, the available careers in these fields are not limited to a few jobs that neatly align with degree titles. As with any other career field, there is a growing number of alternative opportunities to serve Jesus in the church, the marketplace, and other various ministry contexts.

To make wise decisions regarding their area of service, CCCB students need to develop a clear understanding of their identity in Christ, the gifts God has given them, and their unique skills, interests, desires, and motivations. They need to be able to discern how God wants to use all of these to shape their understanding of his calling on their lives. In other words, these students not only need to understand available job opportunities when they graduate, but they also need to be trained in their ability to listen to God as well as to their own hearts in order to understand their vocation and the best future manifestations of that vocation.

Ironically, while Bible college students are usually open to the discussion of vocation and calling from a faith perspective, available resources for VCD training in Bible colleges like CCCB are often limited. CCCB's NetVUE membership application was rejected because Central

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<sup>36</sup> CCCB mission statement. <http://cccb.edu/about/>

holds national accreditation through ABHE<sup>37</sup> rather than regional accreditation through an organization such as the Higher Learning Commission.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, even if CCCB was regionally accredited, the lack of liberal arts degree programs also disqualifies CCCB from membership.

While this exclusion from NetVUE membership does not preclude CCCB from offering VCD training to students, it does limit the college's options in two significant ways. First, NetVUE serves as the distribution arm of the Lilly Foundation's grant which is available to provide funding for colleges and universities developing VCD training programs. Only NetVUE members are qualified for consideration of the Lilly Foundation Program Development Grant.<sup>39</sup> Second, access to the vast majority of NetVUE's resources, including their annual conference and most materials on their website, is limited to their members. While David Cunningham continues to direct schools like CCCB to NetVUE's resources for VCD training, he acknowledges the limitations on networking and continuing education opportunities available to non-member schools.<sup>40</sup>

ABHE, the organization that commissioned the aforementioned joint research project proclaiming VCD is vital for healthy Bible colleges and seminaries, ironically offers very few

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<sup>37</sup> "The Association for Biblical Higher Education is a North American agency, comprising more than 150 postsecondary institutions throughout North America specializing in biblical ministry formation and professional leadership education. ABHE exists to enhance the quality and credibility of higher educational institutions that engage students in biblical, transformational, experiential, and missional higher education through accreditation, professional development, and collaborative engagements benefiting the Kingdom of Christ." ABHE.org. Accessed on 11.4.2021.

<sup>38</sup> David Cunningham, email message to author, 9/1/2021.

<sup>39</sup> <https://www.cic.edu/programs/NetVUE>. (accessed 11/4/2021).

<sup>40</sup> David Cunningham, Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, September 29, 2021.

VCD training resources on their website.<sup>41</sup> Occasionally, vocation and calling are occasionally the subjects of breakout groups at ABHE's annual conferences; however, since this topic was such a significant finding in their research with the Barna Group, it seems that VCD training programs should garner more interest and that more resources should be made available.

An improved, holistic, spiritually-focused vocational discernment training program is a clear need for Bible colleges. This is especially true for small schools like CCCB who only have access to limited external resources. The need for new programming is evidenced by EAs' need for discerning a clear path in life and for tools to help them create space for listening to God regarding their vocation. Such a program requires institutional support, integration into the life of the students and the campus, opportunities to experience specific spiritual practices, and repetition that spans the entire four-year educational path. Together, these elements should achieve optimum benefit for students seeking to discern their vocation in preparation to face a world of vocational and career choices beyond Bible college.

### **Thesis**

Clearly, there is a need in Bible colleges for training that incorporates spiritual practices to help students discern their vocation. To address this need, I am proposing a four-year, integrated curriculum that incorporates classroom training, campus-wide discipleship program experiences, and guidance from the GPS office. This mandatory program includes coaching and practice in the spiritual exercises of solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction, during each year of a student's academic career. Each of these components will contribute to guiding students in the process of learning to listen for a lifetime of vocational discernment. While one or more of these necessary elements are

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<sup>41</sup> ABHE.org

present in other programs, research supports the need for a holistic approach that integrates all of them.

### **Method**

Thus far, this chapter has introduced the problems of college students struggling to discern their vocation, the lack of spiritually-focused resources for vocational discernment training, and the need to develop a curriculum to address this problem. Chapter Two will explore existing research and biblical support for specific spiritual practices beneficial for discernment, including the place of both solitude and community, and the intentional practice of specific forms of biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction. Engaging in these interdependent practices creates space for students to listen to God and discern who he has created them to be, and how they can best serve his Kingdom. Chapter Two will also explore the characteristics of EAs as well as existing research supporting the undergraduate education years as the optimum time and place for vocational discernment.

Chapter Three will build upon the research by examining how these practices work together and how they can best be utilized over a four-year degree program. Next, Chapter Four will provide a closer look at the proposed VCD curriculum, specifically addressing the learning objectives of the curriculum, how students will be guided through the various stages of the training, and how the curriculum adheres to the standards of the school and publication. Finally, Chapter Five will consider additional areas of study that could not be addressed within the scope of this dissertation.

## Primary Conversation Partners

In any research of this scope, several scholars or conversation partners rise to the top as those who are qualified to speak into the topics addressed. In the area of vocational discernment, these conversation partners are Jeffrey Arnett, David Cunningham, David Setran, and Bryan Dik. The work of each of these scholars helps to frame the gap this research seeks to fill. Arnett introduces various characteristics and tendencies of emerging adults. Cunningham introduces the role of undergraduate campus life for VCD practices.<sup>42</sup> Setran provides extensive work in spiritual formation for EAs, and he introduces their need to create space to hear from God in order to discern their calling.<sup>43</sup> Finally, Bryan Dik, a leading voice in the area of vocational psychology, introduces several spiritual practices helpful to vocational discernment.

Numerous authors and spiritual formation scholars are conversation partners for the discussion of specific spiritual practices. Among the most notable of these scholars are Richard Foster, Jan Johnson, James Martin, and Henri Nouwen.

## Defining Terms

This section defines pertinent terms as they appear in this research, since various scholars assign slightly different meanings to these terms, based on the context.

*Vocation vs Career:* The terms “vocation” and “career” are often used interchangeably to describe different, yet related, ideas. For this study, the term vocation is not limited to any single job, occupation, or career path. Vocation will refer to “the response we make with our total

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<sup>42</sup> David S. Cunningham. 2015. *At This Time and in This Place: Vocation and Higher Education* (Oxford University Press, 2015), 7.

<sup>43</sup> Setran, 24.

selves to the call of God (acknowledged or unacknowledged) and to God's call to partnership."<sup>44</sup> Career will refer to a specific job in which one's vocation is made manifest.

Vocation or Calling: From a Christian perspective, one's vocation is defined by God, as the divine caller. The apostle Paul instructs believers to live a life worthy of their calling and explains that Jesus himself has gifted certain individuals to help others grow in knowledge of the son of God and reach unity of the faith.<sup>45</sup>

David Setran defines vocation as a calling from someone greater than ourselves for a specific purpose.<sup>46</sup> Walter Brueggemann defines vocation as finding "a purpose for being in the world which is related to the purposes of God."<sup>47</sup> James Fowler sees vocation as "finding a purpose for our lives that is part of the purposes of God."<sup>48</sup> Perhaps the best definition belongs to Friedrich Buechner: vocation is "the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>49</sup> In this work, vocation and calling are used synonymously.

Discernment vs Job Placement: Job placement matches a candidate to a job opening, but vocational discernment is the "long game of career placement."<sup>50</sup> Placement is a single event for

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<sup>44</sup> James W. Fowler. *Weaving the New Creation: Stages of Faith and the Public Church* (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 126.

<sup>45</sup> Eph 4:1-11

<sup>46</sup> Setran, 119.

<sup>47</sup> Walter Brueggemann. "Covenanting as Human Vocation." *Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology* 33, no. 2 (April 1979): 125.

<sup>48</sup> James W. Fowler and Don S. Browning. *Faith Development and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 37.

<sup>49</sup> Frederick Buechner. *Wishful Thinking: a Seeker's ABC* (London: Mowbray, 1994), 118.

<sup>50</sup> Benjamin Ries. Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, February 23, 2021.

a single job, while vocational discernment is helping students to find rewarding, gainful employment related to, or in support of, their calling for their lifetime.

*Emerging Adults (EAs)*: In 2000, Jeffrey Arnett first proposed a new category describing the transitional period between the ages of eighteen and twenty-nine, in which young people no longer feel the pressure for marriage and adulthood straight out of high school.<sup>51</sup> Instead, many young adults are desperately searching for their identity and their calling or vocation.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter One introduced the need that Bible colleges have for a spiritually-focused VCD program to train students to listen to God and discern the best path for their service in his kingdom. Several existing vocational and career programs at various Christian colleges were evaluated for strengths and weaknesses. While there are several strengths worth including in a new program, the primary weakness is the absence of spiritual practices or the creation of space for listening to God.

Chapter Two will begin by exploring existing research on EAs, their faith, and the need for vocational discernment during the college years. Following this segment will be an exploration of research on the use of specific spiritual practices for listening and discernment, as well as biblical foundations for those same practices. Together these streams of research will establish the foundation for the proposed spiritually-focused VCD program.

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<sup>51</sup> Arnett, 8-10.

## CHAPTER TWO

### RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Emerging Adults (EAs) often struggle amid the noise of online distractions and non-Christian cultural messages to discern their vocation; therefore, it is important for Bible colleges to establish VCD programs that are spiritually-focused. Construction of an effective program is dependent upon an analysis of the available research on emerging adults, spiritual practices, and vocation to determine which practices will be the most effective and beneficial.

Chapter Two will begin with a survey of current research on characteristics common to EAs and the ways in which they tend to engage faith, college, and vocation in order to support the supposition that the college years as the optimal time for VCD training. The next area of research is an overview of the biblical foundations and current research on the practices of solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction, the spiritual disciplines in order to support the proposal that these are the optimal practices for spiritually-focused VCD training.

#### Characteristics of Emerging Adulthood

As mentioned in Chapter One, emerging adulthood is the new in-between age. This particular demographic, ages eighteen to twenty-nine, has been the subject of much study since Jeffery Arnett first proposed the category in 2000.<sup>52</sup> Career Development theorists refer to this as the “Exploration stage,” or the season when a great amount of energy is committed to exploring

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<sup>52</sup> Arnett, 8-10.

numerous life opportunities.<sup>53</sup> Arnett identifies five characteristics that this particular age group exhibits in their explorations: the quest for identity, general instability, a focus on self, a feeling of being in-between, and a certain level of optimism.

First, and likely the most important in addressing the problem of VCD training, is that most EAs actively pursue an understanding of their identity.<sup>54</sup> The quest to know who they are leads them to new discoveries in the areas of education, faith, friendship, love, work, and worldview. Since many EAs are living on their own for the first time, whether in a college dorm room or an apartment, the confines of family obligations and parental supervision no longer provide the barriers they may have previously experienced, allowing them space for such a quest.

Second, the lives of EAs are characteristically unstable.<sup>55</sup> Their newfound freedom away from parental supervision and the responsibilities of their family of origin requires adjustments in the areas of work, school, and making life choices. As they discover their own personal interests and motivations, EAs find this season of decreased supervision and obligations as a time to experiment with a variety of options in their lives. While past generations generally approached life-changing decisions more conservatively, EAs are more comfortable “trying out” new decisions for a season. While Arnett points to the frequent residential moving of this age group as an example of this instability, he adds their tendency toward exploration and experimentation is also evidence of instability.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Paul J. Hartung. “The Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Careers” in *Career Development and Counseling: Putting Theory and Research to Work*. Edited by Steven D. Brown and Robert W. Lent (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2013). 94.

<sup>54</sup> Arnett, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Arnett, 10.

<sup>56</sup> Arnett, 12.

David Setran, however, adds that this phenomenon may not solely be due to the new freedoms EAs experience. He purports that the “stable and scripted road maps” of adult life in previous generations have disappeared.<sup>57</sup> This reality increases the number of life decisions EAs must make for themselves. The cherished new freedoms come with new personal responsibilities which can seem overwhelming. This feeling of uncertainty, instability, the loss of stable expectations of past homelife, can often lead to fear, depression, emotional distress, and forms of addiction and escapist behavior.<sup>58</sup>

The third characteristic Setran observes in EAs is that they are often very individualistic or self-focused.<sup>59</sup> This is likely to be expected, as the transition from their familial home into new frontiers brings a host of new questions many young people have not yet encountered. While some new questions and decisions may be as simple as where to shop for groceries or eat dinner, even these types of decisions require a new evaluation of personal preferences.

The fourth characteristic is likely a byproduct of the instability and exploration. EAs feel as if they are “in between;” that is, while they are no longer teenagers, they are not yet fully adults. In past generations, the age of eighteen marked the entry point into the workforce, enlistment into the armed forces, or even marriage. Today, many of these past expectations are postponed as the explorations of adolescent years find their way into emerging adulthood. This reality becomes evident when considering what are generally accepted as the top three criteria for adulthood: (1) Accepting responsibility for yourself; (2) Making independent decisions; and

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<sup>57</sup> Setran, 4.

<sup>58</sup> Setran, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Arnett, 13.

(3) Becoming financially independent.<sup>60</sup> While there are exceptions, most EAs do not feel they have yet reached these milestones until their mid- to late-twenties.<sup>61</sup> Until each one of the three milestones is reached, this in-between feeling remains.

Finally, this season of emerging adulthood is a season of optimism.<sup>62</sup> There are countless roads forward, and EAs have the freedom and desire to explore all of them. The possibilities of new love, exciting work, and changing worldviews provide reasons for experiential learning in all areas of interest, and subsequently, great amounts of optimism.

An understanding of these common characteristics observed by Arnett (instability, self-focus, a feeling of being in-between, and their quest for identity) provide clarity on EAs' struggles. These difficulties, combined with their high level of optimism, emphasize the need, but also the great opportunity, for VCD training. Since this research addresses the needs of EAs in Bible college, it is also important to examine current trends in the faith development of EAs.

### **Emerging Adults and Faith**

The gradual disappearance of life's scripted roadmaps often causes EAs to lack purposeful engagement in religion and faith.<sup>63</sup> Young adults do not always continue in the faith of their family of origin into their college years. Struggles with the quest for identity combined

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<sup>60</sup> Arnett, 15.

<sup>61</sup> Arnett, 15.

<sup>62</sup> Arnett, 16-17.

<sup>63</sup> Setran, 4.

with increased geographical moves away from the parental home often leads to decreasing church participation, which eliminates the influence of a supportive Christian community.<sup>64</sup>

This pattern of decreasing church involvement and the loss of influence from a Christian community often lead to a lack of solid moral boundaries. When there is no firm, moral foundation in place, behavior is primarily based upon opinion and emotion, leading to a blurred understanding of right and wrong.<sup>65</sup> Sadly, this lack of a Judeo-Christian moral code, combined with the absence of an intentional relationship with God, can dull the EA's senses to God's call.<sup>66</sup>

The inability to hear God's call happens when there is a disconnection between one's loves and beliefs. The factors which most often shape EAs are more often about their love, and less about their beliefs.<sup>67</sup> College students are often deceived regarding that which is worth building their lives around, leading to the adoption of idols and false kingdoms. Such confusion must be confronted through immersion into a biblical worldview, which reveals the deep need EAs have for intentional spiritual formation.<sup>68</sup>

There is, however, reason for hope and optimism since a growing number of EAs desire such intentional spiritual practices. While some areas of religious and moral engagement are waning, others are gaining ground. EAs show renewed passion for social justice issues as an

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<sup>64</sup> As cited by David Setran. Also see: David Kinnaman, and Aly Hawkins. *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Ada, MI: Baker Books, 2011).

<sup>65</sup> Christian Smith, Kari Christofferson, Hilary Davidson, and Patricia Snell Herzog. *Lost in Transition: The Dark Side of Emerging Adulthood* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 19.

<sup>66</sup> As cited by Setran. Also see: Smith, *Lost in Transition*.

<sup>67</sup> Setran, 31.

<sup>68</sup> Setran, 32.

expression of their personal identity.<sup>69</sup> There is a resurgence among EAs who desire to see the Gospel's redemptive power impact the broader social and personal issues of their lives.<sup>70</sup> Many EAs also demonstrate a renewed interest in the ancient traditions of the Christian faith, including liturgical forms and the moral and doctrinal creeds that are seen to constructively confront the problems and struggles of more promiscuous cultures.<sup>71</sup>

While there is reason for concern in the aforementioned areas of declining EA faith formation, the increased interest in social justice as a tangible expression of the Gospel, combined with an interest in ancient liturgy provide reasons for hope that emerging adulthood provides a season of opportunity for these young people to experience God. Training in personal spiritual formation is needed, and research seems to show that college is the optimum time for this to take place.

### **College as the Optimum Opportunity for VCD Training**

For EAs to understand how to make healthy career decisions that align with God's calling, they need training in identity formation and vocational discernment. This section will explore how the undergraduate education experience provides the optimum opportunity for this training. Additionally, research citing the unique opportunity and responsibility Christian colleges have in this effort will also be explored.

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<sup>69</sup> Guerrero, Mayra, Amy J. Anderson, Beth S. Catlett, Bernadette Sánchez, and C. Lynn Liao. 2021. "Emerging Adults' Social Justice Engagement: Motivations, Barriers, and Social Identity." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 68, no. 1–2: 73–87. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12495>.

<sup>70</sup> Colleen Carroll. *The New Faithful: Why Young Adults Are Embracing Christian Orthodoxy* (Chicago: Loyola, 2002), 45–46.

<sup>71</sup> Robert E. Webber. *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World*. (Baker Books, 2002), 78, 86, 195.

David Cunningham purports that college is the best time and place for EAs to receive VCD training. His assessment seems to be correct since roughly two-thirds of the EAs in the United States attend college right after high school.<sup>72</sup> This may be true because the decision to attend college produces a greater focus in VCD in preparation for entering the workforce, just as the overall expense of education heightens the level of attention given to academic efforts.

Many EAs make career decisions primarily based concerns with compensation, status, and personal enjoyment, rather than on God's calling.<sup>73</sup> EAs are less likely to consider how a certain job might affect their relationships or other prior commitments when career considerations are made outside of God's greater purposes for their lives.<sup>74</sup> Helping EAs see occupation as one of many contexts through which they can live out their calling is imperative, as is teaching them that the true vocational question is not "What will I do for a career?" but "What will I do with my life?"<sup>75</sup>

In the typical four-year college or university, students have up to two years of general studies electives and prerequisite classes before they must declare a major. These two years provide opportunity for identity exploration and experimentation with various vocational and career possibilities.<sup>76</sup> However, with all the new areas of exploration and life transitions, combined with EAs' proclivity towards instability, these decisions can become overwhelming. Intentional training on how to process these ideas and opportunities is vital because there is no

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<sup>72</sup> Setran, 119.

<sup>73</sup> Setran, 120.

<sup>74</sup> Setran, 114-117.

<sup>75</sup> Setran, 120.

<sup>76</sup> Setran, 122.

other season of life in which so many decisions about life purpose and career must be made than during one's undergraduate education.

While EAs, as a group, share several specific characteristics and approaches to life decisions, they do not all approach their undergraduate education the same way. To better understand how to best reach different types of students in VCD training, the following section will examine four subcultures that are typical of the way many current college students approach their education.

### **Various Approaches to the College Experience**

Even though college seems to be the best atmosphere in which to discern identity and vocation, not all EAs come to college with the same perspective. Arnett identifies four college student subcultures, each with their own characteristics and approaches toward education and career training. These categories include the Collegiate Subculture, Vocational or Pragmatic Subculture, Academic Subculture, and Rebel Subculture.

Students who fit into Arnett's Collegiate Subculture arrive on campus looking for social opportunities. Academics and career plans are low on their priority list. These students generally do just enough to get by because, in their minds, the primary purpose for college is the stereotypical American college experience.<sup>77</sup>

Students in the Vocational Subculture are practically-minded and are often working their way through college.<sup>78</sup> Their purpose for college is to gain the skills and credentials necessary for better employment. However, just because this group is focused on what they see as a career

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<sup>77</sup> Arnett, 135.

<sup>78</sup> Arnett, 135.

or calling does not mean they are more open to VCD training or coaching from the faculty. This subculture often sees the extra time and energy needed to invest in such relationships as disconnected from their purpose of gaining necessary job credentials.<sup>79</sup>

Students in the Academic Subculture tend to identify with the mission and vision of the college. These students see their studies as directly relating to their career and calling, so they do not hesitate to put all their effort into academic success.<sup>80</sup> Ironically, students within the Rebel Subculture are also deeply engaged in their academic career. While they might not be nearly as excited about the institution, they are eager to learn. However, this group is very selective about where they want to invest their time, and just because they take a class does not mean they will enjoy its explorations or agree with the direction of the instructors. Those in the Rebel Subculture are often harsh critics of the school and the curriculum.

These subcultures are generalizations and cannot represent every college student's perspective, but they do provide a glimpse into the need EAs have for VCD training. The students in each of these subcultures need training to help them slow down and process the learning and career options before them; otherwise, they will default to their subculture tendencies and miss valuable opportunities. According to Dallas Willard, in the absence of instruction in a biblical worldview through Christian community, EAs will "almost irretrievably find themselves susceptible to structuring their own identities."<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Arnett, 135.

<sup>80</sup> Arnett, 136.

<sup>81</sup> Dallas Willard. *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 260.

Willard's assessment identifies the role of walking alongside EAs as they seek to live out their faith and step into a Christian vocation as the responsibility of institutions of Christian higher education. The world bombards EAs with cultural forces which demand their allegiance. Clinging to Christian beliefs requires more than simply refusing to be part of a non-Christian culture; it calls for active engagement in a community of faith, a commitment to the authority of God's Word, and an openness to experiencing life from a Christocentric perspective.<sup>82</sup>

Christian colleges have a responsibility to train EAs in Christocentric, spiritually-focused exercises for shaping and discerning their identity. Setran compares the four-year experience on the campus of a Christian college to the formative process experienced by the twelve disciples as they followed Jesus for a similar span of time.<sup>83</sup> Both the college experience and the Twelve's formative years under Jesus' tutelage provided high levels of "ideological encapsulation" that make a long-lasting imprint on the worldview of the participants.<sup>84</sup>

### **The Matrix of Transformation**

Christian colleges have the task of shaping the worldview of their students to be Christocentric, and then to help them discern their identity and vocation within that kingdom worldview. EAs hunger to understand who they are and what their purpose is, a void that can be satisfied by Bible colleges, if they have the right tools and resources to become centers for Christian

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<sup>82</sup> Setran, 75.

<sup>83</sup> Setran, 76.

<sup>84</sup> Setran, 76-77.

transformation. To this end, Setran offers a “Matrix of Transformation” made up of four key components: Relationship, Rituals, Rhetoric and Roles.<sup>85</sup>

Relationship, the first quadrant of Setran’s matrix, refers to the transformation of one’s identity that occurs through bonding with other individuals who are part of Christian community and reinforce Christian convictions. The process of forging identity in the context of relationships with other Christians helps solidify EAs’ worldview and informs their understanding of their specific calling.

Rituals, the second quadrant of the matrix, refers to “scripted ways of being and belonging” which help students live out their Christian identity.<sup>86</sup> Such activities on Christian college campuses often include participating in chapel, corporate worship and prayer, the Lord’s Supper, baptisms, and campus Bible studies. In addition to these examples, Setran also advises Christian colleges to create or revive more rites of passages within their own community. Modern American society has lost most of its rites of passage ceremonies. Perhaps the entry into upperclassmen status or being recognized as a servant-leader on campus could become a ritualistic moment of recognition on campus. Such a program should include prayer, the reading of Scripture, and a commitment from the school to support the student’s future achievements and their Christian walk.<sup>87</sup>

Rhetoric is Setran’s third quadrant in the matrix, which refers to the way words are used in teaching, song, and dialogue to aid students in interpreting their experience and shaping their

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<sup>85</sup> Setran 76-77; also see: Lewis Rambo. *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

<sup>86</sup> Setran 77; also see: Tory K. Baucum. *Evangelical Hospitality: Catechetical Evangelism in the Early Church and Its Recovery for Today* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 83-105.

<sup>87</sup> Setran, 77.

conceptual and emotional worldview.<sup>88</sup> The entire curriculum should be immersed in this same rhetoric to shape the students' Christian worldview. Furthermore, the language and rhetoric used by Christian colleges should commit to being saturated in the biblical narrative, which informs a Christian worldview and becomes God's language for engaging students in conversations of their calling. Consistent use of biblical vocabulary in the mission and vision of the school as well as throughout classroom instruction, campus activities, and specialized training programs, empowers students to adopt and incorporate the words and themes of God in understanding their identity and worldview.

The final quadrant of Setran's matrix is Roles. Part of the process of shaping a student's identity comes through the opportunities the student has to step into various new roles. Setran states that EAs must be allowed to take on real ministry responsibilities and be given opportunities to serve and "mend the broken places of the world" as they seek to discern how the Spirit has gifted them.<sup>89</sup> Just as Jesus invited his disciples to follow him and to share in the work of his ministry, Bible colleges are wise to invite students to "try on" various callings through opportunities in Christian service and ministry responsibility. These new roles inform their Christian identity and fuel their understanding of kingdom vocation. Christian identity formation has always been tied to the outward expression of ministry, or one's vocation.<sup>90</sup>

Studying Setran's Matrix of Transformation reveals four key components through which a Christian college can provide VCD training from a Christo-centric kingdom worldview. An understanding of these components (Relationship, Rituals, Rhetoric, and Roles) should prove

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<sup>88</sup> Setran, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Setran, 79.

<sup>90</sup> Setran, 79.

helpful for any Bible college endeavoring to create such a program, and this matrix will be revisited in Chapter Three. However, there is still a need to understand how EAs understand this concept of calling, which is the subject of the next section.

### **Emerging Adults and Vocation**

While EAs value the freedom to explore every opportunity placed before them, excessive freedom also can cause them to be reluctant in choosing a single path. Without the ability to discern their calling, purpose, and areas of giftedness, this freedom often turns into fear of choosing the wrong path. Without a deep understanding of their value and self-worth, EAs often struggle to understand their purpose. Developing an understanding of their vocation requires an awareness of the purposes of God's kingdom as well as a willingness to listen for God's call and to determine the best way in which to live it out, even if a decision restricts the remaining options. An overdeveloped sense of freedom combined with an underdeveloped Christian vision and worldview will cause EAs to miss their true kingdom vocational calling and purpose.<sup>91</sup> In light of this truth, Christian Colleges must help EAs expand their vision, discern their calling, and then be able to discern how to live out this calling.

One of the hallmarks of emerging adulthood is the tendency to be primarily self-oriented. VCD training can help EAs relinquish control of their personal dreams, allowing them to be more open to God's call. College VCD programs also need to address the common problem of a compartmentalized understanding of vocation. When vocation is only understood as paid work, everything else in life is undervalued as leisure activity. Thus, everything which is not part of a full-time career becomes treated with lesser value. This is a false view, as evidenced by the fact

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<sup>91</sup> Setran, 112-113.

that Jesus himself was not paid for his calling, and yet his calling provided redemption and forgiveness of sin for all humankind.<sup>92</sup>

Setran encourages the use of VCD training to help EAs pursue their kingdom purpose and discern their unique vocational niche while developing practical and theological ways for current leaders to assist in the process. Part of this VCD training must include training in spiritual practices, so the next section will address these.

### **Spiritual Practices for VCD Training**

Thus far, this chapter has explored various characteristics of EAs, their need for spiritually-focused VCD training, and the prime opportunity Christian colleges have to provide such training. While mention has been made of certain practices that need to be included in such training, no specifics have been mentioned yet. The remainder of this chapter will feature research on the specific spiritual practices to be incorporated in the VCD program, and how they will help EAs hear from God and respond to his call.

#### *Solitude*

The ancient practice of solitude is the place to begin in a review of spiritually-formative practices that are beneficial for discernment. This section will address questions regarding the importance of solitude, the differences between solitude and loneliness, and the symbiotic relationship between solitude and community. In addition to research on these topics, biblical foundations supporting the practice of solitude and its connection to community will also be explored.

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<sup>92</sup> Col 1:14.

Adults and youth alike sift through a barrage of emails, text messages, social media and streaming services on a daily basis. EAs are particularly susceptible to this onslaught of information designed to persuade their thoughts and behaviors.<sup>93</sup> The constant barrage of noise and demands for attention prevents EAs from processing their own personal thoughts and beliefs. Intentional times of solitude and silence are necessary for the EA to begin to discern God's perspective of his or her identity as well as his calling on his or her life, rather than relying solely on the outside influences of the culture.

Understanding one's identity and calling requires focused thought. Hannah Arendt identifies solitude as an essential practice in the act of thinking.<sup>94</sup> In her groundbreaking study of Adolf Eichmann's war crime trial after WWII, Arendt determined that it was Eichmann's tendency to succumb to loneliness and thoughtlessness that made him susceptible to the totalitarianism of the Third Reich.<sup>95</sup> Arendt effectively argues that communities, and the whole of society, are damaged when members of said communities lose their understanding of their personal uniqueness of self in loneliness and isolation.<sup>96</sup>

Relationships, whether personal or political, are strengthened when individuals have a deeper sense of self-identity and calling that are strengthened through the space solitude creates for thinking. In other words, the individual's practice of solitude (or the lack of it) affects the

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<sup>93</sup> Amy L. Bitner and Pia Albinson. "Targeting Young Adults: The Effectiveness of Social Media Use for Local Businesses" in *Atlantic Marketing Association Annual Proceedings* (Boone, NC: Appalachian State University, 2016). [https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ama\\_proceedings/2016/INT-SOCMEDMKTG-T08/3/](https://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/ama_proceedings/2016/INT-SOCMEDMKTG-T08/3/)

<sup>94</sup> Hannah Arendt. "Some Questions of Moral Philosophy" in *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Random House, 2003), 98.

<sup>95</sup> Roger Berkowitz. "Solitude and the Activity of Thinking." *Thinking in Dark Times*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 2010), 237.

<sup>96</sup> Berkowitz, 237.

affairs of society as a whole; therefore, solitude aids in the political improvement of society.<sup>97</sup>

Roger Berkowitz encourages efforts of raising up future generations to foster foundations of “solitude and the activity of thinking” as the gateway to self-understanding and uniqueness.<sup>98</sup>

Setran prescribes solitude and silence as powerful agents of identity formation, and he views solitude as the place where believers can begin to embrace the reality of God’s call and purpose for their lives.<sup>99</sup> He writes that solitude is where EAs “come face-to-face with their true identities” because in solitude, there is “no one but God to tell them who they really are at the core, ... no image management, only the voice of the one who knows them completely.”<sup>100</sup>

Recognizing the necessity of God’s presence in one’s life takes shape in solitude through deep inner conversations that identify areas of brokenness, hurt, sin, and addiction. Henri Nouwen states that it is during times of solitude and personal reflection when believers “can slowly unmask the illusion of our possessiveness.”<sup>101</sup> Bryan Dik also claims that solitude and silence are necessary in order to create space for personal reflection and listening to God.<sup>102</sup>

While solitude in the presence of God the Creator does not create Christ-likeness on its own, the practice does create space for the Holy Spirit to work, helping individuals to see their

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<sup>97</sup> Arendt, 98

<sup>98</sup> Berkowitz, 247.

<sup>99</sup> Setran, 47.

<sup>100</sup> Setran, 47.

<sup>101</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Out of Solitude: Three Meditations on the Christian Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press. 2004), 25.

<sup>102</sup> Dik, 52.

calling as an expression and extension of their identity.<sup>103</sup> In her research into the practice of solitude, Virginia Thomas notes the value of solitude in both mood regulation and identity development.<sup>104</sup> Her research indicates that the benefits of solitude for college students include a higher sense of self-awareness, greater comfort when alone, greater satisfaction with life, and lower rates of depression.<sup>105</sup> However, while the benefits of solitude have been established, the practice is not naturally adopted by many EAs, necessitating instruction in the practice.<sup>106</sup>

Even though research supports the benefits of solitude, EAs often shy away from the practice because it can be difficult. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi attests to this, saying, “keeping order in the mind” is difficult.<sup>107</sup> When external stimulation and feedback are lacking, many individuals allow their attention to wander, resulting in what Csikszentmihalyi terms “psychic entropy.”<sup>108</sup>

Csikszentmihalyi’s assessment of solitude as the “ultimate test for the ability to control the quality of experience” supports the need for EAs to develop the skill of practicing solitude.<sup>109</sup> Embracing time alone, rather than avoiding it, is especially important for EAs as their struggle to embrace solitude often disables them from accomplishing tasks that require significant

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<sup>103</sup> Mark A. Maddix, Jonathan H. Kim, and James Riley Estep. *Understanding Faith Formation: Theological, Congregational, and Global Dimensions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 89.

<sup>104</sup> Virginia Thomas. “How To Be Alone: An Investigation of Solitude Skills” (n.d.). Accessed August 18, 2020. [https://www.academia.edu/42851834/How\\_To\\_Be\\_Alone\\_An\\_Investigation\\_of\\_Solitude\\_Skills](https://www.academia.edu/42851834/How_To_Be_Alone_An_Investigation_of_Solitude_Skills), 3.

<sup>105</sup> Thomas, 3.

<sup>106</sup> Dewald, 6-7.

<sup>107</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience* (New York: HarperCollins, 2008), 169.

<sup>108</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 169.

<sup>109</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 171.

preparation.<sup>110</sup> While Csikszentmihalyi’s work does not directly promote Christianity, he supports the fact that young adults need solitude to positively discern their identity, personal fulfillment, and vocation.<sup>111</sup>

Another common reason many people fear solitude is that when they are alone, they can become more aware of deep secrets, phobias, hurts, and bad attitudes which lurk in the shadows of their minds. In solitude, false narratives and lies rise to the surface, forcing the individual to have to choose whether to face them or flee. When asked about his experience with practicing solitude, one CCCB student said, “people get scared of solitude because past actions and bad attitudes quickly come to the surface, and you have to deal with them, or you go looking for something else to do. It is kind of a fight or flight thing.”<sup>112</sup> Nouwen names this experience “facing your demons,” but this confrontation has less to do with the forces of evil and more with reconciling our false narratives, brokenness and emotional or spiritual struggles within our relationship with God.<sup>113</sup>

Jesus himself faced such attacks in solitude in the wilderness after the Father affirmed his sonship at his baptism (Matt 3-4). Rather than fleeing from solitude, Jesus embraced the opportunity to lean into his Father’s words, allowing those words to define his thoughts and actions, and to become his response. The essence of Jesus’ response in the wilderness was, “My Father, who calls me his own, has already guided my path. I am choosing to agree with my

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<sup>110</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 171.

<sup>112</sup> Classroom discussion on solitude. Student response to the question “Why do people fear solitude?” November 20, 2020. CCCB, Moberly, MO.

<sup>113</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen. *The Way of the Heart* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1981), 15.

Father.” EAs struggle with similar battles with identity and self-worth, and too few of them have the skills necessary to discern and embrace their God-given identity without training in the practice of solitude, which is much different from loneliness.

### **Solitude vs. Loneliness**

Having introduced solitude as a valuable practice for VCD, this section will focus on the important task of differentiating between solitude and loneliness. These two similar, but very different, concepts will be defined, and their differences will be identified to clarify an understanding of the value of solitude.

Given EAs’ dependence upon friends and social media, training in solitude begins by differentiating it from loneliness. While solitude is a vital spiritual practice, it is often confused with loneliness. These two concepts are, in fact, radically different. Parker Palmer describes loneliness as a painful feeling of isolation and an intense longing to be with another person.<sup>114</sup> Emma Pavey points out that loneliness stems from the deprivation of relationships.<sup>115</sup> The tendency to conflate solitude and loneliness begins in childhood when parents and educators use isolation as a punishment, which associates being alone with negative feelings.<sup>116</sup>

The spiritual practice of solitude is not the same as being lonely. This is true in part because solitude with God is anticipated and willingly embraced, even though it may not always be a pleasurable experience. Csikszentmihalyi sees solitude as vital not only to an individual’s

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<sup>114</sup> Parker Palmer. *The Promise of Paradox: a Celebration of Contradictions in the Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 59.

<sup>115</sup> Emma Pavey. “Finding a Place for Solitude in Contemporary Trinitarian Theology.” [https://www.academia.edu/6860406/Finding\\_a\\_Place\\_for\\_Solitude\\_in\\_Contemporary\\_Trinitarian\\_Theology\\_and\\_Christian\\_Practice](https://www.academia.edu/6860406/Finding_a_Place_for_Solitude_in_Contemporary_Trinitarian_Theology_and_Christian_Practice), 4. (Accessed August 18, 2020).

<sup>116</sup> Amanda Balsys. “How to Be Alone: An Exploration of Activities in Solitude and Connections to Processes of Learning.” (Thesis, 2011), 28.

quest for happiness, but to all experiential learning theories. He distinguishes between the concepts of “being alone” and “in solitude,” while acknowledging that being alone is a necessary condition of solitude.<sup>117</sup>

While solitude generally refers to being isolated from other people, it can be practiced in a crowd, since it refers to one’s external connections with others.<sup>118</sup> As a spiritual practice, solitude involves embracing a period of being absent from other people for the purpose of communing with God. Richard Foster differentiates between loneliness and solitude by describing loneliness as “inner emptiness” and solitude as “inner fulfillment.”<sup>119</sup>

While individuals are generally alone when they practice solitude, they are not completely void of companionship. In solitude, the individual is alone with themselves, or alone with God. Arendt states that the “dialogue with oneself” that occurs in solitude is necessary for the act of thinking and reconsidering one’s opinions and actions.<sup>120</sup>

Rather than viewing solitude with fear, time intentionally spent alone with God should be viewed as a gift. Nouwen says it is during these times that Christ-followers “experience the hopeful presence of God.”<sup>121</sup> Solitude is the place where Jesus’ disciples are able to listen for the loving voice of the one who spoke before they could speak a word, who healed before they could ask for help, who set them free long before they could free others, and who loved them long

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<sup>117</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, 165.

<sup>118</sup> John D. Barbour. *The Value of Solitude: The Ethics and Spirituality of Aloneness in Autobiography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 3.

<sup>119</sup> Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), 120.

<sup>120</sup> Arendt, 98.

<sup>121</sup> Henri J.M. Nouwen. *Making All Things New* (New York: HarperCollins, 1981), 75.

before they could love anyone else. In times of solitude, disciples learn that “being is more important than having, and that we are worth more than the result of our own efforts,” and that our “life is not a possession to be defended, but a gift to be shared.”<sup>122</sup>

### **Biblical Foundations for Solitude**

The practice of solitude as an opportunity to discern God’s planned identity and vocation is demonstrated in Scripture through the lives of Jesus and his followers. Matthew records Jesus’ teaching that prayer should take place in solitude, unseen by others (Matt 6:6). Jesus not only taught the practice of solitude, but he often practiced it during his earthly ministry. Scripture indicates that solitude is central to the human experience, as evidenced by Jesus’ own frequent times of solitude.

When Jesus was baptized, the Father affirmed the Son’s identity as well as his love and great pleasure with the Son (Matt 3:17). Immediately following this affirmation of his identity, Jesus spent the next 40 days in solitude, fasting in the wilderness. Even though Jesus is fully divine, this period of solitude allowed him space to process what it meant to be fully human, and how his humanity affected his mission from the Father. Jesus leaned into his identity as the Son of God during this time of solitude, embracing the true narrative of who he is in relationship to the Father, as evidenced each time he quoted the Father to refute Satan’s attacks.

Following this wilderness experience, Jesus continued to practice solitude during significant times of transition in his life and ministry. Prior to selecting the Twelve, he spent the night alone up on a mountain praying to his Father (Luke 6:12-13). When Jesus learned that his cousin John had been beheaded, he sought solitude, but was interrupted by crowds. After Jesus

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<sup>122</sup> Nouwen. *Out of Solitude*, 26.

spent the evening healing and feeding the people, he again withdrew to spend time on a mountain alone with his Father in solitude and prayer (Matt 14:1-23). Finally, at the most trying juncture of his ministry, Jesus spent time alone in prayer in Gethsemane seeking affirmation from the Father regarding his identity and mission (Matt 26:36-38).

After Jesus' ascension and the establishment of the church, Peter continued to practice prayer and solitude, as he learned from Jesus. While in Joppa, Peter spent time in prayer and solitude with God up on the roof (Acts 10:9). While he was there alone, the Lord revealed a vision that completely redefined Peter's understanding of his identity as a Jew who faithfully abstained from unclean foods (Acts 10:10-14). This revelation from God caused Peter to face his own prejudices as the Lord guided him into a more open identity and a new ministry of welcoming all people to faith in Jesus. Following this encounter, Peter was given the opportunity to live out this new identity and conviction by guiding Cornelius and his family to faith in Christ.

Although Paul was not one of the original Twelve, he also followed this pattern of finding new understanding of God's call on his life in solitude. Immediately after Jesus confronted him on the road to Damascus, Saul fasted and prayed in solitude for three days (Acts 9:1-19). At the end of those three days, Ananias restored Saul's sight and baptized him into Jesus, thus completely altering his identity and understanding of his mission for the kingdom. In his later writings, he describes a very intense period of solitude with God in which he experienced "inexpressible things" that shaped his identity (2 Cor 12:2-5).<sup>123</sup>

Paul continued his practice of solitude beyond this initial training period. During one of his missionary journeys, the Lord appeared to him in the night and directed him to Macedonia, and he and his companions obeyed immediately (Acts 16:6-10). Later in Paul's ministry, he was

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<sup>123</sup> All Scripture quotations are NIV unless indicated otherwise.

alone in prison after a mob tried to kill him, and the Lord again appeared to him and spoke words of comfort and assure Paul of his mission (Acts 23:9-11). This divine assurance likely came while Paul was intentionally seeking the presence of God in the solitude of his prison cell.

John the Revelator was forced into an extended time of solitude when he was exiled on Patmos. While this time of solitude was imposed on John rather than voluntary, he took advantage of the opportunity to spend the time in the Spirit, seeking a word from the Lord (Rev 1:9-11). During this time of solitude, Jesus instructed John to record seven messages to the churches (Rev. 2-3). John's time in isolation became a precious time of communion with Jesus in which Jesus led John into his God-given identity as a prophet, witness, and writer.

In each of the above narratives, Jesus and his followers intentionally spent time in solitude in which the Lord affirmed their identity and calling. These and other similar narratives reveal that identity formation and vocational discernment often occur during times of solitude with the Spirit guiding and clarifying the work of ministry. The Holy Spirit is clearly the guiding force in this process, but Scripture is silent as to how this guidance occurs. What is clear is that the process of hearing from God typically occurs during intentional times of solitude and prayer.

### **Solitude and Community**

While solitude is vital to hearing from God, the experience of true community also plays an important role. Parker Palmer says that solitude is where we “come into deeper possession of ourselves so we can emerge to create true Community with others.”<sup>124</sup> Therefore, understanding the roles of both solitude and community and their interaction are crucial for EAs as they seek to discern their identity and their calling. A growing body of research supports the theory that the

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<sup>124</sup> Palmer, 59.

regular practice of solitude by individual members benefits society by providing greater room for higher cognitive activity.<sup>125</sup>

Every community, including the church, depends on each member understanding his or her own unique role and identity, the roles and identities of their neighbors, and the interdependence between them. Pavey argues that as *imago Dei*, everyone must seek to understand his or her own unique identity, which can only happen through time spent in reflective solitude.<sup>126</sup> This process of each individual person discerning his or her own identity in solitude is a prerequisite to effective community.

Research affirms this connection between the practice of solitude and true community.<sup>127</sup> Sondra Matthaai discusses the interdependence among believers in a growing understanding of identity and vocation, saying these only become known in relationship with one another in community.<sup>128</sup> According to Palmer, the individual's need for solitude and for community each deepens the other.<sup>129</sup> Csikszentmihalyi's philosophy of happiness, which he calls "Flow Theory," describes solitude as a necessary condition to develop contemplation, focus, and capability.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>125</sup>Thomas, 46.

<sup>126</sup>Pavey, 90.

<sup>127</sup>This list includes Arendt, Csikszentmihalyi, Nouwen, and Palmer.

<sup>128</sup>Sondra Higgins Matthaai. *Faith in Formation: The Congregational Ministry of Making Disciples* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2008), 89.

<sup>129</sup>Palmer, 59.

<sup>130</sup>Csikszentmihalyi, 165.

Parker Palmer discusses how community assists the practice of solitude.<sup>131</sup> Through the example of the Quakers' Clearness Committees, Palmer supports the need for a concentrated effort to develop relationships with others who listen intently to the person who is struggling with an issue. In this committee, a person shares their struggle with others for the sake of gaining further perspective on how God might be guiding them to handle this issue. The committee listens intently, not seeking to answer the individual's question without first creating space to intentionally listen and process what is being shared.<sup>132</sup> After deliberation, the committee shares what they have heard from the individual and the Holy Spirit. There is a conversation on the subject, allowing the individual to ask for further details, but in the end, they part ways. The committee vows to hold this discussion in secrecy, only sharing about it if the initiator of the committee asks them to do so.

Such practices of community provide a confidential means of processing and affirming what God might be saying to an individual. In the case of vocational discernment, relationships in community provide feedback from trusted people. Individuals can share the thoughts they have been pondering in solitude and to allow God to guide them through the voices of those whom they trust. The Clearness Committee concept is more formal than most Christians might experience today, but the commitment to the privacy of the one seeking wisdom is an element that should be protected.

Research attests to the importance of both solitude and community, but the discernment process begins in solitude. Since discernment cannot take place amidst noise, whether it be internal or external, silence is a necessary component. In his work on vocational discernment,

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<sup>131</sup> Parker Palmer. *Let your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 92.

<sup>132</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 92.

David Setran suggests creating space through abstaining from electronic devices; however, he does not prescribe specific practices that are beneficial for listening to God to fill the void created by this abstinence.

This section has focused on the importance of solitude as a spiritual practice for EAs to create space for listening to God as they seek to understand their identity and calling. However, merely creating space is not enough. The space created in solitude must be filled with positive VCD practices. The remainder of this chapter will feature an exploration of current scholarship and biblical support for several spiritual practices beneficial for vocational discernment when utilized in concert with solitude. These practices include biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction. While these practices are discussed separately, they cannot exist in isolation from one another. Instead, they are all intertwined, building on and enhancing the other.

### *Biblical Engagement*

As previously demonstrated, intentional solitude is a valuable practice for creating space to hear from God, but creating space is not enough. This section will begin with an examination of biblical engagement, the first spiritual practice for filling the space created in solitude. First, biblical foundations for this practice will be identified, followed by a discussion of four important methods of Bible engagement for VCD. These methods include memorization, personal study, Lectio Divina, and Scripture contemplation.

While Scripture reading is generally agreed upon as a necessary practice for a “good Christian life,” many Christians may not understand how God uses biblical engagement to define who they are and to shape them for his purposes. Eugene Peterson explains that reading the Bible

should not be “primarily informational, ... but formational, shaping us into our true being.”<sup>133</sup>

Biblical engagement is a vital part of coming to understand who God created us to be.<sup>134</sup>

### **Biblical Foundations for Engaging Scripture**

Prior to identifying the four recommended methods of practicing biblical engagement for VCD, this section will explore how Scripture itself testifies to the importance of hearing from God through the written Word. First will be an exploration of how Jesus engaged Scripture himself, followed by a brief look at how God’s people were shaped by his Word in the Old Testament. Finally, examples from Paul’s epistles will provide a glimpse of how God’s people embraced biblical engagement as a vital practice in understanding their identity and calling.

The Bible itself provides ample testimony for how Scripture has guided God’s people through the millennia. Jesus himself understood that the human mind is shaped by one’s understanding of Scripture. In his teaching, he often used phrases such as, “You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you” to his audience who had studied the Torah.<sup>135</sup> Jesus also participated in the public reading of Scripture when he read from Isaiah in the synagogue. He was familiar with the text, and he informed those who were present that his life and ministry fulfilled the passage.

When God gave the Israelites the law after he delivered them from Egypt, he instructed them to keep his commands not only in their hearts, but to teach them to their children and to keep constant reminders in view (Deut 6:6-9). Later, he again reminded them to affix his words

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<sup>133</sup>Eugene Peterson. *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 24.

<sup>134</sup> Dik, 52.

<sup>135</sup> Matt 5:21, 27, 33, 38, 43, etc.

in their hearts and minds and keep written reminders before them to remember his commands (Deut 11:16-21). The psalmist vows to hide God's Word in his heart to keep him from sin (Ps 119:11). This also seems to be Jesus' own method for holding to his identity and defeating temptation, as evidenced from his quotations of words from the Torah to defeat the wilderness temptations (Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13).

In his second letter to Timothy, Paul attests to the authority and benefits of Scripture, declaring Scripture to be authored by God and useful for “teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). Paul also writes to the Colossian church on the use of Scripture for instruction, formation, and wisdom (Col 3:16). These instructions all urge Christians to allow God's Word to saturate their hearts and minds, where it can equip them and guide them in godly wisdom.

Both Old and New Testaments provide evidence of how God's people are shaped by engaging with the Word. The remainder of this section will identify four important methods of engaging in Scripture for the purpose of vocational discernment.

### **Scripture Memorization**

Many of the Scripture passages cited above address the importance not only of incorporating God's Word into one's life, but also into one's being for the purpose of growing in Christlikeness. This absorption and incorporation of Scripture takes place through memorization. While it may not be expressly stated, Scripture seems to advocate the necessity of memorizing Scripture. In his teaching on the vine and the branches in John 15, Jesus says, “remain in me and my words remain in you” (vs. 7). His words are best able to “remain” in the life of his followers when they are memorized and internalized. Paul's instructions to let the word of Christ “dwell in you richly” (Col 3:16) is best obeyed through memorization of Scripture. Scripture also speaks

about meditating on God’s Word “day and night” (Ps 1:2; 119:97, 148; Josh 1:8). Meditating on God’s Word through the dark watches of the night is best accomplished when the Word is memorized. The apostle Peter seems to have memorized passages from Psalms and Joel’s prophecy when he incorporates them into his sermon on Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2.

The entire premise of *Eat This Book: A Conversation in the Art of Spiritual Reading* is based on Eugene Peterson’s interpretation of God instructing Ezekiel to eat the scroll (Ezek. 3:1-3) as a metaphor for internalizing the Word of God and allowing it to change the heart and mind, much as food changes and nourishes the physical body.<sup>136</sup> Marion Snapper teaches that the Word of God more effectively accomplishes its life-shaping purpose when it has been committed to memory.<sup>137</sup> The early church faced the challenges of low literacy rates as well as limited copies of the written text, so it embraced memorization as a way to pass the Word of God on to others. Adam Houge views the memorization of entire books of the Bible as a method to carry the Word of God within one’s hearts when print is unavailable.<sup>138</sup>

Scripture memorization is not practiced as commonly today as it once was, but most people still memorize various other things, including song lyrics, funny lines from movies, or quotes from a novel. None of these are usually memorized intentionally, but naturally, through repetition. Like the repetition of song lyrics or movie lines, Morris advocates repetitive reading of the text as an important step in the memorization process.<sup>139</sup> Scripture also needs to be

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<sup>136</sup> Peterson.

<sup>137</sup> Marion J. Snapper. “Memorization in Church Education.” *Calvin Theological Journal* 16, no. 1 (April 1981), 39.

<sup>138</sup> Adam Houge. *How to Memorize the Bible Fast & Easy* (Location Unknown: Living Tree Publishing, 2014), 9.

<sup>139</sup> Dr. Daniel Morris. *Why You Really Can Memorize Scripture: Understand and Unlock Your Mind’s Natural Ability to Memorize Long Passages* (Abbotsford, WI: Aneko Press, 2012), 8-24.

engaged creatively for it to impact the entire self. Sheri Tesar, worship professor at CCCB, encourages viewing the Scripture passage as a part of the overall story and experiencing it “as part of our own story ... [so that] the text not only engages our intellect and logic (left brain), but also our creativity, heart, and emotions.”<sup>140</sup> Adding this step not only helps our memories possess more information, but this practice creates a gospel-formed heart, mind, and spirit.

Transcribing Scripture by hand is another way to aid in the memorization of Scripture, especially longer passages. Bob Martin advocates writing out Scripture because the process involves more of the body than just the mind and the eyes. “In scribing we use our eyes, mind, and millions of motor nerves and muscles running up our fingers, up our arms, and through our spinal cord.”<sup>141</sup> This concept follows God’s command to the kings of Israel to each write out for themselves a personal copy of his law. He wanted them to have a deep, personal engagement with him as they would be representing him to the people.

The repetition of both reading and writing the biblical text is just the beginning of the biblical engagement process. Memorization is not always easy, but it occurs more naturally through familiarity and repetition. Several ancient methods of biblical engagement have proven themselves to provide the repetition, focus, and familiarity necessary for embedding Scripture in the heart and mind for the purpose of spiritual discernment. These practices include personal study, *Lectio Divina*, and contemplation.

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<sup>140</sup>Sheri Tesar. Unpublished paper, *Institute for Worship Studies*, June 2019, 16.

<sup>141</sup>Bob Martin. *iScribe: How to stay very close to God* (Akron, OH: 48Hourbooks Press, ND), 31.

## Personal Study

The process of studying a biblical text is more in-depth than a mere surface reading. Study involves diving deeply into the text to discover the author's intended meaning for the original audience. Students of the Word then consider where the truth of this message speaks into their own lives.<sup>142</sup>

Richard Foster advises the following four steps for studying Scripture: Repetition, Concentration, Comprehension, and Reflection. Just as it sounds, repetition involves reading a passage multiple times, allowing the words to soak into the heart and mind.<sup>143</sup> Concentration involves putting aside all distractions and allowing these ideas from God's Word to capture the student's full attention.<sup>144</sup> With comprehension, the reader seeks answers to the questions, which then become a valuable resource in understanding the meaning of the text.<sup>145</sup> In the reflection stage, the student personally engages the significance of the message and applies it to his or her life, with the goal of understanding more about themselves and their relationship with God.<sup>146</sup>

Adele Calhoun applies creative labels to four different methods of studying Scripture: the Artist, the Detective, the Treasure-Seeker, and Jesus' Apprentice. The Artist method draws pictures or other artistic notations beside various details in the text.<sup>147</sup> The Detective resembles Foster's approach, as it involves asking various journalistic questions to determine application

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<sup>142</sup> Dik, 52.

<sup>143</sup> Richard Foster. *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1988), 64.

<sup>144</sup> Foster, 65.

<sup>145</sup> Foster, 65.

<sup>146</sup> Foster, 66.

<sup>147</sup> Adele Calhoun. *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 165.

and understanding of the text.<sup>148</sup> The Treasure-seeker method is an inductive approach that seeks personal application of treasures from the text (an example to follow, a promise to claim, a sin to confess, etc.).<sup>149</sup> Finally, in the Jesus' Apprentice method, students focus on one of the gospels in an effort to get to know Jesus.<sup>150</sup>

## **Lectio Divina**

*Lectio Divina* is an ancient method of biblical engagement that was practiced regularly during the first 1,500 years of the church.<sup>151</sup> In *Lectio Divina*, the reader dwells on a single passage of Scripture in God's presence, while engaging in the following steps to listen for a word from the Father: *Silencio*, *Lectio*, *Meditatio*, *Oratio*, and *Contemplatio*. *Silencio* involves resting silently in the presence of God in preparation to hear from him. *Lectio* involves slowly reading the text and taking in the words. *Meditatio* involves mentally chewing on the text and reflecting on its meaning. *Oratio* involves responding and praying, entering a conversation with God. The final step, *Contemplatio*, involves simply resting and reflecting on the text in the presence of God, attending to whatever God reveals.<sup>152</sup> *Lectio Divina* is more devotional in nature than some of the other approaches mentioned here, and some people might categorize this practice as a form of prayer rather than biblical engagement. In truth, it is both.

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<sup>148</sup>Calhoun, 165.

<sup>149</sup>Calhoun, 165.

<sup>150</sup>Calhoun, 166.

<sup>151</sup>Calhoun, 168

<sup>152</sup>Calhoun, 169.

Alternatively, rather than going through the entire process of Lectio Divina, students can focus solely on the meditation phase. Meditating on Scripture opens the seeker's heart and mind to God, and therefore, it has always been at the core of Jewish/Christian spiritual practice.<sup>153</sup> Meditating on Scripture trains the mind to stay focused and to grow in the ability to explore the thoughts and words of God. The following pattern, which resembles Lectio Divina, is a beneficial guide for meditating on Scripture:<sup>154</sup>

1. Choose a brief passage of Scripture, usually consisting of a few verses up to a pericope.
2. Slowly read through the chosen text.
3. Write down any questions that come to mind while reading the text.
4. Utilize the imagination to engage oneself in the text.
5. Repeatedly return to the text to chew on various thoughts God brings to the mind.

### **Contemplation**

Contemplation is another practice of biblical engagement which could fall under the categories of both biblical engagement and prayer because the practice consists of reading the text and then entering the biblical context in prayer. Even though this practice has existed throughout the life of the church, Ignatius of Loyola popularized its practice in the 16th century.<sup>155</sup> He encouraged his followers to try “composing the place,” meaning engaging their imaginations in pondering the original context.<sup>156</sup> This is accomplished by engaging the senses and the imagination to picture oneself in the setting of the biblical passage. Bryan Dik identifies

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<sup>153</sup>Calhoun, 173.

<sup>154</sup>Calhoun, 174.

<sup>155</sup> James Martin, SJ. *Learning to Pray: A Guide for Everyone* (New York: HarperCollins Publishing, 2021), 241.

<sup>156</sup> Martin, 242.

the imaginative task of placing oneself in the text as a method for better understand one's identity and place to join God's story and his redemptive work.<sup>157</sup>

James Martin thoroughly explains the process of Scripture contemplation, beginning with the first step being a prayerful invitation for God to be present. The next step is to slowly read the text several times, asking various journalistic and sensory questions, allowing the imagination to compose the scene within the text. The next step is to mentally enter the scene with God, allowing the scene to play out in the imagination, seeking to experience what is taking place in the text through the Holy Spirit's lead. Martin reminds readers who engage in this process to remember that "God desires to communicate with you all the time, but when you intentionally open yourself up, you can often hear God more clearly."<sup>158</sup>

### *Prayer*

In addition to focusing on biblical engagement, an effective Bible college VCD program should also include a strong emphasis on prayer. While some forms of prayer were addressed in the context of biblical engagement, a few additional methods of prayer also prove beneficial to the process of VCD. Since prayers associated with Lectio Divina and Scripture contemplation were covered in the biblical engagement section, this portion will feature other types of prayer methods which are beneficial for VCD.

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<sup>157</sup> Bryan J. Dik. *Redeeming Work: A Guide to Discovering God's Calling for Your Career* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2020), 52.

<sup>158</sup> Martin, 256.

## The Daily Examen

This project will focus on two of the vast number of prayer practices Richard Foster offers: the Daily *Examen* and the Prayer of Relinquishment. While Foster's writing provides clear instruction and insight into the *Examen* prayer, Foster is not the originator of this form of prayer. The Daily *Examen* is a practice originated by Ignatius of Loyola, and the church has used it widely for more than 400 years. The *Examen* is a prayer of reflection over the thoughts, feelings, activities, and actions of the day for the purpose of recognizing where God has been at work in the life of the believer and how the believer has responded to God's presence.<sup>159</sup>

Practitioners of the *Examen* most often engage in this prayer in the evening as they reflect over the details of their day, from the time they awoke until the present moment. In this prayer, believers invite the Lord to search the depths of their hearts as they mentally journey back through their day.<sup>160</sup> Practitioners reflect over the events of the day, searching for occasions when they recognized God's presence as well as times when they missed it. These reflections open the door for confession of missed divine appointments, as well as opportunities for gratitude and praise for those moments that were embraced. The prayer ends by looking forward, asking God to assist the person praying to be more aware of and attendant to God's presence in the coming day.

Foster offers a helpful cautionary word for those beginning to pray the Daily *Examen*. When believers pray the *Examen* alone, two temptations often arise: they either declare their innocence or see themselves as unredeemable. Succumbing to either temptation falls short of the

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<sup>159</sup> Richard J. Foster. *Prayer - 10th Anniversary Edition: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: Harper Collins, 2009), 28.

<sup>160</sup>Foster. *Prayer*, 29.

purpose of this prayer practice. When EAs engage in this prayer honestly and regularly, God can use it to develop a growing awareness of the ways he is active in their lives to shape their vocational orientation.<sup>161</sup>

In addition to the *Examen*, Foster provides additional help in understanding prayer for vocational discernment through his discussion of the Prayer of Relinquishment. Since many EAs consider personal dreams and aspirations which may not be in alignment with God's plans, prayers that help them lay down their own desires in favor of God's will are a necessity.

### **The Prayer of Relinquishment**

Foster says the human tendency to flee struggle is counter-intuitive to the purposes of God. The Prayer of Relinquishment uses struggle as a formative tool in the life of a believer.<sup>162</sup> The prime example of this type of prayer is when Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane, and he asks the Father to remove the cup of suffering before him, but ultimately, he submits to his Father's will (Mark 14:36; Luke 22:42). This prayer example helps believers release areas of personal struggle for the sake of God's active will in their lives.<sup>163</sup>

Foster outlines several steps in the Prayer of Relinquishment.<sup>164</sup> First, he instructs believers to pray over the kenosis of Christ in Philippians 2 in the quest to empty themselves as they quietly listen and strive to obey the direction from the Lord. Next, Foster advises believers to surrender as they prayerfully contemplate Christ's relinquishing prayers in the Garden of

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<sup>161</sup> Setran, 129.

<sup>162</sup> Foster. *Prayer*, 50.

<sup>163</sup> Foster. *Prayer*, 47.

<sup>164</sup> Foster. *Prayer*, 55-56.

Gethsemane. The person praying is encouraged to experience Christ's soul growing heavy in prayer as he struggles with accepting the cup he must drink, until he finally surrenders with the words, "not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). Believers are invited to pray this same phrase over the areas of their lives where they struggle to surrender to God, and to release the things that are keeping them from their true vocation.

The next steps involve praying prayers of abandonment, release, and finally, resurrection. Charles de Foucauld articulates the prayer of abandonment as, "Father I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will. Whatever you may do, I thank you: I am ready for all, I accept all."<sup>165</sup> This prayer articulates the important step of abandoning one's own plans to make room for God's. After abandoning personal plans and desires, the next step is a prayer of release. In this step, believers release their relationships, future, hopes, dreams, and frustrations into the loving arms of God, and then walk away from them, leaving God to handle all these issues however he sees fit. The final step is asking God to bring new life out of releasing our desires to him. Foster's example of the prayer of resurrection is, "Lord bring back to life what will please you and advance your kingdom. Let it come in whatever form you desire. Let it be in your time and your way. Thank you, Lord, for Resurrection."<sup>166</sup> Such prayers are able to help EAs learn to release their desires and plans for the sake of God's perfect will in their lives.

## **Listening Prayer**

In addition to the *Examen* and the Prayer of Relinquishment, perhaps the most important type of prayer for discerning identity and vocation is listening prayer. *Listening* is not usually the

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<sup>165</sup>Charles de Foucauld. <http://www.brothercharles.org/prayer-of-abandonment/>. (accessed October 28, 2021).

<sup>166</sup>Foster. *Prayer*, 56.

first verb that comes to mind when someone hears the word *prayer*. Likely, the most common verb associated with prayer is *talking*. However, prayer is much more than simply asking God to do things on our behalf. Listening prayer is the act of being silent in order to hear the parts of the conversation we most often miss. While there are many ways to practice listening prayer, the following methods are often effective in discerning one's vocation.

Jan Johnson suggests placing questions before God in prayer and then simply waiting on the answer.<sup>167</sup> She says that while sometimes a thought will come to mind during this quiet waiting period, “more often the answer will surprise us, coming at an odd moment later that day... week or year.”<sup>168</sup> This practice works well when claiming questions in Scripture as our own, such as “How can this be?,” a question asked by both Mary (Luke 1:34) and Nicodemus (John 3:9). Such a question can be applied to contemporary circumstances when seeking answers regarding apparent paradoxes seen in daily life.<sup>169</sup> Johnson sees the practice of listening prayer as a means of living out Jesus' teaching from Matthew 7:7-8 in which he calls his followers to ask, seek, and knock in prayer. Setting a question before God in prayer and then silently waiting on his reply is the act of asking, knocking, and seeking his answer.<sup>170</sup>

One of the great strengths of listening prayer is that it moves followers of Jesus beyond shallow prayers of asking for things and into a deeper practice of seeking God.<sup>171</sup> During times

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<sup>167</sup> Jan Johnson. *When the Soul Listens: Finding Rest and Direction in Contemplative Prayer* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1999), 99.

<sup>168</sup> Johnson, 99.

<sup>169</sup> Johnson, 101.

<sup>170</sup> Johnson, 99.

<sup>171</sup> Johnson, 103.

of frustration and fear, the process of learning to wait and trust God to answer and to speak into life situations is a bit like waiting for a simmering pot to break into a full, rolling boil.

Simmering helps those seeking to discern God’s plan for their lives to continue living in faith.<sup>172</sup>

To those who might raise the objection that they cannot simply listen for God to respond, Johnson provides a startling answer: “Waiting on God [in listening prayer] is only a problem when we have made our relationship with him a means to an end.”<sup>173</sup> Listening prayer trains followers of Jesus to approach God in humility, allowing him to set the tone of the discussion and to provide the answers necessary to understand how to live. In this practice, believers set aside their “calculating ways” to contemplate the holy answers of God.<sup>174</sup>

In addition to listening for God, Parker Palmer calls those engaged in listening prayer to listen also to their own lives.<sup>175</sup> He advises those seeking out their vocation: “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.”<sup>176</sup> Leaning into the word “vocation,” which derives from the Latin word for “voice,” Palmer offers a reminder that God calls his people through the yearnings he implanted into their being. Many people tend to listen for guidance regarding their calling everywhere except to their own voice.<sup>177</sup>

Palmer instructs those seeking to discern their vocation to listen silently to their own inner voice, literally taking notes on what it is saying, “lest we forget our own truth or deny we

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<sup>172</sup> Johnson, 104.

<sup>173</sup> Johnson, 106.

<sup>174</sup> Johnson, 106.

<sup>175</sup> Palmer. *Let your Life Speak*, 3.

<sup>176</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 3.

<sup>177</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 5.

ever heard it.”<sup>178</sup> In this process, one moves beyond the chronic inclination to ask what they ought to do with their life, into the more elementary, but demanding questions of identity and vocation, “Who am I? What is my nature?”<sup>179</sup>

Through intentional times of silent listening, while pondering the questions of personal life experience with God and listening deeply to the state of one’s own soul, followers of Jesus discover God speaking into who they truly are and giving voice to their vocation. Silent listening creates space to see where “true vocation joins self and service,”<sup>180</sup> or as Friedrich Buechner defines vocation, “the place where your deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”<sup>181</sup>

This form of listening prayer aligns with what Bryan Dik calls, “Self-Knowledge and Self-examination.”<sup>182</sup> VCD can be greatly aided when one intentionally considers their attitudes and motives toward their work.<sup>183</sup> What are the reasons for considering a specific career? Assessments such as those provided on PathwayU<sup>184</sup> provide valuable information about an individual's abilities, gifts, interests, preferred work environment, and values.<sup>185</sup> Such information provides further help in listening to one’s own heart and can be a catalyst for new and deeper questions to place before God.

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<sup>178</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 6.

<sup>179</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 15.

<sup>180</sup> Palmer. *Let Your Life Speak*, 16

<sup>181</sup> Frederick Buechner. *Wishful Thinking: A Seeker’s ABC* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993), 119.

<sup>182</sup> Dik, 54.

<sup>183</sup> Dik, 54.

<sup>184</sup> PathwayU.com

<sup>185</sup> Dik, 60-61, 70-82.

Three specific forms of prayer that are important VCD practices were explored in this section: the Daily *Examen*, the Prayer of Relinquishment, and Listening Prayer. All three of these integrate with other spiritual practices. Prayer is often practiced in solitude and is informed by biblical engagement, which illuminates questions that should be placed before God. This entire process is aided by handwritten journaling, the next practice to be examined.

### *Handwritten Journaling*

Handwritten journaling is another practice that is beneficial in training EAs to discern their vocation. Research strongly supports the connection between handwriting and the learning process, as well as the benefits of handwriting over typing. This section will delve into the following aspects of writing and learning: how writing affects the overall learning process, how the brain processes thoughts through typing versus handwriting, writing as the embodiment of ideas, and what handwriting says about a person's identity.

### **Handwriting and the Learning Process**

In their compelling work on writing and the cognitive process, Linda Flowers and John Hayes assert that the “writing process itself is learning.”<sup>186</sup> Their work is not an exposition on the technical aspects of writing, but an exploration of writing as an internal process of the mind. Flowers and Hayes describe a cognitive process in which newly acquired information from the external environment is integrated with past knowledge previously stored in the learner's memory. When the brain integrates newly acquired information with the old ideas already in the

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<sup>186</sup> Linda Flowers and John R. Hayes. “A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing.” *College Composition and Communication* 32, no. 4 (1981). doi:10.2307/356600. 386.

memory, it begins to form new ideas which are then further developed through the writing process itself.<sup>187</sup>

The first step in this learning process is the acquisition of new information from outside sources and influences, otherwise known as the “task environment.”<sup>188</sup> This new information may come from listening to a lecture or a podcast, reading a book or a news article, having a conversation with a boss or a peer, observing nature, or from Scripture, in the case of spiritual discernment. All the new information must first be integrated with what currently resides in long-term memory.<sup>189</sup> Once this integration occurs, new questions, ideas, or problems will arise that need to be explored. These new questions, ideas, and problems are what move the learner to engage in the writing process, which Flowers and Hayes break down into three sub-phases: plan, translate, and review.

In the planning phase, learners organize the newly integrated ideas to form an abstract, internal representation of that which will soon be articulated through the written word.<sup>190</sup> Learners generate ideas and allow them to take shape until they coalesce into an understandable structure. Planning is the mental organization process that must take place before learners can solidify what they think and begin to take steps of action in response to the new material.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup>Flowers and Hayes, 369.

<sup>188</sup>Flowers and Hayes, 369.

<sup>189</sup>Flowers and Hayes, 369.

<sup>190</sup>Flowers and Hayes, 372.

<sup>191</sup>Flowers and Hayes, 372.

Translation, the next step, involves putting these newly formed ideas into usable language.<sup>192</sup> This step involves seeing the newly-formed and organized ideas come to life as tangible words on a page. The neurons of the brain communicate through the central nervous system to stimulate the hand as it guides the pen along the page so that letters and words take shape, and abstract ideas become tangible realities.

The final step is a review of the newly produced work. Learners reread their written ideas to determine whether they are complete or in need of further development.<sup>193</sup> As they reread the physical manifestation of their ideas on the written page, they can compare the written page to the ideas in their mind and consider whether these ideas have been clearly communicated or if they need to be revised. This process often leads to an even clearer vision of how to reformulate the ideas with greater creativity and clarity. The evaluation and revision steps are continued until the fully processed thought has been clearly conveyed in writing.

While these steps are presented here in a sequential order, Flowers and Hayes see this process not as a precise order of steps, but rather as components of the whole.<sup>194</sup> These individual components often reorder themselves, cycling through in a variety of new formations, to ultimately arrive at clearly articulated, written ideas. In their work on career counseling, Steven Brown and Nancy Krane found that one of the most effective interventions is instructing clients to write down their goals as this causes them to be committed to the goals rather than merely talking about them.<sup>195</sup> Putting goals and ideas down in concrete form also allows the

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<sup>192</sup> Flowers and Hayes, 373.

<sup>193</sup> Flowers and Hayes, 374.

<sup>194</sup> Flowers and Hayes, 369.

<sup>195</sup> Steven D. Brown and Nancy E. Ryan Krane. "Chapter 23 - Four (or Five) Sessions and a Cloud of Dust: Old Assumptions and New Observations about Career Counseling." *Handbook of Counseling Psychology* (New York: Wiley, 2000), 746 and 760.

writer to review and clarify their goals after some time and experience. While learning theories certainly connect the process of writing to learning, the next level of writing that will be explored is the difference between typing and handwriting regarding learning.

### **Handwriting versus Typing**

The ubiquitous use of electronics for all forms of writing, including journaling, has steadily increased for children and adults alike. At first glance, journaling on a computer or smart device seems like a time-efficient method; however, upon closer investigation, significant benefits exist when using old-fashioned pen and paper.

Aesop's fable of "The Tortoise and the Hare" illustrates the truth that speed does not always win the race. In the fable, the hare was confident in his own speed and ability; however, he chose to pause for a nap in the middle of the race, allowing the slow and steady tortoise to cross the finish line first. Typing may be faster than handwriting, but like the tortoise, the slower act of writing by hand wins the race for efficacy in the learning process.

As individuals learn new facts and ideas, their brains require a certain investment of time to process those new ideas before these ideas can find meaning, as described above. Writing by hand forces learners to slow down through the mechanical process of creating each individual letter, enabling the mind to better reflect on the idea being written down. Typing is beneficial for speedy message reproduction, but it does not create the cognitive space necessary for deep reflection, such as is needed for spiritual discernment of vocation.

Handwriting is not only slower than typing, giving the brain more time to digest the information that is being written, but it also provides a "graphomotor component," which is

absent in typing.<sup>196</sup> Graphomotor skills form the connection between thoughts to words on the page. The physical act of forming words through moving a pen is different from forming words by typing. Writing by hand forces the writer to be more intentional in forming thoughts into written words. This process cements the content into the brain in a more permanent way than merely typing.

The physical act of using a pen to form letters, words, and sentences to convey thoughts to others causes the writer to focus more intentionally on the words which are being formed. When conveying thoughts through the physical effort of writing by hand, the writer focuses on the tip of the pen, forming a stronger connection between the brain and the act of writing. There is more of a disconnect between the brain and the hand when typing. Mangen and Velay discovered a “spatiotemporal decoupling between the visual attention and the haptic input” that disrupts the brain-hand connection and divides it between the mechanical striking of the keys and the visual focus on the screen.<sup>197</sup> The act of writing by hand better connects the brain to the process of reflecting on new information, but it also assists the brain clearly articulate ideas that arise from deep reflection.

### **Handwriting and the Embodiment of Ideas**

The process of transferring thoughts from the brain into written form cements them into tangible artifacts that become a part of the writer and his or her identity. This task is best accomplished through writing by hand rather than typing. Philosopher Martin Heidegger sees

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<sup>196</sup>Anne Mangen, Jean-Luc Velay. “Digitizing Literacy: Reflections on the Haptics of Writing.” IntechOpen. Last modified April 1, 2010. <https://www.intechopen.com/books/advances-in-haptics/digitizing-literacy-reflections-on-the-haptics-of-writing>. location 122.

<sup>197</sup>Mangen and Velay, location 122.

typing (or “mechanized writing”) as a dehumanizing technology which “deprives the hand of dignity in the realm of the written word and degrades the word into a mere means for the traffic of communication.”<sup>198</sup>

Thoughts and ideas are a major part of one’s identity, and the labored focus of putting pen to paper to communicate those ideas helps incorporate them into the mind by engaging a larger number of neurological systems in the brain.<sup>199</sup> Typing is fast, but the price of speed and ease is the loss of the sensuality and power of the gift of language.

According to Mangen, the purpose of learning to write is to gain the ability to get ideas out of the brain and into a fixed format. This process develops the internal memory while creating an external memory device to assist in ongoing cognitive function.<sup>200</sup> While typing on a computer can be used for this process, there is a documented decrease in mental recall due to a disconnect between our embodied cognition and the produced text.<sup>201</sup>

Several studies demonstrate the value of handwriting over typing for memory and retention, regardless of age. A study involving 11-year-old children and 16-year-old adolescents demonstrated better mental recall from handwriting than either laptop keyboarding or touchscreen typing.<sup>202</sup> Some physicians even recommend handwriting as cognitive exercise for

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<sup>198</sup>Martin Heidegger and Manfred S. Frings. Gesamtausgabe. *Freiburger Vorlesung Wintersemester 1942/43*. (Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1982), 118-119.

<sup>199</sup>Mangen and Velay, location 159.

<sup>200</sup>Anne Mangen, L.G. Anda, G.H. Oxborough, and K. Brønnick. “Handwriting versus Keyboard Writing: Effect on Word Recall.” *Journal of Writing Research* 7, no. 2 (2015): 300. doi:10.17239/jowr-2015.07.02.01.

<sup>201</sup>Mangen, et al., 300.

<sup>202</sup>Satu-Maarit Frangou, Jan Wikgren, Sara Sintonen, Leila Kairaluoma, and Pekka Vasari. “The Effect of Writing Modality on Recollection in Children and Adolescents.” *Research in Learning Technology* 27 (2019). doi:10.25304/rlt.v27.2239., 8.

older adults to keep their minds sharp and retain their mental capacity as they age.<sup>203</sup>

Handwriting is proven to be a better method for the learning process and for giving concrete form to abstract ideas, which is vital to the discernment process. The next benefit of handwriting to be addressed is the connection between handwriting and identity.

## **Handwriting and Identity**

Aside from the cognitive function, another significant difference between typing and handwriting is the unique connection between an individual's penmanship and his or her identity. No two individual's penmanship is identical because each person possesses their own idiosyncrasies, inconsistencies, and preferences. Graphology, the study of one's handwriting, is more an art than a science, but historically it has been seen as a valuable area of study.

In Medieval times, gazing upon a handwritten letter was believed to provide a special connection between the writer and the reader.<sup>204</sup> Gwendolyn Bounds says this is still common today, pointing to "the intimacy implied by a loved one's script," and how the shape of letters might reveal elements of a person's personality.<sup>205</sup> This is likely one reason that many Americans travel to the Smithsonian in Washington D.C. to view the original, handwritten versions of the U.S. Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Seeing the original, handwritten documents somehow connects viewers to the authors, despite the distance of two centuries.

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<sup>203</sup>Gwendolyn Bounds. "How Handwriting Trains the Brain." *The Wall Street Journal*. Last modified October 5, 2010. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704631504575531932754922518>.

<sup>204</sup>BBC News. "The Lost Art of Reading Other People's Handwriting." *BBC News*. Last modified April 29, 2016. <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-36168408>.

<sup>205</sup>Bounds, 4.

Writing by hand creates a space for our thinking to take shape and begin to reveal the substance of our cognitive activity in tangible ways. As such, handwritten journaling becomes a place to meet with God and grow in the discernment of identity and vocation.

### *Spiritual Direction*

The final spiritual practice for discerning identity and vocation to be explored in this chapter is spiritual direction. This discussion will not only describe the process of spiritual direction and its role in the discernment of identity and vocation but offer some understanding as to how spiritual direction engages and enhances all the other practices previously discussed.

Spiritual direction is a growing practice among seekers in Catholicism, mainline Protestants, and evangelicals alike. Those who are unfamiliar with this term often fear it as a dangerous or occult-like practice. On the contrary, spiritual direction is not new, mysterious, or authoritarian.<sup>206</sup> It is not the same as preaching, discipling, counseling, or teaching, although some elements can be quite similar.<sup>207</sup>

Definitions of spiritual direction vary widely. Author and spiritual director Casey Tygrett defines spiritual direction as “listening another person into the presence of Jesus.”<sup>208</sup> Margaret Guenther says spiritual direction helps people discover how to define themselves in relation to the world and to God.<sup>209</sup> In his book *The Art of Spiritual Direction*, W. Paul Jones provides

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<sup>206</sup> David G. Benner. *Sacred Companions: The Gift of Spiritual Friendship & Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 89.

<sup>207</sup> Benner, 89-93.

<sup>208</sup> Casey Tygrett, Interview by author. Zoom Call. Moberly, MO, February 1, 2021.

<sup>209</sup> Margaret Guenther. *Holy Listening: The Art of Spiritual Direction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1992), 69.

multiple definitions for spiritual direction, but the following three are the most applicable for this purpose.

Jones says spiritual direction is the act of “providing companionship on someone's pilgrimage; walking together in the spirit so as to provide support, discernment, and encounter; integrating spirituality at the intersection of the person's intellectual, emotional, social, and cultural context.” He says the practice also involves “relating with another mature Christian before whom one is willing to be vulnerable and held accountable, expecting to hear prayerful guidance during the struggle to discern God's active presence in one's life,” with the goal of “forging an iconic self-knowing in which, through kindly support and wise advice, one is able to accept, affirm, and incorporate what one already knows.”<sup>210</sup>

David Benner offers a more succinct, holistic definition, saying it is a “prayer process in which a person seeking help in cultivating a deeper personal relationship with God meets with another for prayer and conversation that is focused on increasing awareness of God in the midst of life experiences in facilitating surrender to God's will.”<sup>211</sup> Benner also describes “spiritual friendship” as a specific form of spiritual direction that takes place between equals supporting each other, rather than the unequal relationship of a director and a directee.

Spiritual friendship is a blessing from God, and it is an example of the type of relationship God desires to have with each one of his children. Spiritual friendship is not an ordinary relationship and should not be confused with mere acquaintanceship.<sup>212</sup> Benner

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<sup>210</sup>W. Paul Jones. *The Art of Spiritual Direction: Giving and Receiving Spiritual Guidance* (Upper Room Books, 2016), 13-14.

<sup>211</sup>Benner, 94.

<sup>212</sup> Benner, 62.

proposes five ideals in spiritual friendships: Love, Honesty, Intimacy, Mutuality, and Accompaniment.<sup>213</sup> In the ideal of love, the foundational desire is to bless the other person.<sup>214</sup> In the ideal of honesty, spiritual friends define their relationships in the reality of God's honesty about their relationship to him. Speaking truth in love to one another, spiritual friends take difficult steps of obedience to bring about a fuller expression of his presence through lives shaped by honest encouragement toward Christlikeness.<sup>215</sup>

Benner's third ideal of spiritual friendship is intimacy. This is not physical intimacy, but a spiritual intimacy in which deeper matters, such as the longings of the heart, anxieties, hopes, concerns, dreams, preoccupations, and our experiences with God, are valued and shared in the safe, intimate space.<sup>216</sup> Benner describes the ideal of mutuality as the defining difference between friendship and all other relationships. "One can offer support, counseling, or ministry to someone who does not offer anything in exchange, but one can be a friend only to someone who offers the same in return."<sup>217</sup> In Benner's final ideal of accompaniment, spiritual friends choose to travel together along life's journey. Instead of experiencing life in isolation, spiritual friendship turns life into a shared journey of intentionally practicing God's presence together.

While most friendships will not live up to these ideals, Benner still invites readers to live into the space between this ideal and the broken realities of their own relationships.<sup>218</sup> By doing

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<sup>213</sup> Benner, 65-80.

<sup>214</sup> Benner, 67.

<sup>215</sup> Benner, 70-71.

<sup>216</sup> Benner, 74.

<sup>217</sup> Benner, 75-76.

<sup>218</sup> Benner, 83.

so, friendships become a place to experience God’s healing presence together as well as a place to discuss deep reflections such as discernment of one’s identity and vocation.

### **Biblical and Historical Support for Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual direction is an ancient spiritual practice that reaches back to the earliest days of the church, or even the earliest activities of human history. Since spiritual direction is a practice regarding the presence of God, Jones argues that Adam and Eve’s regular walks in the garden of Eden with their Creator (Gen 3:8) are the first examples of spiritual direction.<sup>219</sup> He also argues that God speaking messages to the nation of Israel through prophets is also an example of spiritual direction.<sup>220</sup>

The New Testament sees Jesus, Israel’s last prophet, serving as the ultimate spiritual director. Jones’ assessment of Jesus as a spiritual director is that “in refusing his direction, the people killed the director.”<sup>221</sup> Jesus provided spiritual direction not only in his words, but also through his faithful obedience to God. Jones summarizes Jesus’ approach to spiritual direction by saying, “Jesus’ key directive is ‘Follow,’ [but] his key invitation is ‘Come and see.’”<sup>222</sup>

The apostles who continued Jesus’ ministry saw spiritual direction as doing what Jesus did, teaching what he taught, and living as he lived. They functioned as spiritual directors for the early believers by following Christ’s example. Paul, as apostle to the Gentiles, also became their spiritual director. Paul’s epistles to a variety of early churches provide evidence of him

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<sup>219</sup> Jones, 24.

<sup>220</sup> Jones, 24.

<sup>221</sup> Jones, 25.

<sup>222</sup> Jones, 25.

intentionally listening to their concerns and to God, followed by his response of clear guidance as to how believers could better align with God's will for their lives.<sup>223</sup>

The *Didache* and other writings of the early church fathers also provide clear examples of spiritual guidance addressing the difficulties of the church. Upon the legalization and nationalized politicization of the church in 300 A.D., many sought spiritual direction and guidance from the desert mothers and fathers.<sup>224</sup> Over time, monastic communities developed in which individuals could live out the practice of corporate spiritual direction in seriously committed and disciplined efforts to make space for spiritual growth. Monasticism gave birth to new institutions such as hospitals and schools, the latter of which created an intentional space for discerning the meaning of one's life.<sup>225</sup>

Martin Luther is a prime example of monastic spiritual direction.<sup>226</sup> Luther's convictions of reform were likely born out of the reflective practices common to monastic spiritual direction.<sup>227</sup> Jones purports that Luther's intent for the emphasis of the priesthood of all believers and of the Christian family was to develop a renewed form of spiritual direction.<sup>228</sup> Other reformers, such as Zwingli and Calvin, regularly taught and practiced various elements of spiritual direction and holy listening within their ministries.<sup>229</sup> During this time, Ignatius of

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<sup>223</sup> Jones, 25.

<sup>224</sup> Jones, 26.

<sup>225</sup> Jones, 26.

<sup>226</sup> Luther was a member of the Hermits of Saint Augustine.

<sup>227</sup> Jones, 26-27.

<sup>228</sup> Jones, 27.

<sup>229</sup> Jones, 27.

Loyola was guiding retreatants through the *Spiritual Exercises*, which consisted of thirty days of intentional spiritual direction focused on contemplation of the gospel narratives. In later years, church leaders such as John and Charles Wesley revived elements of the practice of spiritual direction.

### **Spiritual Direction as Hospitality**

Margaret Guenther sees both spiritual friendship and spiritual direction as the gift of hospitality.<sup>230</sup> According to Guenther, hospitality is the primary God-given tool spiritual directors use to assist their directees in listening to God.<sup>231</sup> Hospitality is a gift of space that the director provides the directee so that he or she feels heard so he or she is open to sharing. The spiritual director serves as a host who offers their guests friendship through abundant hospitality, which is lived out as a reflection of God's hospitality toward his creation.<sup>232</sup> Benner builds on Guenther's discussion, describing God as the ultimate hospitable host. In the biblical account of creation, as well as in experiencing the beauty of creation around us, we recognize God as the ultimate spiritual host, practicing hospitality by providing a place for his people, beginning with Eden.<sup>233</sup>

Benner describes "soul hospitality" as an important aspect of the gift of hospitality regarding spiritual direction. First, hospitality in spiritual direction is a gift of safety. Directees, especially EAs, often need assurance that the space they share with their director is safe for

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<sup>230</sup> Guenther, ix.

<sup>231</sup> Guenther, 10.

<sup>232</sup> Guenther, 10.

<sup>233</sup> Benner, 47.

spiritual and personal exploration.<sup>234</sup> Another important aspect of hospitality in the context of spiritual direction is the gift of a place where anything can be said without fear of criticism and ridicule.<sup>235</sup> Benner's final definition of the gift of soul hospitality, which is the heartbeat of spiritual friendship and direction, is that it is a gift of love.<sup>236</sup>

### **Spiritual Direction as the Gift of Presence**

Spiritual direction and spiritual friendship not only provide the gift of hospitality, but they also provide the gift of presence. The host is present with their guest, not in an artificial or superficial way, but as a genuine expression of who the host is in relationship to God. Benner explains that the spiritual director can only be fully present for someone else when he or she is willing to be present to themselves, and one can only be present with themselves when they are genuinely present with God.<sup>237</sup>

While spiritual direction involves the experience of the presence of the directee with the director, the transformative power comes from the presence of God.<sup>238</sup> Benner describes this process like this: "As I bring my true self-in-Christ to relationships of spiritual friendship, what the other person encounters is not just me but Christ in me. Spiritual friends help each other discern God's presence and respond to him in loving surrender and service."<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Benner, 48.

<sup>235</sup> Benner, 48.

<sup>236</sup> Benner 48.

<sup>237</sup> Benner, 51.

<sup>238</sup> Benner, 52.

<sup>239</sup> Benner, 52.

At the heart of all spiritual growth is a growing awareness of the presence of Christ. Spiritual friendship and direction begin with learning to be attentive to the presence of Jesus and surrendering to his will.<sup>240</sup> Spiritual friendship empowers each participant in the relationship to discern and embrace God's will through intentional meditation upon his grace.<sup>241</sup>

### **How Spiritual Direction Integrates with Other Practices**

Spiritual direction is not a separate practice, but one that integrates the experiences from each of the other practices in the life of the seeker. For instance, many scholars associate handwritten journaling with spiritual direction. Guenther encourages journaling as a "great aid to self-awareness."<sup>242</sup> She challenges her directees to journal about the events of their day, making note of specific activities to aid their decision-making and the use of their time.<sup>243</sup> The directee will often share the observations in their journal during sessions with their spiritual director, and together, they can listen to the Holy Spirit's guidance regarding the findings.

Beth Booram encourages journaling to help directees process personal reflections and responses to the various spiritual direction exercises she assigns to her directees.<sup>244</sup> This empowers their memory by creating a written record so that reflections on personal dreams and desires can be shared in the next spiritual direction meeting. Jones places journaling in the

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<sup>240</sup> Benner, 54.

<sup>241</sup> Benner, 57.

<sup>242</sup> Guenther, 13.

<sup>243</sup> Guenther, 74.

<sup>244</sup> Beth A. Booram. *Starting Something New: Spiritual Direction for Your God-given Dream* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2015), 14.

category of self-direction, used primarily for processing personal reflections.<sup>245</sup> Finally, David Benner values the practice of journaling about dreams as a method to hear a message from God.<sup>246</sup>

Spiritual directors can also help their directees set appropriate career goals for themselves through journaling. Bryan Dik identifies journaling as a helpful tool for developing career goals that support one's understanding of their identity and vocation.<sup>247</sup> He advocates setting goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant to one's greater purpose, and time-bound, meaning they have enforceable deadlines for accountability purposes.<sup>248</sup> Personal desires and motivation are necessary to carrying out one's goals, as is reinforcement from others who can encourage and assist in meeting the objective.<sup>249</sup> This is where the spiritual director can be of help. They can help the directee listen to God, write out goals after prayerful contemplation, and refine their impressions into a tangible action plan in their journal.

Prayer is another spiritual discipline that overlaps with spiritual direction. As discussed previously, Benner defines spiritual direction as a prayerful process in which one person (the directee) seeks the help of another (the director) for prayer and conversation to help grow in relationship with God.<sup>250</sup> Since prayer is the primary focus in the relationship with God, it

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<sup>245</sup> Jones, 15.

<sup>246</sup> Benner, 117.

<sup>247</sup> Dik, 58.

<sup>248</sup> Dik, 59.

<sup>249</sup> Dik, 59.

<sup>250</sup> Benner, 94.

becomes a vital part of spiritual direction.<sup>251</sup> Benner sees prayer as the core of spiritual direction.<sup>252</sup> Guenther provides a similar focus in her description of spiritual direction as an ongoing external and internal dialogue for the purpose of “discerning the object of one’s love by listening to its manifestations.”<sup>253</sup>

Before making any decisions, Booram encourages her directees to reflect upon how God has directed their thoughts and prayers over the previous days or weeks.<sup>254</sup> Paying particular attention to prayers that are consistent over time can be helpful in determining how to live out one's calling in a particular situation.

### **Spiritual Direction for College Students**

Spiritual direction has long been a resource for those seeking a deeper understanding of their calling. William A. Barry describes spiritual direction as assisting another person attune to the Holy Spirit dwelling in their hearts, much like using a” tuning fork set to the music of God’s action.”<sup>255</sup> Calhoun states that submitting to the guidance and tuning of a spiritual director is not an activity for the spiritually immature.<sup>256</sup> A significant amount of trust in God and in another person are required to submit to a spiritual director.

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<sup>251</sup> Benner, 105.

<sup>252</sup> Benner, 105.

<sup>253</sup> Guenther, 38.

<sup>254</sup> Booram, 36.

<sup>255</sup> Barry, 87.

<sup>256</sup> Calhoun, 116.

Guenther uses the midwifery as a metaphor for the relationship between spiritual director and directee. The director acts as a spiritual midwife, assisting with the birth of new understandings of God's voice in the directee's life, a deeper understanding of their identity, and a greater understanding of their vocation. Often these ideas are shrouded in false emotions and feelings which the mature director will be able to detect and press for discussion. Like a midwife, the spiritual director journeys with the directee through an uncomfortable season to help the person better listen to God and give birth to the new reality he desires to bring into their life.<sup>257</sup>

Due to this need for spiritual maturity, many EAs may require an investment of time to learn to trust a spiritual director. Walking with a spiritual friend could be more welcome to EAs because it involves a mutual submission between spiritual friends who see their faith in Christ as a shared journey.<sup>258</sup>

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Two explored the characteristics of emerging adults, the reasons college is the right time and place for EAs to explore their vocation, and five specific spiritual practices important to the process of vocational discernment. Each of the five spiritual practices presented in this chapter are crucial for helping college students listen to God to discern their vocation. The information in this chapter not only supports the need for VCD guidance EAs, but also the inclusion of spiritual practices in a Bible college discernment program. Chapter Three will explain further how these practices work together to help Bible college students discern their vocation, and it will outline a theoretical framework for a practical solution.

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<sup>257</sup> Guenther, 91.

<sup>258</sup> Benner, 27.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

College students struggle to slow down in their busy lives, turn off their electronic devices, and listen for the voice of their Creator in the quest to discern their vocation. To assist Bible college students in this endeavor, intentional training in spiritual practices and the elimination of distractions is necessary to enable them to hear God affirm who they are and what they have been created to be and do. For these skills are to become part of the students' daily lives, this training needs to be integrated into each year of the academic curriculum and incorporated into the campus discipleship program. As described in the previous chapter, the spiritual practices utilized should include a focus on both solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction.

Having laid the foundation of research and biblical support for these spiritual practices, this chapter will further describe the incorporation of these spiritual practices into a four-year, comprehensive VCD program for Bible college students. To this end, the following questions must be addressed: (1) How do these specific practices work together to benefit vocational discernment? (2) Why should these practices be integrated over the course of a four-year academic degree program? (3) How can the VCD program be fully integrated into the Bible college experience?

#### **How these Practices Work Together for Vocational Discernment**

A common problem Bible college students have with vocational discernment is the ability to eliminate distractions to create space to hear from God and to listen to their own thoughts, feelings, and motivations. The spiritual practices incorporated into the prescribed VCD

curriculum are designed to create a distraction-free space in which students can better listen for God's voice.

While these practices were isolated to some degree in the previous chapter to evaluate their individual contributions, these practices do not function apart from one another. They are not separate entities like Lego blocks that Bible students can pick and choose which ones to utilize; rather, these practices are fully melded together and impossible to fully separate, like scrambled eggs.<sup>259</sup>

Solitude is the necessary component to free up space and time to be able to hear from God. In solitude, one is alone with God, removed from external noise, in order to foster the quietness of heart necessary to listen for God's voice as well as internal thoughts and reflections.<sup>260</sup> Solitude is a vital component, but so are relationships with others in community who are able to affirm or challenge one's impressions from God which are discerned in the silence. Community will be revisited later in the chapter after a discussion of spiritual practices to fill the void and silence created in solitude.

Biblical engagement fills the silence and brings company into the solitude through hearing God's voice as it has been received through the written Word. Personal Bible study encourages exploration of questions about God, creation, and the story of his interaction with his people. *Lectio Divina*, already described as a process of meditating on a passage of Scripture, is perfectly suited for practicing in solitude as the Holy Spirit is invited to bring meaningful words and phrases from the text into the imagination. Scripture contemplation of Scripture takes

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<sup>259</sup> Bob Rognien used the metaphor of Legos and scrambled eggs to explain integration of heart, soul, mind, and strength in worship. See: Bob Rognien. *Experiential Worship: Encountering God with Heart, Soul, Mind, and Strength* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2005), 41.

<sup>260</sup> Dik, 51.

engagement of the imagination and the text to the next level through placing oneself in the text. Memorization of particularly meaningful passages of Scripture implants God's Word into the mind where it can shape one's thoughts and attitudes to become more like that of Christ. These methods of biblical engagement through silence and solitude also benefit from the guidance of a spiritual director who can help students see how Jesus addresses their needs or questions in the Bible.

Meditation and contemplation of Scripture does not happen without prayer. Prayer is an integral part of listening to the Holy Spirit's guidance, and it is one of the steps in *Lectio Divina*. Engaging with Scripture and the Holy Spirit also fuels one's ability to discern God's presence and instruction through specific prayer practices such as the Daily *Examen*, the Prayer of Relinquishment, and Listening Prayer. As seen in depth in the previous chapter, the *Examen* teaches students to be more aware of God's presence daily, which is vital for hearing from God and discerning vocation. The Prayer of Relinquishment is especially beneficial when paired with *Lectio Divina* or contemplation of passages such as Jesus' prayers recorded in Matthew 6:10 or 26:39-42. Through these practices together, students are encouraged to ponder how their current goals and dreams line up with what they have learned of God's kingdom and his ways from their biblical engagement practices.

Listening prayer is especially beneficial for those wrestling with a VCD decision or seeking to understand how God is moving in their circumstances, but this practice does not take place in isolation. In Listening Prayer, students pose a question to God and then wait until God speaks to them, either through opportunities in life, Scripture, community, or a spiritual director. Answers to such questions are best documented and considered through the process of

handwritten journaling.<sup>261</sup> Participants may ask God to speak and then wait in silence, journal in hand, ready to record any thoughts, feelings, or impressions for future reflection.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, handwritten journaling is often overlooked as a spiritual practice, but it is beneficial for bringing together new information and experiences gleaned through biblical engagement and prayer and fixing them into a tangible form for later review. The simple act of recording reflections in a journal provides several benefits, as detailed in Chapter Two, including increased recall, a record of past reflections, and a tangible method for clarifying one's thoughts that arise during the practices of biblical engagement, prayer, solitude, spiritual direction, and reflections during supervised ministry experiences.<sup>262</sup>

Students process their supervised ministry experiences while praying and journaling in solitude, but these experiences also provide prime opportunities for the student's reflections to be challenged or affirmed within a Christian community. During supervised ministry, students receive feedback on their giftedness and calling from their supervisor or mentor as well as members of the church where they are serving. As students serve within the community, others in the community can affirm the students' gifts, based on observation of their service. These kinds of feedback are of great importance to students seeking to discern their vocation.

In addition to this engagement in the field, whether it be in the church or the surrounding community, several other opportunities for community engagement exist on the Bible college campus and through spiritual friendships or spiritual direction. The reflections and impressions discovered during times of solitude can be tested through conversations that focus on faith,

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<sup>261</sup>Barbara K. Dewald. "A contemplative vocational discernment model for Christian college students" (2011). Doctor of Ministry. <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/dmin/13>, 41.

<sup>262</sup>Brandon A. Bradley. *The Role of Handwritten Journaling in Spiritual Discernment for Emerging Adults*. Unpublished Manuscript, NTS, 2020.

identity, and spiritual formation within the campus discipleship program. Here, identity and vocational opportunities are explored in a safe environment, surrounded by professors, staff members, and fellow students through experiences both inside and outside the classroom. More intimate conversations regarding the discernment of one's vocation take place in the context of spiritual friendships and spiritual direction. Spiritual friendships develop through the discipleship program, while spiritual directors are available in the GPS office. However, even with all these opportunities, students will be unable to hold a beneficial conversation regarding their vocation without engaging in spiritual practices in solitude.

The components of the newly developed curriculum are all completely integrated and cannot be teased out and isolated from each other. Effective biblical engagement must be practiced with prayer, in both solitude and community. Impressions gained through the above practices are best processed through handwritten journaling so they can be pondered and prayed over after further review. No component can be eliminated or isolated and practiced on its own. Because the program is so integrated, the practices cannot be adequately taught or learned by students within a single class. Repetition and building upon previous experiences are necessary to the success of the program, and this is the topic of the following segment.

### **Why the VCD Program Should Span Four Years**

CCCB's mission is to train servant-leaders for the church, a function that will be manifested differently in the life of each student. Therefore, the adoption of a spiritually-focused VCD program fits the mission of CCCB, as the goal of the program is to help students discern how God is calling them to be a servant-leader in the Kingdom. Bible college graduates have many opportunities in which can serve in ministry, whether in the church, the mission field, or in the marketplace as a bi-vocational kingdom servant. Prior to beginning the task of finding a place

to serve, students need time to discern how God would have them serve his kingdom. As already described, this reflection comes through an amalgam of academic training, spiritual practices, personal prayer and reflection in solitude, and feedback from others in the community and a spiritual director.

Most students require repetition to fully integrate new concepts. The complete learning process includes an introduction, theory, practice, and a capstone.<sup>263</sup> It takes time for students to grasp the idea of spiritually discerning their vocation, and even more time to experiment with the various spiritual practices. Students are first invited to engage in spiritual practices simply for the purposes of deepening their relationship with God and learning to recognize his voice. After the initial invitation, students need time to learn how to listen for how God is speaking to them concerning their interests, desires, and goals, as well as the needs of the world around them. To give students the best opportunity to fully integrate the concepts and activities, students need repetition through all four years of their undergraduate education, not just a brief conversation prior to graduation.

The planned pedagogical pathway for students to grow in their discernment skills is curriculum integration. Learning how to hear from God and discern one's vocation requires an investment of time and repetition, so an effective VCD program needs to include multiple stages, progressing over the course of the student's degree program.<sup>264</sup> This multi-year approach includes assignments in spiritual practices and discernment for each year the student is in school, through incorporating assignments in existing classes.

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<sup>263</sup> There is not space in this dissertation to fully discuss this learning theory. For more information, see: David A. Kolb. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2015).

<sup>264</sup> Pierce, interview, 2021.

In their freshman year, students are introduced to the idea of spiritual discernment of vocation and the applicable spiritual practices. In their sophomore year, students continue to engage in these practices, and they take career assessments through PathwayU to focus the discussion of possible vocation and career opportunities. Their junior year focuses on trying out a vocation or career through a supervised ministry experience. Finally, in their senior year, students will continue reflecting on previous knowledge and experiences through the spiritual practices to discern next steps beyond college.

Quality tools for student assessment and career counseling are also a vital part of a Bible College VCD program. While many other programs focus solely on career counseling without a discussion of vocational discernment, career assessment tools should not be left out of a Bible college VCD program. Quality tools, such as PathwayU, provide valuable information for students to consider in their discernment process, and help students consider a wide range of career options through which they might live out their calling. True transformation into a servant-leader who has discerned God's calling and the best way to live out that calling takes time and multiple inputs.

### **Integrating the VCD Program into the Bible College Experience**

One helpful tool introduced in the previous chapter is Setran's *Matrix of Transformation* (MOT).<sup>265</sup> This matrix provides a framework to better understand how the proposed VCD program's spiritual practices work together to help EAs discern their calling in the Bible college experience. This section will explore how the various spiritual practices and other elements of

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<sup>265</sup> Setran, 76-77.

the VCD program function within the four categories of the MOT: Relationships, Rituals, Rhetoric, and Roles.

### *Relationships*

The first quadrant in Setran's MOT involves the students' relationships. Bible college campuses center around relationships, whether those relationships are among the students themselves, between faculty and students, or between the college as a whole and the surrounding churches. Discipleship efforts on campus and in the surrounding community create networks of spiritual and emotional support for students as they journey through their education. Community engagement also comes through service learning opportunities, campus employment, discipleship groups, dorm life, classes, and more.

The fact that solitude plays a vital role in the VCD training process does not diminish the importance of relationships. Solitude is where students develop their own relationship with their Creator, but solitude is also where God moves individuals into community relationships. Biblical engagement, prayer, and journaling in solitude equips students to view their community through God's kingdom perspective, thus preparing students for effective engagement in their relationships.

While students develop formal relationships with the faculty through classroom engagement, more informal involvement outside the classroom is also vital. These informal relationships help students not only in their vocational discernment process, but also in networking for their post-graduation career. One study demonstrates that the lack of faculty involvement with their undergraduate students is among the greatest contributors to students feeling adrift in their studies as well as their understanding of where they might find a job post-

graduation.<sup>266</sup> Faculty members often function as the gatekeepers of many career and training opportunities, so it behooves students to discuss vocational reflections with their professors.

While students benefit from both formal and informal relationships with the faculty, other relationships developed through the campus-wide discipleship program and the GPS provide additional opportunities for informal conversations on VCD reflections. The discipleship program provides students opportunities to engage in conversations with mentors and spiritual friends which further help them discern their vocation. In this way, GPS, the discipleship program, and the classroom all function together and provide symbiotic relationships for VCD.

### *Rituals*

The second quadrant in Setran's MOT involves rituals which help individuals live out their identity through scripted ways of being and belonging.<sup>267</sup> There are numerous rituals in Bible college life which help students live out their Christian identity. Recurring events like chapel, campus Bible studies, and regular discipleship groups are all key portions of a campus discipleship program and examples of healthy Bible college rituals. The regular rhythm of these events helps reinforce faith practices such as prayer and biblical engagement. Direct participation and leadership in these rituals provides opportunities for students to use their growing skills and abilities in vocational exploration.

Advancing along the path of a particular degree program itself can be seen as a series of rituals, or rites of passage. Each class in the VCD curriculum could offer an opportunity to

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<sup>266</sup> Richard Arum and Josipa Roksa. *Academically Adrift: Limited Learning on College Campuses* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011).

<sup>267</sup> Setran, 77; see also Tory K. Baucum. *Evangelical Hospitality: Catechetical Evangelism in the Early Church and Its Recovery for Today* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2008), 83-105.

ritualistically mark milestones a student reaches along their journey. The Supervised Ministry Experience (SME) would especially be an opportunity for this, as a student begins a concentrated effort in trying on a possible calling and career. Successful completion of the SEM could also be marked by a ritual emphasizing the student's successful complete of this portion of the program and this season of listening for affirmation of God's calling.

Finally, events such as senior sermons, honors banquets, and commencement all provide needed "rites of passage" rituals for those who have attained specific milestones in their college career. Through rituals of this nature, the campus community comes together to affirm the student's identity, honor their achievements, and encourage their continued vocational discernment. Many of the rituals mentioned here all include specific language or rhetoric that is important to the Bible college community and the matrix of transformation for each student.

### *Rhetoric*

The third quadrant of Setran's MOT involves rhetoric, or the language that is used in the college community. Students need to be familiar with the language and rhetoric specific to Scripture, prayer, and a kingdom worldview.

At a Bible college such as CCCB, the consistent use of Scripture and biblical vocabulary provides a great resource in understanding the rhetoric of God's kingdom perspective. However, this can be greatly aided by the personalization of such language through each of the recommended spiritual practices. Utilization of practices such as Bible study, memorization, Lectio Divina, and contemplation each engage the student's mind and imagination in a different way, further embedding the student with the language of God's kingdom understanding.

Bible college students not only need classroom instruction in biblical knowledge, but also in how to listen to God in order to understand how his leading in daily life. Proper training in the

rhetoric of biblical language and concepts, which are the foundations of a Bible college curriculum, can fuel the student's relationship with God. Prayers become more attuned to the heart of God, and they grow better able to hear his voice when the rhetoric of prayer is aligned with the words of Scripture. Students need repetition and practice with what they are learning to create personal habits of spiritual practices which are the heartbeat of VCD. While handwritten journaling is useful in each quadrant of the MOT, the practice is most beneficial in the rhetoric quadrant in that it promotes the formation of abstract ideas into tangible language, which further assists processing the information gained in each quadrant.

Integration of the academic curriculum and training in spiritual practices helps students connect their coursework to their vocation and their intended career through the rhetoric of a kingdom worldview. This understanding of a kingdom worldview is vital for students to understand their role in the kingdom.

### *Roles*

Bible colleges need to provide students with multiple opportunities for trying on the various roles associated with their perceived vocation. Such opportunities are made available through many of the services in the GPS, including service learning, campus employment, and SME (internships). Through each of these opportunities, students can experience aspects of these roles, using their gifts, training, and abilities to experience different expressions of their calling in order to determine if that particular role is a good fit for them.

The ability to think deeply and reflect on whether a particular role is a good fit or not demonstrates the importance of solitude in identifying one's place in the community. Solitude provides students the needed space to consider their sense of calling and ponder how an

opportunity aligns with their gifts and abilities. Training in listening prayer and biblical contemplation provides a posture of listening centered upon the greater biblical narrative.

CCCB's mission is to train servant-leaders for the church, but this plan is not to crank out identical, interchangeable automatons, but uniquely gifted individuals who have discerned who God has created them to be and how he has created them to function, serve, and lead in his kingdom. The lens of Setran's MOT provides a comprehensive way to view how the spiritual practices and other aspects of the proposed VCD program work together to assist college students not only discern, but live out their calling.

### **Conclusion**

The answers to the questions in this chapter support the importance of a four-year, spiritually-focused VCD training program for Bible colleges. While numerous vocational training programs exist at other Christian colleges and quality career counseling tools are available, development of a program that addresses career counseling and vocational discernment through the lens of spiritual formation is necessary for Bible colleges like CCCB. A holistic, integrated, spiritually-focused program will help Bible college students discern their vocation; therefore, the following chapter will provide details on the form, function, and objectives of CCCB's new VCD program.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **OBJECTIVES, STRATEGIES, AND IMPLEMENTATION**

Following the research in Chapters Two and Three, Chapter Four is an introduction to the curriculum developed in response to the problem identified in Chapter One. This four-year VCD training program for Bible colleges focuses on spiritual formation for the purpose of helping CCCB students discern their vocation. The curriculum is integrated into the classroom, the campus-wide discipleship program, and the GPS office. Program participation is mandatory for all students during each year of the student's undergraduate education. Students will receive training and practice through classroom assignments, guidance and spiritual direction through the GPS office, and relationships through the campus discipleship program.

The classroom training portion takes place in five classes that are required in every degree program. These classes are Saints Seminar and Principles of Disciple-Making in the freshman year, Vocational Preparation in the sophomore year, Supervised Ministry Experience (SME) in the junior year, and Senior Seminar in the senior year. The remainder of this chapter will outline the aforementioned classes, the learning objectives for the VCD curriculum, the curriculum review process for CCCB, and the standards of publication.

#### **Four-Year Curriculum Integration**

A fully integrated, spiritually-focused VCD curriculum has been developed for CCCB for the purpose of training students for a lifetime of discerning their vocation. The details of this four-year VCD curriculum will be discussed in this section.

The VCD curriculum has components in the classroom, GPS office, and discipleship program to provide spiritual direction and vocational guidance to students. Following the

research findings, this curriculum includes instruction and experiences in the practices of solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction to help CCCB students create the necessary space and the ability to hear from and respond to God.

Students will engage this curriculum through five classes which are required for all students. Two classes are scheduled for the freshmen year, and then one class each subsequent year of the student's undergraduate education. These classes provide the necessary biblical language and rhetoric to shape the student's understanding of kingdom vocation, the spiritual practices needed to create space to listen to God's call, as well as training for stepping into ministry roles as an expression of vocation. Following are the descriptions for the five classes from CCCB's Course Catalog.

*Saints Seminar* (freshman orientation): Prepares new students to meet the spiritual, academic, and campus life expectations necessary to be successful as a student at Central Christian College of the Bible. Includes assessments, writing, and lectures during the first eight weeks of a student's enrollment.

*Principles of Disciple-Making* (freshman year): Students explore the spectrum of making disciples from conversion to Christian maturity, highlighting how one comes to faith in Christ, followed by various approaches to facilitating faith formation, growing in Christ through spiritual practices, and the practice of developing discipling relationships.

*Vocational Preparation* (sophomore year): Students build on the spiritual practices learned in their freshmen year to hone their vocational discernment skills. They further practice these skills as they seek out appropriate internship opportunities, prepare resources for job applications, and consider their values and interests regarding their future career paths.

*Supervised Ministry Experience* (junior year): Students try out possible callings by interning for a semester, school year, or summer at an approved site under the tutelage of an approved mentor in their chosen field of service. Over the course of a minimum of 300 hours of supervised ministry, students are guided through engagement in an SME

reflection journal to aid them in discerning how God is shaping them through this experience.

*Senior Seminar* (senior year): Students take various assessments to measure their progress, strengths, and weaknesses throughout their academic career at CCCB. They engage in interviews and teach servant-leader lessons to the student body, based on reflections of their experiences at Central. Students are presented with multiple options for future career paths, internships, residency programs, and grad schools, which provide students with opportunities to utilize the skills learned in the VCD program in discerning next steps for their future.

In Saints Seminar, the first class of the program, students receive the VCD Student Guidebook. This document is designed to provide students with an overview of the four-year pedagogy. The guidebook introduces students to the functions and benefits of the GPS office, their faculty advisor, and various aspects of the discipleship program. Students are also given a surface introduction to the prescribed spiritual practices and an overview of the five specific courses in the curriculum. While this is not a step-by-step guide through the entire four-year plan, the information contained in the guidebook provides valuable information to help students understand how various components of the comprehensive curriculum work together and where they can go for guidance.

In order to effectively impact undergrad college students, a VCD program needs to be integrated into each year of the student's degree plan. This allows for students to receive instruction, practice the spiritual exercises, deepen their relationship with God, and learn to listen for his voice over the course of several years. As with any quality educational program, the VCD program needs objectives the students are to strive to reach. These objectives will be outlined in the following segment.

## Learning Objectives

Every course or program of study at an accredited institution of higher education must include learning objectives for the purpose of evaluating the efficacy of the course of study, and the courses for CCCB's new VCD training program are no exception. The VCD program has six primary learning objectives to guide the curriculum over the student's entire undergraduate career at Central. These learning objectives will be accomplished through the academic courses, the campus discipleship program, and the guidance of the GPS office. They will be the framework used to evaluate the efficacy of the program and to guide any future changes. Following are the six learning objectives and their descriptions.

1. *Students will learn the importance of, and engage in, the practices of solitude with God and its impact on the Christian community.*

Solitude creates space free from outside distractions to hear from God as well as one's true thoughts and feelings to discern one's vocation. In community, fellow members of the community are able to affirm the student's identity in Christ as well as offer opportunities for the student to experiment with his or her vocation.

2. *Students will learn to participate in specific biblical engagement practices to grow in the knowledge of God and receive direction to serve his Kingdom.*

The apostle Paul instructs believers not to be conformed to the patterns of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of their minds to know the will of God.<sup>268</sup> There is no greater way to have one's mind transformed by God than to engage deeply in his Word. Through the

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<sup>268</sup> Romans 12:1-2.

process of biblical engagement, the mind is transformed and understanding of calling becomes how one engages in God's Kingdom.<sup>269</sup>

Four different areas of biblical engagement are included in this curriculum: memorization, personal study, *Lectio Divina*, and contemplation. Memorization implants God's words into the mind so that one's thoughts are shaped by God. Students will be asked to memorize passages of Scripture during each course in the VCD pathway.

Bible study is a benchmark practice at a Bible college. At CCCB, every ministry degree program requires a minimum of 51 credit hours in Bible and theology. In this way, biblical study is incorporated into each student's course work every semester. Through deep study of Scripture, students engage the deeper meaning of what they are reading, which in turn informs them as to the deeper meaning of their own place in God's greater story.<sup>270</sup>

*Lectio Divina* provides a greater devotional value to biblical engagement than personal study. Rather than simply studying the meaning of the words and the context of the passage, *Lectio Divina* engages the student's imagination, providing mental space to meet with Jesus.

Like *Lectio*, contemplation is also an imaginative prayer process in which students intentionally imagine themselves in the story of the text. This process provides greater insight into the emotions and motives of the people in the text, inviting the one contemplating the Scripture passage to discern where their life circumstances intersect the text. This practice also opens the door for God to guide the imagination through the text itself. As the mind becomes captivated with a particular situation or moment, students are encouraged to wait and listen for God.

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<sup>269</sup> Dik, 52.

<sup>270</sup> Dik, 52.

3. *Students will learn more about, and engage in, certain prayer practices in order to better experience God's presence in their daily lives and to begin to identify specific ways God is inviting them to join in the work he is doing in and around them.*

In addition to the prayer components of *Lectio Divina* and Scripture contemplation, three other specific forms of prayer are incorporated into the VCD program for providing space to meet with, hear from, and respond to God: the daily *Examen*, the Prayer of Relinquishment, and Listening Prayer.

The daily *Examen* trains participants to be more aware of God's presence during their daily activities and to recognize when they may have overlooked his presence. The prayer ends with a plea for Jesus' help to better recognize his presence the following day and to join him there.

The Prayer of Relinquishment helps students prepare for some of the more difficult realities of answering God's call on their lives. Living one's calling often means letting go of certain goals, dreams, or ideas in order to embrace the calling of God.<sup>271</sup> College students of every lifestyle and worldview arrive at their chosen school in pursuit of certain dreams and goals. For Christian college students who are seeking to spiritually discern their vocation, some of these personal dreams and goals often need to be pruned away to bear fruit for God's kingdom.<sup>272</sup> By relinquishing personal plans and goals, followers of Jesus are better able to catch God's vision and dreams and begin to live into them.

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<sup>271</sup> Dik, 53.

<sup>272</sup> John 15:1-8.

Listening prayer combines the insights and strengths of all the other prayers and various practices of biblical engagement. In listening prayer, students simply sit before God and wait for him to speak. Students may place a specific question or issue before God and then patiently wait in silent solitude until the Holy Spirit begins to share God's perspective. Answers to these questions are rarely heard as an audible voice, but through a resounding quiet echo heard in life experiences, reflections on Scripture, and affirmations from spiritual friends or a spiritual director. Keeping track of all these details is one of the great reasons for spiritual handwritten journaling.

- 4. Students will learn and practice the discipline of handwritten journaling through regular VCD classes and activities through GPS and the discipleship program.*

Over the course of the VCD pathway, students will gain numerous pieces of information and revelations about themselves, others, God, and their calling through the prescribed spiritual practices. Handwritten journaling provides a memorable record of the student's new thoughts, feelings, and impressions that emerge during their experiences. The process of handwriting helps the student integrate new information from God into their existing knowledge base, and then create a plan of response.

To facilitate this learning objective, some classes and assignments will forbid the use of electronic devices, and instead, will require the use of a handwritten journal to provide students a comparison of how they engage what God is telling them.

- 5. Students will learn to value and practice a basic level of spiritual friendship and spiritual direction.*

Throughout their undergraduate experience at CCCB, students will engage in a form of spiritual friendship through the campus-wide discipleship program. Students are invited to gather in pairs or in small groups for encouragement, prayer, Bible study, and fellowship. As time passes and relationships deepen, these groups become a safe space for Christian community and spiritual friendships. Christian character is shaped through these developing relationships, and impressions regarding identity and vocation discovered in solitude are affirmed. These relationships also become a safe place in which to share vocational considerations, allowing spiritual friends to pray over and speak into each other's lives.

Spiritual direction for VCD is a core function of the GPS office. As students process information about what may or may not be their calling, they can meet with one of the two GPS directors for a focused session. By listening to the student share their personal insights and experiences gathered from the previously mentioned spiritual practices, PathwayU assessments, services learning, or internship experience, directors listen for places where the Holy Spirit is at work in the student's life and then address areas where the student needs to listen closely to God. Rather than providing specific answers, spiritual directors focus on helping students discern the right questions they should be placing before God. Spiritual directors invite students to contemplate a deep question or to engage in an additional spiritual practice to help them hear from God in a particular area. In each case, spiritual direction is not about telling the student what they should do, but rather helping them identify the opportunities in which God is inviting them to join him.

6. *Students will explore specific career options that line up with their perceived calling and will create a career action plan to assist them on their journey.*

As with any college or educational organization, CCCB places great emphasis on helping students step into a career that utilizes their education and training. While a career and calling are not always in alignment, the GPS office helps students consider and narrow down appropriate career options. This discernment process utilizes each previously mentioned spiritual practice to aid the student as they process the vast array of information gained from experimenting with a calling.

Students can experiment in several ways. First, simply processing what they are learning through their classroom instruction provides a glimpse into what a particular ministry or vocation might involve. Specific practical assignments help students personalize the information and explore potential career opportunities.

During the sophomore-level Vocational Preparation and senior-level Senior Seminar classes, students undergo various tests and assessments from PathwayU to ascertain their unique interests, values, personality, and workplace preferences. PathwayU is an excellent career counseling and preparation resource that provides students with valuable information about themselves and the real-time career opportunities available for them to consider as options for living out their calling. These assessments provide information that fuels the students' spiritual VCD practices during their time at CCCB.

CCCB requires all students to participate in two hours of volunteer work, or service-learning, each week of every semester they are enrolled in classes. Service-learning is an excellent way to gain practical experience in a specific calling. SME, CCCB's official 300-hour internship for each degree program, provides a deeper immersive opportunity to help students reflect on the actual work in a given career.

The GPS office helps students find service-learning opportunities related to their perceived calling to help them experience possible vocations. Students take part in post-SME interviews with their faculty advisor as well as with the GPS office to process their experiences and prepare for the next steps beyond college. The GPS office assists the students as they consider further training needed, possible residency options, or employment opportunities. The GPS also provides specific professional development training such as professional networking, resume and ministry portfolio creation, interview skills, and more.

### **Standards of Publication and Evaluation**

After discussing the components and learning objectives of the four-year VCD curriculum, the next elements to be defined are the standards of publication and evaluation. Accepted standards of publication define how the artifact will be constructed and evaluated. CCCB's new VCD curriculum artifact consists of two genres, each with its own required standards of publication. These two artifact genres are the written curriculum and the accompanying video-recorded lectures.

This curriculum was evaluated based on the six previously listed Learning Objectives. The written portion follows the 9th edition Turabian citation guide.<sup>273</sup> The curriculum was initially evaluated for implementation and publication by the following preliminary panel of internal experts in education, spiritual development, and student development. This panel includes:

- Jim Estep, PhD, DMin, CCCB Vice President of Academics
- Darryl Ammon, MA, CCCB Vice President of Student Services
- Sheri Tesar, MA, CCCB Director of Worship Ministry
- Eric Stevens, DMin., CCCB Dean of Student Success

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<sup>273</sup> Kate L. Turabian. *A Manual for Writers of Research Papers, Theses, and Dissertations: Chicago Style for Students and Researchers, 9th edition* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017).

After preliminary approval was granted, CCCB's Academic Leadership Team (ALT) reviewed the curriculum and accompanying material and recommended it for approval from the entire faculty. Once the faculty granted approval, the VCD curriculum became part of the standard ongoing accreditation and review process of CCCB. All faculty are expected to conduct annual reviews of their courses.<sup>274</sup> Regular curriculum assessment is vital for any academic institution to ensure the efficacy of the programs, courses, and faculty. The GPS office, the VCD curriculum, and the faculty who teach these courses are all subject to CCCB's thorough assessment process.<sup>275</sup>

CCCB's official assessment plan includes twenty-one specific academic assessment protocols, nine of which have a particular bearing on the VCD curriculum, the specific courses involved, and the GPS office. These include: The Noel-Levits student satisfaction survey, course evaluations, four-year program review, Service-Learning, Curriculum Map review, Assessment Day, and the Assessment of General Education.<sup>276</sup> The GPS office also has its own departmental review and assessment which take place annually each May.<sup>277</sup> The faculty members who teach classes in the VCD curriculum are subject to CCCB's faculty assessment process, which include seven protocols. These include: The Noel-Levitz student satisfaction survey, faculty update

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<sup>274</sup> Jim Estep, editor. CCCB Faculty Handbook, 2021-22, Moberly, MO, 32

<sup>275</sup> Assessment Plan: Central Christian College of the Bible, 2021-2022. Moberly MO.

<sup>276</sup> Assessment Plan, 11-14.

<sup>277</sup> Assessment Plan. 13.

evaluations, peer review, Student Learning Assessment Forms (SLAF), online faculty evaluation, Assessment Day, and faculty development review.<sup>278</sup>

As a small but growing Bible college, CCCB often finds itself in need of video training for the online program and the extension sites in Florence, Kentucky and St. Louis, Missouri. The video lessons for the VCD curriculum were recorded in the Christensen Preaching Center on CCCB's campus in Moberly, Missouri. Brian Taylor, CCCB's Vice President of Enrollment and Marketing and an expert in the field of video production, conducted the video-recording, editing, and sound editing. The lessons were shot in 1920 x 1080 HD at 29.97fps in conformance to ATSC (Advanced Television Systems Committee) standards for television production.<sup>279</sup> The video was encoded in an H.264 format to allow for ubiquitous distribution through internet sites such as YouTube and Vimeo. All videos were edited in Adobe Suite products, including Premiere Pro for video editing and Audition for audio editing.

### **Conclusion**

Chapter Four defined the objectives, strategies, and implementation of CCCB's new VCD curriculum, including the five required classes and the six learning objectives which will enable the school to ensure the efficacy of the program. Finally, the required standards of publication ensure the curriculum artifact will be produced in a professional manner, suitable for use in an accredited institution of higher ed.

The new VCD curriculum is designed to be an effective solution to assist CCCB students in creating space to hear from God to discern their vocation. This program is integrated into the

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<sup>278</sup> Assessment Plan, 8-9.

<sup>279</sup> Brian Taylor, Interview by author. Central Christian College of the Bible. Moberly, MO, November 4, 2021.

academic classroom, the campus-wide discipleship program, and the GPS office to provide multiple major touchpoints for students during each semester they attend CCCB. The full curriculum, including both the written and video-recorded portions, is available for review in Appendix A.

Chapter Five, the final chapter in this work, contains some evaluative comments and a discussion wrap-up, followed by several areas of consideration for future study. The limited scope of this dissertation imposed several restrictions, revealing areas which could be studied further in future efforts. These areas of further research include related issues faced by emerging adults as well as comparison studies regarding the long-term efficacy of the proposed curriculum.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **EVALUATION AND LEARNING**

Research and biblical foundations support the use of specific spiritual practices to train busy EAs to focus on listening to God, as well as their own hearts, to discern their vocation. These practices are solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction. Since time, space, and repetition are required to learn to recognize the voice of God and follow his leading, training in these spiritual practices is most effective when it takes place over multiple years of an undergrad degree program. Finally, this program is integrated into the classroom, the campus-wide discipleship program, and the GPS office in order to have the maximum effect on students.

#### **Recap and Evaluation**

This study addressed the struggle Bible college students, primarily EAs, have with discerning their vocation due to the distractions they face and the alternative worldviews battling for their attention. In response, a 4-year, spiritually-focused VCD program to help students create space to listen to God and to themselves, in an atmosphere free from external distractions, was created.

Research indicates that the spiritual practices of solitude and community, biblical engagement, prayer, handwritten journaling, and spiritual direction are effective in creating the necessary space for listening, while eliminating the many distractions common to college students. More than simply creating space in solitude, the program created in this study embraces a Scripture-focused worldview, assumes a posture of listening, pursues new information through established learning processes in handwritten journaling, and provides affirming community

practices of spiritual direction and spiritual friendship to walk beside and help students in the process.

Solitude creates time and space for individuals to be alone with God and themselves through elimination of outside distractions. Biblical engagement, through memorization, personal study, *Lectio Divina*, and contemplation, saturates the student's thought process with the Word of God and his kingdom principles in order to guide their lives toward the will of God. Prayer, specifically the daily *Examen*, the Prayer of Relinquishment, and Listening Prayer, is beneficial for helping college students rest in God's presence and listen for his answers to their inquiries. Handwritten journaling, when used in conjunction with the previously listed practices, helps embody God's Word and prayers while simultaneously creating a tangible record of the journey with Jesus. This record then becomes a powerful reminder of how God consistently guides the student and provides clues as to the direction he is leading them in decisions about their future.

While these practices are often done in solitude, they are not to be done in complete isolation from career counseling and other considerations of calling. On the contrary, the information gained from PathwayU and other career assessment tools needs to be integrated into the spiritually-focused VCD program as another means through which God speaks into the lives of college students. This combined information speaks directly to the way God prepares servant-leaders for a particular calling. The academic material acquired in the classroom, as well as the experiences gained through trying out a calling in opportunities of service-learning or an internship, assist the prayerful focus of the spiritual VCD program. These practical insights speak to ways God leads students to make wise choices as to how and where they will serve Jesus through their calling and gifting.

Students need affirmation that they are on the right track as they seek to discern their vocation. When students step out of solitude into Christian community within the college campus, they can hear others in the community challenge or affirm their calling. The campus discipleship program provides the necessary spiritual friendships and fellowship, while the GPS provides intentional spiritual direction for helping students listen to God and confidently step into their vocation. These spiritual practices require careful instruction delivered through the teaching of knowledgeable professors, while opportunity for putting these into practice is made possible through the discipleship program and the SME overseen by the GPS.

VCD cannot be mastered in a single lecture or semester-long class. The four-year integrated curriculum provides the time and space for these practices to become holy habits throughout the student's life. The creation of an effective, comprehensive VCD program for Bible colleges that incorporates spiritual practices must consider the answers to several questions: (1) Why these specific practices, and how do they integrate with each other? (2) Why incorporate these practices in the classroom as well as the discipleship program? (3) Why extend VCD training throughout the four-year undergrad degree program?

During this project, three VCD programs from other Christian institutions of higher ed were considered as alternative ways to conduct a VCD program. None of the three required participation in the VCD program for 4 years and only one of the three schools offered VCD training in the classroom each year of their students' undergrad degree program. Furthermore, the training provided was primarily focused on career counseling rather than spiritual practices necessary for discerning vocation. While these programs likely work well in their given contexts,

they are not comprehensive enough for Bible college students who are striving to hear from God regarding their vocation and the career opportunities placed before them.

An immersive, multi-component VCD curriculum has been created to serve the students of CCCB. This four-year curriculum integrates the biblically-based spiritual formation training of the classroom, the Christian community of the campus discipleship program, and the spiritual guidance of the GPS office to equip students with skills to eliminate distractions in order to hear from God and discern his call on their lives.

### **Considerations for Future Study**

The scope of this project was limited to a finite number of specific spiritual practices and how to integrate them into a Bible college VCD program. Numerous other related questions and areas of study worthy of research and attention arose during the work on this dissertation. These areas of study involve drilling down into the efficacy for specific groups, further connections with Setran's MOT, and both qualitative and quantitative studies for long-term efficacy.

One area of study involves considering how other spiritual practices can assist students in discerning their vocation. Researchers might explore whether specific spiritual practices are better suited for various stages in the VCD process, or whether specific practices are better suited for different age groups, genders, personality types, or ethnic groups. Researchers could seek to determine the optimum frequency of student engagement in the spiritual practices that ensures the most benefit. Additional study could further examine the connection between specific spiritual practices and each part of Setran's MOT (relationships, rhetoric, rituals, and roles).

Qualitative and quantitative studies into the students' experience with God through each practice could benefit the understanding of their value. A comparative study of Bible college graduates who had engaged in a spiritually-focused VCD program like the one prescribed in this

project, as compared to those who had not, could provide long-term data revealing how such training affected their career, faith, and understanding of calling. Likewise, research into how VCD training impacts ministry career longevity could garner even better understanding for students as to the importance of these practices. Given the current shift in the United States workforce that some are calling the “Great Resignation,” a future study might be to consider if VCD training had any impact on decisions to change jobs during this season.<sup>280</sup>

Finally, as years go by, CCCB should conduct a quantitative and qualitative study of the efficacy of the VCD program developed in this project in order to assess effectiveness and address areas of weakness.

### **Final Thoughts**

Spiritual disciplines and struggles with vocational discernment have existed far longer than modern evangelical Bible colleges, and longer than the articulation of emerging adults as a specific age group. Doctrine and academic training have long been a priority for Christian higher ed, over and above engagement with spiritual practices. Unfortunately, this means past students and alumni have missed out on training in spiritually-formative practices and vocational discernment, which are vital components of the Christian faith. These practices have practical bearing on churches and ministries who regularly call upon their leaders to provide such guidance for their members and clients to help them respond to God’s call.

It is my hope that this project will be a catalyst in Bible colleges that empowers generations of Christian servant-leaders to discern God’s call and obediently serve his Kingdom.

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<sup>280</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/11/01/great-resignation-may-be-altering-workforce-dynamic-for-good.html>

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**APPENDIX A**  
**VCD PATHWAY FOR CCCB**

1. [Saints Seminar](#) (freshman orientation)
  - a. Introduction to all things CCCB, including the VCD Pathway.
  - b. [VCD Student Guidebook](#)
  - c. [VCD Pathway Introduction Video Lesson](#)
2. [CCCB Campus Discipleship Program](#)
3. [Principles of Disciple-Making](#) (freshman year)
  - a. PDM explores the foundations of Christian Discipleship. For the sake of the VCD Pathway, spiritual exercises are introduced and practiced in order to learn their role in the life of a disciple.
4. [Vocational Preparation](#) (sophomore Year)
  - a. Focused teaching on spiritual practices for vocational discernment combined with traditional career discernment training.
  - b. Video Lessons: Spiritual Practices for VCD
    - i. [Vocational Prep Introduction - Art and Wagon Wheel](#)
    - ii. [Henri Nouwen's Wagon Wheel](#) (full explanation)
    - iii. [Solitude and Community](#)
    - iv. [Bible Engagement](#)
    - v. [Spiritual Exercise: Lectio Divina](#)
    - vi. [Prayer](#)
    - vii. [Spiritual Exercise: Daily Examen](#)
    - viii. [Handwritten Journaling](#)
    - ix. [Spiritual Friendship and Direction](#)

- c. [Lesson outlines: Spiritual Practices for VCD](#)
  - i. Includes outlines and scripts for multiple lessons and spiritual exercises.
- 5. [Supervised Ministry Experience](#) (junior year)
  - a. Guided VCD Spiritual Practices through the SME Reflection Journal to assist students as they contemplate their calling and career during their internship.
  - b. [SME Reflection Journal](#) (presented in Vocational Prep, but used throughout the SME)
- 2. [Senior Seminar](#) (senior year)
  - a. A capstone course that both looks back upon the student's academic career at CCCB while also helping them look forward and discern their next steps into their calling and career.
  - b. [Spiritual Practice and Lesson Outlines: Senior Seminar](#)