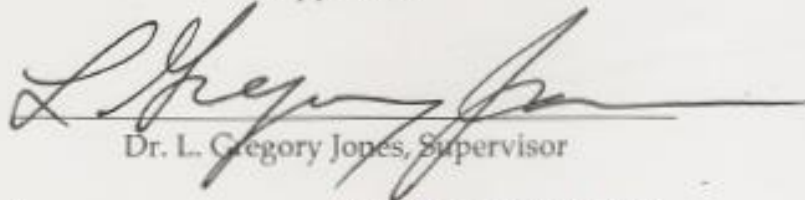# A Matter of the Heart: Developing Empathic Skills in Church Teachers

by

Michael Wayne Andrews

Date:_____%S(!S"S"_____

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Dr. L. Gregory Jones, Supervisor

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry
in the Divinity School of Duke University

2020

Abstract

A Matter of the Heart: Developing Empathic Skills in Church Teachers
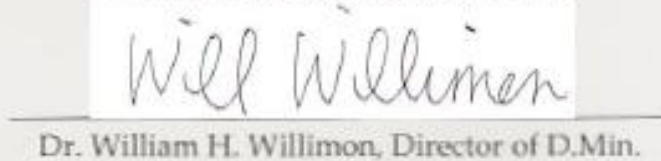
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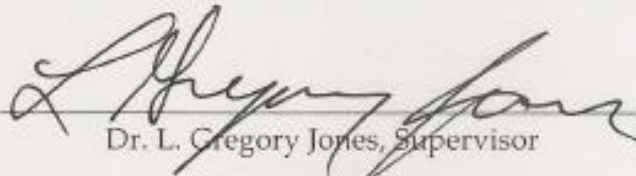## Abstract

Christian teachers lead godly change in the lives of people whom they influence. The preparation of people to lead as teachers in the church requires the development of inner character that is consistent with Christian purposes. One of the fundamental attributes of this sort of character is empathy because it engages the heart in all of its dimensions. My argument in this thesis is that the qualities of empathy can be used as a means to highlight specific practices and skills that Christian teachers need. Helping Christian teachers to cultivate such practices and skills provides them with a more sustainable foundation than any set of teaching techniques found in teacher training materials. This approach enables the church's education program to effectively shape people's hearts to follow Christ and serve one another.

Drawing upon a broad selection of literature that includes narrative theology, adult educational philosophies, developmental psychology, and business leadership perspectives, this study begins by examining the nature of empathy and spiritual practices. I propose that a teaching ministry is most effective when it encompasses two specific practices that cultivate identity and integrity. A practice of *formative presence* highlights the incarnational nature of the teacher's role and identity, and a practice of *resilient trust* establishes a framework for building and sustaining integrity. Both of these are patterns of communal action in which the benefits of God's presence and power are made available to people. Furthermore, these practices depend on some underlying skills that help Christian teachers develop empathy. My discussion includes three

specific skills: *reception* is a collaboration between people that communicates acceptance and understanding; *reflection* is a way of fostering shared meaning-making; and *response* is a type of action that expresses accountability with collective wisdom. When these practices and skills are wrapped in empathy and empowered by God's Spirit, godly character and shared learning are cultivated in both teachers and students.

Dedication

This work is devoted to and inspired by the many Christians who create and embody new ways of learning and teaching the meaning of being *in* Christ. "The greatest thing a human soul ever does in this world is to see something, and tell what it saw in a plain way."[1]

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[1] John Ruskin, *Modern Painters* (J. Wiley & Son, 1866), Vol. III, Part IV, Chap. XVI.

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Acknowledgements

I am abundantly grateful for the many who have influenced and supported the work in this thesis. God has been gracious, and his Spirit has been kind. Foremost among the encouragers is my wife, Beth, whose assurances and insightful feedback have helped me articulate the thoughts of my heart. My thesis advisor, Dr. Greg Jones, has expanded my thinking with grace and acuity, two characteristics that are seldom found together in anyone. Dr. David Odom, my second reader, has shared with me his gift of deep perception regarding leadership. My small writing group pushed me to think about the church's teaching ministry in terms of empathy and spiritual practices; Johnathan Richardson and Simon Stokes provided the seed that grew and blossomed in this study. I am also thankful for the friendships and conversations among my fellow D.Min. cohort members; their presence enriched my learning in leadership. The professors at Duke Divinity School and at Erskine Theological Seminary have been a great treasure; I am especially grateful to Dr. Terry Eves, whose passing this year was a reminder to me that holy friendship is stronger than death. My parents taught me to love learning, and I regret that my mom is not present to witness me finishing this project. Finally, my spiritual family at the Holland Park Church have demonstrated constant support for my teaching and leading.

1. Introduction

The church needs teachers. Indeed, most vocations and convictions demand to be

passed on to others so that the wisdom and benefits gained by those interests and

pursuits might be sustainable. The primary leaders in any organization usually do not

have the capacity to provide all of the necessary direction, so their leadership must be

multiplied. Potential leaders—especially those who will teach others how to sustain

leadership—must have the sort of inner character that embodies the values and goals of

the group to be led. Within Christianity, those values are manifested in a relationship

with God, received through Jesus Christ, formed in and by the Holy Spirit. The most

significant challenge for training teachers is to determine how to develop the inner value

system—in other words, the *heart*[1]—of those who will lead godly change and spiritual

relationships. In particular, the aspect of character that teachers most require is the

capacity to *connect hearts*, creating learning pathways together with others such that the

inner character of each engaged person is transformed "into Christ" (Eph 4:15).[2] Such a

relational capacity to be "with another person in thinking, feeling, and action" is often

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[1] This definition of "heart" is consistent with the New Testament usage of καρδία (*kardía*) rather than σπλάγχνον (*splánchnon*). Verlyn D. Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Abridged (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 288–89, 535–36. Richard Bondi claims that the heart is used a metaphor "to describe the center of our being, that about us which unites intellect and feeling on a fundamental and telling level." Richard Bondi, "The Elements of Character," *The Journal of Religious Ethics* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1984): 210.

[2] Unless otherwise noted, all Bible quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, Copyright © 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.

referred to as *empathy*.[3] Teachers exhibit this quality when they "enter into another person's perspective" for the sake of the other person,[4] but the processes for attaining and sustaining such behavior are much debated—similar to the pursuit of personal virtues. However, the subjective characteristics of empathy are well-known and may be used as a *lens* to help identify and evaluate teaching skills with regard to *connecting hearts*.

The specific question that I will address in this thesis is how to employ the qualities of empathy as a focal concept to facilitate the identification and development of specific skills that Christian teachers need. My argument is that when the characteristics of empathy are used to highlight the most fundamental activities of teaching, these basic skills coalesce into distinctive practices that create opportunities for people to connect with each other and with the heart of God. A teaching ministry is embodied in the spiritual practices of *formative presence* and *resilient trust.* These practices will be explained along with the three basic skills that comprise them: *reception, reflection,* and *response*. When these practices and skills are wrapped in empathy and empowered by God's Spirit, they provide an effective approach to Christian teaching as well as a foundation for nurturing godly character in the teachers themselves.

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[3] Miriam B. Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities: Teachers in Connection* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 17.

[4] Richard Robert Osmer, *Teaching for Faith: A Guide for Teachers of Adult Classes* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 141.

Practices of teaching which are formative for the teacher as well as the students have a positive impact on both the identity and the integrity of the learning participants. Parker Palmer expresses one of the principles of my thesis when he asserts that "good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."[5] The identity that Christians seek is found in a close relationship with Christ, and the sort of integrity necessary for equipping Christians is formed in service to Christ. There are two teaching practices that I will use to highlight the importance of empathy in a Christian teaching ministry. A practice of *formative presence* is derived from the incarnational nature of the manner in which teachers represent Christ. A practice of *resilient trust* establishes a framework in which trust and integrity are cultivated both inside and outside a church congregation. These are genuine spiritual practices because they foster an environment in which the church as a community seeks the presence and power of God's Spirit. They provide practical ways to exercise empathic skills and to participate in God's works.

A triad of skills forms the basis of the empathic teaching practices. In this study, I define the skill of *reception* as a collaboration between people that communicates acceptance and understanding. It begins with listening and evokes genuine dialogue. Raymond Wlodkowski, writing about adult motivation, claims, "Of the skills necessary

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[5] Parker J. Palmer, "The Heart of a Teacher," *Change* 29, no. 6 (December 1997): 16.

for empathy, listening is most important."[6] Furthermore, I will show that *reflection* is the

component of learning that consists of shared meaning-making. Questioning and

feedback lead to processes of analysis, synthesis, application, and evaluation.[7] As a

result, teachers and students share in the mutual development of integrity, identity, and

social conscience. Finally, I will explain how the teacher *responds* to the students and the

larger community with collective wisdom for moving forward into the future. Darcia

Narvaez asserts that "moral intelligence is embodied in action."[8] Paulo Freire further

urges the teacher to become an agent of change: "I cannot, therefore, fold my arms

fatalistically in the face of misery, thus evading my responsibility, hiding behind

lukewarm, cynical shibboleths that justify my inaction because 'there is nothing that can

be done.'"[9]

    The following section introduces the reasons for pursuing a teaching ministry

that emphasizes empathic skills, and it explains my own involvement with this subject.

My intention is to show that a particular gap exists in contemporary teaching resources,

and this thesis offers a way to address that need.

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[6] Raymond J. Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching All Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), 40.

[7] Wlodkowski, 214.

[8] Darcia Narvaez, "Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning: Insights from Developmental Psychology and Neurobiology," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*, ed. Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), 36.

[9] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage*, trans. Patrick Clarke (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), 72.

1.1 Why Aim for the Heart?

An effective teacher is someone who exemplifies God's truth and grace. These are the principles that the apostle Paul assumed in developing his beloved friend, Timothy, for a ministry of teaching. Timothy needed *training* in addition to the *gift* that he had been given. The pursuit of godliness requires both personal effort (1 Tim 4:7–8) and spiritual enablement (4:14), and Timothy was instructed to "put these things into practice" (4:15). This task of transformation requires greater reliance upon God's Spirit and greater engagement and preparation of Christian volunteers. The church community—the body of Christ—supports this preparation with a formative narrative, a common purpose, and mutual guidance. Teaching is a specific form of leadership that creates a space for diverse people to "enter into a fearless communication with each other" for the purpose of both personal and communal development.[10] Locke Bowman adds that "Teaching is a form of *being with* learners that can never be fully accomplished from pulpit or lectern … It prepares people—equips them spiritually and helps them to be the creative individuals God wants them to be."[11] A teaching ministry that develops such leaders requires the use of empathic skills.

My experience with the practice of teaching stems from my interests in learning and from my calling to lead adult education in a Christian context. Having served as

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[10] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Reaching Out: The Three Movements of the Spiritual Life* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1986), 85.

[11] Locke E. Bowman Jr., *Teaching Today: The Church's First Ministry* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980), 85, 87.

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both an interim minister/pastor and as a director of church education in a non-denominational context,[12] my responsibilities have included identifying as well as cultivating the leadership skills in current and future teachers. I have discovered that adult education is an ever-changing ministry because there are always new teachers, new topics of concern, and new areas of need in the church that require focused study and discussion. Furthermore, I have found that teachers of adult classes are more effectively and sustainably prepared with one-on-one discussions than in general-purpose "teacher training" events. Group training has its benefits in communicating information, but beyond policies and schedules, there is often too little impact on personal, heart-changing preparation. Encouraging and equipping teachers is a ministry that requires personal mentoring, organizational proficiencies, and substantive guidance.

My objective is to discover ways to connect people to God's power so that he may mold them (and myself) into leaders who embody the presence of God's Spirit. In order to make this happen, we as leaders must allow God's Spirit more opportunities to work in people's lives. Many of today's approaches to Christian education create a fervor to motivate people to live better lives, while God's own power is regarded more like a background effect than as the essential means for changing hearts. I am

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[12] The tradition in which I serve is a product of the nineteenth-century American "Restoration Movement" (a part of the Second Great Awakening) which includes Churches of Christ, Christian Churches, and Disciples of Christ.

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encouraged and instructed by the apostle Paul's example of stimulating transformation by relying upon the Holy Spirit: "My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power" (1 Cor 2:4).

Whenever I talk with people about training teachers (and this is a conversation that I often have in my ministry), the typical response I receive includes good advice for methods and techniques that have worked well for those individuals. I do not recall ever hearing someone emphasize the importance of preparing the inner character of the prospective teacher. Perhaps such a consideration "goes without saying" so that anyone who teaches is presumed to have already developed a commendable value system. On the other hand, maybe our educational culture is so saturated with choruses of "best practices" that we have ignored the fundamental necessity of becoming the *kind* of people who are teachers.

Many materials on leadership training for public schools, churches, and business programs emphasize methods, tools, and tricks for managing a group and do not ultimately guide the ongoing development of the character of the leader in relation to the community. A cursory examination of publishers' advertisements reveals an increasing amount of resources targeted for ease-of-use (with videos, study guides, workbooks, etc.), ostensibly enabling "anyone" to be a teacher. The investment in

"teacher-proof curriculum materials"[13] has surpassed the attention given to cultivating

teachers and has resulted in a diminishment and commoditization of the value of the

adult Bible class teacher.[14] I am an advocate of well-written and well-presented

materials, but I believe that our church culture has lost an important piece of our

educational responsibility. Something more profound is required for developing

character and shaping people's hearts. As Jay Adams asserts, "When your goal is to

mold the character of an individual, you pursue that task much differently than when

your goal is to enable him to answer questions."[15] The preparation of Christian teachers

should be a priority for the church, and it requires formation of character and

community to nurture talents, skills, and relationships.

In the following section, I provide some background regarding the nature of

learning and teaching with particular attention to adult moral formation and spiritual

development. The various perspectives demonstrate the wide range of theories about

education, indicating the need to identify the aspects of teaching that will most benefit

Christian leaders.

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[13] Elliot W. Eisner, *The Educational Imagination: On the Design and Evaluation of School Programs* (New York: Macmillan, 1979), 15, 171, 270, 274. In the four decades since Eisner used this phrase to describe the state of curricular publications, the proliferation of such materials has increased.

[14] Susanne Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 138–39.

[15] Jay E. Adams, *How to Help People Change: The Four-Step Biblical Process* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 194.

1.2 Foundations for a Ministry of Teaching

The development of character (that which I am referring to as "heart") in adults

is related to growth in capabilities and traits that are cognitive, emotional, relational, and

spiritual. Growth involves learning, and learning usually follows some form of teaching.

The process of learning for adults has been described in terms of "*what* adults are ready

to learn at various times in their lives and *how* they can be helped to accomplish various

developmental tasks."[16] The particular development tasks that are most relevant for this

study have been examined in the fields of psychology, education, and spirituality,

although there are relevant insights from other fields (e.g. biology/neurology,

business/economics, sociology, and politics). Some of these resources and their

precursors initially focused attention on child development but later expanded their

findings into the domain of adult development; therefore, their findings are also

applicable to this study.

The cultural context for this study is primarily the North American adult

experience of Western Christianity (with some emphasis on Protestant aspects of lay

leadership), although I have attempted to incorporate viewpoints that are inclusive and

cross-cultural. The contemporary understanding of adult education in this setting has

been strongly influenced by adult developmental psychology (especially

cognitive/structural approaches), adult educational development (including secular as

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[16] K. Patricia Cross, *Adults as Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1981), 153. Italics are original.

well as Christian approaches), and narrative theology/spirituality (including biblical

descriptions and cultural notions of spirituality). Business leadership methodologies

overlap with several of the educational concepts (e.g. apprenticing/mentoring

approaches), and some concepts borrowed from "liberatory pedagogy"[17] (particularly

the principles of Paulo Freire) are germane to the context of an educational ministry that

equips adults in the church. Because I am particularly interested in a methodology for

equipping church teachers, the contributions described in the following paragraphs are

arranged with the intention to ultimately address character formation.

1.2.1 Psychological Perspectives

In the American context of psychological studies, the impetus for human

development has been sought in four major paradigms: *psychoanalysis* of inner personal

tensions (Sigmund Freud), traditional *behaviorism* as conditioned responses to specific

environmental situations (B. F. Skinner), *humanistic* psychology that describes innate

self-actualization (Carl Rogers, A. Maslow), and *cognitive/structural* developmental

theory that describes the appropriation of progressive moral characteristics (Jean Piaget,

Lawrence Kohlberg, and others).[18] Each of these psychological approaches offers

important insights into how people progress to maturity. Freud and Skinner emphasize

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[17] Susan Rice, "Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy: The Centrality of Teacher Listening," in *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 29.

[18] James Riley Estep Jr. and Alvin W. Kuest, "Moral Development through Christian Education," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 74.

the natural human responses to various conditions affecting the person internally and externally. Maslow and Rogers explore instinctive advances in behavioral growth that are normal for most humans. Only the cognitive/structural approach allows for a significant degree of rational response in the learners, and the necessity for such a response in a teaching environment suggests that these theories are most pertinent to my thesis.

The Swiss psychologist, Jean Piaget, advocated a process in which maturity progresses through specific stages,[19] and Lawrence Kohlberg added a theory of moral development. Kohlberg discovered that as people develop morally, the quality of their reasoning changes in a predictable manner. He outlined three levels of moral reasoning, advancing from self-interest through external rules/standards to internal moral principles.[20] Carol Gilligan observed that the existing research on cognitive development was biased toward male behavior and that men and women often make moral decisions differently. She explains that male development involves "coming to see the other as equal to the self and the discovery that equality provides a way of making connection safe." For some women, however, development entails "the inclusion of herself in an expanding network of connection."[21] The implication for education is that the typically

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[19] Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgement of the Child*, trans. Marjorie Gabain (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 26–27.

[20] Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development: Moral Stages and the Idea of Justice* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981).

[21] Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 39.

male accent on fairness and justice should be counterpoised with the typically female focus on care and responsibility.[22] Thus, the values of respectfulness and relationship are both important and are key elements in the cultivation of those (both male and female) who will lead and teach others in the church.

Although psychological theories propose a plurality of developmental stages, there are few explanations of the process of change which results in attaining those levels. Howard Gardner offered a new theory about intellectual competencies that was intended to "elucidate particular forms of learning."[23] He demonstrated a variety of forms of learning (i.e. "intelligences") along with the environments which are conducive to those forms. In another of Gardner's works, he provides additional tools for effecting real change in people. He defines a framework in which seven "levers" can be applied to prompt significant changes in thinking.[24] Gardner's methods are instructive for helping individuals as well as entire church congregations to move in new directions.

Raymond Wlodkowski built upon the work of Gardner to illuminate the importance of stimulating change. The key motivational conditions for change are inclusion (establishing a respectful and relational atmosphere), attitude (developing a

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[22] Catherine Stonehouse, "The Power of Kohlberg," in *Nurture That Is Christian*, ed. James C. Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 69.

[23] Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* (New York: Basic Books, 2011), 349. The popular concept of "emotional intelligence" is an indirect outgrowth of Gardner's foundational research. See Daniel Goleman, *Emotional Intelligence* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995).

[24] Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2004), 14–18. The seven "levers" for change are reason, research, resonance, redescriptions, resources/rewards, real world events, and resistances.

favorable disposition through personal relevance and choice), meaning (providing challenging experiences that embrace learners' perspectives and values), and competence (helping learners actualize something they value).[25] Teachers are leaders of change, and these perspectives on the nature of change provide critical insights for how my thesis can help people become agents of transformation.

The recognition of faith as a component of human development appears in psychological discussions framed by the work of Erik Erikson and James Fowler. Erikson based his research on Freud, but was more optimistic about human nature and introduced a connection between psychoanalysis and a functional aspect of faith. Erikson defined a series of predictable (and perhaps deterministic) life stages in which healthy people encounter and resolve certain psychosocial issues that arise from the demands and expectations that individuals encounter.[26] Typical responses to these events include "the acquisition of new information, the development of a new skill, or the refinement of personal goals," and the outcome might be either positive or negative.[27]

James Fowler established a theory regarding the structural development of faith, claiming that faith is a common activity shared by all humans and is formed through a

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[25] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 69–81.

[26] Erik H. Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980). This work was first published in 1959.

[27] Ellery Pullman, "Life Span Development," in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 65.

process of predictable phases. He explained that adult development occurs when the

person's psychosocial progress is incongruent with that person's structural faith

development.[28] In a more recent work, Fowler characterizes faith as "an integral,

centering process, underlying the formation of beliefs, values, and meanings."[29] Faith

links people together in the sharing of loyalty and trust, giving direction to their lives.

Whereas the specific content of *what* an individual believes might vary widely, the

patterns of *how* faith functions are relatively predictable and independent of religious

affiliation.[30]

Fowler's theory provides a practical way of understanding how faith operates as

people mature, but it does not necessarily acknowledge the role of God's Spirit. In fact,

the stages he proposes appear to conflate ego development and spiritual development.[31]

Parker Palmer goes further in explaining character development, suggesting that the

inner landscape of a teacher's life is a combination of intellectual, emotional, and

spiritual paths that are interdependent and are all necessary for effective teaching.

Palmer stresses that relational community is vital for spiritual formation; he states that

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[28] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981), 109, 114.

[29] James W. Fowler, *Faithful Change: The Personal and Public Challenges of Postmodern Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 56.

[30] James W. Fowler, "Faith and the Structuring of Meaning," in *Faith Development and Fowler*, ed. Craig Dykstra and Sharon Parks (Birmingham: Religious Education Press, 1986), 26.

[31] Mary Ford-Grabowsky, "Flaws in Faith Development Theory," *Religious Education* 82, no. 1 (Winter 1987): 85–86, 91.

"through the other we learn much about ourselves."[32] The communal aspect of character

development is necessary because changes that impact faith and maturity are difficult to

achieve alone.

1.2.2 Educational Perspectives

American educational systems have historically been modeled on behaviorist

rather than cognitivist models, and this has led to the commonplace notion that teaching

is primarily a matter of transmitting information. Only in recent decades have

constructivist/developmental models influenced the way that schools operate.[33] John

Dewey, a philosopher, wrote that "all genuine education comes about through

experience" and that education should serve the purposes of both the teachers and the

learners.[34] Dewey described education as a "social process" in which the teacher leads a

group of students in cooperative learning experiences.[35] From this perspective, the

teacher is also a learner, and everyone in the educational process is a beneficiary.

Malcolm Knowles expanded on Dewey's theories and popularized the term

"andragogy" (the education of adults) in contrast to "pedagogy." His critical

assumptions about adult learning are: (1) the adult becomes self-directed as he or she

[32] Parker J. Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known: Education as a Spiritual Journey* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1993), 101.

[33] Linda R. Kroll and Tomás Galguera, "Teaching and Learning to Teach as Principled Practice," in *Teaching as Principled Practice: Managing Complexity for Social Justice*, ed. Linda R. Kroll et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 11.

[34] John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), 13.

[35] Dewey, 66.

matures, (2) the adult's accumulated experience is a key resource for learning, (3)

readiness to learn is shaped by tasks required for social roles, and (4) the focus of

learning shifts from subjects to problem-solving.[36] Knowles also promoted a new model

for a caring environment, characterized by trust, respect, freedom of expression, and

acceptance of differences.[37] Furthermore, he laid a foundation for the creation of learning

environments that are based on collaboration rather than competition.[38] Collaborative

settings form the basis of the supportive, relational practices that I will promote.

Adult learning experiences are usually separated into organized and self-

directed formats, the latter being the most common,[39] which suggests that most people

will seek individualized encounters with new concepts. Knowles suggests that the

identity of the adult is also important, since the person "comes into an educational

activity largely because he is experiencing some inadequacy in coping with current life

problems."[40] Allen Tough asserts that "most adult learning begins because of a problem

or responsibility, or at least a question or puzzle, not because of a grand desire for a

liberal education."[41] The motivations for adult learning (i.e. *why* people want to learn)

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[36] Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Modern Practice of Adult Education: From Pedagogy to Andragogy* (New York: Association Press, 1970), 39.

[37] Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, *Making Disciples: The Significance of Jesus' Educational Methods for Today's Church* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2004), 192–93.

[38] Malcolm S. Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species* (Houston: Gulf, 1978), 120.

[39] Cross, *Adults as Learners*, 52.

[40] Knowles, *The Adult Learner: A Neglected Species*, 58.

[41] Allen M. Tough, *The Adult's Learning Projects: A Fresh Approach to Theory and Practice in Adult Learning* (Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 1971), 72.

were investigated by C. O. Houle, who identified three basic categories: some people are stimulated by addressing certain needs through objectives, others by an activity itself (e.g. as an escapist or leisurely pursuit), and the remainder by a personal desire to know and to grow through learning.[42] There is no unique path that people pursue when approaching God, and both spiritual and psychological factors influence adult learning patterns that are based on observation, reflection, and conceptualization of individual and group experiences.[43]

From an educational perspective in a university context, William G. Perry Jr. extended the developmental insights of Piaget and Kohlberg to encompass adult learners. Perry explains that adults move through stages of realizing that there are multiple valid perspectives, while also believing that some directions are nevertheless more correct than others. The maturing student does not escape from the complexity of the world but engages with problems without rigid reliance upon known authorities.[44] Echoing Gilligan's response to Kohlberg, Mary Belenky realized the bias in Perry's all-male research and postulated that women often use a different form of reasoning. Belenky made a distinction between "separate knowers," who value impersonal and

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[42] Cross, *Adults as Learners*, 82–83. Citing Cyril O. Houle, *The Inquiring Mind* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961).

[43] Peter Jarvis, *The Sociology of Adult & Continuing Education* (Dover, NH: Croom Helm, 1985), 93–115.

[44] William G. Perry Jr., *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1970). Also see Richard E. Butman and David R. Moore, "The Power of Perry and Belenky," in *Nurture That Is Christian*, ed. James C. Wilhoit and John M. Dettoni (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1995), 110–11.

analytical procedures, and "connected knowers," who value experience and empathy.[45]

Her work indicates that the teacher greatly influences the character of the learning

environment and has the opportunity to give voice to all of the participants.[46]

The voices of the learners are especially significant in the context of oppressed or

under-represented peoples. Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator who believed that

educational processes can be used as either a tool for perpetuating the status of a

dominant culture or for lifting the disinherited masses out of their bondage. Such issues

of authority and power are now being recognized in American educational systems, and

teachers are discovering opportunities to influence social justice.[47] In Freire's ground-

breaking work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, he asserts that students are not merely

"receptacles" to be "filled" by a teacher and indoctrinated by an education system that

conforms to a "banking" model. Instead, he claims that "knowledge emerges only

through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful

inquiry men pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other."[48] The way this

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[45] Mary Field Belenky et al., eds., *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), 101–9. Also see Catherine Stonehouse, "Learning from Gender Differences," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 109.

[46] Stonehouse, "Learning from Gender Differences," 117.

[47] Regarding discussions of power and authority in educational contexts, see Tomás Galguera, "Learning to See the Invisible: Power, Authority, and Language in the Classroom," in *Teaching as Principled Practice: Managing Complexity for Social Justice*, ed. Linda R. Kroll et al. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2005), 124–28, 139; Elizabeth Campbell, "Cultivating Moral and Ethical Professional Practice: Interdisciplinary Lessons and Teacher Education," in *The Moral Work of Teaching and Teacher Education: Preparing and Supporting Practitioners*, ed. Matthew N. Sanger and Richard D. Osguthorpe (New York: Teachers College Press, 2013), 32.

[48] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York: Continuum, 1981), 58.

happens is that the people with limited opportunities are the ones who "must find

themselves among the emerging leaders" because the oppressive culture needs to learn

from them.[49] In a later work, Freire explains that

> to teach is not *to transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the
> production or construction of knowledge. … It is essential therefore, from the
> very beginning of the process, that the following principle be clear: namely, that
> although the teachers or the students are not the same, the person in charge of
> education is being formed or re-formed as he/she teaches, and the person who is
> being taught forms him/herself in this process. In this sense teaching is not about
> transferring knowledge or contents.[50]

Freire believed the essential skill for teachers is the ability to critically reflect on oneself

and one's behavior.[51] Moreover, this need for self-evaluation leads to "the necessity for a

series of attitudes or virtues,"[52] and my thesis will show how a teacher or leader can

develop these.

Alasdair MacIntyre's well-known work, *After Virtue,* was written with a concern

for the general breakdown of moral authority in America's public sphere.[53] He focused

on the need to restore the sort of virtue which enables humanity to live well with an

identity and a purpose that extend the limits of human activities.[54] He explained that

virtues are lived through certain beneficial practices.[55] Paul Wadell expanded on

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[49] Freire, 162.

[50] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 30–31. Italics are original.

[51] Freire, 43. Also see Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 191.

[52] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 63.

[53] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 6–61. This work was originally published in 1981.

[54] MacIntyre, 191, 203.

[55] MacIntyre, 187.

MacIntyre's work by claiming that "we cannot have the virtues apart from the kinds of friendships which make acquiring them and flourishing in them possible."[56] Furthermore, by suggesting that the virtuous life must be formed in community, Wadell provides an impetus for the *relational* practices that I plan to examine in this thesis. Such practices provide a way to address the gap in teacher training that exists due to the popular emphasis on classroom management techniques. Craig Dykstra, applying MacIntyre's ideas to Christian education, notes that moral practices not only help us do better, but even our conceptions of what is good are extended. He states that "practices are those cooperative human activities … in which and through which human life is given direction, meaning, and significance."[57] Dykstra asserts that such practices that open our hearts to "the grace, mercy, and presence of God" should be the primary focus of Christian education;[58] therefore, they should be central in the development of the heart of a teacher.

1.2.3 Spiritual Perspectives

The biblical terminology for developing character includes the ongoing process of *sanctification.* Together with the grace of being placed in a new relationship with God through faith in the sacrifice of Christ (referred to as *justification*), the life-giving action provided by Jesus Christ in and through the Holy Spirit continues to help believers

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[56] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2009), 45.

[57] Craig Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith: Education and Christian Practices* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 69.

[58] Dykstra, 66, 71.

grow and develop (referred to as *sanctification*).[59] Both justification and sanctification are

brought about through faith (Rom 3:28; 2 Thess 2:13). While both are enacted as part of

an individual's new birth, sanctification is also characterized by an on-going application

of grace that nurtures personal holiness (Heb 12:14). In justification, sin is pardoned once

for all time, whereas in sanctification, sin is increasingly conquered by the Spirit to

enable righteous living. Unlike the theories of some developmentalists (especially

Fowler), character development does not typically follow predictable stages. As Susanne

Johnson explains,

> formation of character is like an unfolding drama, with unpredictable twists and
> turns in the plot. There are fits and starts, sudden shifts and surprises, as well as
> imperceptible growth. Christian character is shaped as believers learn, through
> the guidance of the faith community, to orient their entire existence according to
> God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ. Formation, understood in this light, is the
> guiding image for Christian educational ministry.[60]

The developmentalists do, however, remind us that faith and obedience involve action

as well as knowledge. They provide practical ways of understanding how faith operates

as people mature, but they do not always acknowledge the work of God's Spirit in the

ongoing sanctification of Christians.

The New Testament model of "discipling" offers a paradigm for spiritual

development, and it aligns well with the empathy-based, practice-driven emphasis that

is presented in this thesis. Sylvia Collinson suggests that a discipling model relies upon

voluntary, personal relationships between individuals and in community, with a

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[59] Anthony A. Hoekema, *Saved by Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 66, 172, 192.

[60] Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, 104.

commitment to sharing life and learning together.[61] This model clarifies the possibility

that while some people may have specific gifts or positions of teaching, all Christians are

called to influence others and "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb

10:24 NASB). A variety of spiritual practices support this approach to Christian

education: for example, acts of service, worship, forgiveness, generosity, hospitality,

prayer, and sharing Scripture are ways of helping one another grow spiritually. The

apostle Paul explained to his close companion, Timothy, that being a leader and a

teacher in the church is about holding on to faith and good conscience, cultivating a

relationship with God, nurturing God's gifts, honoring leaders, and living a holy life

(1 Tim 1–5; 2 Tim 1). Teaching is not a matter of endless talk and empty posturing (1 Tim

1:6–7). Many teachers, like Timothy, are aware of their vocation as a *gift* from the Lord,

accompanied by the ongoing contributions of God's Spirit (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:28–30;

Eph 4:11–13).

Dykstra suggests that Christians develop and derive a sense of meaning through

various spiritual practices.[62] Some of these practices are associated with church

functions, but others are shaped through additional manifestations of community,

personal experiences of brokenness and adversity, and larger relationships with the

world and nature. Researchers have observed that finding meaningfulness in spiritual

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[61] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 4. The Greek term μαθητής (*mathētēs*) is translated as "disciple" in the New Testament Gospels, and it refers to a learner or apprentice who is bound to a διδάσκαλος *(didáskalos)* (teacher or master). Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 350.

[62] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 12, 40–46.

matters can take three forms: the "development of self-awareness; a sense of

interconnectedness of all things; and a relationship to a higher power or higher

purpose."[63] People's lives are often messy, and the spaces in which they discover what is

meaningful to them about God's presence vary with the complexity of their experiences.

Although Christians sometimes think of their religious practices as being limited to

traditional and "official" spaces, the reality is that our spirituality is embodied and

performed in the spaces where we live. Christians live their faith in both private and

public spheres, so they learn about God in many places and situations.

Nancy Ammerman describes everyday spiritual life in three ways:[64] a *theistic*

focus on one's relationship or encounters with a transcendent reality; an *extra-theistic*

emphasis on various kinds of connections with other people, meaningful ideas, and the

natural world; and an *ethical* approach to "living a virtuous life, one characterized by

helping others, transcending one's own selfish interests to seek what is right."[65] Specific

places and postures of devotion encourage certain practices of spirituality.[66] Certain

objects and images connect circumstances and practices to God in a person's memory.

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[63] Elizabeth J. Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult Education and Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 30. For the specific study that reached this conclusion, see Diane M. Hamilton and Mary H. Jackson, "Spiritual Development: Paths and Processes," *Journal of Instructional Psychology* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 1998): 262–270.

[64] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Sacred Stories, Spiritual Tribes: Finding Religion in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 28–47.

[65] Ammerman, 45.

[66] Ammerman, 57–59, 87. Ammerman cites Alasdair MacIntyre for her view of practices.

Thus, as Meredith McGuire suggests, the practical, lived religion of individual

Christians is exhibited "in ordinary places and in everyday moments."[67]

Henri Nouwen speaks of the spiritual life as characterized by movement and

change. He describes it as a journey that begins by reaching for our inner selves,

stretching outward to fellow humans, and then searching for God.[68] This paradigm is

useful for an examination of teaching because it explores the necessary relationships in

every realm of life. Like Nouwen, I intend to rely primarily upon the biblical narrative

for my view of spirituality. In the chapters that follow, I will apply the movement

suggested by Nouwen to teachers, but in the reverse order. For the equipping of

teachers, I suggest that it is best to begin with our submission to the Lord, moving

toward greater collaboration within community, and finally impacting our inner

character in significant ways. The chapters that focus on specific empathic skills will

follow this movement, tracing each empathic behavior from Christ's "heart" to the

community's "heart" to the individual's "heart."

1.3 An Empathic Approach

The primary objective of this thesis is to show that teachers in the church are

developed by addressing the needs of their inner character—the workings of the

"heart." Empathy is the quality that engages the heart in all of its dimensions. Therefore,

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[67] Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 213.

[68] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 20.

empathy is the focal concept (the "lens") that I will rely upon to identify and describe

the practices and skills of teaching. Indeed, my intention in this thesis is to approach a

diverse range of resources with openness and reflection, some of which have not been

widely used in studies of Christian education. I hope that by exercising empathic

behaviors in the very production of this study, the reader will appreciate the benefits of

valuing new input, reflecting on its significance, and discerning how to respond to what

is learned. The desired outcome of this work is more connection—with the hearts of

people and of God.

Chapter 2 will examine the features of empathy from psychological and

historical perspectives that emphasize the nature of virtue.[69] I suggest that empathy, like

a virtue, is a quality which enables certain practices to contribute to a common good.[70]

Empathy is a significant factor in creating effective and safe communication that leads to

spiritual formation.[71] Chapter 3 will explore the nature of Christian practices and the

suitability of teaching as a practice. Craig Dykstra makes the point that Christian

practices are not primarily focused on what we do by our own power. What is most

significant is that "they become arenas in which something is done to us, in us, and

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[69] There is considerable debate about whether empathy should be considered as a distinct virtue. Heather D. Battaly, "Is Empathy a Virtue?," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 277.

[70] I will adopt a modified version of the definition of virtue that MacIntyre and Dykstra present.

[71] Regarding empathy as foundational for effective communication, see Tim Muehlhoff and Todd V. Lewis, *Authentic Communication: Christian Speech Engaging Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 30; Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Safe People: How to Find Relationships That Are Good for You and Avoid Those That Aren't* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 44; Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 17.

through us that we could not of ourselves do."[72] Practices themselves achieve certain

valuable benefits, and the greater result is that both our ability to excel and our

conception of the goal are extended beyond our own capacity.[73] There are specific

practices that are Christian (also called spiritual disciplines), and they are a means for

connecting human aspirations with God's purposes and power. A definition of some

coherent teaching practices will be helpful for focusing the discussion on the underlying

behaviors or skills ("what we can do") that are fundamental for anyone who desires to

be an effective teacher. Chapters 4–6 will then present the key elements of those

practices which depend on—and are enhanced by—the qualities of empathy. The skills

of reception, reflection, and response will each be analyzed and applied to a ministry of

teaching. Finally, Chapter 7 will examine the impact that this form of personal

preparation and development has on the various aspects of an education program. I will

discuss what it potentially looks like when the empathic practices and skills come

together in church teaching environments.

The results of this study should be beneficial for anyone interested in the

church's ministry of adult education—current teachers, potential teachers, adult

learners, pastors and other leaders. I would also suggest that the potential applicability

of an empathic approach is much broader than church education. Leaders in other

contexts—e.g. public schooling, professional advancement, organizational leadership,

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[72] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 56.

[73] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 203.

and civic policy—understand the importance of developing (or at least encouraging) commendable character in leaders. Since these other settings may have requirements and expectations that differ from a church context, the impact of the Spirit's role in changing lives may not be as valued. Nevertheless, most groups desire an environment that builds trust and connects people. An empathic approach prepares hearts for seeking the value that people offer.

2. Empathy as Virtue

One of the purposes of an adult education ministry is to lead the change that is necessary for developing every believer's character. When teachers employ the qualities of empathy, they are more likely to facilitate inner growth in themselves and in their students or colleagues. This transformation of the *heart* is achieved by God's Spirit in concert with the conviction (faith) and commitment (repentance) of the individual. Every dimension of what is called the *heart*—thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and desires—is altered so that the result is indeed a new person (Rom 6:4; 2 Cor 5:17). The makeover begins with new life (*conversion*) and continues in growth toward maturity (often referred to as the process of *sanctification*) in all of those same dimensions of the heart. The path of transformation takes place in community because our progress toward becoming like Christ depends not only on the working of the Holy Spirit and our own devotion, but also on the efforts of many who provide the guidance and nurture that we need (Rom 12:4–5). Those who are faithful leaders and teachers in the context of the church community are already on the path of transformation, and their role—whether they are family, friends, teachers, or pastors—includes the cultivation of godly character and faithful commitment. Growth occurs when people connect with each other and with the Lord Jesus in ways that influence the heart, with the necessary result that education in the church is much more than a mental exercise. The goal is connection that creates wholeness, bringing us to "fullness" in Christ (Col 2:10).

What does it mean to be *connected* with other people and even with God himself? In a society like ours that attempts to distinguish and disconnect our cognitive, affective, and relational capabilities, how is it possible to engage our whole selves with others (especially those who seem alien to our experience)? Brené Brown describes this connection as "the energy that is created between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment."[1] As individuals (or groups) craft opportunities for encounters of the heart, people appreciate and learn from each other. "Connection, along with love and belonging, is why we are here, and it is what gives purpose and meaning to our lives."[2] In this chapter I will explore the nature of empathy and how it can be pursued in a Christian context. Various understandings of empathy will be compared, followed by an examination of virtue and a framework in which empathy might be similarly regarded. It will then be appropriate to discuss some problems associated with empathy. I will explain how empathy can operate as a focal *lens* in this study, and then I will suggest how empathy relates to character development and Christian education. The purpose of this analysis is to determine how empathy prepares teachers in the church by developing godly character in themselves and in their students. Later chapters will show how the pursuit of empathy can be achieved in specific teaching practices.

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[1] Brené Brown, *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* (New York: Avery, 2015), 145.

[2] Brené Brown, *Dare to Lead: Brave Work, Tough Conversations, Whole Hearts* (New York: Random House, 2018), 126.

2.1 Defining Empathy

There is general agreement among a variety of authors on the subject of empathy that its essential characteristic can be described as "the ability to identify with the feelings and perspectives of others … and to respond appropriately."[3] Empathy offers space for a person's thoughts, feelings, behaviors, intentions, and values to be fully comprehended by someone else. It is often described as "walking in another person's shoes," but the concept entails more than trying to fit myself (with my own perspectives and feelings) into someone else's situation. In order to exhibit empathy toward others, we must "receive them in all their complexity."[4] Martin Hoffman identifies the two most significant ways that psychologists have defined empathy: (a) "the cognitive awareness of another person's internal states, that is, his thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and intentions" and (b) a "vicarious affective response to another person."[5] This distinction between cognitive awareness and affective awareness is typical among scholars, separating the two types into perspective-taking versus emotional-matching.[6] However, the separation of intellectual and emotional functions may reveal more about our Western Enlightenment cultural heritage than empathy itself. A cognitive conception of

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[3] Mary Gordon, *Roots of Empathy: Changing the World Child by Child* (New York: The Experiment, 2009), 30.

[4] Ashley Taylor, "Listening in the Pedagogy of Discomfort: A Framework for Socially Just Listening," in *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 124.

[5] Martin L. Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development: Implications for Caring and Justice* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

[6] Some examples of the distinction between affective and cognitive awareness are found in Roman Krznaric, *Empathy: Why It Matters, and How to Get It* (New York: Perigee, 2015), 9–10; Katharina Manassis, *Developing Empathy: A Biopsychosocial Approach to Understanding Compassion for Therapists and Parents* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 9–10.

someone's internal state requires an emotional awareness as well as a rational analysis. Furthermore, an affective mirroring of someone's feelings requires some degree of discernment in order to comprehend the basis of those expressions in specific social contexts.[7] Helen Reiss supports this assertion: "One of the most important contributions made by neuroscientists who study empathy has been to prove that the capacity has both emotional (affective) and cognitive (thinking) parts."[8] One of the significant aspects of this study is the intent to embrace both the emotional and rational components of empathy, along with a relational aspect that is important for an empathic response.

The confusion about cognitive and affective elements is but a part of the problem with understanding empathy. The word itself is relatively new, first coined in 1909 by E. B. Titchener to render the German word *Einfühlung*,[9] which originally referred to "an artist's act of imagining what it would be like to be some specific person or, more often, some inanimate object."[10] Theodor Lipps had been one of the first to apply the concept of *Einfühlung* (meaning "to feel one's way into") to the psychology of how an individual

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[7] Karla McLaren, *The Art of Empathy: A Complete Guide to Life's Most Essential Skill* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2013), 28. An example of the expectation to exercise rational discernment regarding emotional expressions is found in the adoption of particular "display rules" for behaviors that correspond to specific communities. Paul Ekman and Wallace V. Friesen, "The Repertoire of Nonverbal Behavior: Categories, Origins, Usage, and Coding," *Semiotica* 1 (1969): 49–98.

[8] Helen Reiss and Liz Neporent, *The Empathy Effect: Seven Neuroscience-Based Keys for Transforming the Way We Live, Love, Work, and Connect Across Differences* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2018), 11. Similarly, Karla McLaren states, "In my experience, affective and cognitive empathy are not separate states; rather, I see cognitive empathy as a function of affective empathy, in that you can't effectively perform the process that some people identify as cognitive empathy unless you already have the capacity to *feel* what's going on." McLaren, *The Art of Empathy*, 293, n. 21. Italics are original.

[9] Edward Bradford Titchener, *Lectures on the Experimental Psychology of the Thought-Processes* (New York: Macmillan, 1909), 21.

[10] C. Daniel Batson, *Altruism in Humans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 17.

understands the consciousness of other persons.[11] Titchener chose to derive the new

word *empathy* from the Greek εμπάθεια (*empátheia*, literally "in feeling/suffering"), and

he explained that it describes a "tendency to feel oneself *into* a situation." The concept is

analogous to "sympathy, which is feeling *together with* another."[12] Before the word

empathy was created, its older sibling, *sympathy*, bore some of the same meaning that is

accorded to affective empathy today.[13] Indeed, *sympathy* in contemporary use is often

contrasted with *empathy* such that the former relates to understanding someone else's

emotion (without actually feeling it yourself) while the latter refers to a visceral sharing

of an emotion with someone.[14] Lauren Wispé describes them as distinct processes:

empathy is a way of *knowing* and sympathy is a way of *relating*.[15] Furthermore, when

empathy is viewed strictly as an affective quality, it is usually differentiated from

compassion, and the latter then acquires the nuance of "feeling for" the other rather than

"feeling with" the other.[16]

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[11] Lauren Wispé, "History of the Concept of Empathy," in *Empathy and Its Development*, ed. Nancy Eisenberg and Janet Strayer (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18–20. The concept was first presented in Theodor Lipps, "Einfühlung, Innere Nachahmung, Und Organempfindungen," *Archiv Für Gesamte Psychologie* 1 (1903): 465–519. Translated as "Empathy, Inner Imitation and Sense-Feelings," in Melvin Rader, ed., *A Modern Book of Esthetics* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 374–82.

[12] Edward Bradford Titchener, *A Beginner's Psychology* (New York: Macmillan, 1915), 198. Italics are original.

[13] First published in 1759, Adam Smith's description of sympathy as a "fellow-feeling" sounds quite similar to empathy: "Whatever is the passion which arises from any object in the person principally concerned, an analogous emotion springs up, at the thought of his situation, in the breast of every attentive spectator." Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1966), 5.

[14] McLaren, *The Art of Empathy*, 24.

[15] Lauren Wispé, "The Distinction Between Sympathy and Empathy: To Call Forth a Concept, a Word Is Needed," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 50, no. 2 (February 1986): 318.

[16] Paul Bloom, *Against Empathy: The Case for Rational Compassion* (New York: Ecco, 2018), 138. Also see Tania Singer and Olga M. Klimecki, "Empathy and Compassion," *Current Biology* 24, no. 18 (September 22, 2014): R875. Note that the etymology of *compassion* (from the ecclesial Latin **compassio**, meaning "with feeling") strongly parallels the Greek etymology of *sympathy* (**συμπάθεια**, *sumpátheia,* meaning "with feeling").

It may seem strange that a quality to which people can easily relate is so difficult

to define. Perhaps the reason for the confusion is that *empathy* has been assigned a wide

variety of definitions that depend on particular contexts of discussion. A useful

summary of these understandings has been provided by C. Daniel Batson:[17]

- *Feeling concern for the perceived welfare of another person* (also referred to as "empathic concern" or "sympathy")

- *Knowing another person's internal state, including thoughts and feelings* (also referred to as "cognitive empathy," "understanding," or "perceiving accurately")

- *Adopting the posture or matching the neutral response of an observed other* (also referred to as "imitation," "motor mimicry," or "physiological sympathy")

- *Coming to feel as another person feels* (also referred to as "emotion matching/catching," "emotional resonance," "fellow-feeling," or "shared physiology")

- *Intuiting or projecting oneself into another's situation* (also referred to as "aesthetic projection," "imaginative projection," or "reenactive empathy")

- *Imagining how another is thinking and feeling* (also referred to as "psychological empathy," "cognitive role taking," or an "imagine-other perspective")

- *Imagining how one would think and feel in the other's place* (also referred to as "vicarious introspection," "projective empathy," or an "imagine-self perspective")

- *Feeling distress as a result of witnessing another person's suffering* (also referred to as "empathic distress," "sympathetic pain," or "promotive tension")

Some of these forms of empathy involve feeling *for* another person, while some

include feeling *as* the other person does, and others entail a feeling produced *by*

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[17] Batson, *Altruism in Humans*, 12–19. A similar list of types of empathy (with a focus on moral perception) is provided by Lawrence Blum, "A Moral Account of Empathy and Fellow Feeling," in *Forms of Fellow Feeling: Empathy, Sympathy, Concern and Moral Agency*, ed. Neil Roughley and Thomas Schramme (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 151–54.

association with the other person in a particular situation. The emotion that one feels

may be produced by processes of imitation, imagination, or projection, and in any case

the congruence and accuracy of one's emotion (relative to the other person) may vary.

Furthermore, the scope of empathy can be broadened to connect diverse social groups

by perceiving and sharing their life situations.[18] All of these contexts and expressions are

possible in a Christian learning environment.

2.2 Is Empathy a Virtue?

Despite the bewildering assortment of definitions, a complete description of

empathy must include that it is context-dependent, often beyond one's own control,

sustained by specific activities or skills, and narrative-focused (i.e. reliant on personal

and communal *stories*). In these respects, empathy is like a virtue—although empathy

rarely if ever appears on lists of virtues. In ancient Greek culture, the term for "virtue"

(ἀρετή, *aretē*) meant "that which causes a thing to perform its function well"—thus,

"human virtue" would be that which enables people to live well according to their

purpose.[19] As Alasdair MacIntyre surveyed the conceptions of virtue in ancient and

modern times, he observed various ways that virtues have been thought to help people:

to fulfill particular social roles (Homer), to achieve a specifically human purpose or *telos*

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[18] Elizabeth A. Segal, *Social Empathy: The Art of Understanding Others* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 4, 14–16.

[19] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 111. This Greek term ἀρετή (*aretē*) is rare in the Septuagint (LXX) and in the New Testament; it is used only in the sense of "excellence" or "fame." Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, Abridged (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 77.

(Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas), and to attain heavenly as well as earthly success

(Benjamin Franklin).[20] Such a broad range of purposes and applications makes it difficult

to list the defining characteristics of virtue; therefore, it is a complicated task to ascertain

whether empathy should be considered a virtue. Yet, our approach to developing

empathy (and even the possibility of such a pursuit) depends on whether it is a virtue, a

specific learned skill, or an involuntary behavior. In the following paragraphs, I will

discuss several important aspects of empathy and demonstrate that these qualities are

consistent with the general nature of virtue.[21]

2.2.1 Empathy is Contextual

The mutual connection of individuals, in thoughts as well as feelings, is strongly

influenced (sometimes even precipitated) by shared situations. This is how human

virtues work, as they are called upon in personal (or social) circumstances to influence

individual actions and contribute to personal identity. Every situation requires

discernment of both the events and the context of the participants' lives. An exercise of

empathic skills helps one to "understand the usually unspoken and hidden rules of

social interaction so that you can respond in a socially sensitive way."[22] There can be no

genuine appreciation of the other person's thoughts and feelings without a grasp of the

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[20] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 185.

[21] It should be noted that Adam Smith observed a strong connection between virtue and sympathy (and sympathy would include the concept of empathy in our contemporary language). Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 328–31.

[22] McLaren, *The Art of Empathy*, 55. "Sensitivity to context" is one of six dimensions of emotional style described in Richard J. Davidson and Sharon Begley, *The Emotional Life of Your Brain: How Its Unique Patterns Affect the Way You Think, Feel, and Live—and How You Can Change Them* (New York: Plume, 2013).

context. Learning experiences are particularly dependent upon the context or

environment and the relationship between teacher, learner, and subject matter.[23] Stanley

Hauerwas makes a similar observation regarding virtues, claiming that "any account of

the virtues is context-dependent."[24] Because virtue pertains to human character, it also

pertains to the human condition and specific contexts of living a life of *wholeness*. Donald

Evans explains that "a moral virtue is a pervasive, unifying stance which is an integral

part of a person's fulfillment as a human being, and which influences his actions in each

and every situation, especially his dealings with other human beings, where it helps to

promote their fulfillment."[25] Virtues become normative in a community of people who

praise a common set of qualities that reflect the identity or purpose of that group.

Empathy functions like a virtue insofar as it is considered a praiseworthy trait within the

contexts of particular communities of people.

2.2.2 Empathy is Risky

Opening oneself to another person requires relinquishing absolute control.

Empathy is most effective when it produces a benefit in the participants that was not

specifically at their command—sometimes referred to as serendipity or providence or

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[23] Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 3. Raider-Roth recommends Hawkins's triangular model of this relationship: "I, Thou, and It." David Hawkins, "I, Thou, and It," in *The Informed Vision: Essays on Learning and Human Nature*, ed. David Hawkins (New York: Algora Publishing, 2002), 51–64. The philosophical underpinnings of this relationship are expressed by Buber in the statement, "All actual life is encounter." Martin Buber, *I And Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 62.

[24] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 112.

[25] Donald Evans, *Struggle and Fulfillment: The Inner Dynamics of Religion and Morality* (New York: Collins, 1979), 14. Quoted in Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 112.

luck. Some modes of perspective-taking are subject to voluntary control, but "if one is

paying attention to the victim they can be involuntary and triggered immediately on

witnessing the victim's distress."[26] Robert Katz recognizes that therapists who use

empathic skills with clients must take the risk of relaxing self-control, "giving up

temporarily our carefully cultivated habits of alert observation."[27] This opening of

oneself often requires certain *boundaries* to maintain a safe and healthy differentiation

with respect to the other person in order to avoid detrimental captivation by an

emotional state.[28] The development of empathy exemplifies Aristotle's notion that virtue

consists of both intellectual excellence and moral behavior, both learned and performed.

"Thus, the virtues are implanted in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature: we are

by nature equipped with the ability to receive them, and habit brings this ability to

completion and fulfillment."[29] Augustine of Hippo argued in the late fourth century that

virtue cannot be *possessed* by anyone but is produced in a person *indirectly* as a person

pursues various worthwhile activities.[30] Likewise, empathy is formed in an individual

through specific, habituated behaviors. In Christian terms, empathy is produced as a

fruit of faithful participation in practices given to us by God through his Spirit (Gal

5:22–25).

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[26] Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 5.

[27] Robert L. Katz, *Empathy: Its Nature and Uses* (London: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963), 24.

[28] Henry Cloud and John Townsend, *Boundaries: When To Say Yes, When To Say No, To Take Control of Your Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 35–40.

[29] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Ostwald (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 33 (§1103a23–25).

[30] Augustine of Hippo, "Of the Morals of the Catholic Church," New Advent, §6.9, accessed April 9, 2019, http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1401.htm.

2.2.3 Empathy Requires Action

The previous paragraph does not imply that empathy is a passive condition. As Brené Brown asserts, empathy is a "vulnerable choice" to connect with another person emotionally as well as intellectually.[31] Similarly, Aristotle held that virtues *combine* emotion and action.[32] He explained that virtues develop "by first having put them into action," and he gave examples of builders and artists performing activities that contribute to doing their work well.[33] Empathy requires doing things in various situations that provide necessary experience for becoming empathetic. Hauerwas and Pinches clarify that a virtue "must be capable of development and growth within us rather than just being there, in the depths of our untrained hearts. At the very least it will require *practices*, actions."[34] For the Christian, such actions are a response to the love of God expressed in Christ Jesus, cultivating empathic character in the same way that practices develop other dispositions of virtue.

2.2.4 Empathy is Rooted in a Narrative

One of the misconceptions about empathy in our contemporary culture is the belief that it is simply a matter of individual behavior or decisions. However, empathy is about connecting people and discovering "those narratives that live through us,"

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[31] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 142.

[32] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 43 (§1106b24–1107a3).

[33] Aristotle, 34 (§1103a30–1103b1).

[34] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles R. Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 137. Italics are original.

because "who we are and what we do has everything to do with what story we are in."[35]

Empathy cannot function properly without a guiding narrative—an over-arching interpretive account—that calls upon the history, traditions, and culture of the group of people that seek to have a connection. In describing the need for connection in our society, Robert Bellah claims that

> a community is involved in retelling its story, its constitutive narrative, and in so doing, it offers examples of the men and women who have embodied and exemplified the meaning of the community. … The stories that make up a tradition contain conceptions of character, of what a good person is like, and of the virtues that define such character.[36]

The Christian story is one that develops an expectation of empathic practices, particularly in the following parables spoken by Jesus:[37]

- A despised Samaritan helps an injured Jew (Luke 10:30–37)
- A shepherd searches for a lost sheep (Matt 18:12–13; Luke 15:3–7)
- A father welcomes his wayward son and encourages the other (Luke 15:11–32)
- A king sympathizes with an indebted servant (Matt 18:23–35)

As James K. A. Smith observes, "The Scriptures function as the script of the worshiping community, the story that narrates the identity of the people of God."[38] For believers in

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[35] Hauerwas and Pinches, 125.

[36] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996), 153.

[37] Not all of Jesus's parables express empathic behaviors. Some of the Gospel stories indicate that God (and Jesus, too) tolerantly endures our annoying advances. In such cases (e.g. Luke 11:5–8; 12:16–21; 14:15–24; 18:1–8), God's response may exhibit patience and mercy rather than empathy. This is consistent with Howe's suggestion that our intention of helping is occasionally "to rid ourselves of discomfort, whether of distress, guilt, embarrassment or even annoyance." David Howe, *Empathy: What It Is and Why It Matters* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 153.

[38] James K. A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom: Worship, Worldview, and Cultural Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 195.

Christ, empathy is not merely an individual behavior, but rather an affirmation of (and a commitment to) the story of Jesus Christ and the church. This story presents Jesus empathizing with us in our weaknesses and offering mercy and grace (Heb 4:15–16).

Not all groups and societies share the same story, but all of them have some sort of guiding narrative.[39] It is upon these particular traditions and history that a society builds its sense of virtue.[40] Therefore, MacIntyre asserts that "the telling of stories has a key part in educating us into the virtues."[41] As philosophers and psychologists have attempted to scrutinize the meaning of empathy and theorize about the concept, some have disallowed the contributions of altruistic motivation (i.e. caring for others), thereby disconnecting empathy from a narrative that empowers it. As a result, empathy is regarded as either an involuntary feeling (i.e. strictly an emotional contagion) or as a voluntary—and potentially manipulative—skill.[42] Some scholars claim that cognitive empathy cannot be a virtue because it can go wrong; it is not sufficiently abstract to be independent of context and circumstances.[43] This criterion exposes the underlying narrative of radical individualism that cannot comprehend empathy as a virtue. Another similar narrative, promoted by the psychologist Carl Rogers, is the belief that people are

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[39] Charles Taylor asserts, "Every person, and every society, lives with or by some conception(s) of what human flourishing is: What constitutes a fulfilled life? What makes life really worth living?" Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, UK: Harvard University Press, 2007), 16.

[40] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 112.

[41] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 216.

[42] Battaly, "Is Empathy a Virtue?," 285–300.

[43] Battaly, 298.

inherently good and have a natural tendency toward wholeness.[44] Such an outlook

emphasizes humanity's ability to take charge of life's events without deep interpersonal

connections. For Christians who live through a different narrative, "the moral life does

not derive from some general conception of the good, nor even from an analysis of those

skills or excellences that allegedly allow human nature to flourish. Rather, the moral life

of Christians is determined by their allegiance to a historical person they believe is the

decisive form of God's kingdom."[45]

2.2.5 Empathy is Communal

Christians have a story, and that story is shared with the community of believers.

Charles Foster explains it this way:

> *Community* takes precedence as a category for understanding the nature and
> meaning of existence, rather than personal identity. This is not to conclude that
> our uniqueness, independence, and individuality are not important. Rather it is
> to take seriously Urban Holmes' description of the Hebraic view of the
> "corporate person," in which the "individual embodies the community, and the
> community is responsible for the individual." People in this definition are not
> discrete individuals, but are what they are "by virtue of" their "membership in
> the community." One of the most powerful and formative of all human
> experiences, in other words, is to be found in our connectedness—our
> relatedness—with each other, with all of creation, and with God.[46]

MacIntyre points out that the predominant social environment shapes one's sense of

virtue and guides the members of the group in pursuing virtue. For Aristotle and Plato,

"the milieu in which the virtues are to be exercised and in terms of which they are to be

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[44] Howe, *Empathy*, 106.

[45] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 29.

[46] Charles R. Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 18–19. Italics are original. The quotations are from Urban T. Holmes III, *Ministry and Imagination* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976), 19.

defined is the *polis*" (the Greek socio-political structure).[47] For the Christian, the

community of the church is the environment in which virtues have meaning.

The communal structure of empathy is significant because it supplements the

cognitive and affective characteristics with a *relational* aspect that transcends the

individual self. James Childs refers to this social engagement as being similar to playing

in an orchestra. Each member has a particular part to play in harmony with the others,

and each one shares in the ownership of the total result. "It is indeed good news that we

are saved as a community, as a people, and not merely as individuals. It invites us to

value the gifts that all of us bring to our common tasks. It invites us to treasure the

experience of those from different cultures and with different histories who can be our

teachers, even as they are our brothers and sisters in Christ."[48] The apostle Paul spoke of

the church operating as a *body* with many members that exercise a variety of interrelated

functions (Rom 12:3–8). This unity-among-diversity creates an environment that differs

from Aristotle's idea of the *polis* because it encourages every citizen to contribute distinct

spiritual gifts to the common good rather than to support a status quo among people

who are expected to become similar in character.[49] Therefore, the Christian community

is more capable than the Aristotelian *polis* of reaching empathically into the lives of

people who currently live on the margins of the community. When Father Gregory

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[47] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 135, 186.

[48] James M. Childs Jr., *Faith, Formation, and Decision: Ethics in the Community of Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 9.

[49] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 83.

Boyle speaks about a community of faith in the midst of street-gang culture, he says,

"You don't go to the margins to make a difference; you go to the margins so that the

folks at the margins make you different."[50] Empathy achieves its role as a virtue only in

the complex encounters of genuine community.

2.2.6 Empathy is Purpose-Centered

Within the narrative of the Christian community, the purpose of empathy is

closely associated with the believer's imitation of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul

reminded the Philippian church that the very existence of "compassion and sympathy"

in their communion was an expression of the Christian's objective to "look not to your

own interests, but to the interests of others" (Phil 2:1–3). The end goal of Paul's directive

is to imitate Jesus, who "humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—

even death on a cross" (2:8). Such a purpose is often contrary to the values and priorities

of Western culture:

> What is good is what one finds rewarding. If one's preferences change, so does
> the nature of the good. Even the deepest ethical virtues are justified as matters of
> personal preference. Indeed, the ultimate ethical rule is simply that individuals
> should be able to pursue whatever they find rewarding, constrained only by the
> requirement that they not interfere with the "value systems" of others.[51]

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[50] Gregory Boyle, Keynote Address (United Ministries Luncheon, "Uniting for Change," Greenville, SC, April 25, 2019).

[51] Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 6. This is an example of a cultural objective that disregards any development of empathy. However, it is also possible to purposefully employ empathic behaviors for *negative* reasons, such that "moral skills or technique alone may enable a person to use them for great evil— for example, skills of empathy may enable a person to manipulate others, as when Iago feigns friendship with and manipulates Othello." Barry Schwartz and Kenneth Sharpe, "The War on Wisdom and How to Fight It," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*, ed. Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), 177, n. 11.

A sense of purpose is what gives meaning to life, and for the Christian who asks the deep questions regarding identity and values (e.g. "Who am I?" and "How should I live?"), that purpose is located in service to the Triune God.

Alasdair MacIntyre follows the Aristotelian definition of virtues as particular qualities "which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia*,"[52] the Greek term for well-being, blessedness, and prosperity. Virtues represent the capacity for living life at its best—not merely as the *preparation* for living such a life, but as the actual living of that life. Such virtues are "states of character by which one is formed to know what is the good and to do it."[53] The underlying assumption is that such a life has a purpose—*telos* in Greek terminology—and that actions (i.e. "practices") which are aligned with that purpose produce benefits (i.e. "goods") that are fulfilling for the individuals and sustaining for the virtues represented.[54] This *telos* must transcend the individual's own life so that there is a higher good for the community and all of humanity;[55] otherwise,

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[52] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 148. MacIntyre offers an explicit definition (the italics are original): "*A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods.*" MacIntyre, 191. Augustine adopted the classical fourfold division of virtue from Plato and Aristotle (temperance, courage, justice, and prudence), and he described them as four forms of love which have their *telos* in God. Thomas Aquinas agreed that these four were taught in the Christian Scriptures, and he added three "theological virtues"—faith, hope, and love. Augustine of Hippo, "Of the Morals of the Catholic Church," §15.25; Thomas Aquinas, "The Summa Theologiæ," New Advent, II.1.61, accessed February 1, 2020, http://www.newadvent.org/summa/.

[53] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 19.

[54] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 191.

[55] MacIntyre, 203. Aristotle believed that wisdom (prudence) is required for the exercise of other virtues and therefore represents a higher good. Thomas Aquinas argued that such wisdom belongs to God. MacIntyre eventually concluded in a later work that this transcendence points in the direction of God: "God creates and orders particulars and knows them precisely as what he has made and is making, We, if we act rightly, reproduce that ordering." Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), 196.

there is no motivation to pursue practices and virtues that support common values. The

goal may vary for different people, groups, and historical periods, but virtues can only

exist in the context of a supreme purpose. One of the problems in our contemporary

society is that the emphasis on radical individualism is often a rejection of shared human

telos; thus, "the Enlightenment project had to reject any notion of *virtue*."[56] Empathy

exists as a virtue in a Christian context wherein the purpose of the people is to imitate

Christ.

Although I have not seen empathy appear explicitly in any list of virtues

(remember, it is a relatively new term), the essential nature of empathy is well

represented in other virtuous qualities of character. The New Testament lists various

virtues as the "gifts of the Spirit" and as the "fruit of the Spirit." Terry Linhart explains

the connection: "The transformation through the Holy Spirit produces the virtues and

fruit (Gal. 5:22–25) that reflect Christ's presence in our lives."[57] Descriptions of gifts and

fruit which relate to empathy include love, honor, joy, hope, patience, hospitality,

truthfulness, kindness, compassion, goodness, righteousness, humility, gentleness,

forgiveness, self-control, peace, forbearance, and faithfulness.[58] The supreme Christian

virtue is love. Jesus Christ commanded his disciples to "love one another. Just as I have

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[56] David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith, "Introduction: Practices, Faith and Pedagogy," in *Teaching and Christian Practices: Reshaping Faith and Learning*, ed. David I. Smith and James K. A. Smith (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), 7. Charles Taylor offers a similar diagnosis and critique of the Enlightenment model on this point. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 79–80.

[57] Terry Linhart, ed., *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), x–xi.

[58] See Romans 12:9–21; 14:17; Galatians 5:22–23; Ephesians 4:25–5:10; Colossians 3:12–14; Titus 1:8; 2 Peter 1:5–7.

loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34–35; cf. John 15:12, 17). Jesus's statement is consistent with God's commandment to Israel to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev 19:18; cf. Gal 5:14), which is the basis of the so-called Golden Rule: "do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt 7:12; Luke 6:31). Although it is popular today to criticize the Golden Rule as projecting one's own feelings and thoughts onto the needs of another person,[59] the admonitions in the Bible express the intention to treat others with empathic love that is not only a virtue for the godly person, but also (and especially) a representation of God as one who invites the "other" to participate and contribute their feelings, thoughts, and actions. This empathic notion of relating to one's neighbor *as if* one were that person is expressed in the rabbinic maxim "do not judge your fellow until you have come into his place" (Mishnah Avoth 2:5).[60]

2.2.7 Summary

In this study, empathy will be regarded as a virtue according to MacIntyre's definition (drawn from Aristotle) while also adopting the more theological sense in which the New Testament describes virtues related to love. Furthermore, I will adopt Augustine's recognition of God as the *telos* of Christian virtues,[61] recognizing that the

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[59] For examples of critiquing the Golden Rule, see Segal, *Social Empathy*, 152; Krznaric, *Empathy*, 58–59.

[60] Katz, *Empathy*, 31.

[61] Any set of virtues alone is insufficient for making ethical choices unless the virtues operate under an overarching wisdom. I am suggesting that this wisdom is found in God and his divine love. This is contrary to some contemporary scholars who suggest that the supreme virtue is "practical wisdom"—what Aristotle called *phronesis.* "It was for him a kind of master virtue: one that gave order, coherence, and direction to all the other virtues." Schwartz and Sharpe, "The War on Wisdom and How to Fight It," 175.

Christian understanding of virtue diverges here from the Greek tradition due to Christianity's perspective that transcends humanity. Understanding empathy as a virtue in this way provides a basis for understanding how it can be developed. Empathy should be regarded as (1) grounded in a purposeful narrative that is larger than any individual and (2) developed through the exercise of particular practices which represent living life at its best. Teachers in the church (as well as other leaders) depend on the benefits of empathic virtues in order to be effective educators. Paolo Freire recognized this necessity:

> It is fundamental for us to know that without certain qualities or virtues, such as a generous loving heart, respect for others, tolerance, humility, a joyful disposition, love of life, openness to what is new, a disposition to welcome change, perseverance in the struggle, a refusal of determinism, a spirit of hope, and openness to justice, progressive pedagogical practice is not possible.[62]

Empathy helps us to communicate with others on a deeper level and understand them more completely. Most people relish the satisfaction of being accepted and appreciated. Robert Katz points out that when our relationships function in this manner, we know "we are recognized and accepted for the particular kind of person we are."[63] Developing people of character involves practices of empathic virtue. At the same time, there are unhealthy behaviors associated with empathy that must be recognized and avoided. The next section describes some of these extremes.

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[62] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 108.

[63] Katz, *Empathy*, 7–8.

2.3 Distortions of Empathy

Aristotle described virtue as "a mean between two vices, one of which is marked by excess and the other by deficiency."[64] The most excellent, beneficial way to live the virtuous life is to exercise those characteristics of a virtue that do not stray into an extreme embodiment of that virtue. "There are extremes on *both* sides of a virtue which we must avoid."[65] In our current culture of polarization, where people are encouraged to adopt an extreme position (e.g. right-wing versus left-wing), aiming for the middle may seem strange. Aristotle is addressing the human tendency to either carry a good thing too far or to ignore/deny that the good exists. Our vices are outsized expressions of virtues, or as Judith Sills says, "Our greatest weaknesses are always the flip side of our greatest strengths."[66] The prophet Jeremiah pondered who is able to comprehend the workings of the human heart, and he realized that the Lord knows what is inside us better than we do. "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure" (Jer 17:9). The problem is less with our *striving* than with the character of our *hearts*.

As we consider the nature of empathy as a virtue, it is possible to imagine two separate continua of empathic operation. Earlier in this chapter, the popular distinction between cognitive and affective awareness was introduced, with the caution that *both* aspects are required for empathy to be beneficial. Emotional connection alone, unrestrained by discernment, can create situations in which empathy becomes "biased

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[64] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 49–50 (§1109a19–24).

[65] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 21. Italics are original.

[66] Judith Sills, *Excess Baggage: Getting Out of Your Own Way* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 12.

and parochial."[67] Rational judgment alone, without adequate emotion, fosters coercion

and insensitivity. The second spectrum of empathic behavior is found in the distinction

between oneself and the other person or group. A focus entirely on the self creates

distance between people while excessive emphasis on the "other" eliminates healthy

boundaries.[68] Therefore, it is possible to imagine some of the negative extremes of

empathy in two separate dimensions, as depicted in Figure 1. The following paragraphs

will describe the four quadrants in this diagram, each representing a category of extreme

empathy.
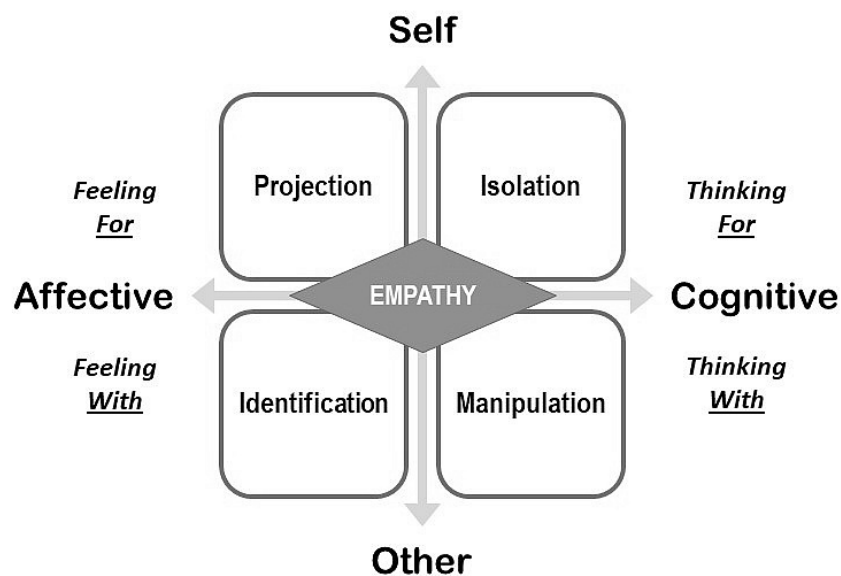
Figure 1: Empathic Extremes

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[67] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 36.

[68] Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 51–62.

2.3.1 Projection

Stephen Covey tells a story about someone going to an optometrist for help with eye problems. The doctor listens to the complaint and then takes off his glasses and hands them to the patient. He claims that he has worn this pair of glasses for ten years and they have helped him tremendously. Of course, the patient's vision is not improved, but the doctor insists that the glasses work great and that the problem must be that the patient is not trying hard enough.[69]

One of the necessary ingredients of healthy empathy is the ability to differentiate between oneself and the other party. Otherwise, people "are prone to assuming that the other person feels as they would in a given situation. They do not take into account the other person's distinct characteristics which might result in a very different experience for that person than the one they themselves would have had."[70] This predilection for our own perspective or a viewpoint that is familiar to us is referred to by psychologists as "in-group bias."[71] Projection is a distortion of empathy that focuses only on our own conditions and thereby distorts moral judgments regarding other people, making it difficult to evaluate the value/costs of our choices and the extent to which our own assumptions contribute to the situation.[72] When we project our own feelings and

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[69] Stephen R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 236–37.

[70] Manassis, *Developing Empathy*, 10. Manassis cites Amy Coplan, "Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects," in *Empathy: Philosophical and Psychological Perspectives*, ed. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[71] Reiss and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 33.

[72] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 31, 55, 95. For a convincing critique of *projective empathy*, see Taylor, "Listening in the Pedagogy of Discomfort."

thoughts (including our own biases and preconceptions) onto others, we assume that they should behave as we would—that they are working with the same resources and networks that we have. We may be "walking in their shoes," but we are merely wearing their shoes without comprehending what it is like for them. "When the other person is very different from ourselves, the danger of this kind of projection is that we simply project onto the other our own beliefs and attitudes, fears and hopes, and desires and aversions."[73] This is why there is a tendency to blame the victim (also known as "fundamental attribution error") for the adversity rather than recognize the effects of social, economic, or cultural factors.[74] The upper-left quadrant in Figure 1 represents the problems that we encounter when "we believe we can take our lenses off and look through the lenses of someone else. We can't. … What we can do, however, is honor people's perspectives as truth even when they're different from ours."[75]

2.3.2 Isolation

Another form of extreme empathy that emphasizes the self over all others relies on cognitive awareness to the exclusion of affective response. This condition is sometimes manifested as a "passive empathy" that removes itself from responsible action toward other people, engaging only in *consumptive* relationships with groups that

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[73] Catriona MacKenzie and Jackie Leach Scully, "Moral Imagination, Disability and Embodiment," *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 24, no. 4 (2007): 345.

[74] J. D. Trout, *Why Empathy Matters: The Science and Psychology of Better Judgment* (New York: Penguin Books, 2010), 40–41.

[75] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 143.

are different.[76] In the upper-right quadrant of our matrix, emotions and diversity both

carry negative connotations, leading people to exhibit stoic and strictly rational

behaviors. Those who are teachers focus on dispensing knowledge rather than paying

attention to learners.[77] Paul Bloom makes a case for emphasizing the cognitive aspects of

empathy over the affective aspects while "maintaining an emotional distance," but he

acknowledges that caring may not actually work that way.[78] Since a strictly intellectual

understanding of empathy cannot fully engage others, it ultimately isolates the

individual from the potential benefits of empathy. Furthermore, whenever there is

fearful suspicion or a power dynamic between people, there is a likelihood that empathy

will be pushed toward the upper-right quadrant of the matrix. Powerful people (e.g.

higher social class, more educated, greater wealth, more prestige, etc.) tend to pay less

attention to social contexts and the need for perspective-taking. They are often more

inspired by themselves than by others.[79]

2.3.3 Manipulation

The bottom half of the empathy matrix (Figure 1) moves toward extremes that

focus on an unhealthy connection with the other person or group. The lower-right

quadrant, with its emphasis on cognitive awareness, represents "the capacity to

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[76] Megan Boler, *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 158, 163–65. Boler uses the term "consumptive" to describe "the application of emotional intelligence as a mode of social control, … rooted in workplace management and behavioral psychology as a basis for increased social efficiency and cultural assimilation." Boler, 61.

[77] Reiss and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 103.

[78] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 147.

[79] Segal, *Social Empathy*, 95.

appreciate what's going on in the minds of other people without any contagion of feeling."[80] Although Bloom argues for a form of cognitive empathy, he acknowledges that it can be abused: "Successful therapists and parents have a lot of cognitive empathy, but so too do successful con men, seducers, and … bullies."[81]

One of the problems of living in a "hyper-individualistic capitalist culture" that commodifies both products and people is that our society assumes that persuasion (i.e. marketing) demands manipulation of emotions and attitudes.[82] The exploitation of people for personal ambition is not a new situation, and Paolo Freire explains how governments can use education to manipulate people:

> Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the "banking" concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. … But in the last analysis, it is men themselves who are filed away through the lack of creativity, transformation, and knowledge in this (at best) misguided system. For apart from inquiry, apart from the praxis, men cannot be truly human.[83]

2.3.4 Identification

Adam Smith observed that there is a form of fellow-feeling that can come upon people automatically, involuntarily, and instantaneously.[84] A multitude of contemporary authors claim that humans are "hard-wired" for empathy, and this

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[80] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 17.

[81] Bloom, 37.

[82] Gary Olson, *Empathy Imperiled: Capitalism, Culture, and the Brain* (New York: Springer, 2013), 106.

[83] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58.

[84] Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, 6, 10. Also see Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 17.

conclusion is usually attributed to the discovery of "mirror neurons" in the brain.[85]

However, those who attempt to separate empathic functions by brain location tend to

over-simplify the complexity of what actually happens across the entire brain.

Furthermore, these authors recognize that people do not all respond in the same way to

observations of pain (or any other feeling) in other people—especially when there are

social, spatial, or temporal differences between those people.

Involuntary emotional contagion does create problems when the observer

identifies so closely with the one who originally exhibited the emotion that the observer

cannot distinguish who is feeling the emotion (sometimes referred to as "empathic over-

arousal").[86] The lack of differentiation between *self* and *other* exacerbates the situation at

hand because such people are "perpetually invading the space of their neighbors."[87] The

observable result is over-attachment to certain people and an imbalance in the treatment

given to sufferers. While it is usually true that people offer greater help and support to

sufferers who are closer to them relationally (e.g. "familiarity bias," which favors family

and friends over strangers) or temporally (e.g. "here-and-now bias," which favors

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[85] For example, Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 62–70; Howe, *Empathy*, 157; Marco Iacoboni, *Mirroring People: The Science of Empathy and How We Connect with Others* (New York: Picador, 2009), 268; Krznaric, *Empathy*, 10, 21–26; Olson, *Empathy Imperiled*, 2, 63; Reiss and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 19; Segal, *Social Empathy*, 190; Trout, *Why Empathy Matters*, 233, 29–31; Iacoboni, *Mirroring People*, 268; Carolyn Zahn-Waxler, Andrew Schoen, and Jean Decety, "An Interdisciplinary Perspective on the Origins of Concern for Others: Contributions from Psychology, Neuroscience, Philosophy, and Sociobiology," in *Forms of Fellow Feeling: Empathy, Sympathy, Concern and Moral Agency*, ed. Neil Roughley and Thomas Schramme (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 193.

[86] Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 197.

[87] Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2017), 138.

immediate situations),[88] this extreme behavior overwhelms the person's self-definition and self-regulation. Bloom maintains that it must be completely avoided because it contributes to injustice.[89] Friedman asserts, "The focus on empathy rather than responsibility has contributed to a major misorientation in our society about the nature of what is toxic to life itself and, therefore, the factors that go into survival."[90] Others explain that this condition causes fatigue and burn-out in those who are giving care to others.[91]

2.3.5 Summary

The four quadrants of the matrix in Figure 1 are all distortions of healthy empathy, and the authors who oppose the use of empathic behaviors are usually reacting to these unhealthy manifestations. Virtuous empathy is found in a balance of cognitive and affective awareness as well as a balance between one's sense of self and the other. I have not addressed the possibility of behaving *without* empathy because I agree with Karla McLaren that such a condition (e.g. psychopathy or sociopathy) is relatively rare. Many of those who have been labeled as low-empathy may be either coping with hyper-empathy (e.g. people on the autism spectrum) or exhibiting some of the unhealthy extremes that have been presented here.[92]

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[88] Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 197.

[89] Bloom, *Against Empathy*, 13, 31, 95.

[90] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 134. Friedman's critique is aimed at a distortion of empathy that consists of toxic, enmeshed relationships.

[91] For example, see Krznaric, *Empathy*, 44–45; McLaren, *The Art of Empathy*, 151.

[92] McLaren, *The Art of Empathy*, 22. McLaren refutes the claims of British psychopathologist Simon Baron-Cohen that autistic people are neurologically unempathic, citing studies by Swiss and Israeli neuroscientists

One of the benefits of viewing empathy as a virtue is that this perspective helps us understand the deceptive nature of distorted empathy. Seldom are individuals aware of the level of their empathy or how far they are from a healthy, centered empathy. Although a full examination of the means to achieve a wholesome balance is outside the scope of this thesis, a few suggestions can be made about movement from the extremities of the matrix toward the center. Movement in a cognitive direction (i.e. from the *affective* side of the matrix toward the center) requires learning what others are actually thinking (not just feeling) about their own behavior. In the reverse direction, movement from the *cognitive* side of the matrix toward the center occurs as a result of building (or improving) relationships in such a way that we are more engaged with the actual feelings—not just the ones we make up in our heads—that accompany behaviors. On the vertical axis of the matrix, moving out of the region of *self* toward the center (i.e. in the direction of the *other*) requires that we humbly accept responsibility for our own actions, thoughts, and emotions; then we must find ways to humanize (make familiar) the other person or group. Those who wish to move away from an extreme identification with the *other* toward the center (and toward *self*) must learn to reflect

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that propose a theory describing autism in terms of hypersensitivity. McLaren, 290, n. 7. For some astute questions raised about Baron-Cohen's methodology, see Thomas Schramme, "The Role of Empathy in an Agential Account of Morality: Lessons from Autism and Psychopathy," in *Forms of Fellow Feeling: Empathy, Sympathy, Concern and Moral Agency*, ed. Neil Roughley and Thomas Schramme (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 312–14. Baron-Cohen's findings are detailed in Simon Baron-Cohen, "Empathy Deficits in Autism and Psychopaths: Mirror Opposites?," in *Navigating the Social World: What Infants, Children, and Other Species Can Teach Us*, ed. Mahzarin R. Banaji and Susan A. Gelman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 212; Simon Baron-Cohen, *Zero Degrees of Empathy: A New Theory of Human Cruelty and Kindness* (New York: Penguin, 2011), 108.

critically on personal relationships and establish boundaries that differentiate *self* from

the *other*. Later chapters will expand on this brief recommendation to describe some

helpful skills related to teaching practices that are guided by the virtue of empathy. In

the next section, I will explain how empathy can act as a guide.

2.4 Empathy as a Focal Concept

I am an amateur photographer, and since my wife and I enjoy hiking, my

camerawork is mostly outdoors, where lighting is often a challenge. Although most

cameras provide sufficient options to accommodate a variety of conditions, sometimes

additional help is required for setting up the desired scene. Specialized lenses and filters

offer a means for controlling or augmenting the camera's view. For example, a

polarizing lens only allows light rays that are traveling in one direction to enter the

camera, thus reducing glare from normally scattered light. The intended subject can then

be viewed and photographed in a controlled context that prioritizes the direction of

light. Similarly, it is possible to consider a subject of study in a controlled state that

prioritizes a specific concept. The "lens" used to examine the subject constrains the

perspective so that certain attributes are more (or less) evident. Assuming that the lens

does not distort the veracity of the image, we would expect particular aspects of the

subject to be highlighted in a way that an unfiltered view might not reveal.

Any of the virtues can be used as a lens onto a given subject. As an example,

consider how a court of law depends on the virtue of *truth* as a lens that reveals what is

most significant about the case at hand. As each witness is cross-examined, the jury, the

attorneys, and the judge are looking for evidence of truth in the stories being told. The

virtue of *justice* is relied upon in a similar fashion in the same setting. As a biblical

example, the virtue of *mercy* was the focal concept in the observance of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–

55; cf. Isa 61:1–3), and it later became the centerpiece in Jesus's ministry (Luke 4:18–21).

Notice how mercy focuses the practices of Jubilee:

> The jubilee traditions of the Bible are not a set of divine prescriptions amounting
> to a systematic scheme for achieving justice in our time. Rather, they concretize
> the virtue of mercy, combining the closely knit meanings of mercy as these relate
> to the whole of human need: forgiveness of sin and forgiveness of debt, freedom
> from physical and economic bondage, and freedom from bondage to evil and,
> ultimately, death.[93]

This example of the biblical Jubilee highlights the importance of the narrative and

purpose behind the use of virtue. No group other than Israel has attempted such an

embodiment of mercy because God's people have a unique story and *telos*. Furthermore,

we might observe that the virtue of *justice* highlights a broader scope of interpersonal

behaviors in a Jubilee-centered environment (where it is joined with *mercy*) than in a

strictly legal context.

In the Christian context, the ultimate picture of *empathy* as a virtue is the

incarnation of Jesus Christ. God becoming human is the definitive picture of what is

meant by "being with" people. *Immanuel* ("God with us") is the foremost image of

empathy (Isa 7:14; Matt 1:23; cf. John 1:14). Robert Katz, a leading psychologist,

recognizes the significance of Jesus's incarnation:

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[93] Childs Jr., *Faith, Formation, and Decision*, 66–67. Childs cites the following: Sharon H. Ringe, *Jesus,
Liberation, and the Biblical Jubilee: Images for Ethics and Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 29–30;
Karen Lebacqz, *Justice in an Unjust World* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1987), 122–35.

> Dramatized in the person of Jesus who walked among men, the divine message was communicated more directly and intimately and salvation was made more comprehensible. The theme of empathic identification is prominent in religious literature, in ceremony, and in liturgy. With instinctive wisdom, religious seers endorsed empathy as an ethical discipline, recognizing the fact that altruistic feelings are generated in empathic role-taking.[94]

When *empathy* is the lens on Christian activity, the narrative behind the activity becomes evident: the incarnation of Christ is revealed in practices that emphasize God's purpose for humanity. Moreover, the identity that is given by Christ to the church (both as community and as individuals) is driven by God's purposes rather than secular motivations that "place value exclusively on performance and measurable results with no real consideration for why teachers are getting the results they are getting."[95]

The intent of this thesis is to examine specific aspects of education in the Christian context in such a manner that they are illuminated (and strengthened) by the virtue of empathy—specifically as evidenced in the incarnation of Christ and the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church community. This approach will help define the most significant aspects of church education and will help us understand better how the heart of a teacher is shaped by empathic practices.

2.5 Empathy and Christian Education

Can a virtue be learned and taught? With respect to Christian virtues, Athanasius of Alexandria (c. AD 296–373) claimed, "One cannot possibly understand the

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[94] Katz, *Empathy*, 32.

[95] Reiss and Neporent, *The Empathy Effect*, 101.

teaching of the saints unless one has a pure mind and is trying to imitate their life."[96]

Some contemporary scholars suggest that this imitation of moral excellence requires

guidance: "Qualities of character can be learned by intentional, guided imitation so that

one's reasoning, passions, and actions more closely resemble those of moral experts."[97]

Hauerwas maintains that the help we need is available *in Christ*: "Christian virtue is not

so much initiated action but response to a love relation with God in Christ."[98] Likewise,

empathy as a virtue can be learned by imitating Christ and his followers, directed by

God's Spirit. We are formed "in the image of Christ" as both God's gift and our calling

(Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18). Explaining God's empathy toward us, Cyril of Alexandria (c. AD

376–444) described Christ as "blending Himself, as it were, with our nature … in order

that … He might enable man to share and partake of the Nature of God."[99] Athanasius

said it even more simply: "He, indeed, assumed humanity that we might become

God."[100] Christians develop the virtue of empathy by engaging in various practices of

imitating Christ, who embodies the empathy of God.

    Like other virtues, empathy is acquired from habitual exercise and "a gradual

buildup of the appropriate characteristics."[101] As James K. A. Smith explains, "the

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[96] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation: The Treatise De Incarnatione Verbi Dei*, trans. A religious of C.S.M.V. (Sister Penelope Lawson) (New York: MacMillan Company, 1946), 39 (§9.57).

[97] Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt, "Introduction," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), 2.

[98] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 68.

[99] Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John, Vol. 2, John IX-XXI*, trans. Thomas Randell (London: Walter Smith, 1885), Book XI, Chapter 11, http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/ cyril_on_john_11_book11.htm.

[100] Athanasius, *On the Incarnation*, 38 (§8.54).

[101] Hauerwas and Pinches, *Christians among the Virtues*, 152.

motions and rhythms of embodied routines train our minds and hearts so that we develop habits—sort of attitudinal reflexes—that make us tend to act in certain ways toward certain ends."[102] The necessary learning process for developing empathic skills requires very concrete, repetitive exercises of interacting with God, community, and individuals. Augustine of Hippo encouraged Christians to sympathize with others who shared their plight, accentuating "the medicinal power in good works of mercy." He begged people "to recognize their own wounds—'to fear what you have not been, to remember what you have been, and to consider what you may be'—and thus to show mercy to others as God had shown and would yet show mercy to them. And, he insisted, these works of mercy always had to be done with great sensitivity, with graciousness and humility."[103] Works of mercy are works of empathy, and they take many forms as Christians pursue acts of love directed toward nonbelievers as well as believers.

A person's inner character—what I am calling *heart*—is an accumulation of habits that produces (and is eventually guided by) certain dispositions or virtues. Tom Lickona writes, "Character matters—in every sphere of society. … At the end of the day, the most important measure of a society is not its economic wealth, its technological genius,

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[102] Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom*, 59.

[103] William Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2014), 335–36. The author quotes (using his own translation) from Augustine, *Sermon* 259.3–5.

or its military might; it is the character of its people."[104] Therefore, character development (or moral education) is not only about the right *in*formation concerning procedures, obligations, and responsibilities; rather, it is a matter of *formation*: "the inscription of good habits (virtue) as the construction of character. And such moral formation happens by means of practice."[105]

As I mentioned earlier, empathy is grounded in a narrative (in this case, the Christian story) and it is developed through practices that align us with God's purposes. The essence of empathic teaching consists of connecting hearts together in an environment of shared character development. This sharing and inner growth occurs both inside and outside the classroom, and it is based on "the principle that we comprehend those whom we resemble. … In the moment of empathy our sense of similarity or identity is made more intense and more vivid."[106] Practices of empathic teaching and learning reach across human differences in order to transcend prejudice and pride. Hoffman summarized the challenge of empathic education:

> To create a concept of oneness with others, moral educators may have to point
> up the emotional commonalities that exist across groups despite the differences
> in social structure, culture, and physical appearance. These emotional
> commonalities include similar fears, anxieties, and life goals. They include
> similar emotional responses to being applauded, criticized, and treated unfairly,
> and similar emotional responses to universal life crises and significant events
> such as attachment, separation, loss, and aging.[107]

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[104] Thomas Lickona, "Developing the Ethical Thinker and Responsible Moral Agent," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*, ed. Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), 41.

[105] Smith and Smith, "Introduction: Practices, Faith and Pedagogy," 8.

[106] Katz, *Empathy*, 185.

[107] Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 294.

In this chapter, we have examined the nature of empathic behaviors and how they operate. I have described empathy as the capacity to identify with the feelings and perspectives of another person to such an extent that the individual feels understood. Such an activity creates a safe and respectful environment for sharing thoughts, feelings, behaviors, intentions, and values. The importance of understanding empathy as a virtue is that we can view it as an element of a larger narrative related to God's love. In fact, empathy can be used as an effective lens (i.e. focal concept) for revealing God's ongoing story in the lives of the people with whom we work and minister. In the church's teaching ministry, the virtue of empathy gives precedence to the incarnation of God's Son in every encounter. The purpose of church education is God's purpose for humanity: *Immanuel*—"God with us."

The next chapter will consider how spiritual practices incorporate empathy to shape the development of church teachers. Various practices of liturgy and ministry form empathic behaviors and skills, contributing to the connectedness of every participant. We will begin to comprehend how the process of teaching and learning is itself a key practice, one in which empathy is a form of receiving and appreciating other people as gifts from God.

3. Teaching as Practice

When the lens of empathy is held up to the various activities encompassed by programs of education in the church, which aspects of teaching are significant? This chapter begins with an examination of the nature of learning and teaching among Christian adults, followed by some scrutiny of Christian practices. In this context, I pose the question of whether teaching should be considered as a spiritual practice. How does teaching conform to (or conflict with) the definition of spiritual practices that I adopt in this thesis? The result of this study consists of two distinct (but related) teaching practices that highlight the qualities of empathy. Both of these practices are built upon specific empathic skills that will be discussed in later chapters.

A popular conception of teaching represents it as an assigned role given to an individual for the limited purpose of facilitating a forum for the transfer of information. Such a notion often promotes an expectation of proficiency in a subject and superiority in knowledge, so that only a relatively small number of people seek roles as nonprofessional teachers—even in the church. Certainly, the Bible refers to a *gift* of teaching, suggesting that some people are helped in special ways by God's Spirit (Rom 12:6–8; 1 Cor 12:28–30; Eph 4:11–13). Also, the biblical authors warned that teaching is a

serious endeavor to not be taken lightly (1 Tim 4:16; Jas 3:1),[1] suggesting that only a

distinct subgroup of Christians were teachers (e.g. the leaders described in 1 Tim 3:2).

However, Jesus encouraged all of his disciples to be *like him* as a teacher (Matt 10:25;

Luke 6:40). *Any* servant of the Lord may have the aptitude to teach (2 Tim 2:24–26). The

writer of the book of Hebrews laments that the entire church has missed opportunities to

be teachers (Heb 5:12). On the one hand, as Locke Bowman asserts, "All Christians are,

in some degree, teachers."[2] However, as Augustine of Hippo pointed out, only Christ is

the true teacher; everyone else learns from him.[3] Therefore, we must first understand the

dynamic between teaching and learning—the correlation between teachers and

learners—so that we might clarify who in the church should teach and what that role

entails.

The biblical concept of learning is grounded in knowing and respecting (literally,

"fearing") the Lord God (Deut 6:1–2, 13, 24; 10:12, 20; 31:12–13).[4] The principle of

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[1] Specific warnings include cautions regarding the teaching of a different doctrine from the apostles (1 Tim 1:3–7; 6:3–5; Titus 1:10–11; 2 John 9–10) and the grasping of authority over other leaders (Matt 23:8; 1 Tim 2:8–15).

[2] Bowman Jr., *Teaching Today*, 81.

[3] William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 69–70. Harmless includes a translation of Augustine, *De Magistro* (*On the Teacher*), 11.36–12.40. The idea of Christ as the "inner teacher" also appears in some of Augustine's homilies (e.g. *Sermon* 134.1.1; *Sermon* 293A.6).

[4] The Hebrew root למד (*lmd*) is one of twelve words that refer to teaching in the Old Testament, and it specifically encompasses both learning and teaching. Cognates of this word are used to describe both the teachers of the law and the students or apprentices of the law. In fact, the Jewish Talmud derives its name

learning from the Lord and embodying his instruction is prominent in Psalm 119; the

psalmist delights in learning (and obeying) God's ordinances in order to declare them in

the presence of others (Psa 119:13, 46, 54, 79). Certainly God is the source of all truth,

and the role of the learner in the Jewish/Christian context has been not only to accept

instruction but also to pass it on to others—to children (Exod 12:26–27; Deut 6:20–25;

Josh 4:19–24), to fellow Jews (Acts 4:1–2), to foreigners (2 Chron 6:32–33; Acts 8:29–36;

10:17–48), and even to all the world (Matt 28:19–20). A key aspect of learning is to

embody and communicate what is received.

Greek culture following the Classical period (fifth and fourth centuries BC)

largely adopted the idea of Socrates and Plato that learning primarily consists of

recollection.[5] However, most Jewish and Christian writers continued to use language

that described learning as a process that may consist of receiving instruction, gaining

familiarity, or appropriating knowledge through experience or practice.[6] Jewish wisdom

literature often made the claim that learning must precede speech or teaching (Sirach

18:19), and most people learned about Jesus and God's plan in the context of group

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from the same root. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, eds., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981), 480, §1116.

[5] Kittel and Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 552–53, "manthánō".

[6] The primary word that is translated "learning" in the New Testament is μανθάνω (*manthánō*). Walter Bauer et al., eds., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature (BDAG)*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 615.

meetings (e.g. Acts 16:13–15). A Christian's transformation is achieved in relationship

with the Triune God and with people who demonstrate practices that reflect Christ.[7]

Therefore, a Christian teacher might be anyone who appreciates and engages with those

who are learning, while honoring the Lord who provides the message and clearly

representing the implications of that message.

What would it look like if more Christians were imitating the teaching methods

of Jesus and spreading the good news in the ways that he did? The Christian virtue of

empathy guides believers toward practices which imitate Jesus. The nature of empathy

is fundamentally relational (i.e. a means of identifying people's feelings, thoughts, and

perspectives), and what comes into focus for us is the way that God's story operates in

the intersecting lives of people. Augustine understood that "when people are affected by

us as we speak and we by them as they learn, we dwell in the other and thus both they,

as it were, speak in us what they hear, while we, in some way, learn in them what we

teach."[8] As we observed in the last chapter, the ultimate picture of empathy as a virtue is

the incarnation of Jesus Christ. As Jesus came to be *with* humanity, so also we are called

to be with people (compare Matt 1:23 with Matt 28:19–20). As Gregory Boyle is fond of

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[7] L. Gregory Jones, *Transformed Judgement: Toward a Trinitarian Account of the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 3, 63, 75.

[8] Harmless, *Augustine and the Catechumenate*, 266. The translation is from *De catechizandis rudibus* 12.17.

saying, "The strategy of Jesus is not centered in taking the right stand on issues, but rather in standing in the right place—with the outcast and those relegated to the margins."[9] Jesus's identity as *Immanuel* ("God with us") reveals the empathic behaviors that help develop Christian character.

The lens of empathy highlights what is taking place in our relationships. Robert Banks suggests that "our effectiveness as teachers flows ultimately from who we are and how we relate as much as what we do."[10] Thus, our identity and purpose are significant factors in shaping behaviors. Laurent Daloz claims that our success in fostering growth depends on our attitude toward those whom we lead: "For when the aim of education is understood to be the *development* of the whole person—rather than knowledge acquisition, for instance—the central element of good teaching becomes the provision of *care* rather than use of teaching skills or transmission of knowledge."[11] The lens of empathy clarifies the significance of each participant being fully attentive or "incarnate" on behalf of each other. Parker Palmer describes this sort of presence as "a pledge to engage in a mutually accountable and transforming relationship, a relationship forged of

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[9] Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 72.

[10] Robert Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education: Exploring a Missional Alternative to Current Models* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 170.

[11] Laurent A. Daloz, *Mentor: Guiding the Journey of Adult Learners* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999), xix. Italics are original.

trust and faith in the face of unknowable risks."[12] He goes on to explain that certain

practices enable and sustain such relationships: "If we are to reform our teaching and

our way of knowing the world, we must allow our hearts to be known by the love and

truth in which they were first formed. We must practice disciplines that permit love and

truth to re-form our hearts, disciplines that empower us to do the sort of teaching that

can help re-form our students, our schools, and our world as well."[13] In the next section,

such disciplines or practices will be further defined and examined.

3.1 Defining Practices

Every form of cooperative human activity has specific practices (or, more

formally, a *praxis*) that guide(s) individual and collective behavior. Explanations of these

activities range from mundane tasks to obscure sacramental rituals, and lists of practices

(or disciplines) abound. The following paragraphs outline a range of perspectives

regarding spiritual practices, from which I will derive the definition to be used

throughout the remainder of this thesis.

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[12] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 31.

[13] Palmer, 108.

Dykstra and Bass provide a helpful comparison of three perspectives on

Christian practices.[14] The first category considers practices as socially meaningful actions

that create space for theological reflection in the midst of ordinary routines. Guided by

the thoughts of Pierre Bourdieu, Kathryn Tanner argues that individuals discern the

"needs of the moment" in order to guide them to make decisions regarding which

actions (and even beliefs) are appropriate.[15] She states, "Rather than having a rigidly

fixed structure, practices in general are fluid and processional in nature, working

through improvisation and ad hoc response to changing circumstances."[16] A similar

model has been applied to clergy practice as a "transformative art, reinvesting inherited

traditions with new meanings and strategies in response to changing circumstances and

shifting contexts."[17] Such an *improvisational approach* to practices motivates quick

responses in social contexts, but may lack adequate reliance upon accepted traditions to

foster effective education of future leaders.

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[14] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "A Theological Understanding of Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 20–21.

[15] See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977); Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

[16] Kathryn Tanner, "Theological Reflection and Christian Practices," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 230.

[17] Charles R. Foster et al., *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and the Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 23.

A second definition of Christian practices draws upon ancient spiritual disciplines and exercises in which people engage for the purpose of drawing nearer to what is sacred. In order to emphasize the power of divine grace rather than human achievements, Sarah Coakley describes practices that are distinctively Christian and are followed so that a person becomes an "unimpeded receptacle of infused grace."[18] She presents such practices as "the *precondition* for trinitarian thinking of a deep sort."[19] For example, Ignatius of Loyola wrote the *Spiritual Exercises* in the sixteenth century as a structure for learning to love God and other people in order "to overcome oneself, and to order one's life."[20] One might consider this model a *sacramental approach* to practices, and one of its strengths is that it emphasizes the necessity of the context of tradition necessary for spiritual formation. However, as Winner recognizes, ecclesial practices (e.g. eucharist, prayer, and baptism) inherently carry a risk of distortion whenever devotion to them becomes misguided.[21] Whereas the first definition of practices

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[18] Sarah Coakley, "Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 80.

[19] Sarah Coakley, *God, Sexuality, and the Self: An Essay "On The Trinity"* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 16. Italic are original.

[20] Ignatius Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: The Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. George E. Ganss (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), 129 (§21). Quoted in Karen-Marie Yust and E. Byron Anderson, *Taught By God: Teaching and Spiritual Formation* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2006), 142.

[21] Lauren F. Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice: On Wayward Gifts, Characteristic Damage, and Sin* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 167–68.

highlights the power of the practitioner, this second construal features the authority of

the institution in which the practices take place.

The third perspective is influenced by MacIntyre's understanding of social

practices in the context of human virtues. According to MacIntyre,

> By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially
> established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that
> form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of
> excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of
> activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human
> conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.[22]

The significance of this definition lies in its *cooperative approach*, connecting to a group

that recognizes certain moral/spiritual benefits which are "realized in the very activity of

carrying out particular practices."[23] Craig Dykstra and others have supplemented

MacIntyre's description by focusing the purpose (*telos*) of Christian practices on the

presence of God being revealed to us. Dykstra describes

> the practices of the Christian faith as habitations of the Spirit. They are not,
> finally, activities we do to make something spiritual happen in our lives. Nor are
> they duties we undertake to be obedient to God. Rather, they are patterns of
> communal action that create openings in our lives where the grace, mercy, and
> presence of God may be made known to us. They are places where the power of
> God is experienced. In the end, these are not ultimately our practices but forms
> of participation in the practice of God.[24]

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[22] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

[23] Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989), 9.

[24] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 66.

These are fundamentally practices of community; "church practices *are* the church's

participation in God's own life" because the church is Christ's body—the evidence that

the Godhead has adopted humanity.[25] Dykstra goes a step further, saying,

"Communities do not just engage in practices, in a sense, they *are* practices."[26]

The definition of Christian practices that will be used in this thesis follows the

third perspective as augmented by Dykstra. In his words, a spiritual practice is "an

ongoing, shared activity of a community of people that partly defines and partly makes

them who they are."[27] Practices are done "in response to and in light of God's active

presence for the life of the world."[28] By anchoring the resulting benefits in God rather

than in humanity or in the practices themselves, this understanding differs from

MacIntyre's explanation. Our participation in God's redemptive plan involves both the

grace-empowered freedom to enjoy the blessings of such practices and also the divinely-

disciplined formation to continue growing in grace.[29] This paradox is exemplified in the

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[25] L. Roger Owens, *The Shape of Participation: A Theology of Church Practices* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2010), 2, 45, 89, 93, 125, 183. Italics are original.

[26] Craig Dykstra, "Reconceiving Practice in Theological Inquiry and Education," in *Virtues and Practices in the Christian Tradition: Christian Ethics after MacIntyre*, ed. Nancy Murphy, Brad J. Kallenberg, and Mark Thiessen Nation (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 1997), 174. Italics are original.

[27] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 48, n. 16.

[28] Craig Dykstra and Dorothy C. Bass, "Times of Yearning, Practices of Faith," in *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 5.

[29] Serene Jones, "Graced Practices: Excellence and Freedom in the Christian Life," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 55.

realization that such practices are both facilitated by faith and generative of faith. There

is something for us to do, but it is not our "doing" that creates the "goods" we seek. The

result is produced by the community functioning in Christ, empowered by God's Spirit.

The spiritual practices that I will be discussing are, as Richard Foster asserts, "an inward

and spiritual reality, and the inner attitude of the heart is far more crucial than the

mechanics for coming into the reality of the spiritual life. … [Practices] allow us to place

ourselves before God so that he can transform us."[30] We do not obligate God through

our activities, even when we are doing them out of obedience. They are instead the sort

of activities that create space in which we allow the Spirit to operate and we respond to

God's presence. Paul encouraged the church in Rome "to present your bodies as a living

sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship" (Rom 12:1). As

we commune with God and with each other, we are strengthened and equipped to live

sacrificial lives.

  The remainder of this chapter will examine the sort of spiritual practices that are

appropriate for a ministry of teaching. First, I will address the question of whether

teaching might be considered as a spiritual practice. Then two specific practices that

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[30] Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), 3, 7.

align with my definition will be presented with a view to how they function in

relationship with Christ, community, and the individual self.

3.2 Is Teaching a Practice?

In the New Testament letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul prays for the

church's spiritual growth:[31]

> [16] I pray that, according to the riches of his glory, he may grant that you may be strengthened in your inner being with power through his Spirit, [17] and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love. [18] I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, [19] and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. [Eph 3:16–19]

Paul's objective in reaching out to these Christians is to strengthen them—so that each

might be supported "in your inner being" (εἰς τὸν ἔσω ἄνθρωπον).[32] The companion

phrase, "in your hearts" (ἐν ταῖς καρδίαις ὑμῶν) amplifies the intention that something

significant is happening within these Christians. Gordon Fee describes this inner self as

"not only the seat of personal consciousness, but the seat of our moral being."[33] Paul is

praying for the development of their character, which in addition to being grounded in

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[31] Some scholars debate whether Paul actually wrote the Epistle to the Ephesians; nevertheless, I will refer to the author as "Paul." The authorship is not critical for my discussion, as long as the normative significance of the canonic letter is accepted.

[32] Peter refers to the "inner self" (ὁ κρυπτὸς τῆς καρδίας ἄνθρωπος) in 1 Peter 3:4—literally "the hidden person of the heart." Peter's wording combines the same thoughts found in Paul's statement.

[33] Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 696.

love, is empowered by the Holy Spirit and consists of knowing the love of Christ and being filled with God's abundance. Since he is writing to Christians, Paul is not praying for their conversion here; he is praying that they may "'be all that God wants them to be', that is, spiritually mature."[34] In this section, we will explore the sort of preparation necessary for Christians to develop capable, godly character.

It should be clear from Paul's prayer that neither he nor any other leader could transfer people into this glorious relationship with God. There is no practice of teaching (at least in the traditional understanding of human teaching) that can effect such a result. Furthermore, the conventional notion of teachers as facilitators of information does not correspond to the definition of practices that was presented in the previous section. In order to qualify as a Christian practice in this study, there must be grace-empowered participation with God and divinely-disciplined formation. It becomes a *practice* when the church and the Spirit are engaged in the spiritual formation of the teacher as well as the students. So is there such a concept as a "teaching practice"? In order to answer this question, we must first understand the sort of "teaching" that Paul might have expected Christians (including himself) to offer to others. He instructed his friend Timothy to take

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[34] Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 266.

what Paul had taught him and "entrust [it] to faithful people who will be able to teach others as well" (2 Tim 2:2). What do practices such as this look like?

Teaching is undeniably dependent on learning, so perhaps the practice we seek is one of *learning* rather than teaching. Paulo Freire claims, "There is, in fact, no teaching without learning. One requires the other. … Whoever teaches learns in the act of teaching, and whoever learns teaches in the act of learning.[35] Yet, he goes on to emphasize that *teachers have a specific role*, and it "is essentially one of inciting the student to produce his or her own comprehension of the object."[36] Teachers have a peculiarly significant function in *guiding* learners on a spiritual journey. They bring something to the educational situation that is not already there, something that is a gift to the students, transcending the subject material. In other words, the gift of teaching is much more than the gift that the teacher receives; it is also the gift of grace that the teacher *offers.*[37] Sara Little describes the role of teaching in the following way:

> Teaching is that offering on the part of the designated teacher of a structure and a process within which the intentional learner may be exposed to the integrity of the subject and supported in his/her efforts to understand and assimilate the meaning of that subject for himself/herself.[38]

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[35] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 30–31.

[36] Freire, 106.

[37] Sara Little, *To Set One's Heart: Belief and Teaching in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1983), 89. Also see Gert J. J. Biesta, *The Beautiful Risk of Education* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2014), 44.

[38] Little, *To Set One's Heart*, 9.

Locke Bowman suggests that the teacher functions metaphorically as a "midwife" to help learners bring forth new ideas.[39] The intent of this thesis is to discover practices and skills of teaching which cause spiritual learning to take place and to be handed on to others.[40]

Using empathy to focus our vision reveals some unexpected results. First, Jesus did not establish a "school" in the sense that we consider places of learning today. As Robert Banks points out, "it was not *preparation* of the Twelve *for* mission that was uppermost in his mind, but *engagement* of the Twelve *in* mission."[41] Jesus's goal for his disciples was not to create teachers, per se (in Matt 23:8, Jesus discouraged them from regarding themselves as teachers), but he sought instead to develop the spiritual character of a few who would exhibit the presence of Christ and the Spirit in their lives and pass on the transformative learning to others. Even though schools and teachers were familiar concepts among the Scribes in the first century, neither Jesus nor the apostles used that model for growing the kingdom.[42] Collinson reminds us that Jesus's

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[39] Bowman Jr., *Teaching Today*, 93.

[40] Dykstra lists a range of significant Christian practices, most of which are helpful for teachers. He includes acts of worship, attention to Scripture and the church's experience, prayer, confession, service, generosity, forgiveness, hospitality, struggling and suffering together, and care for one another. Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 42–43.

[41] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 111. Italics are original.

[42] Dominic F. Ashkar, *Road to Emmaus: A New Model for Catechesis* (San Jose, CA: Resource Publications, 1993), 113.

relationship with his disciples was expressed "not only by travelling together but through giving and receiving hospitality, sharing meals, pastoral care for those in need, prayer, sharing good and bad news and even an all night fishing trip. … And as they experienced God's love they were able to display it towards others."[43] Jesus focused on practical life applications and experiences rather than abstract instruction. The apostle Paul recognized that he was a teacher (1 Tim 2:7; 2 Tim 1:11), but he described his ministry as a "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor 5:18–19) and he saw himself as a "servant of the gospel" (Eph 3:7; Col 1:23). He was mainly interested in the *pattern* of teaching that helped people mature in Christ (Rom 6:17; Col 1:28; 2 Tim 1:13). The practices of teaching in the early church were practices of building relationships for the purpose of joining people to Christ.

A second unexpected result of looking at the empathic aspects of teaching is that practices of relationship are often conducted by those who have no "official" position. Pastors, shepherds, missionaries, worship leaders, and congregational staff are responsible for many of the formative processes in the church, and their vision often establishes the pattern of participation for all believers. Yet, it is often observable that "the distinct role of the whole people of God has been eclipsed by a preoccupation with

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[43] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 85.

the 'ministry' as a special class of individuals."[44] In order to equip the entire church for

ministry, a corresponding change is necessary in church leadership. Will Willimon

suggests that pastors "give away ministry to the laity and sit loose on the organizational

reins of the church in order to foster lay initiative and empowerment."[45] A significant

feature of empathic teaching is the *sharing of leadership* between clergy and laity, between

shepherds and sheep, between old and young. As a result, Christians who might be

interested in a role of leadership are no longer constrained to see themselves merely as

"instructional technicians," but are encouraged to become mediators of God's grace and

truth.[46] This shift in leadership requires greater attention to the *calling* that each believer

experiences from God, which includes discernment of God's gifts and each person's

sensitivities. Not everyone is called to teach, but everyone has a responsibility to

represent Christ to others. It is in community that we find our identity and it is also

there that we learn to live with integrity; our fellow believers often see our gifts and

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[44] Edward L. Hayes, "Theological Foundations for Adult Education," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 41. Greg Jones makes a similar analysis: "Indeed, we believe that one of the pathologies in contemporary ministry has been a tendency to understand the pastoral leader as primarily an 'expert' charged with tasks that are essentially distinct from the vocations of the laity and the congregation as a whole." L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 50.

[45] William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 288. For this particular point, Willimon cites Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism: Christianity in the New Millennium* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

[46] Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith*, 9.

calling before we do, and situations in communities outside the church stimulate and

motivate us to respond in meaningful directions. The practices we are looking for are

those that nurture the shared responsibility that we have for (and with) each other.

A third unexpected result of viewing teaching through the character of empathy

involves semantics. The range of biblical terminology usually associated with "teaching"

is more about instruction than connecting people,[47] so the language we use may

undermine our pursuit of empathic practices. Throughout the Bible, empathic

connection is often expressed with the term "compassion."[48] The Greek word

σπλάγχνον (*splánchnon*, the "gut" or "bowels") normally describes affective forms of

empathy,[49] and the word οἰκτίρμων (*oiktírmōn*, "compassionate") conveys the notion of

cognitive concern. Sometimes the two words appear together (Phil 2:1; Col 3:12), and in

the Philippian letter a pattern for developing the Christian's heart builds upon Jesus's

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[47] In the New Testament, the terminology for teaching is roughly divided between giving commands (e.g. **διατάσσω, ἐντέλλω, προστάσσω,** and **συντάσσω**), transferring information (e.g. **κατηχέω** and **παραγγέλλω**), and instructing (e.g. **διδάσκω**). All of these terms express an intent to create learning experiences but are often focused on behaviors rather than the person's inner character.

[48] One of the key Old Testament terms for "compassion" is **רַחוּם** (*raḥûm*, a cognate of **רחם**), which is often used in connection with **חֶסֶד** (*hessed*, "loving-kindness") to describe God (e.g. Exod 34:6; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2). In the New Testament, God's self-description is referred to in James 5:11 using the Greek words **πολύσπλαγχνος** (*polýsplanchnos*, a high degree of compassionate emotion) and **οἰκτίρμων** (*oiktírmōn*, concern about another's misery). Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 700, 850.

[49] The verb form (**σπλαγχνίζομαι,** *splanchnízomai*) is used to describe Jesus as having compassion for people on various occasions; it is also used to describe the compassionate actions of key characters in the parables of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:33) and the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:20). A Greek term that parallels **σπλάγχνον** (*splánchnon*) in meaning is **συμπαθής** (*sumpathēs*), the source of the English word "sympathy" (1 Pet 3:8; the verb form is used in Heb 4:15; 10:34). Bauer et al., 938, 958.

own example. Paul tells these Christians that they should have the same mind and the

same love as Christ (Phil 2:2), which means that their presence exhibits the very heart of

Christ. Furthermore, the church is to be a place where each member dwells in safety and

humility with the others, seeking the growth and blessings of one another (2:3–4).

Finally, Paul explicates what it means to be in relationship with Christ, as the Father

exalts those who give themselves to others (2:5–13). The letter describes practices of

identity and integrity in the church, and Parker Palmer explains how these qualities

work: "*Identity* lies in the intersection of the diverse forces that make up my life, and

integrity lies in relating to those forces in ways that bring me wholeness and life rather

than fragmentation and death."[50] The wholeness (i.e. integrity or *shālôm*) that we seek is

found in Christ, and such fullness is available to us when we practice identifying

ourselves with Christ.

This image of lifting up one another challenges most norms of teaching—even in

the church. Yet, Paulo Freire saw (in a politico-economic context charged with racial

inequities and tensions) that practices of education only benefit those whose identity

and integrity are shaped by love, respect, and reconciliation:

> It is fundamental for us to know that without certain qualities or virtues, such as
> a generous loving heart, respect for others, tolerance, humility, a joyful
> disposition, love of life, openness to what is new, a disposition to welcome

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[50] Palmer, "The Heart of a Teacher," 17. Italics are original.

change, perseverance in the struggle, a refusal of determinism, a spirit of hope, and openness to justice, progressive pedagogical practice is not possible. It is something that the merely scientific, technical mind cannot accomplish.[51]

This desire for mutual growth among diverse people drove Freire "to create possibilities for the construction and production of knowledge rather than to be engaged simply in a game of transferring knowledge."[52] This form of teaching is comprised of genuine practices in which any Christian can engage. Such practices may be discovered to be God's gift or calling to some individuals, and for others it is a way of participating in the kingdom. Mary Moore sees in such practices the act of sharing faith with one another, asserting that

> one can describe pedagogy, or teaching, as *an act of walking with, sharing with, acting with, remembering with, and constructing meaning with people in a learning community.* … Christian education thus includes the full life of the church— sharing and reflecting in classrooms, praying and planning with others, recreation, worship, and service in the community.[53]

Can teaching be considered a Christian practice? In the conventional sense of merely facilitating classroom activities, the answer would likely be "no." In the biblical sense of compassionate responsibility for one another, the answer is "yes." The irony is that when teaching is the end goal of the activity, it is *not* what we are calling a spiritual

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[51] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 108.

[52] Freire, 49.

[53] Mary Elizabeth Mullino Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2004), 13. Italics are original.

practice. As Francis Chan asserts, "The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them. Jesus's call to make disciples includes teaching people to be obedient followers of Jesus, but the teaching isn't the end goal. Ultimately, it's all about being faithful to God's call to love the people around you."[54] The spotlight should never be on the teaching itself, but rather on our Lord who transforms us. Moreover, when Christ is in the spotlight, as in the second chapter of Philippians, we see a pattern for shaping the Christian's heart: developing identity and integrity by imitating Christ.

In the following sections, I will describe two practices that follow this pattern with specific attention to the formation of identity and integrity. A practice of "formative presence" highlights the incarnational nature of the teacher's role and identity, and a practice of "resilient trust" establishes a framework for building and sustaining integrity. Both of these are genuine spiritual practices (according to the definition that I am using) because they are patterns of communal action in which the internal goods of God's presence and power are made available to us.[55] My objective in discussing these specific forms of teaching is to understand some concrete, underlying skills that help people (particularly teachers in the church) develop empathy.

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[54] Francis Chan and Mark Beuving, *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook, 2012), 44.

[55] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 66.

3.3 Teaching as Formative Presence

Our definitive example of empathy is the incarnation of Jesus Christ. The sort of relationship in which God is *with* humanity and people are *with* other people is exemplified by the Son of God, who "became flesh and lived among us" (John 1:14). When Nicodemus the Pharisee came to consult with Jesus (John 3:2), he said, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who has come from God; for no one can do these signs that you do apart from the presence of God." To be in the presence of Jesus is to be in the presence of God, the most holy place. It was in the Holy of Holies that God manifested his presence to the people (Exod 25:21–22; 1 Kgs 8:6–11), and Jesus is described with the same term (ἱλαστήριον, *hilastērion*) that described the ark's covering where God dwelt in the tabernacle (Rom 3:25; Heb 9:5).[56]

In his famous psalm of contrition, David pleaded with God to remain present, restoring to him the joy of salvation and a desire to obey, so that David might teach others about God's ways (Psa 51:11–13). God's presence was perceived through joy, motivation, and guidance. It was welcomed and it was feared. It is a place for listening

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[56] The Septuagint (LXX) uses this term for the lid on the ark of the covenant (כַּפֹּרֶת, *kappōret*), which was annually sprinkled with blood on the Day of Atonement (Exod 25:17–22; 38:5–8; Lev 16:2, 12–14; Num 7:89). Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 474.

(Acts 10:33) and also for speaking (2 Cor 2:17). God revealed his glory to Moses with the proclamation,[57]

> [6] … "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, [7] keeping steadfast love for the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, yet by no means clearing the guilty, but visiting the iniquity of the parents upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." [Exod 34:6–7]

The presence of the Triune God is an encounter that changes people. It is a *formative presence.* For example, Jesus's appearance to his disciples on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35) began with them discouraged, but after an extended conversation, they shared a meal and prayer that opened their eyes to his presence.[58] Moreover, Jesus did not leave his disciples alone, but sent the Holy Spirit to provide them with truthful guidance (John 14:15–26; 16:13–14). This same Spirit still exhibits God's presence in believers today (Rom 5:5), equipping, guiding, strengthening, and advocating for us.

A practice of formative presence is a representation of how God operates in us. Because we are "in Christ," we seek to imitate Jesus, following the guidance of the Spirit. In order to represent Christ, we must pay attention to him, to his message for us, and to the people around us. We must know *whose* we are as well as *who* we are in order to re-

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[57] God's self-description provides a foundational understanding of his character (i.e. his *presence*), and similar phrases appear throughout the Old Testament (e.g. Num 14:18; Deut 7:9–10; Neh 9:17; Pss 86:15; 103:8–10; 145:8–9; Joel 2:13; Jon 4:2; Mic 7:18). In the New Testament, compare James 1:19–20.

[58] Ashkar, *Road to Emmaus*, 28–29.

present what he has already shown us. In order for the practice to be formative, we need

to be *with* people and connect with them. Miriam Raider-Roth explains, "To connect in

relationships means to reach outside ourselves to tune in, to be present, to see the

'other,' and to respond empathically."[59] An essential ingredient for connecting with

others is to have a "deepening connection with one's self," which is often referred to as

"authenticity."[60]

Laura Weaver and Mark Wilding describe educational practices using the

metaphor of a tree. The roots of the tree represent the foundational underpinnings that

support and inform five practical dimensions of engaged teaching which, in turn, are

useful for developing skills in both teachers and students.[61] The five dimensions

constitute some of the most significant aspects of a practice of formative presence:[62]

- *Cultivating an open heart* refers to the capacity to express warmth, compassion, care, authenticity, and, at times, vulnerability with students and colleagues.

- *Engaging the self-observer* means tapping into the part of ourselves that has the capacity to notice our own thoughts, behaviors, and triggers; reflect on what we notice; make conscious choices going forward; and shift our course of action when necessary.

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[59] Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 26.

[60] Raider-Roth, 27.

[61] Laura Weaver and Mark Wilding, *The 5 Dimensions of Engaged Teaching: A Practical Guide for Educators* (Boomington, IN: Solution Tree Press, 2011), 2–6.

[62] Weaver and Wilding, 21, 41, 57, 69, 87.

- *Being present* refers to our capacity to be awake, relaxed, and alert in the moment so that we can effectively engage with our students and colleagues.

- *Establishing respectful boundaries* is an essential part of our teaching practice, as it calls us to compassionately express our authority, take responsibility for ourselves and our classrooms, and clearly define and communicate our limits.

- *Developing emotional capacity* includes expanding our emotional range, cultivating our emotional intelligence, developing emotional boundaries, creating emotional safety, and developing positive connections between emotions and learning.

In the following paragraphs, I intend to examine how our various connections with Christ, with others, and with ourselves develop a particular *presence* that influences people in *formative* ways. Also, I will summarize some of the difficulties inherent in this practice and how they might be addressed. Ultimately, the dimensions listed above factor into these relationships and call upon us to develop empathic skills.

3.3.1 Identity in Christ

The practice of formative presence underscores the importance of belonging to Christ, the one who reveals God to us and to the world. Johnson explains that "we are called to follow the One who says 'I am the truth' and to participate in the community created by that following. In the context of Christian education … to teach is to create the environment or space where we may be grasped by truth, follow it, practice it

together."[63] God is the one who first demonstrated how one's presence functions, so we must first attend to our identity in Christ. God's own practices, exercised through his Spirit, inculcate the patterns that we follow.[64] The Spirit transforms us, and we grasp God's presence through the Spirit dwelling in and with us. Our lives demonstrate that we believe God is ultimately in charge and deserves our allegiance more than other authorities in the world.

When Jesus announced his mission, he framed it in the context of both Scripture (Isa 61:1–3) and the local worshipping community in his hometown. There were no great fanfares, public announcements, or major productions—just an ordinary Sabbath reading in a rural synagogue. He was handed a scroll and he found what he wanted to read:

> [18] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, [19] to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." [Luke 4:18–19]

It is no wonder that the hearers were amazed. The carpenter's son was announcing the fulfillment of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–55)! Yet, here was the mission that Jesus established for himself: to change the world in humble, personal ways by his presence alone. Many

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[63] Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, 142.

[64] Reinhard Hütter, "Worship and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 206–7, n. 1.

people did not believe it was possible then, and many still do not believe it today. Even John the Baptist and his disciples were perplexed, so Jesus told them, "the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (Luke 7:22; cf. Isa 29:18; 35:5–6). The apostle Paul understood this mission as one of reconciliation, restoring people to God and to each other, despite the impossibility of such claims. This is the mission that informs our practices: God's people are a formative presence in the world (and in the church!) because God is healing and reconciling relationships.

3.3.2 Identity in Community

When Father Gregory Boyle asked for Mother Teresa's diagnosis of the world's problems, she replied that we have "forgotten that we belong to each other."[65] People want to *belong*. Meaningfulness is usually found in togetherness. The Christian community invites people into relationship with a purpose: God is making the world new. As Henri Nouwen points out, "we are not primarily for each other but for God. … Therefore, the Christian community is not a closed circle of people embracing each other, but a forward-moving group of companions bound together by the same voice

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[65] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 187.

asking for their attention."[66] The identity of the church is offered to the world, and that

identity is not lost in its association with the world. The practice of formative presence

emphasizes the value of God's own presence to such an extent that everyone's identity is

connected to him.

Paul's relationships with Titus and Timothy are illustrative for understanding

how formation for spiritual leadership works in community. Titus worked as a fellow

"brother," much like the connection between apprentice and master. Timothy, however,

was more like a "son" than an apprentice to Paul. Collinson describes Paul's method of

training as follows:

> Paul did not relate to Titus or Timothy in a formal academic setting like the
> rabbis with their students. The learning which occurred was very much life and
> ministry centred. Although Paul's letters to them contained teaching, it arose in
> response to the situations in which they found themselves, not some pre-
> determined curriculum. The world was their classroom.[67]

Paul describes Timothy's preparation in 1 Timothy 4:6–16. First he was nourished on

faith and sound teaching (4:6). He was trained in εὐσέβεια (eusébeia, "godliness")

because it has potential for benefiting both the present life and the life to come (4:7–8).

Our hope for life is in God who saves all who believe (4:10). Timothy's preparation ("the

things you must insist on and teach," 4:11) proceeded with emphasis on his own speech

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[66] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 154. Nouwen explains that the Greek word for "church" means "called *out*,"
emphasizing that Christians are part of the new rather than the old.

[67] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 129.

and conduct, exemplifying love, faith, and purity (4:12). This personal component was supplemented with the "reading," the "exhorting," and the "teaching" (4:13). The second term, "exhorting" (παράκλησις, *paráklēsis*, cf. Heb 13:22), refers to the presentation of a message that inspires and strengthens. The role of the third component, "teaching" (διδασκαλία, *didaskalía*, i.e. formal instruction), is to establish the message in the hearts of the listeners. All these aspects of teaching are developed in two ways: they flow from the spiritual "gift" that was *given* to Timothy, and they become evident as Timothy *gives* himself to carefully practice them. The final verse states that the result will be the salvation of himself and his hearers. Greg Couser explains, "It is this manner of life that promotes the fullest realization of God's saving work in Timothy's life and in the lives of those to whom he ministers in Ephesus (v. 16)."[68] Paul's approach to training Timothy focuses on "godliness" in both proclamation (i.e. the words spoken) and embodiment (i.e. the conduct exhibited). Paul is not attempting to *delegate* a task of teaching to Timothy, but rather showing how to *propagate* the message of the gospel to anyone whom Timothy encounters.

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[68] Greg A. Couser, "The Sovereign Savior of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus," in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 117.

Another example of formative presence is the use of catechetical instruction in the church prior to baptism. Learning the faith in a community of believers is "a powerful formative process for new Christians that concomitantly becomes a reformative process for the 'old' Christians who welcome them into the faith—perhaps because it combines so aptly the dimensions of belief, desire, and practice."[69] Between the second and third centuries, the preparations for baptism were expanded with catechetic instruction, resignation from improper professions, renunciation (and perhaps exorcism) of evil spirits, and a demonstration of sustained sober living.[70] By the time of Augustine of Hippo (fifth century), the candidates for baptism were "catechized, exorcized, and scrutinized."[71] Catechumens recited an affirmation of faith and were interrogated about their faith in order to ascertain the working of the Holy Spirit in their decision to be baptized.[72] Many of the creeds and confessions of the first several centuries were influenced by baptismal confessions, and the Apostles' Creed retained its

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[69] L. Gregory Jones, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education," in *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, ed. Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 193.

[70] Jack P. Lewis, "Baptismal Practices of the Second and Third Century Church," *Restoration Quarterly* 26, no. 1 (1983): 6–8.

[71] Everett Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 781. Citing Augustine, *On Faith and Works*, 6.9.

[72] J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3rd ed. (New York: David McKay Company, Inc., 1972), 95–98.

association with baptism.[73] The community's rituals of formative presence contributed theology and conviction to church councils as well as to individual lives throughout the history of Christianity.

The identity that is formed in community includes both an "open heart" and "respectful boundaries,"[74] and Christian teachers exemplify these characteristics. This is a paradox, for we are called to express vulnerability as well as responsibility. In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul addressed this conundrum when he told them to "bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2) but that "all must carry their own loads" (6:5). Without healthy boundaries, our hearts will be overwhelmed and will eventually shut out relationships. God designed us to love each other while maintaining our own wholeness, and that requires our identities to be both distinct and connected.[75] Our presence in community is formative when we grow and change *with* others—not *for* them and not *instead of* them. We can only change ourselves, but that change can be very influential.

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[73] David F. Wright, "The Baptismal Community," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160, no. 637 (March 2003): 12.

[74] Weaver and Wilding, *The 5 Dimensions of Engaged Teaching*, 21, 69.

[75] Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 241–42.

3.3.3 Identity in Self

Those of us who teach hope that our students will bring their "whole selves" to
class, and that means that we as leaders need to be willing to do so as well. The extent to
which we are open with others depends on our own personal wholeness and
vulnerability.[76] There are many factors that affect our relationship with a group
(including one's race, gender, class, education, and sexual orientation), and our ability to
be authentic begins with how we relate to ourselves. As we allow ourselves to be
known, we begin to truly know ourselves, and our world enlarges. Regarding our
relationship with God and with other people, Parker Palmer observes, "Paradoxically, as
we listen obediently to the voice of the other, our own speech becomes clearer and more
honest; through the other we learn much about ourselves."[77]

Our identity—our concept of self—profoundly affects everything in our lives. In
particular, one's attitude toward change and growth will determine how to perceive
success and failure, learning and achievement, leadership and followership, conflict and
reconciliation. Carol Dweck claims that we each have adopted one of two *mindsets*: a
fixed mindset that believes our qualities are "carved in stone" or a *growth mindset* that

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[76] Tisdell, *Exploring Spirituality and Culture in Adult Education and Higher Education*, 254.

[77] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 101.

believes our characteristics can be cultivated and changed.[78] Explaining how accurately

each type assesses itself, Dweck claims,

> If, like those with the growth mindset, you believe you can develop yourself,
> then you're open to accurate information about your current abilities, even if it's
> unflattering. … However, if everything is either good news or bad news about
> your precious traits—as it is with fixed-mindset people—distortion almost
> inevitably enters the picture. Some outcomes are magnified, others are explained
> away, and before you know it you don't know yourself at all.[79]

The practice of formative presence presumes that we expect growth and change—in

ourselves as well as others. None of us is a finished product. The apostle Paul told

Timothy that everyone would see his *progress*; yet, it would require that Timothy pay

close attention to his practices (1 Tim 4:15–16). In other words, he would become a "self-

observer."[80]

3.3.4 Challenges to Formative Presence

The practice of formative presence is an approach to empathic teaching that

engages our relationships with God, community, and self. The important focus of the

practice is growing in the life that we have in Christ, enabled by the Spirit of God. In

order for the practice to yield good "fruit," certain distractions should be avoided.

Significant obstacles arise when excessive attention is given to our *fears* and our *results*.

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[78] Carol S. Dweck, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006), 7–8.

[79] Dweck, 11.

[80] Weaver and Wilding, *The 5 Dimensions of Engaged Teaching*, 41.

Teachers know that their practice entails change and that change causes people to face their fears. Charles Foster says it well: "Teaching is, by nature, a disturbing activity."[81] There are deep awakenings, startling discoveries, difficult decisions, and conflicts over fundamental beliefs. Leaders are seldom prepared for the questions, worries, and accusations that engaged group study often precipitates. Fear comes upon us when we feel that our responsibility, integrity, or security is on the line. Fear of exposure, failure, or shame can diminish our courage to take risks. In our fearfulness, our ability to be fully present is diminished, and that, in turn, makes our practice less formative. The antidote to fear is love. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Parker Palmer suggests that teachers have opportunities to diminish fear by reclaiming the connectedness that fear destroys:

> Each time I walk into a classroom, I can choose the place within myself from which my teaching will come, just as I can choose the place within my students toward which my teaching will be aimed. I need not teach from a fearful place: I can teach from curiosity or hope or empathy or honesty, places that are as real within me as are my fears. I can have fear, but I need not be fear—if I am willing to stand someplace else in my inner landscape.[82]

A second obstacle to formative presence is that church growth is often regarded as a competition for improving membership statistics and results. Perhaps one of the

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[81] Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith*, 120–21.

[82] Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 57.

contributing factors is that educational perspectives in America have been influenced by

metaphors of the factory and the assembly line.[83] Furthermore, we find that in churches,

"the predominating paradigm for ministry is a composite of therapeutic, managerial,

and organizational development values."[84] Education becomes a means for perpetuating

the status quo or for "fixing" an outcome. Even spiritual disciplines can turn into ways

to address and repair various problems.[85] Paulo Freire pointed out that one of the

consequences for students is that they are regarded as "receptacles" to be filled by a

teacher. "The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better a teacher he is. The

more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better students they are.

… Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the

depositories and the teacher is the depositor."[86] Freire called this the "banking" concept

of education and it is ironically now held up as a "best practice" in school districts that

rely on standardized testing in the United States.[87] Furthermore, it is the approach often

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[83] Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 262.

[84] Johnson, *Christian Spiritual Formation in the Church and Classroom*, 137.

[85] Winner, *The Dangers of Christian Practice*, 180.

[86] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 58.

[87] Rice, "Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy," 34. John Dewey used a similar analogy, claiming that "the mind of the pupil is treated as if it were a cistern into which information is conducted by one set of pipes that mechanically pour it in, while the recitation is the pump that brings out the material again through another set of pipes. Then the skill of the teacher is rated by his or her ability in managing the two pipe-lines of flow inward and outward." John Dewey, *How We Think* (Boston: D. C. Heath & Co., 1933), 261.

used by Christian publishing houses to provide standard denominational materials.

However, Freire warned that it is a primary method for dominant classes to control

lower classes. Since this is a problem of educational authority distancing itself from the

learners, the solution is to reconnect with people. Jesus is our primary example of

formative, incarnate presence, and he found ways to connect with the lowliest people in

society. As Gregory Boyle explains,

> Jesus was not a man *for* others. He was one *with* others. There is a world of
> difference in that. Jesus didn't seek the rights of lepers. He *touched* the leper even
> before he got around to curing him. He didn't champion the cause of the outcast.
> He *was* the outcast. He didn't fight for improved conditions for the prisoner. He
> simply said, "I was in prison."[88]

A practice of formative presence encompasses those actions that make Christ known and

accessible to those who need his touch. As we exercise habits in which we call upon the

Holy Spirit to change people and situations, we ourselves are formed into examples of

empathic character.

3.4 Teaching as Resilient Trust

Parker Palmer has said that "*good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; good

teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*."[89] The previous section

described the practice of formative presence, which develops identity in the church

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[88] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 72.

[89] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 10, 149. Italics are original.

community. This section will introduce a practice that is aimed at cultivating *integrity*.

Integrity means *wholeness*, whether personally or in community, and it includes qualities

of honesty, congruence, humility, and courage.[90] Palmer says, "By choosing integrity, I

become more whole, but wholeness does not mean perfection. It means becoming more

real by acknowledging the whole of who I am."[91] Integrity is an important concept in

Hebrew wisdom literature, and the specific word *tōm* (תֹּם) refers to purity, innocence, or

completeness.[92] The Hebrew word *shālôm* (שָׁלֹום) is used in similar ways, often with a

broader connotation of wholeness, well-being, and peace.[93] The opening verses of

Psalm 26 connect "integrity" (תֹּם, *tōm*) with "trust" (בטח, *bāṭaḥ*, denoting whole-hearted

confidence in God):

> [1] Vindicate me, O LORD, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in
> the LORD without wavering. [2] Prove me, O LORD, and try me; test my heart and
> mind. [3] For your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to
> you. [Psa 26:1–3]

A teaching practice that underscores empathy will create "a place where

wholeness is welcomed and students can be honest, even radically open."[94] Such an

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[90] Stephen M. R. Covey and Rebecca R. Merrill, *The Speed of Trust: The One Thing That Changes Everything* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 62–65.

[91] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 13.

[92] Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament (HALOT)*, ed. M. E. J. Richardson, Study Ed. (Leiden: Brill Academic, 2001), 1743–44. Various forms of the word תֹּם (*tōm*) appear nine times in Job, nine times in Psalms, and eight times in Proverbs.

[93] Koehler and Baumgartner, 1506–10.

[94] bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Wisdom* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 21.

environment requires significant evidence of trust and trustworthiness, along with

sufficient motivation to face the challenges and risks of this level of openness. I am using

the phrase "resilient trust" to describe a practice of expressing steadfast commitment to

truthfulness and love in order to imitate Christ and increase solidarity. This sort of trust

is a mutual interdependence that consists of much more than simple reciprocal

transactions. Trust means making yourself vulnerable to another person (or group) in

such a way that their actions potentially expose your relationship to risk or

uncertainty.[95] In one of her popular presentations, Brené Brown examines the "anatomy

of trust"—also referred to as the "BRAVING Inventory":[96]

- *Boundaries:* You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's okay and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.

- *Reliability:* You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't overpromise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

- *Accountability:* You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

- *Vault:* You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

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[95] I am paraphrasing Charles Feltman, *The Thin Book of Trust; An Essential Primer for Building Trust at Work* (Bend, OR: Thin Book Publishing, 2008), 7.

[96] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 224–33. The "Anatomy of Trust" video is accessible at Brené Brown, "The Anatomy of Trust," *SuperSoul Sessions* (blog), accessed February 5, 2020, https://brenebrown.com/videos/anatomy-trust-video/.

- *Integrity:* You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.

- *Nonjudgment:* I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment. We can ask each other for help without judgment.

- *Generosity:* You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

Brown also explains how trust develops: "Trust is the stacking and layering of small moments and reciprocal vulnerability over time. Trust and vulnerability grow together, and to betray one is to destroy both."[97] This is a practice that requires ongoing support and renewal as everyone occasionally fails or disappoints. The *resilience* that I am incorporating here is about finding healthy ways to integrate difficult experiences into our lives—not merely enduring them or expecting to "bounce back" to some reality that no longer exists, but establishing a direction for the future.[98] In the following paragraphs, I will explore how we develop resilient trust in Christ, in community, and in ourselves. Some of the challenges associated with this practice will also be exposed.

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[97] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 34. A similar statement was made by an expert in cross-cultural studies: "Trust comes in small, incremental steps over time." Duane Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood: Serving the World in Christlike Humility* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 77.

[98] Eric Greitens, *Resilience: Hard-Won Wisdom for Living a Better Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2015), 22–25.

The various elements listed above in the "BRAVING Inventory" will help us identify some key empathic skills.

3.4.1 Integrity in Christ

In defining the Christian life, Brennan Manning claims that "the supreme need in most of our lives is often the most overlooked—namely, the need for an uncompromising trust in the love of God."[99] A quick scan through the Book of Psalms reveals the ineluctable faithfulness of God, and it is his faithfulness that makes him trustworthy. Moreover, Christ was faithful, so he is worthy of being trusted (Heb 3:1–6). Our faith is how we as receivers relate to God as the giver. Miroslav Volf refers to this faith as "empty hands held open for God to fill."[100] My faithfulness is imperfect, so I am never wholly trustworthy in the way that Christ is. My hope in Christ's redemption works together with my faith to shape the trust that God accepts from me.[101] Some contemporary descriptions of trust suggest that one must be "competent" in order to be trusted,[102] but people are not fully competent in their faith. We desire to behave

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[99] Brennan Manning, *Ruthless Trust: The Ragamuffin's Path to God* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 4.

[100] Miroslav Volf, *Free of Charge: Giving and Forgiving in a Culture Stripped of Grace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 43.

[101] Manning, *Ruthless Trust*, 87.

[102] For example, see Julie Combs, Stacey Edmonson, and Sandra Harris, *The Trust Factor: Strategies for School Leaders* (Larchmont, NY: Eye on Education, 2013), 56; Covey and Merrill, *The Speed of Trust*, 30; Rosemarye T. Taylor and Carol Chanter, *The Coaching Partnership: Tips for Improving Coach, Mentor, Teacher, and Administrator Effectiveness* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 41.

responsibly, but as Manning observes, "What we have failed to learn is that clarity, reassurance, and proof cannot create trust, sustain it, or guarantee any certainty of its presence."[103] In fact, trust motivates a person to behave in a particular way in the face of *uncertainty*—predisposed for action rather than passivity.[104] Therefore, my "reliability" is not entirely self-determined, but because I am "accountable" to Christ, I receive grace and help.[105]

Does God trust us? Since humanity is not completely trustworthy, we should not expect that he is obligated to have faith in mankind. Nevertheless, he has extended his favor and entrusted his message to people (Acts 7:44–46; 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 2:7). Jesus told his disciples a parable about some slaves entrusted with the property of their master (Matt 25:14–30; cf. Luke 19:11–27). The slaves who were deemed trustworthy were the ones who did something with what they were given, but there is no indication that *success* was the determining factor. They did not all have the same capabilities or resources, and only the one who withdrew in fear—doing nothing with what the master

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[103] Manning, *Ruthless Trust*, 113.

[104] Alexandra Michel and Stanton Wortham, *Bullish on Uncertainty: How Organizational Cultures Transform Participants* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 187–88. Michel and Wortham studied bankers who worked in an environment that relied on collaboration rather than individual expertise, and they found that such workers were open about their interdependence and lack of competence in order to succeed as a team.

[105] The terms "reliability" and "accountability" are part of Brown's "BRAVING Inventory." Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 225.

invested in him—was found untrustworthy. God's resilient trust surpasses our transgressions, and that is our model for extending trust to others. King David knew that his meager attempts to trust God were met by God's love and forgiveness: "steadfast love surrounds those who trust in the LORD" (Psa 32:10).

3.4.2 Integrity in Community

One of the most significant aspects of building trust in a community is the first item in Brown's "BRAVING Inventory": the recognition of "boundaries." Whenever there are relationships, there are interactions and interfaces between people that foster or diminish the cohesion of that group. Teaching situations have special dynamics that affect the nature of the relationship's mutuality. Both teacher and student can share in the process of learning (and teaching), but there are often specific expectations about their roles that define the limits of behavior. Despite such distinctions, Raider-Roth suggests that "mutuality occurs when students can see that they have had an impact on the teacher—that the teacher has learned from the student."[106] Boundaries establish how the relationships are open to new people and ideas; they also close off particular directions and connections. Henri Nouwen makes this point: "An intimate relationship between people not only asks for mutual openness but also for mutual respectful

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[106] Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 27.

protection of each other's uniqueness."[107] The trusting environment is constructed with attention to guarding each person's safety and privacy so that the challenges of being a member of the group are not overwhelming, embarrassing, or harmful. Katherine Schultz defines a "pedagogy of trust" as a learning environment characterized by mutual respect and a willingness to navigate the boundaries of difference between people.[108]

A community of trust is built upon truthfulness (which Brown includes in her list as "integrity"). The apostle Paul encouraged the churches to "speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another" (Eph 4:25). James Childs Jr. explains that "truthfulness regards the needs of the neighbor first, contributes to his or her well-being, and builds the trust that is the cornerstone of the community that agape seeks to realize."[109] The Holy Spirit is our guide into all truth (John 16:13), so a practice of resilient trust relies upon the Spirit to develop integrity in the community. As we practice trust and integrity, we will be demonstrating our love for the Lord and his impact on our lives. Love made truthfully plain is contagious.[110]

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[107] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 31.

[108] Katherine Schultz, "Listening in a Pedagogy of Trust," in *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 163.

[109] Childs Jr., *Faith, Formation, and Decision*, 137–38.

[110] The story was told by Fred Rogers that when Margaret McFarland, professor of child psychology at the University of Pittsburgh, wanted to introduce little children to the work of a sculptor, she told the artist, "I don't want you to teach sculpting. All I want you to do is to love clay in front of the children." As a result of

A pedagogy of trust guides the Christian teacher in the pursuit of

"accountability" (the third component in Brown's list). Every resource that contributes

to a Christian's maturity should emphasize the source of all knowledge and wisdom—

God himself.[111] Adequate preparation for teaching addresses every aspect of the

teacher's inner character. Robert Pazmiño asserts, "The example of one's life as a teacher

needs to support the content of one's teaching."[112] Yet, Elliot Eisner can argue that

educational programs "teach far more than they advertise."[113] The organization itself

displays in its rituals, structures, and patterns of relationship those values that make up

the local culture.[114] Freire explains that in a culture of trust, inner character is built by

modeling integrity:

> The climate of respect that is born of just, serious, humble, and generous
> relationships, in which both the authority of the teacher and the freedom of the

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the sculptor "loving" his clay in front of the children, they caught his enthusiasm for the art. Sally Ann Flecker, "When Fred Met Margaret." *Pitt Med Magazine* (Publication of the University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine; Winter 2014). Quoted in Maxwell King, *The Good Neighbor: The Life and Work of Fred Rogers* (New York: Abrams Press, 2018), 138–39.

[111] Several authors speak about educational curriculum as a means for developing wholeness in students. For example, see Terry Linhart, "Curriculum and Teaching," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 138; Ronald T. Habermas and Klaus Issler, *Teaching for Reconciliation: Foundations and Practice of Christian Educational Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 135; Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 29–30; Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 39.

[112] Robert W. Pazmiño, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian? Teaching in the Name, Spirit, and Power of Jesus* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2008), 83.

[113] Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 78. Eisner labels the important aspects of what is taught as the *explicit* curriculum, the *implicit* curriculum, and the *null* curriculum. Eisner, 74–92.

[114] Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 49.

students are ethically grounded, is what converts pedagogical space into authentic educational experience.[115]

Even that which is *not* taught has an impact on the learning of the community, because those areas include "the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not a part of their intellectual repertoire."[116] Schools and churches are rarely candid about the concepts they disregard and the taboos they ignore; such subjects just aren't part of their tradition and identity. The practice of resilient trust creates a space for humility and generosity—qualities that are necessary for developing the sort of respect and trust that are capable of addressing systemic blind spots.

3.4.3 Integrity in Self

After considering the importance of truthfulness for a community that practices mutual trust, we should also (perhaps especially) reflect on the importance of individual truthfulness. Palmer maintains that "to teach is to create a space in which obedience to truth is practiced."[117] He explains that the space we create has three essential dimensions (which are similar to some of Brown's points): "openness, boundaries, and an air of

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[115] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 86.

[116] Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 92.

[117] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 69, 88, 105, 107.

hospitality."[118] Openness is a matter of removing barriers and clutter so that we can hear

others without judgment. Just as God respects our "yes" and "no," we must answer with

integrity (Matt 5:37; 2 Cor 1:17–18; Jas 5:12). Boundaries actually prepare us to have open

hearts, for "if we can't say no, we can't say yes."[119] The third dimension, hospitality, is

the practice of welcoming each other without prejudice regarding what the other person

brings to the relationship.

Trustworthiness is modeled by welcoming, hearing, and respecting others as

they express truth. Every teacher who engages in the practice of resilient trust will

encounter the tension between speaking truth and hearing truth, and it is in humility

that each of us learns that none of us has a monopoly on the truth. Whenever a power

dynamic is present, there is a tendency to control and manipulate people, yet respectful

trust is "more about power *with* rather than power *over*."[120] According to Kouzes and

Posner, "you become more powerful when you give your power away."[121] One way to

share leadership is to actively listen to others graciously and generously. A good listener

helps others articulate *their* message and gain clarity about *their* problems.[122] This is why

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[118] Palmer, 71.

[119] Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 110.

[120] Combs, Edmonson, and Harris, *The Trust Factor*, 76, 124.

[121] James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2017), 221.

[122] Combs, Edmonson, and Harris, *The Trust Factor*, 59.

Freire asserts, "Simply speaking will never be enough."[123] We can speak with integrity

when we allow (and *welcome*) questions and critique from others as we seek to create a

space where we obey truth together.

3.4.4 Challenges to Resilient Trust

Trust can be developed and it can be destroyed. The practice of resilient trust

emphasizes the commitment to continue imitating Christ and work toward building

community despite the negative forces that diminish trust. One of the challenges to

sustaining this practice is our own faith. Trust naturally deteriorates when we lack faith

in God, in others, or in ourselves. Since community is built through trusting

relationships, the impact of our own distrust (or lack of trustworthiness) is a withdrawal

from the environment in which integrity is formed. In our isolated disappointment, we

either elevate or diminish ourselves relative to others. Expecting criticism and rejection,

people approach each other with suspicion or fear, and the role of leadership is often

guarded rather than shared.

A second challenge arises when some of the people in a group are unable to trust

others. Certain kinds of wounds, fears, and experiences of shame deeply inhibit personal

expressions of vulnerability, inducing a persistent suspicion that no one can be trusted.

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[123] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 89.

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Such people do not (or cannot) engage with those who might help lift them out of their condition. Instead, they may focus on striving for self-sufficiency, fixating on their suffering, retreating in their humiliation, or panicking in their entrapment.[124] Henri Nouwen suggests that it might be possible to assist people who are hurting deeply, but it requires engaging with them in their specific situations. He says that

> no one can help anyone without becoming involved, without entering with his whole person into the painful situation, without taking the risk of becoming hurt, wounded or even destroyed in the process. The beginning and the end of all Christian leadership is to give your life for others.[125]

A third type of challenge originates in people's assumptions about their own capabilities. In the Gospel of Mark, there is an example of this sort of obstacle when disciples apparently took for granted their own credibility and power to heal people. Jesus had just descended from the Mount of Transfiguration, and he encountered a mob scene where the scribes were arguing with the disciples (Mark 9:1–18).[126] The disciples were unable to heal a young boy who was afflicted with demonic seizures, and the

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[124] Harold Ivan Smith, *Tear-Catchers: Developing the Gift of Compassion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 79–83.

[125] Henri J. M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Image Books, 1979), 72.

[126] This episode recalls the scene of Moses descending Mt. Sinai with his servant Joshua to confront rebellion and idolatry (compare Mark 9 with Exod 32). James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 276.

combativeness of the crowd indicates a loss of trust.[127] Apparently Jesus let the disciples

fail so that they (and the crowd) might be more ready to learn (9:21–29). Collinson

observes that "the very process of the recognition of their weaknesses facilitated their

learning, and their failures were never regarded as irreparable."[128] Each of these

challenges is a result of accepting certain assumptions without questioning the potential

to change them. Our responsibility is to move out of the fixed mindset that there is little

we can do about trust and pursue the growth mindset that Christ helps us become

trustworthy.[129]

The practice of resilient trust is rewarding but not easy. Deep relationships

require attention and effort, and the "true test of a friendship is its ability to sustain

conflict."[130] When people come together and develop more than a superficial

relationship, the interactions are often unstable for a time while the group dynamics are

sorted out. As people discover their identities and roles relative to the group, their union

becomes more fruitful than the sum of the individuals. After the group accomplishes its

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[127] The word for "argue" in Mark 9:14–16 (συζητέω, *syzēteō*) is used by Mark to describe belligerent confrontations, unlike the disciples' thoughtful questioning in Mark 9:33 (where the word for "argue" is διαλογίζομαι, *dialogízomai*). Edwards, 277.

[128] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 39.

[129] Covey and Merrill, *The Speed of Trust*, 25–26. Carol Dweck claims that a *growth mindset* "is based on the belief that your basic qualities are things you can cultivate through your efforts. Although people may differ in every which way—in their initial talents and aptitudes, interests, or temperaments—everyone can change and grow through application and experience." Dweck, *Mindset*, 7.

[130] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 104.

purpose, it may disband or recommit. The entire process (or cycle) is often referred to as

forming, storming, norming, performing, and *reforming*.[131] The storming phase is a turbulent

and vulnerable time, when the members of the group either find ways to resolve their

conflicts or they progress no further. It is usually a fallacy to hope (as many people do)

that their group will not have to deal with differences and disagreements. Every married

couple knows that conflicts must be addressed rather than ignored, and the key to

successful resolution is forgiveness. The mutuality of forgiveness affirms our boundaries

as well as our desire to be in relationship.

3.5 Empathic Skills for Teaching

Our discussion thus far has been centered on developing identity and integrity,

realizing that these qualities are formed in the Spirit, in community, and in oneself. As a

result of adopting empathy as a focal theme, we have been able to identify two practices

that might not otherwise (in a traditional educational framework) have been associated

with teaching. Since the practices of formative presence and resilient trust were

formulated with a view to empathy, the skills required for both are similar. Both of them

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[131] See Osmer, Teaching for Faith, 98, 101; Brené Brown, Rising Strong (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2015), 27; Bruce W. Tuckman, "Developmental Sequence in Small Groups," Group Facilitation, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 66; Denise A. Bonebright, "40 Years of Storming: A Historical Review of Tuckman's Model of Small Group Development," Human Resource Development International 13, no. 1 (February 2010): 111–20. Osmer changed the name of the fifth stage from adjourning to reforming.

include the necessity of cultivating an openness that is characterized by compassion,

emotional safety, nonjudgment, and generosity. I will address this skill using the term

"reception" (i.e. our *receptivity* to each other). Another key proficiency that is common to

both practices is a form of self-examination that is deeply observant and accountable to

others, which I will refer to as "reflection." The third skill translates our learning into

practical, responsible action that respects interpersonal boundaries. I will call this last

ability "response" because it is the culmination of the praxis I am describing. These three

teaching activities—*reception*, *reflection*, and *response*—comprise the method that I

propose for enacting effective practices of teaching that highlight the virtue of

empathy.[132]

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[132] Similar sets of components have been suggested in other contexts. L. Gregory Jones describes "catechesis, critical reflection, and faithful living in the world," as the way to integrate practices, beliefs, and desires in community with other Christians. Jones, "Beliefs, Desires, Practices, and the Ends of Theological Education," 188–89. In another context, Jones suggests that the practical wisdom which helps people implement other virtues requires perception, discernment, and careful action. L. Gregory Jones, *Christian Social Innovation: Renewing Wesleyan Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 98–99. James Wilhoit uses similar terminology to describe the entire scope of spiritual formation as "receiving, remembering, responding, and relating." James C. Wilhoit, *Spiritual Formation as If the Church Mattered: Growing in Christ through Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 50. Stephen Covey claims that the three roles of a leader are "pathfinding, aligning, and empowering." Stephen R. Covey, "Three Roles of the Leader in the New Paradigm," in *The Leader of the Future: New Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the Next Era*, ed. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 152–53; Stephen R. Covey, *The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 113–14. Barrett McRay describes a taxonomy that "moves from a willingness to pay attention to new learning to a willingness to commit to a changed way of behaving based on the new learning." Barrett McRay, "How People Develop Their Thinking," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 82–83. Preskill and Brookfield suggest that "leaders who support other people's growth do this most successfully through dialogue—by listening, asking constructive questions, responding appropriately and appreciatively, and finding common ground among community members." Stephen Preskill and Stephen D. Brookfield,

In the following chapters, I will describe the skills of *reception*, *reflection*, and *response*. My intent is to identify practical, concrete skills that any Christian can exercise in order to implement the empathic practices of formative presence and resilient trust.

Learning As a Way of Leading: Lessons from the Struggle for Social Justice (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 67. Darcia Narvaez describes four components of moral behavior: "ethical sensitivity (noticing and interpreting events), ethical judgment (reasoning and deciding on moral action), ethical focus (prioritizing moral action), and ethical action (having the wherewithal to complete the moral action)." Narvaez, "Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning," 35–37. Marshall Goldsmith offers yet another similar paradigm: "The effective leader of the future will consistently and efficiently *ask, learn, follow up, and grow.*" Marshall Goldsmith, "Ask, Learn, Follow Up, and Grow," in *The Leader of the Future: New Visions, Strategies, and Practices for the Next Era*, ed. Frances Hesselbein, Marshall Goldsmith, and Richard Beckhard (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 229.

4. Empathic Reception

The basic skills and behaviors that are essential for the practices of formative presence and resilient trust derive from the fundamental association of these practices with the virtue of empathy. Since empathic behavior is expressed in connection with God and other people, the necessary skills are interpersonal and interactive. I have identified three areas of practical focus to be considered in depth: *reception, reflection,* and *response.* Each entails particular ways of thinking and organizing our relationships. In this chapter, I will examine the skill of empathic reception, and I will discuss some approaches to thinking *openly* and initiating the sort of *apprenticing* relationships that nurture connection with God and with people. Some of the crucial ingredients to be explored are listening and dialogue. In later chapters, I will present skills of reflection that include thinking *perceptively* and developing relationships characterized by *friendship*, followed by skills of response that incorporate elements of thinking *socially* and nurturing new bonds of *kinship*. Each of these chapters represents a further stage of character development that deepens and broadens the range of relationships with people.

In order to understand what is intended by the term *reception,* it will help to consider a New Testament example. The apostle Paul and his coworkers encountered a variety of responses to their ministry and their message, ranging from a welcome

acceptance to violent rejection. After some Jews in Thessalonica jealously precipitated a

riot, Paul left for Beroea[1] and received a much more positive welcome:

> [10] That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Beroea; and when they
> arrived, they went to the Jewish synagogue. [11] These Jews were more receptive
> than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and
> examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so. [12] Many
> of them therefore believed, including not a few Greek women and men of high
> standing. [Acts 17:10–12]

The welcome that Paul received was different because the character of the Beroean Jews

was more honorable.[2] Rather than creating a violent mob scene, they accepted the

visitors and their message with goodwill, evidently predisposed to give Paul's

proclamation a generous hearing.[3]

The sort of receptive behavior that Paul encountered in Beroea included skills

that Paul himself displayed on his next stop in Athens (Acts 17:16–34). After his arrival,

the local philosophers took the apostle to the Areopagus (Mars Hill) to scrutinize his

teaching. Paul exhibited his relational skills by first eliciting the questions and curiosities

of his audience and then challenging them to consider an alternative conclusion. He

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[1] This is the English spelling used in the NRSV, and it is closer to the Greek spelling (**Βέροια**, *Béroia*) than the more common English rendering, "Berea."

[2] The attitude of the Beroeans is described as "receptive" (NRSV). Other English versions translate the Greek word εὐγενής (*eugenēs*) as "noble-minded" or "open-minded," with the connotation that they were less prejudiced than the Thessalonians.

[3] The Greek verb δέχομαι (*déchomai*, "receive," "be receptive") suggests that the Beroeans were open to accepting and approving both the message and the messengers. The descriptive noun προθυμία (*prothymía*, "eagerness," "readiness," "goodwill") explains their action as ready and willing to be of service. Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 221, 870.

addressed the subjects of God's identity and God's expectations together with his

hearers and offered a path for them to critique and transcend their own understanding

of supernatural immanence and moral truth. He observed their methods and listened to

their explanations, and the Athenian philosophers responded with interest in further

dialogue. D. Bruce Roberts applies Paul's approach in the following manner:

> Good teaching is a process that introduces students to the questions of authority
> and truth, and invites them to join the teacher in a lifelong quest. This quest
> involves the construction of contingent and unfinished affirmations of what is
> true and what is appropriate to do in a given context. It is a process of constant
> experimentation in a community of exchange, a process that involves learning to
> share control and to think critically with others.[4]

Like the Beroeans, Paul knew that learning is a mutual interaction, and that "both

parties are giving and receiving."[5] As Christians learn how to teach with empathic skills,

a significant aspect of that teaching is an aptitude to be receptive to the community of

wisdom that exists within the body of Christ. An open, honorable kind of thinking is

exemplified in listening, questioning, communicating, and collaborating. In the manner

than Jesus Christ walks *alongside* us as we trust him, so we also walk with others in a

relationship that positions us more as apprentices than as consumers of knowledge.

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[4] D. Bruce Roberts, "What Constitutes Effective Teaching with Adults?," in *A Lifelong Call to Learn: Approaches to Continuing Education for Church Leaders*, ed. Robert E. Reber and D. Bruce Roberts (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001), 77.

[5] hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 64.

Openness and its associated skills will be discussed in the next section, followed by an

exploration of apprenticing.

4.1 Thinking Openly

Learning requires openness to other people and to God. Empathic openness is

characterized by expressions of compassion, a humble embrace of vulnerability in safe

spaces, a generous pursuit of understanding, and works of collaboration rather than

judgment. Learning becomes an act of reaching out to another person and connecting

hearts. Parker Palmer explains how we enter into this with one another:

> The mind motivated by compassion reaches out to know as the heart reaches out
> to love. Here, the act of knowing *is* an act of love, the act of entering and
> embracing the reality of the other, of allowing the other to enter and embrace our
> own. In such knowing we know and are known as members of one community,
> and our knowing becomes a way of reweaving that community's bonds.[6]

Genuine openness begins with listening, and listening is "the single most powerful

transaction that occurs between us and another person that conveys our acceptance of

his or her humanity."[7] Our attention and listening communicate to people (and God)

how much we value them and desire to be in relationship with them. Writing on the

nature of human understanding, the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer asserts that

"anyone who listens is fundamentally open. Without such openness to one another there

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[6] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 8.

[7] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 40. Duane Elmer defines *acceptance* as "the ability to communicate value, worth and esteem to another person." Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, 58.

is no genuine human bond. Belonging together always also means being able to listen to one another."[8]

Jesus was also concerned about the manner in which we hear—that is, how receptive we are to truth and how willing we are to act upon that message. Dallas Willard explains that "Jesus alerted his hearers to the fact that they might not be using their ears simply for hearing but for other purposes as well—such as to filter and manage the message so it fits better their own lives and purposes."[9] This is why Jesus admonished the people, "Let anyone with ears to hear listen!" and "Pay attention to what you hear" (Mk 4:9, 23, 25). The first skill that is expressed in the practices of formative presence and resilient trust consists of developing ears that hear and eyes that see the stories of individuals and the activity of God.[10] Jesus encouraged this skill with several people, including Nicodemus (John 3:1–15) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:5–30). He began where they were in their understanding and aroused their curiosity before addressing their spiritual needs. Jesus's attentiveness to them prompted their listening to him.

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[8] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. W. Glen-Doepel, Joel Weinsheimer, and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 369.

[9] Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 257.

[10] Yust and Anderson, *Taught By God*, 39.

Unfortunately, attentive listening is not a commonplace activity in our noisy, boisterous society, although most people long to be deeply heard and understood. Michael Nichols describes the difficulty of listening as follows:

> Genuine listening involves a brief suspension of self. You won't always notice this because it's reflexive and taken for granted and because in most conversations we take turns. But you might catch yourself rehearsing what you're going to say next when the other person is talking. Simply holding your tongue while the other person speaks isn't the same thing as listening. To really listen you have to suspend your own agenda, forget about what you might say next, and concentrate on being a receptive vehicle for the other person.[11]

In a world that is preoccupied with talking, listening offers grace. Parker Palmer states that "the way to truth is to listen attentively to diverse voices and views for the claims they make on us."[12] Effective listening requires paying attention to what is going on in someone's life, and it begins with genuine interest or curiosity. It is like the close reading of a poem, entering empathically into the other context that exists behind the words.[13] Listening often requires a slowing of the pace of the conversation so that reflection on the message is possible. The next chapter will focus on the process of reflection.

There is a paradox regarding listening and change. Listening is necessary in order to respect that which is different from ourselves,[14] and "unless we are prepared to

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[11] Michael P. Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening: How Learning to Listen Can Improve Relationships* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1995), 63.

[12] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 67.

[13] Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, 14, 110.

[14] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 108.

become in some way different from what we are, listening cannot be understood

properly."[15] In order to become listeners, we have to allow ourselves the opportunity to

become different, which means that vulnerability, risk, and change are not only possible,

but likely. However, Western culture eschews most interactions that might appear

vulnerable, so it is not surprising that listening often seems impossible.[16] Developing

listening as a skill requires two unintuitive but practical actions: we have to relinquish

control (i.e. temporarily let go of our own narrative and objectives) while also

respectfully protecting each other's identity. Charles Foster explains these initiatives

using terminology provided by Henri Nouwen:

> This kind of hearing involves both a receptivity that accepts the stranger "into
> our world on his or her terms, not on ours." But it also involves "confrontation"
> as we each define the boundaries through which we orient ourselves to the
> worlds of the others and by which we make clear what we bring to the
> relationship that might emerge from our encounters.[17]

When we give conversational control to others, we give others a stake (a responsibility)

in creating a worthwhile outcome.[18] We are also more likely to grasp the things that are

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[15] Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 165.

[16] Fiumara, 61–62.

[17] Charles R. Foster, *Educating Congregations: The Future of Christian Education* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1994), 67; Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 69.

[18] Michael Marquardt, *Leading with Questions: How Leaders Find the Right Solutions by Knowing What to Ask* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 55.

not being said—what is presumed, what is desired, what is feared, and what is taboo.[19]

In the context of teaching, an emphasis on listening reminds us that we are called to lead

people rather than *lessons.* As Dominic Ashkar points out, such an approach "requires

insight into the special needs, weaknesses, aptitudes of each member; it also requires

special preparation of the lesson so as to apply it to each member, awakening each one's

aptitude, overcoming each weakness, meeting each need."[20] Those who lead discussion

with listening skills have a clearer idea of who or what is controlling the conversation,[21]

and they can more easily identify which voices are *not* being heard.[22] Finally, everyone

who listens can sharpen their own thoughts in comparison with others, so that "our own

speech becomes clearer and more honest."[23]

When there is mutual listening, there is the possibility of *dialogue*. Reuel Howe

defines dialogue as "that address and response between persons in which there is a flow

of meaning between them in spite of all the obstacles that normally would block the

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[19] Marquardt, 91. Fiumara claims that "only when we know how to be silent will that of which we cannot speak begin to tell us something." Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 99.

[20] Ashkar, *Road to Emmaus*, 70–71.

[21] Jim Garrison, "Ameliorating Violence in Dialogues Across Differences: The Role of Eros and Lógos," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 100.

[22] Huey Li, "Rethinking Silencing Silences," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 79. Li asserts, "A truly liberating pedagogy must be based on a conjoint effort to listen to the silences and to reclaim the silenced voices."

[23] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 101.

relationship."[24] The Greek term (διαλέγομαι, *dialégomai*) from which the word

"dialogue" is derived is used in the New Testament to describe several of Paul's

interactions with people, including his debates in both the synagogue and the

marketplace (Acts 17:2, 17; 19:8–9), as well as his discourse (not "preaching" but

"dialoguing") in the church at Troas (acts 20:7–12). Robert Banks understands the latter

passage as suggesting that Paul's "favored way of proceeding was an opening

presentation leading into questions and answers about concrete situations, followed by

more general discussion about all manner of things."[25] It may surprise us to realize that

Paul was as apt to listen as he was to speak,[26] but one of his skills (perhaps a spiritual

gift) was an ability to create diverse communities built upon shared interests. Love for

Christ and for humanity motivates the apostle and us to reach across differences in

order to connect with rather than exploit each other.[27] Through open dialogue, we

support other people's growth "by listening, asking constructive questions, responding

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[24] Reuel L. Howe, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1966), 37.

[25] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 117.

[26] Given that Paul was engaged in *dialogue* in Acts 20:7, we are reminded that even the word **λόγος** (*lógos*, which describes his further discussion) doesn't always refer only to speech, but often includes the nuance of interactive discourse.

[27] Paulo Freire claimed that liberating the oppressed is an act of love. He quoted the well-known activist, Ernesto "Che" Guevara: "Let me say, with the risk of appearing ridiculous, that the true revolutionary is guided by strong feelings of love. It is impossible to think of an authentic revolutionary without this quality." Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 78, n. 4.

appropriately and appreciatively, and finding common ground among community members."[28]

Listening and dialogue are vital elements within the practices of formative presence and resilient trust. They are receptive skills that build communities of integrity. The following sections will examine how these skills function in relation to God, our community, and ourselves.

4.1.1 Receptive to God

One of the most important Old Testament texts for Jews and Christians alike is God's admonition to be receptive to him. It is called the Shema (שְׁמַע), which in Hebrew means "hear":

> [4] Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. [5] You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might. [Deut 6:4–5]

Dennis Olson explains that the Shema "functions as a positive restatement of the first commandment" (Deut 5:6–7).[29] It is a proclamation of affirmation that calls Israel to love God with their "heart" (will and mind), their "soul" (entire being or self), and their "might" (strength and existence). The Shema was recited by faithful Jews weekly in the

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[28] Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 67.

[29] Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 50.

synagogue and also daily during morning and evening prayers.[30] Its import is far greater than knowing what God says; in Hebrew, the notion of "hearing" has a broad range of meaning that includes listening, understanding, discernment, and obedience.[31] The Shema presumes that God will speak and that his people will follow only him.

Jesus Christ, the shepherd of God's flock, also speaks with an intent to be heard: "My sheep hear my voice. I know them, and they follow me" (John 10:27). Surely it is significant that many of Jesus's healing miracles provided sight or hearing to people, enabling them to see and hear him. Similarly, we are enabled by the Holy Spirit to hear God (John 16:13; 1 Cor 2:13). Furthermore, the scriptures testify to Christ (John 5:39; Acts 18:28) and are "useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim 3:16). Augustine of Hippo claimed that when we approach the biblical text to inquire after God, we "encounter the God who is relentlessly inquiring after us."[32] As we seek to interpret and apply Scripture to our lives, a common discovery

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[30] Everett Ferguson, *Backgrounds of Early Christianity* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 527. By the second century CE, the Shema expanded into three paragraphs, drawing from Deut 6:4–9, Deut 11:13–21, and Num 15:37–41, and was incorporated into Rabbinic Judaism's statutory prayers for the morning and evening. Stefan C. Reif, "Liturgy as an Educational Process in Talmudic and Medieval Judaism," in *Jewish Education from Antiquity to the Middle Ages: Studies in Honour of Philip S. Alexander*, ed. George J. Brooke and Renate Smithuis (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 258.

[31] Koehler and Baumgartner, *HALOT*, 1571–72, "שׁמע".

[32] C. Clifton Black, "Augustinian Exegesis and the Nature of Christian Inquirers," in *Inquiring after God: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Ellen T. Charry (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 226. Black is referring to Augustine's sermons on 1 John (specifically Homilies 7 and 8).

is that Scripture is interpreting us, revealing what our lives mean to God. The voice of

God is most often heard in conjunction with either the text of the Bible or the words of a

person. Dallas Willard explains that recognizing God's voice takes practice:

> Those who want to live under God's guidance and who by proper teaching or
> God's other special provision become convinced that he will speak and perhaps
> *is* speaking to them can learn through experience the particular quality, spirit
> and content of God's voice. They will then distinguish and understand the voice
> of God; their discernment will not be infallible, but they will discern his voice as
> clearly and with as much accuracy as they discern the voice of any other person
> with whom they are on intimate terms.[33]

Thinking openly about God is a matter of observing his activity in the world and

discerning his call and message as his agents who seek to faithfully engage in his work

of reconciliation.

Dialogue with God usually takes the form of prayer. The eighteenth-century

French mystic Jean-Nicholas Grou wrote, "It is the heart that prays, it is to the voice of

the heart that God listens and it is the heart that he answers."[34] This dialogue is possible

because God's Spirit dwells within us and sustains the prayer of our hearts (Rom 8:12–

27). Tim Keller offers a succinct definition: "Prayer is continuing a conversation that God

has started through his Word and his grace, which eventually becomes a full encounter

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[33] Willard, *Hearing God*, 256. Italics are original. As examples of God's voice, Willard identifies specific phenomena, supernatural messengers, dreams and visions, audible (including human) voices, and the "still, small voice" of the human spirit. Willard, 120–21.

[34] Jean-Nicolas Grou, *How to Pray* (Greenwood, SC: Attic, 1982), 18. Quoted in Richard J. Foster, *Prayer: Finding the Heart's True Home* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 133.

with him."[35] Richard Foster adds that through prayer "we are increasingly conformed to

the image of the Son."[36] There are many kinds of prayer, but they are all about

relationship. Prayer is communication between creature and Creator, and in a broader

sense, prayer is about being in a place where the Holy Spirit transforms us. As we have

already discussed, listening to anyone requires allowing ourselves to be changed in

some way; dialogue engages that process of change. In our relationship with God, we

seek opportunities for change in ourselves as well as in the world around us. The

Christian teacher/leader knows that God responds to our prayers in conjunction with

our other practices, disciplines, and activities (e.g. study, meditation, and worship) so

that believers may "stand mature and fully assured in everything that God wills"

(Col 4:12).

4.1.2 Receptive to Community

The best preparation for thinking openly in community is to live openly with

God in prayerful dialogue with him. Miroslav Volf claims that "God's reception of

hostile humanity into divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate

to the other."[37] Since God approaches humanity with love and respect for each

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[35] Timothy Keller, *Prayer: Experiencing Awe and Intimacy with God* (New York: Dutton, 2014), 48.

[36] Foster, *Prayer*, 57.

[37] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 100.

individual, so we should also consider people as having intrinsic value—with the

anticipation that each person has something to offer. Those who feel valued and

respected are enabled to have the freedom to express their own integrity, knowing that

they are "safe, capable, accepted, and able to influence the situation when appropriate or

necessary."[38] Furthermore, such acceptance and respect enables people to "listen across"

differences, even in difficult social situations.[39] Christian teachers demonstrate the value

of people by modeling skills of listening and dialogue both inside and outside the

classroom. Such a teacher believes that all of the students have something to say, with

the possible consequence that "an atmosphere is created which actually helps them

contribute."[40] The environment for learning is created through respectful listening, and

the leader does not have to be the one who has all the great ideas.[41]

Nichols summarizes the primary steps of reaching across to hear another person:

"Effective listening requires *attention*, *appreciation*, and *affirmation*."[42] The process begins

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[38] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 121. Palmer claims that "one of the great tasks in our time is to 'hear people to speech,'" and the way this happens is by "making space for the other, being aware of the other, paying attention to the other, honoring the other." Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 46.

[39] Earl Koile, *Listening As a Way of Becoming* (Waco, TX: Calibre, 1977), 79. Also see Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 108.

[40] Sara Little, *Learning Together in the Christian Fellowship* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1965), 80.

[41] Simon Sinek, *Start with Why: How Great Leaders Inspire Everyone to Take Action* (New York: Penguin Books, 2011), 99.

[42] Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening,* 109.

with a behavior that is difficult in our culture of distraction: removing all barriers and tuning in exclusively to the other person. Most of us know what it feels like to be on the receiving end of such attention, but most of us tend to neglect the skill ourselves. The good listener is not passive, but encourages the speaker to control the discussion, while the listener shows honor and humility by showing genuine interest (with all of the attendant nonverbal activities like eye contact, posture, facial expression, voice tone, and supportive responses). Some leaders fear that attentive listening will bring issues to the surface that they are not prepared to handle, but "simply listening with compassion and insight to the pain and struggles of our students is not psychotherapy."[43] Such listening does not consist of giving advice or "fixing" someone, but instead it exhibits joy in the connection between people. The teacher who listens becomes the learner, affirming the student's discernment in a manner that is vital for education. Freire recognized that listening to "the student's doubts, fears, and incompetencies" is necessary for the learning process. "It is in listening to the student that I learn to speak with him or her."[44] Indeed, listening in this sense becomes an act of specialized teaching centered on the student's own experience and character.

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[43] Daloz, *Mentor*, 240–41.

[44] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 106.

Dialogue between people requires listening for the differences and commonalities between people. Only when there are other viewpoints am I encouraged to see my own actions and habits in a new light, and unexpected perspectives can be "productively disturbing" when I am stimulated to broaden my perspective.[45] The Christian teacher promotes the sort of dialogue that is not competitive (as in a debate); rather, it is an empathic engagement aimed at the discovery of group harmonies as well as group tensions. Each person's voice is a unique combination of identity and integrity, a mixture of narratives, perspectives, and aspirations, but not everyone in a culture is allowed to equally express his or her voice. Educational systems (as well as other professional and religious systems) routinely elevate some voices and diminish others through the selective implementation of policies, curriculum, personnel, structures, environment, and assessments.[46] Creative dialogue involves a sharing of authority and a critique of oppressive power structures, although it is usually difficult for people to loosen their grip on their authority. In fact, genuine dialogue between dominant and subordinated groups often requires members of the dominant culture to *talk less*, so that the dialogue is an opportunity for new leadership to emerge rather than a tool for

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[45] Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 111.

[46] Ronald David Glass, "Moral and Political Clarity and Education as a Practice of Freedom," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 19.

suppressing (and "colonizing") diverse perspectives.[47] Therefore, a reasonable first step

for the teacher/leader toward establishing dialogue is to observe which people are not

being heard and to appreciate how those voices can and should be heard with equal

authority.[48] Another helpful step is to pray (i.e. initiating dialogue with God) about the

need to dialogue with people. God's Spirit will inevitably respond by presenting

opportunities for valuable (but not necessarily comfortable) connections.

The biblical writer James emphasizes the practical nature of receptive dialogue:

"You must understand this, my beloved: let everyone be quick to listen, slow to speak,

slow to anger" (James 1:19). One way to give priority to listening is to ask questions that

enable others to speak. Open, curious questions draw people into the thoughts of the

teacher as well as the challenges of the subject to be discussed. Jane Vella, an authority in

education and teaching, says, "The open question is a most effective means of inviting

dialogue. … An open question invites critical reflection, analysis, review, and personal

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[47] When a marginalized group is exposed for the benefit of the dominant group, "dialogue may be understood as a sort of colonization where the powerful require the subordinate to open their territory for exploration (so the powerful can hear the marginalized voices)." Alison Jones, "Talking Cure: The Desire for Dialogue," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 66. Jim Wallis advocates listening to people whom our society has failed to serve and protect. He says, "Loving our neighbors means identifying with their suffering, meeting them in it, and working together to change it." Jim Wallis, *America's Original Sin: Racism, White Privilege, and the Bridge to a New America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 8.

[48] hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 45. Every voice should be heard, and no voice is presumed to be either superior or inferior. Megan Boler, "All Speech Is Not Free: The Ethics of 'Affirmative Action Pedagogy,'" in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 4.

perceptions."[49] Questions help students compose their own thoughts and responses rather than merely reciting the teacher's statements.[50] Marquardt suggests several types of open-ended questions that are helpful for launching fruitful discussions, regardless of whether the situation involves a classroom or a personal dialogue:[51]

- *Explorative questions* open up new avenues and insights and lead to new explorations ["Have you thought about …?"]

- *Affective questions* invite members to share feelings about an issue ["How do you feel about …?"]

- *Reflective questions* encourage more elaboration: ["What do think might be at the root of …?"]

- *Probing questions* invite the person or group … to be more open and expansive in their thinking ["Would you explain …?"]

- *Fresh questions* challenge basic assumptions ["Why must it be that way? What do you always …?"]

- *Questions that create connections* establish a systems perspective ["What are the consequences of these actions?"]

- *Analytical questions* examine causes and not just symptoms ["Why has this happened?"]

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[49] Jane Vella, *Training Through Dialogue: Promoting Effective Learning and Change with Adults* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 179–80. Vella distinguishes between open and closed questions: "An open question is one that does not have a predetermined response. … A closed question, conversely, invites the 'correct' answer. Closed questions stop dialogue, invite monologue, and put the authority of knowing back onto the teacher."

[50] Bowman Jr., *Teaching Today*, 96.

[51] Marquardt, *Leading with Questions*, 71–72. Also see Karen Lee-Thorp, *How to Ask Great Questions: Guide Your Group to Discovery With These Proven Techniques* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1998).

- *Clarifying questions* help free us from ambiguity ["What did you mean by that? How does that follow from …?"]

The Gospels reveal that Jesus himself asked many of these types of questions as he taught his disciples and ministered to the people he encountered.

In a discussion about team dynamics, Brené Brown explains that the problems which often inhibit effective interactions between people include making inappropriate judgments, giving unsolicited advice, interrupting the one who is speaking, and undermining confidentiality. Then she says, "The behaviors that people need from their team or group almost always include listening, staying curious; being honest, and keeping confidence."[52] These latter actions are central to effective dialogue because they are ways to establish trust. However, they do require more time for a teacher than what is needed to merely address the planned topics; after all, open dialogue helps people think for themselves. One teacher explains the benefits of taking the time to focus on the students: "I don't want parrots. I want songbirds, and songs come as a loving response to a loving initiative. … My investment of time up front in the learning process actually accomplishes more in the long run."[53]

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[52] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 37.

[53] Ashkar, *Road to Emmaus*, 86.

4.1.3 Receptive to Self

We often joke about the craziness of *talking* to ourselves, but we consider it common-sense wisdom to *listen* to ourselves (whether or not we actually do it). We need to develop a receptive spirit toward ourselves because the ability to access one's own inner, emotional life ("intrapersonal intelligence") affects the skills of empathy that one exhibits toward others.[54] Reinhard Hütter claims that "one whose self cannot accept the truth about herself has no way to share herself with others, no way to give himself away in genuine personhood."[55] Practices of teaching rely upon more than an understanding of the students and the subject matter; teachers need a sense of self-awareness in order to practice formative presence and resilient trust. Earlier we saw the importance of considering others as having intrinsic value; now we are examining the significance of our own core values. Our ability to grow is often limited by negative values that we refuse to relinquish; yet, those values that are consistent with growth (such as devotion to Christ) enable us to thrive.

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[54] John Loughran, ed., *Researching Teaching: Methodologies and Practices for Understanding Pedagogy* (Philadelphia: Falmer Press, 1999), 220. Howard Gardner defines *intrapersonal intelligence* as "access to one's own feeling life, one's range of emotions, the capacity to make discriminations among these emotions and eventually label them and to draw on them as a means of understanding and guiding one's own behavior." Howard Gardner, *Multiple Intelligences: New Horizons in Theory and Practice* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 17.

[55] Hütter, "Worship and Truth," 215.

Jesus claimed that little children were models of spiritual growth: "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt 18:3; cf. Mark 10:15; Luke 18:17). He said that people require a change—a *reset* or *conversion*—in order to become *receptive to God's kingdom.* Jesus was pointing out that children have a way of being receptive that many adults have lost. The innocent child is dependent upon someone greater. Our birth into God's kingdom (i.e. trusting that he is reigning) is a dying to our own kingdom (our own self-rule). In order to receive the life that God intends for us, we must give up the life that we fashion for ourselves: "Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it" (Luke 17:33). At the heart of this change is accepting that our true identity is bound together with Christ.

The primary barrier to personal change and self-receptivity is erected by the fears, uncertainties, and hostilities that we have about ourselves and our relationships. Henri Nouwen explains how we often build walls around ourselves to prevent change:

> We indeed have become very preoccupied people, afraid of unnamable emptiness and silent solitude. In fact, our preoccupations prevent our having new experiences and keep us hanging on to the familiar ways. Preoccupations are our fearful ways of keeping things the same, and it often seems that we prefer a bad certainty to a good uncertainty. Our preoccupations help us to maintain the personal world we have created over the years and block the way to revolutionary change. Our fears, uncertainties and hostilities make us fill our inner world with ideas, opinions, judgments and values to which we cling as to a precious property. Instead of facing the challenge of new worlds opening

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themselves for us, and struggling in the open field, we hide behind the walls of our concerns holding on to the familiar life items we have collected in the past.[56]

Although fear inhibits our ability to engage in open, receptive, loving relationships (with ourselves and with others), acts of love diminish fear (1 John 4:18). Our devotion to Christ enables us to overcome fear and genuinely accept ourselves.

The self-receptive teacher realizes that change in the world does not come about by controlling other people's behavior but by changing oneself.[57] This perspective, together with the convicting influence of the Holy Spirit, enables one to start listening beyond differences and biases in order to "recognize his or her own place within hierarchies of social power that condition what testimony is or is not regarded as intelligible."[58] Taylor goes on to say, "Because we play a part in others' suffering, because we are complicit in the social forces that perpetuate that oppression, we have a fundamental ethical obligation to evaluate and challenge our roles."[59] Teachers are in a position to observe that problems of exclusion and exploitation are not just occurring "out there" but also find habituation in each person's subconscious assessments of other people. Therefore, our imperative is "to identify when and how our habits harm

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[56] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 74–75.

[57] Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, 243, cf. 45. Simply stated, "trying to change others doesn't work." Arbinger Institute, *Leadership and Self-Deception: Getting Out of the Box* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2015), 134.

[58] Taylor, "Listening in the Pedagogy of Discomfort," 120.

[59] Taylor, 130.

ourselves and others."[60] What are my hidden assumptions? What story am I telling

myself? Freire refers to this process of *conscientização* ("conscientization") as "learning to

perceive social, political, and economic contradictions, and to take action against the

oppressive elements of reality."[61] Listening to ourselves is the beginning of truly

listening to others. The popular theologian Frederick Buechner once commented,

> If I were called upon to state in a few words the essence of everything I was
> trying to say both as a novelist and as a preacher, it would be something like this:
> Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery that it is. In the boredom and
> pain of it no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your
> way to the holy and hidden heart of it because in the last analysis, all moments
> are key moments, and life itself is grace.[62]

4.2 Developing Apprenticeships

The skills of reception provide an entry into empathic practices so that genuine

openness can be developed in our relationships. Teachers who are learning to exercise

such skills will need concrete opportunities for listening and dialogue, especially if they

are accustomed to doing most of the talking. These are changes that are difficult to make

in oneself, especially since most of us are blind to our own behaviors. Cloud and

Townsend explain the challenge of changing our patterns of behavior:

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[60] Boler, *Feeling Power*, 185.

[61] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 19. Also see Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 55.

[62] Frederick Buechner, *Listening to Your Life: Daily Meditations with Frederick Buechner* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), 2. Quoted by Timothy Floyd, "Answering the Call to Service: Vocation and Professional Identity," in *Toward Human Flourishing: Character, Practical Wisdom, and Professional Formation*, ed. Mark L. Jones, Paul A. Lewis, and Kelly E. Reffitt (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2013), 140.

> The areas that we usually most need to change, we are unaware of; know, but resist owning; or we know and openly rebel against. All three of these stances demand intervention from the outside. We need our brothers and sisters to make us aware of our behavior, confront our denial, and take a stand against our rebellion. If we remain in some hurtful or sinful pattern, a true friend will come to our aid to save us from ourselves.[63]

Effective teachers are always learners first, and the sort of learning that is needed for empathic skills is only developed in relationship with other people. The necessary kind of relationship is one that encourages mutual growth and that is accessible to anyone who is ready to learn. I am going to refer to this affiliation as *apprenticing* because the primary perspective of interest here is that of the person who desires to improve. Other terms that often apply to the same relationship are protégé, mentoree (or mentee), trainee, directee, and disciple.[64] The unique aspect of this role for teachers is that they are expected to learn enough from this stage to eventually become those who can mentor, train, coach, and disciple others. Attention to knowing how to be the learner is a prerequisite for effectively discovering how to become a mentor/coach, and the effective mentor continues the life-long process of learning. My objective in this section is to outline some key aspects of being the protégé as well as the coach.

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[63] Cloud and Townsend, *Safe People*, 154.

[64] There are some peculiarities about each of these roles, but the differences are minor for this discussion. Collinson gives an example: "In contrast with the apprentice model which usually teaches a craft or technical skill, mentoring is used for more rational or intellectual learning situations, although the division between these two may not be totally clear-cut." Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 154–55.

Apprentices want guides who will provide some scaffolding for growth and then gently step away as more responsibility is taken.[65] The mentor and the apprentice together create an environment in which the experienced practitioner encourages the learner to watch, listen, ask questions, and practice specific skills.[66] Although the relationship is often pictured as a master and a student, experts have observed that more learning occurs among a group of people who are apprenticing together.[67] This is an environment in which the participants learn from each other. Furthermore, Christian apprentices learn to pay attention to what God is already doing in people's lives and how God communicates with them. The goal is to "lean into God's activity no matter where it takes them."[68]

As Christians, we need others who will walk alongside us; fundamentally, apprenticing and mentoring are about *walking with others*.[69] One of the ways that Jesus modeled the practice of formative presence was by sending the Holy Spirit to be present

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[65] Narvaez, "Wisdom as Mature Moral Functioning," 39.

[66] Elena Aguilar, *Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2013), 6.

[67] Etienne Wenger, Richard McDermott, and William M. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 233, n. 1.

[68] Steve Saccone and Cheri Saccone, *Protégé: Developing Your Next Generation of Church Leaders* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2012), 196. Also see Keith R. Anderson and Randy D. Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring: A Guide for Seeking and Giving Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 1999), 40; William A. Barry and William J. Connolly, *The Practice of Spiritual Direction* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 8.

[69] Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 182. Also see Saccone and Saccone, *Protégé*, 22.

alongside (παράκλητος, *paráklētos*) his disciples as their "advocate" (John 14:15–26; 16:13–14). We imitate Christ when we position ourselves in support of another person as mediator, intercessor, or helper.[70] We do not diminish the significance of either Christ's role or the place of the Spirit because this partnership is a three-sided relationship between the apprentice, the human advocate, and the Holy Spirit as heavenly advocate.[71]

Jesus established an example of mentoring in his training of the disciples, and the disciples exemplify how apprentices respond. Unlike the Jewish rabbis who expected their disciples to serve them, Jesus ministered to his followers (Luke 22:26–27).[72] He nurtured them and provided them a relatively safe environment for their formation. He showed them how to face temptation and adversity, how to pray, how to live righteously, how to express love to the Father, and how to love difficult people. The good news that Jesus spread was exhibited in real lives, and he made demands on their lives that reached deeper than any of the rabbis:

> More like the work of the master craftsman tutoring the young apprentice, Jesus'
> style of instruction embodied a pedagogy that invested life in the learner through
> an incarnation of the message being taught. This teaching was not something
> that was conceptually defined for his disciples as much as it was lived,

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[70] This is the definition of "paraclete" (παράκλητος, *paráklētos*) given in Bauer et al., *BDAG*, 766.

[71] Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 46, 50–51.

[72] Phil A. Newton, *The Mentoring Church: How Pastors and Congregations Cultivate Leaders* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2017), 34.

experienced, tasted and touched by the learners. Jesus not only spent time instructing, training and informing; he spent much time *forming a community.*[73]

The apostle Paul learned from Jesus how to share his life with his fellow Christians and to embody the truth that he proclaimed. Paul even explained to the Thessalonian church how his approach to mentoring worked: "you became imitators of us and of the Lord" (1 Thess 1:6). His protégé Timothy was in turn a model for others (1 Cor 4:16–17), showing how learners become teachers and followers become leaders.

Laurent A. Daloz claims that a mentoring relationship offers support, challenge, and vision and that these components must remain in balance.[74] From the perspective of the apprentice, to be *supported* is to gain affirmation of the boundaries and norms which have already been established. Both the mentor and the mentoree thrive in an empathetic environment. Catherine Stonehouse asserts, "We will be most effective if we meet people where they are, celebrate the good things they are learning, support them as they realize the limitations of their present approaches, and walk with them into new discoveries."[75] In addition to support, the apprentice needs to be *challenged* in order to push through some of the boundaries that perpetuate the status quo. The challenge

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[73] Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 16. Italics are original.

[74] Laurent A. Daloz, *Effective Teaching and Mentoring: Realizing the Transformational Power of Adult Learning Experiences* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1990), 212–13. Also see Daloz, *Mentor*, 206–9.

[75] Stonehouse, "Learning from Gender Differences," 113. Psychologists have identified an essential factor for emotional safety in relationships: in the interactions between peers and/or between student and teachers, there must be at least five positive exchanges for every negative interaction. Aguilar, *Art of Coaching*, 218.

disrupts the current environment, creating a gap between aspirations and reality. The

apprentice and mentor together learn and exercise leadership by focusing attention on

specific issues created by that gap. They perform what is called "adaptive work" by

regulating the level of distress caused by this challenge and ensuring that responsibility

for the problem is given to the primary stakeholders.[76] In this manner the apprentice

learns to handle problems successfully and manage the stress of change. Lovett Weems

emphasizes the need for balance: "If the tension is too little, there is no growth; if too

great, there is too much anxiety for constructive change."[77] Furthermore, a *vision* of the

future result requires dialogue between the apprentice and the mentor. Daloz points out

that "mentors provide proof that the journey can be made, the leap taken."[78]

One of the challenges of apprenticing is that many of us are not accustomed to

letting others lead. This is a reversal in our expected hierarchy of authority, and it echoes

Jesus's admonition, "whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant"

(Matt 20:26). Instead of studying successful people as role models, Jesus recommended

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[76] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), 99–100, 128.

[77] Lovett H. Weems Jr., *Take the Next Step: Leading Lasting Change in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2003), 114–15.

[78] Daloz, *Mentor*, 207. The term "mentor" is derived from a story about teaching a young protégé. "In Greek mythology Mentor was the name of the Ithacan nobleman whose disguise the goddess Athene assumed. He was put in charge of Odysseus' household while he was away fighting in the Trojan and other wars and he became a wise friend and counsellor to Odysseus' young son, Telemachus." Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 154.

that his disciples—those who submit to God's kingdom/reign—learn from the very

people that the world normally regards as suffering or weak. In the Sermon on the

Mount, Jesus first declares that his followers learn about God's blessings from the poor

and those who mourn (Matt 5:3–4). His statement is much more than simply an appeal

to remedy social needs; Jesus is recommending that we be *taught* by those who are poor,

oppressed, and suffering. The solidarity that Jesus proposes "means a readiness to learn

from them and to accept the mantle of their experience as a blessing."[79] We are to

apprentice ourselves to those whom God is blessing through their adversity; otherwise,

our charity is likely to become paternalism and our mentoring may become a form of

colonizing.[80] Nouwen suggests that our own salvation depends on our willingness to

receive from others:

> I am increasingly convinced that one of the greatest missionary tasks is to receive
> the fruits of the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering as gifts offered
> for the salvation of the rich. We who live in the illusion of control and self-
> sufficiency must learn true joy, peace, forgiveness, and love from our poor

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[79] Childs Jr., *Faith, Formation, and Decision*, 40. Duane Elmer says that listening "communicates that you are willing to be taught by the one speaking. In being good listeners we allow the other person to have access to our mind and heart." Elmer, *Cross-Cultural Servanthood*, 122.

[80] Soong-Chan Rah states, "If you are a white Christian wanting to be a missionary in this day and age, and you have never had a nonwhite mentor, then you will not be a missionary. You will be a colonialist. Instead of taking the gospel message into the new world, you will take an Americanized version of the gospel." Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2009), 162.

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brothers and sisters. As long as we only want to give, we remain in the house of fear—so much giving can be a way of staying in control.[81]

Those who appear to be powerless are empowered by God, and they are often the ones whom we should seek as our mentors. As Freire points out, "trusting the people [who have been oppressed] is the indispensable precondition for revolutionary change."[82] Diversity in leadership can occur when the dominant culture (e.g. white male leadership) shares authority, and a first step toward that goal is to seek mentors and coaches who are culturally different from us.

This sort of apprenticing is difficult, and both the apprentice and the mentor will probably face a number of temptations. When viewed from the perspective of the apprentice, the temptations include envy, self-reliance, overconfidence, and entitlement.[83] Our envious desire to imitate those whom we admire, along with our craving for people to like us, can result in some people having an inappropriate amount of influence on us.[84] Mentors may exacerbate this problem if they exhibit a "messiah complex," believing that their role is to rescue or deliver the mentoree from various

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[81] Henri J. M. Nouwen, "Bearing Fruit in the Spirit," *Sojourners* 14, no. 7 (July 1985): 30. Quoted in Childs Jr., *Faith, Formation, and Decision*, 41.

[82] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 46.

[83] Saccone and Saccone, *Protégé*, 32. The authors refer to these as the "four deadly sins of emerging leaders."

[84] Koile, *Listening As a Way of Becoming*, 47–48.

struggles.[85] Secondly, the individualistic culture in which we live pressures apprentices

to perform in a way that is self-reliant and no longer open to others. If the mentor

behaves like a fountain of wisdom-on-demand, then the mentoree is unlikely to learn

how to search for wisdom. The third temptation for an apprentice is to become

overconfident regarding what is known and what can accomplished. Mentors who are

primarily problem-solvers suggest to mentorees that all problems have to be "fixed,"

and the objective becomes expertise instead of spirituality. Finally, a sense of privilege

can lead to feelings of entitlement for the apprentice. The mentor's own stereotyped

assumptions about the apprentice's future may enable such an attitude. Since these

problems are pervasive among people who are trying to "help" each other, the mentor

and the mentoree must actively maintain a dialogue about their motivations and

objectives in this relationship. Teachers must learn early to examine their assumptions

and expectations.

In summary, anyone who wishes to develop empathic teaching skills can learn

from experiences that emphasize listening and dialogue. Some examples of possible

apprenticing initiatives and associated resources include the following:

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[85] Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 89–90.

- Cultivating unlikely friendships to stimulate new learning

- Learning to encourage and listen to people in poverty[86]

- Receiving counsel from people who live sacrificially

- Engaging in the lives of people with disabilities

- Standing in solidarity with people who have been victims of crimes or abuse[87]

- Showing hospitality to immigrants[88]

- Supporting women (or other under-represented groups) in leadership[89]

- Seeking to be mentored for leadership by persons of color.[90]

These relationships develop trust and transparency so that we can uncover our own

blind spots and broaden our perspectives. A fruitful apprentice/mentor relationship

helps both parties comprehend what controls, restrains, and stimulates their behaviors.[91]

4.3 Receptivity and Christian Education

The most important step in applying empathic practices and skills to Christian

education is getting started. Brené Brown says, "If you're expecting someone to operate

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[86] Ruby K. Payne, Philip E. DeVol, and Terie Dreussi Smith, *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities* (Highlands, TX: aha! Process, Inc., 2009).

[87] Lisa Barnes Lampman, ed., *Helping a Neighbor in Crisis: How to Encourage When You Don't Know What To Say* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1997), 151–224.

[88] Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 174–76.

[89] Brown, *Daring Greatly*, 85–91.

[90] Allan Aubrey Boesak and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Radical Reconciliation: Beyond Political Pietism and Christian Quietism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012), 89.

[91] Aguilar, *Art of Coaching*, 198.

from a place of receptivity, then you had better show up open, curious, vulnerable, and full of questions. You have to model the behavior."[92] Church leaders can kick-start an atmosphere of receptivity by engaging people in the local congregation and welcoming them into ministry responsibilities as quickly as possible. Many churches are reluctant to empower people without adequate training, but people get motivated to learn when they are entrusted with a role that requires it.[93] Building a receptive environment in which Christians learn from each other will generate a contagious, communal equipping of the church body. Educational programs must create space for cultivating relationships and encouraging diverse dialogue. The people who are invited into these activities should comprise as broad a spectrum as possible, so that new leaders can emerge out of the work that they are doing.[94] The process begins when leaders seek to hear and learn from God and each other. The process can be assessed by monitoring the *persistence* of the participants in ministry: look for people who are asking questions,

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[92] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 201.

[93] Andy Stanley, *Deep & Wide: Creating Churches Unchurched People Love to Attend* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 128. Also see Stanton Wortham and Alexandra Michel, "Promoting Listening by Augmenting Uncertainty," in *Listening to Teach: Beyond Didactic Pedagogy*, ed. Leonard J. Waks (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2015), 173, 177.

[94] Note that this approach is not about embedded leaders *allowing* diverse people to have responsibilities; that is a patronizing way of perpetuating the dominant culture's status quo. As I explained earlier, dialogue is used here as an opportunity for new leadership to emerge rather than as a tool for suppressing diverse participation.

seeking challenges, broadening perspectives, and excited to recognize and contribute to the activities that they witness God performing.[95]

4.3.1 Practical Exercises

In order to assist with getting traction toward better listening, dialogue, and apprenticing, I would like to suggest some activities. The first is for the reader to consider now before leaving this chapter. After that exercise, some congregational recommendations are provided.

I would like you to imagine that you have an appointment in fifteen minutes with someone who requested an opportunity to talk with you.[96] This person is someone whom you do *not* want to see at this time. Picture in your mind the person who will be coming. Try to feel deeply what you are sensing about this person and about the prospect of listening for the next hour. Describe the person who arrives for the appointment. How old? What gender? What features of appearance or manner stand out? Why did he or she come? What about this person are you reluctant to see or hear? After taking a few minutes to process that image, I want you to picture another scene. You have another appointment in fifteen minutes with someone who wants to discuss a problem. This time, however, the person is someone whom you are eager and happy to

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[95] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 326.

[96] This exercise is borrowed (with some condensing) from Koile, *Listening As a Way of Becoming*, 87–91.

listen to. What is your description of this person? How old? What gender? What sort of attitudes or behavior are noticeable? Why did he or she come? Why is this person someone you want to see and hear? Now, if you were able to imagine these two people, how would you compare and contrast them? Did you discover that you characteristically prefer some kinds of problems and certain types of people? Finally, I want you to imagine a third appointment. This time *you* are the person who wants someone with whom to discuss a serious concern. Describe the person whom you wish to have as your listener. How old? What gender? What features of appearance or manner stand out? Can you see any connection between the listening that you desired and the way that you listened to the others? How do you suppose the person who listened to you might feel about listening to you? Did he or she want to hear you? *What would it be like to listen to you?* The purpose of this exercise is to give you insight into the kinds of people and behaviors that you find (un)comfortable. The differences that you identified might be possible areas to consider for dialogue or apprenticing.

Communities can also become more welcoming and receptive to people. Two recommendations are offered here. First, relative to the discussion of the Sermon on the Mount, churches can learn about the suffering, poverty, and powerlessness that exists nearby. Find some group projects that work *together with* people who are hurting rather than merely on their behalf. People who are in shelters, detention/prisons, and

nursing/hospice facilities want to be heard, and there are community services who will

encourage churches to connect with people.

Another recommendation is to engage in forums that promote learning from

other cultures, traditions, classes, or backgrounds. Churches have opportunities to lead

in celebrating diversity by planning events to hear, understand, and engage people in

learning "the history, the folk traditions, the literature, and musical traditions of one

another's cultures."[97] The importance of hearing each other's stories is emphasized by

bell hooks:

> Stories help us to connect to a world beyond the self. In telling our stories we
> make connections with other stories. Journeying to countries where we may not
> speak the native tongue, most of us communicate by creating a story, one we
> may tell without words. We may show by gesture what we mean. What becomes
> evident is that in the global community life is sustained by stories. A powerful
> way we connect with a diverse world is by listening to the different stories we
> are told. These stories are a way of knowing. Therefore, they contain both power
> and the art of possibility. We need more stories.[98]

There is healing in the telling of stories, and everyone has a need to be heard. The

sharing of stories connects us with each other. Margaret Wheatley claims that being

heard has a significant healing effect because listening creates and restores relationships.

Listening "helps us become more whole, more healthy, more holy. Not listening creates

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[97] Ricardo Ramirez, "Reflections from the Wider Church: Diversity and the Challenges to Inclusion," in *Educating Leaders for Ministry: Issues and Responses*, ed. Victor J. Klimoski, Kevin J. O'Neil, and Katarina M. Schuth (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2005), 179.

[98] hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking*, 52–53.

fragmentation, and fragmentation always causes more suffering."[99] As Christians, we can provide safe boundaries within which "the often painful past can be revealed and the search for a new life can find a start."[100] The specific recommendation for church leaders is to find ways to become more curious, open, and honest with the surrounding community, admitting that the church needs the community as much as the community needs the church.[101] When the church listens, God's grace is evident, and the community is offered reconciliation.

The next chapter will extend this discussion of receptivity to include reflection upon the messages and the relationships that are developed through dialogue. Although it is important to be open to others, it is only the beginning. The interaction will be fruitless unless it impacts the lives of the participants. How that impact takes place is part of the process of reflection, and the result of that reflection will drive our responses in the world.

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[99] Margaret J. Wheatley, *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009), 93–94.

[100] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 96–97.

[101] Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 216.

5. Empathic Reflection

Practices of teaching that are built upon the virtue of empathy find their beginnings with skills of reception that include listening, dialogue, and apprenticing. These skills provide ways to open up new relationships, invite the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and initiate new forms of learning. Yet, as important as these actions are, they alone are not sufficient to develop teachers. In order to fashion a heart prepared for empathic forms of leadership, there must also be reflective consideration and application of that which has been received. In other words, after the welcoming of the subject comes the processing of what that subject means (and will mean in the future) for oneself and the community of learners. This chapter will explore how empathic reflection builds upon receptivity in order to deepen one's perception and also strengthen one's commitment to finding significance in both people and learning. After explaining some attributes of reflection, an approach will be outlined and used as a guide for deep, perceptive thinking. The value of deliberate inquiry in the context of Christian teaching becomes evident in collaborative environments, so the notion of reflection is examined relative to our connections with God, community, and ourselves. One of the vital resources for effective reflection consists of developing friendships, and this study will show that friends enhance the meaning in our lives.

Peter Senge has written extensively about learning organizations, and he asserts that learning occurs as a result of both effective listening and *reflection* on the received information. Specifically, Senge points out that there are two different aspects of openness: participative and reflective. The first of these consists of stating one's view (i.e. what is often referred to as "open communication"), and the second is a matter of challenging one's own assumptions. He states, "Skills of reflection concern slowing down our own thinking processes so that we can become more aware of how we form our mental models and the ways they influence our actions."[1] Reflection is a method of thinking perceptively in order to reveal underlying assumptions and to find significance in events, statements, or experiences. The renowned educational reformer, John Dewey, claimed that reflective thought is an "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends."[2] Therefore, the skill of empathic reflection works to strengthen the teacher's identity and integrity.

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[1] Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday Business, 1994), 191, 277. Also see Goldsmith, "Ask, Learn, Follow Up, and Grow," 231. Heifetz refers to this process of observation as "getting on the balcony." Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 252.

[2] Dewey, *How We Think*, 9. Dewey's comments are insightful despite his insistence that "reflection originates in a problem," a claim that unnecessarily limits the scope of meaningful reflection. Dewey, 281; cf. 15, 107, 119, 145, 188.

Jesus provided an example for his disciples to imitate, including a model of

kingdom values that emphasized the exercise of wisdom in relationships. As Collinson

explains, Jesus showed them how to learn *reflectively*:

> In the midst of his busy, public ministry Jesus provided opportunities for the
> disciples to withdraw from the crowds in order to have time to reflect and learn
> from their experiences before moving on to further ministry. Thus their learning
> came from the cycle of action and reflection established. He gradually increased
> the responsibilities he entrusted to them, and built on previous learning before
> proceeding to more difficult concepts and expectations. He gave them his
> authority and supported, encouraged or rebuked them as was appropriate.[3]

Jesus asked his followers many questions, and his reason for asking was apparently to

help them consider their own thoughts. After all, he certainly did not need their insights

or advice! Jesus's questions were often aimed at developing their skill of reflection. For

example, consider what Jesus wanted to achieve by asking the following:

- "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" (Matt 8:26)

- "But who do you say that I am?" (Matt 16:15)

- "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I tell you?" (Luke 6:46)

- "For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves?"
  (Luke 22:27)

- "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6)

Like Jesus, the apostle Paul was an advocate of personal reflection. He

encouraged the churches to reflect on their identity in Christ and to give careful thought

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[3] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 41–42.

to those things that contribute to godliness. As he wrote to the church in the Macedonian

city of Philippi,

> [8] Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just,
> whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any
> excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
> [Phil 4:8]

Reflection is a vital component of spiritual formation, and it encompasses much more

than merely looking back on past deeds. Paul suggests that in *reflecting* on Jesus's

character, we become like him and *reflect* him to the world (Phil 2:1–11).

Already we can observe a variety of connotations in the term "reflection," and

Paul affirms our use of all of them. It can refer to "simple awareness of an object, event

or state, including awareness of a perception, thought, feeling, disposition, intention,

action, or of one's habits of doing these things. It can also mean letting one's thoughts

wander over something, taking something into consideration, or imagining

alternatives."[4] In addition to this cognitive usage, the term also signifies a "mirroring" or

"replication" of a person, an object, or an idea. All of these notions play some role in

how it is to be acquired and applied as a skill. Reflection is a process of interpreting

information, experiences, and events, followed by an assimilation with past experiences,

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[4] Jack Mezirow, "On Critical Reflection," *Adult Education Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (Spring 1998): 185.

and then building the necessary connections for fresh perspectives.[5] It is both a

pondering and a mirroring; we adopt an identity or image of that which we think about

most. As the process continues, learners become like (reflect) the people, events, and

experiences from which they have learned. For example, I have become, like many other

students, an imitator of the professors that I appreciated the most in college and

seminary. I did not set out to copy their style or their knowledge, but as I learned the

subject material from them, I also learned their way of articulating and relating to the

content. The implication here is that teachers are students of the people who have taught

them, and they have learned not only some ways to think but also some models that

they have imitated.

Maria Harris describes education as an artful process of imaginative reflection.

The steps in the process are "(1) contemplation, (2) engagement, (3) form-giving, (4)

emergence, and (5) release."[6] Although she presents them as a general paradigm for

teaching, I am adopting the categories specifically for the purpose of distinguishing the

functions of reflection. *Contemplation* is an openness to learning from an encounter that

stimulates dialogue and thought. In the context of teaching, reflection consists of

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[5] Richard Patterson, "How Adults Learn," in *The Christian Educator's Handbook on Adult Education*, ed. Kenneth O. Gangel and James C. Wilhoit (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 131.

[6] Maria Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination: An Essay in the Theology of Teaching* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), 25–40, 163. Also see Moore, *Teaching as a Sacramental Act*, 114.

observation, remembrance, and replay of the information or experience. This process of "thinking openly" was discussed in the previous chapter, so the remaining components of Harris's model will be emphasized here. *Engagement* is the first step in what I will refer to as "perceptive thinking," and it involves analytical interaction with other people, the world, and a range of texts and issues.[7] *Form-giving* represents the initial move toward reflective meaning-making and includes personal and communal expressions of significance about the subject(s) being reflected upon.[8] *Emergence* is characterized by the appearance or development of new forms, solutions, and methodologies that imaginatively reflect the original issue or event. *Release* is the stage at which actions or solutions are distributed or publicized. Reflection upon the result as well as the original issue can then potentially spread to a wider population.[9]

The process of reflection outlined above will be used as a guide in the next section for exploring how Christian teachers uncover assumptions and make sense of

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[7] The steps of *contemplation* and *engagement* correspond to "reflective observation" in Kolb's experiential learning cycle. David A. Kolb, *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development* (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Pearson Education, 2015), 51; Jarvis, *The Sociology of Adult & Continuing Education*, 104–8; Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 43. Although Kolb's theory of experiential learning has received some criticism, it offers a convenient way to connect experience to reflection and the process of learning. "Experience becomes represented through reflective observation, organized through abstract conceptualization and put into practice through active experimentation. These four processes—experience, reflection, conceptualization and action—mark the four essential forms of learning." D. Christopher Kayes, "The Limits and Consequences of Experience Absent Reflection: Implications for Learning and Organizing," in *Organizing Reflection*, ed. Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 67.

[8] The *form-giving* step corresponds to Kolb's "abstract conceptualization."

[9] The steps of *emergence* and *release* correspond to Kolb's "active experimentation."

their encounters with people, subjects, and experiences. The objective is to determine how to build learning environments that seek meaning and connection.

5.1 Thinking Perceptively

Learning consists of more than receiving and storing information; knowledge is not simply a commodity to be passed from one person to another.[10] Learning involves modes of thinking that engage the individual and the community (i.e. the relational context of the learning) in processing, comprehending, and synthesizing various experiences. Therefore, as Preskill and Brookfield assert, "The starting point for analyzing all experience is the simple act of valuing that experience."[11] In most cases, people's experiences are communicated and appreciated in the form of stories. As discussed in the previous chapter, the skill of empathic reception is the first step toward hearing and seeing the stories around us. Whether or not the story is our own, the beginning of learning is reflection on the story. This is the process of *engagement,* which occurs when people are "encouraged to explore, to discover for themselves, and to subject their convictions to critical, scrupulous comparison with alternative doctrines."[12]

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[10] Paulo Freire, *Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those Who Dare Teach* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998), 22.

[11] Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 106. John Dewey says, "When the mind thoroughly appreciates anything, that object is experienced with heightened intensity of value." Dewey, *How We Think*, 277.

[12] Hayes, "Theological Foundations for Adult Education," 37.

Fred Korthagen provides a summary of the layers of contextual experience that influence people in regard to engagement and reflection. Beginning with the most observable elements and moving toward a "core" of deeper functional perspectives, the layers include environment (what is encountered), behavior (what we do), competencies (what we prefer), beliefs (what I commit to), identity (who I am), and mission (who/what inspires me).[13] Thoughtful deliberation on any of these layers with respect to specific stories of experience can generate new ways of perceiving problems and understanding the nature of conventional practices.

This form of deep reflection is often labelled as critical thinking (also critical reflection or critical pedagogy). Daniel Willingham explains that

> critical thinking consists of seeing both sides of an issue, being open to new evidence that disconfirms your ideas, reasoning dispassionately, demanding that claims be backed by evidence, deducing and inferring conclusions from available facts, solving problems, and so forth.[14]

In this context, "critical" does not imply an unappreciative or negative critique. Furthermore, this sort of thinking goes beyond the typical practices of interpretation,

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[13] Fred A. J. Korthagen, "In Search of the Essence of a Good Teacher: Towards a More Holistic Approach in Teacher Education," *Teaching and Teacher Education* 20, no. 1 (January 2004): 79–81. Also see Fred Korthagen and Hildelien S. Verkuyl, "Do You Encounter Your Students or Yourself? The Search for Inspiration as an Essential Component of Teacher Education," in *Enacting a Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Values, Relationships and Practices*, ed. Tom Russell and John Loughran (New York: Routledge, 2007), 114.

[14] Daniel T. Willingham, "Critical Thinking: Why Is It So Hard to Teach?," *Arts Education Policy Review* 109, no. 4 (April 2008): 21.

analysis, and problem-solving.[15] The focus is more acutely on the discovery of

underlying assumptions, opinions, rules, and emerging differences, and because these

observations are often retrospective, there is also a need for a complementary emphasis

on mindfulness regarding present (and even future) experiences.[16] A prime example of a

lack of critical thinking can be observed in the way that people often respond to social

media comments. As people surround themselves with like-minded voices, many online

conversations are characterized by an arrogance of presumed uniformity and a

vehement disregard for other perspectives. Many of us assume that all of the *good* people

believe what *we* do, without an examination of the underlying assumptions.[17]

Brookfield identifies three types of assumptions that are important subjects for

critical thinking and reflection: *paradigmatic* assumptions about things that we hold as

unquestionable, fundamental truths (which are seldom reflected upon because they are

regarded as basic facts); *prescriptive* assumptions about what we believe ought to be

happening (including obligations between people); and *causal* assumptions about how

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[15] On the depth of critical thinking, see Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 89; Li, "Rethinking Silencing Silences," 73; Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 41.

[16] Mezirow, "On Critical Reflection," 195. Also see William N. Isaacs, "Taking Flight: Dialogue, Collective Thinking, and Organizational Learning," *Organizational Dynamics* 22, no. 2 (September 22, 1993).

[17] Tim Keller suggests that a refusal to think perceptively places people perilously close to idolatry. He claims that "when we are completely immersed in a society of people who consider a particular idolatrous attachment normal, it becomes almost impossible to discern it for what it is." Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods: The Empty Promises of Money, Sex, and Power, and the Only Hope That Matters* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009), 130.

the world operates (including expected patterns, sequences, logic, and progress).[18] There are assumptions underlying all of our decisions, actions, and judgments, and perceptive (critical) thinking scrutinizes these assumptions for truthfulness (i.e. whether they are accurate or deceptive), coherence (i.e. whether they are consistent with accepted values and norms), and authenticity (i.e. whether they are emotive as well as cognitive in substance and intent).[19]

We usually limit our reflective engagement to those things that we regard as relevant, with a normal disregard for a large range of our sensory experience. As part of our community's socialization (and every culture is different), we learn what is appropriate to ignore, with the result that reflection requires looking for what we cannot easily see.[20] Kegan and Lahey suggest that our biggest assumptions "are not so much the assumptions we have as they are the assumptions *that have us*."[21] Therefore, reflection requires an ardent questioning of what may seem obvious in order to begin to grasp why a particular decision or outcome was either unexpected or incoherent. As Kegan

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[18] Stephen Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995), 2–3.

[19] Regarding the scrutiny of assumptions, see Mezirow, "On Critical Reflection," 188; Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 41.

[20] On seeking to uncover what we otherwise ignore, see Eviatar Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes: An Invitation to Cognitive Sociology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 37, 47; Jane Westberg and Hilliard Jason, *Fostering Reflection and Providing Feedback: Helping Others Learn from Experience* (New York: Springer, 2001), 14.

[21] Robert Kegan and Lisa Laskow Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work: Seven Languages for Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 68. Italics are original.

and Lahey point out, "We may need first to consider whether what we are telling is how it *is*—the truth at last to set us free—or how it *seems* to us."[22] The hiddenness of our assumptions is often the reason why revolutions in thought are rarely prompted by new data; what is needed is a new perspective—a new way of looking at the same reality. Eviatar Zerubavel claims that great discoveries are often the result of "dramatic epistemological shifts" in which the familiar is seen in a different light or from another angle.[23] A variety of methods have been suggested to assist in reflective engagement, each offering the prospect of enlightening, surprising, or disturbing the user with an "Aha" moment. Some of these include investigative questioning,[24] free writing and journaling,[25] concept maps,[26] role playing, exploring an unfamiliar culture, and creative/expressive activities like painting or sculpture.[27] As we will discuss later in this chapter, friends can also stimulate effective reflection.[28] Reflective activities have the

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[22] Kegan and Lahey, 122–23. Italics are original.

[23] Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, 26.

[24] Anderson and Reese, *Spiritual Mentoring*, 146–47.

[25] For insights into journaling, see Anderson and Reese, 133–35; Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 22.

[26] Jennifer Osmond and Yvonne Darlington, "Reflective Analysis: Techniques for Facilitating Reflection," *Australian Social Work* 58, no. 1 (March 2005): 10–11.

[27] Carolin Kreber, "Critical Reflection and Transformative Learning," in *Handbook of Transformative Learning: Theory, Research, and Practice*, ed. Edward W. Taylor and Patricia Cranton (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 330.

[28] Stephen D. Brookfield, "Transformative Learning as Ideology Critique," in *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress*, ed. Jack Mezirow (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 125–50.

potential to provide a better understanding of what we (or others) think and believe, with appreciation for underlying alternative views and explanations. Reflection does not in itself improve the accuracy of our beliefs, but may uncover additional concerns or commitments that have been obscured in our thinking.[29]

The *form-giving* step in reflection consists of making sense or meaning of a particular subject or experience. Kayes asserts, "As knowledge transforms from experience to reflection, the intuitive texture of experience is translated into symbolic form."[30] Form-giving is a process of trying on various structures or narratives in order to find a good fit between sense and experience. For example, we encounter a persistent barrier at work and wonder what it *means*; or we scrutinize a particular work of art for its *meaning*. Westberg and Jason suggest that this process of meaning-making "enables learners to elaborate on fresh insights, connect them with what they know, link them with other knowledge areas, derive generalizations, and figure out how they can use these insights in other situations."[31] Connections are what give purpose and meaning to the experiences, objects, ideas, people, and activities in our lives. We make meaning at

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[29] Hilary Kornblith, *On Reflection* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 23–25, 114, 135.

[30] Kayes, "The Limits and Consequences of Experience Absent Reflection," 70.

[31] Westberg and Jason, *Fostering Reflection and Providing Feedback*, 5. Dewey asserts, "To grasp the meaning of a thing, an event, or a situation is to see it in its *relations* to other things: to note how it operates or functions, what consequences follow from it, what causes it, what uses it can be put to." Dewey, *How We Think*, 137. Italics are original.

every level and aspect of our lives—from individual words and sentences to the

summative purpose of a life—and these expressions of meaning comprise the stories

that we live by. Osmer says this is a fundamental quality of human nature:

> Narrative is the shape of personal identity. We know ourselves through our stories. This is because personal identity is an attempt to make sense of the history of our lives: how we have become who we are over time. In understanding who we are—forming a sense of personal identity—we weave together the important events and characters of our life into a meaningful plot unfolding through time. In short, our self-understanding naturally takes a narrative form.[32]

People bind themselves into shared narratives in order to form or affirm their identity,

and this binding can broaden a limited perspective; however, adopting a particular

narrative can also blind a person to alternative perspectives.[33]

Once a person is invested in a particular story (whether or not it has been proven

to be true), shifting to another narrative is difficult. Most of us have been puzzled by

people describing an image quite differently from how we see it, and we notice that

shifting to the other perspective is not easy.[34] The very connections and recognitions that

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[32] Osmer, *Teaching for Faith*, 113. Brené Brown claims that if there is no story readily available to give meaning to our experience, we will often *make one up*. Brown, *Rising Strong*, 79.

[33] Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Random House, 2012), xvi, 110. Dewey makes a similar statement: "Thought can more easily traverse an unexplored region than it can undo what has been so thoroughly done as to be ingrained in unconscious habit." Dewey, *How We Think*, 141.

[34] Some examples include Rubin's Vase and the image of the young or old woman. Centre for the Study of Perceptual Experience, "Explore Illusions," The Illusions Index, accessed September 27, 2019, https://www.illusionsindex.org/illusions.

open certain areas of meaning also close other avenues, making it necessary to "jump" perspectives in order to grasp more than we currently see. Our willingness to make this "jump" is important in the context of cultural differences because one group's approach to reception and reflection may be misunderstood by another social group. For example, a person whose perspective is that of a dominant class will likely assess the power dynamic in a given a situation or encounter quite differently from people who feel subordinate to that class.[35] The way that we engage in reflection carries assumptions about appropriate behaviors.

Many of the typical forms of meaning involve *symbols*, which are structured as "a mental association of two elements, one of which (the 'signifier') is regarded as representing, or 'standing for,' the other (the 'signified')."[36] Meaning is found in that which is represented by (or associated with) the particular symbol or sign being used.[37] In the study of such relationships of meaning (known as semiotic theory), *semantics* refers to the connections between the symbols (signs) and what they represent (signify). This might involve the nuanced meaning of a specific word or an analysis of the impact of an historic event on a particular culture. Crystal Downing offers the example of the

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[35] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 168.

[36] Regarding the use of symbols, see Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, 68; Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics* (New York: Philosophical Library, 1959), 67.

[37] Thomas E. Hill, *The Concept of Meaning* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 59, 95–96, 178.

use of the "X" in "Xmas," which some people decry as evidence of "Christ" being

absent from Christmas. However, others consider the "X" to *symbolize* Christ, since the

Greek letter *chi* is the first letter of "Christ."[38] *Syntactics* is another category of meaning

in semiotic theory, and it involves the relations between different symbols and how they

combine together without regard for their specific significations. An example is the way

that different parts of speech operate in a sentence (like a prepositional phrase or a

predicate-object construction) to achieve an understandable result irrespective of the

specific words' meanings. Another example might be a certain maneuver or sequence (a

"play") that a sports team uses to coordinate the roles of the players on the field

irrespective of their individual identities as people. Finally, *pragmatics* concerns the

origins, uses, and effects of signs and symbols.[39] Since the connection between the

signifier and the signified is formed in and by community as a social construction, the

pragmatic meaning of symbols is "a property of the way they are socially used."[40]

Therefore, the same object or event may be perceived differently by another person or

culture, making the context a significant factor for understanding the intent behind the

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[38] Crystal L. Downing, *Changing Signs of Truth: A Christian Introduction to the Semiotics of Communication* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2012), 89. Downing fails to mention that some people have also considered the "X" as a symbol of the cross of Christ.

[39] Hill, *The Concept of Meaning*, 114–15.

[40] Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, 78.

preferred sense. For example, the meaning attributed to a campfire is very different in the context of a church retreat than in the context of shipwrecked survivors coping with basic survival. Social meanings rely upon the possibility of multiple people (or a small number of people repeatedly) sharing patterns of experience and associating those patterns with symbols that can be used to communicate such experience.[41]

The nature of meaning and meaning-making is important for teachers because learning is about connecting events, information, and people to a narrative that suitably offers meaningful explanations and hope. Christian teachers aim at "helping people reinterpret part of their life story in light of the Christian story in such a manner that some area of their life is changed."[42] As Kegan and Lahey point out, "It is very hard to sustain significant changes in behavior without significant changes in individuals' underlying meanings that may give rise to their behaviors."[43] This process of change is messy because teachers draw students (and themselves) into perceptive ways of thinking that are "open to the complexity, paradox, and ambiguity of reality."[44] Ronald Heifetz describes this approach to perceptive thinking as *adaptive work*:

> Adaptive work consists of the learning required to address conflicts in the values
> people hold, or to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the

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[41] Hill, *The Concept of Meaning*, 264.

[42] Osmer, *Teaching for Faith*, 110.

[43] Kegan and Lahey, *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work*, 3.

[44] Foster et al., *Educating Clergy*, 78–79.

> reality they face. Adaptive work requires a change in values, beliefs, or behavior. The exposure and orchestration of conflict—internal contradictions—within individuals and constituencies provide the leverage for mobilizing people to learn in new ways.[45]

People construct meanings differently from each other due to differences in their perceptions of reality. Conflict can be a catalyst for change and learning when it prompts people to reflect upon the current situation and consider alternative possibilities. Wlodkowski asserts that "the edge of our comfort zone [is] a very good place to stretch our understanding, take in a different perspective, and expand our awareness."[46] However, without the skill of reflection, conflict is more likely to hinder change. A commitment to working through messy, adaptive problems is necessary for formulating innovative solutions in the context of community.

Reflective *emergence* involves new ways of thinking that produce new kinds of solutions. Riel and Martin remind us that "if you think about a problem as you have always thought about it, you will get the answers you have always gotten."[47] One of the ways to constructively disrupt our thinking is to use the lens of empathy, which focuses

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[45] Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 22.

[46] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 129. Carol Gilligan states that Erikson, in a discussion of human development through crisis, "demonstrates how a heightened vulnerability signals the emergence of a potential strength." Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 108; Erik H. Erikson, *Insight and Responsibility: Lectures on the Ethical Implications of Psychoanalytic Insight* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1964), 139.

[47] Jennifer Riel and Roger L. Martin, *Creating Great Choices: A Leader's Guide to Integrative Thinking* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2017), 124.

attention on affective as well as cognitive processes. Learning environments that connect hearts will reach beyond the "modern, secularist narrative that prizes *autonomy*"[48] toward shared, spiritual reflection on the use of social power, mutual trust, and the persistence of our own biases. Thinking about these topics can be disturbing because the way we classify problems often perpetuates the status quo. For example, the choices that seem obvious to many Christian leaders—e.g. choices regarding conservative vs. liberal, mega- vs. small, clergy-led vs. lay-led, or traditional vs. contemporary—may turn out to be less important than choices regarding lordship vs. popular idols or risk vs. comfort. Riel and Martin recommend exploring the core values of the opposing alternatives with the goal of creating a great, new choice, for "it is in the tension between competing ideas that we come to understand the true nature of a problem and start to see possibilities for a creative answer."[49] We are likely to discover that the apparent polarities that consume our attention do not represent the actual forces that are working to pull the church apart. The problem of our disconnectedness requires new kinds of solutions that reach into our hearts.

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[48] James K. A. Smith, *You Are What You Love: The Spiritual Power of Habit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2016), 159. Italics are original.

[49] Riel and Martin, *Creating Great Choices*, 39, 67, 77, 88.

The *release* stage involves sharing solutions and evaluating the results. I am

suggesting in this chapter that empathic reflection, demonstrated through perceptive

thinking, enables a fruitful learning environment. Without reflection, a group of people

will seek to maintain their current direction and identity, looking for new experiences

merely as a means to validate the group's existence.[50] On the other hand, an educational

system that uses reflection in its teaching practices has the potential to dramatically

improve both the motivation among its participants and the quality of the educational

experience. Wlodkowski identifies four essential conditions that are enhanced by

reflective behaviors:[51]

- *Establishing inclusion:* creating a learning atmosphere in which learners and teachers feel respected and connected to one another

- *Developing* [*a positive*] *attitude:* creating a favorable disposition toward the learning experience through personal relevance and choice

- *Enhancing meaning:* creating challenging, thoughtful learning experiences that include learners' perspectives and values

- *Engendering competence:* creating an understanding that learners are effective in learning something they value

Practicing reflection contributes to an awareness that everyone is connected and

accepted; participants recognize that their interests, values, ideas, and histories are

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[50] Kayes, "The Limits and Consequences of Experience Absent Reflection," 71.

[51] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 69, 80–81.

appreciated.[52] In the following sections, we will explore how reflection operates in the specific contexts of our heavenly relationship, our community relationships, and our relationship with ourselves.

5.1.1 Reflective with God

God is in love with his creation, and "He is mindful of his covenant forever" (Psa 105:8; cf. Psa 106:45; Luke 1:72). The very possibility that we might reflect about God is based on the truth that he reflectively thinks about us. As N. T. Wright explains, "Being in God's image is *both* about reflecting God into the world (the purpose) *and* about receiving and returning the divine love (the relationship)."[53] Our human attempts to reflect upon God are inadequate as a means to comprehend God, but the impossibility of thinking about God has been made possible by God's active involvement in both the inspiration of Scripture and the illumination of those who read and hear it. John Calvin observed,

> For as God alone is a fit witness of himself in his Word, so also the Word will not find acceptance in men's hearts before it is sealed by the inward testimony of the Spirit. The same Spirit, therefore, who has spoken through the mouths of the prophets must penetrate into our hearts to persuade us that they faithfully proclaimed what had been divinely commanded.[54]

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[52] Wlodkowski, 69–78.

[53] N. T. Wright, *Paul and the Faithfulness of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 487. Italics are original.

[54] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, Book 1 (Albany, OR: Books For The Ages, 1998), 121 (1.7.4).

This dependence upon the Spirit does not exempt or exclude anyone from actively seeking God's Word in the Bible. It does mean, however, that we might be surprised by what we discover. Karl Barth explained that the Bible "offers us not at all what we first seek in it. … It is not the right human thoughts about God which form the content of the Bible, but the right divine thoughts about men. The Bible tells us not how we should talk with God but what he says to us; not how we find the way to him, but how he has sought and found the way to us."[55] The questions that we earnestly bring to the Bible are all redirected toward the one who is at its center: Christ the Word. The self-revealing God of Scripture makes it possible for us to participate in the humanly impossible task of knowing the Word of God.[56] I have found in my work with church teachers that regular Scripture reading (and re-reading) is one of the best practices for allowing the Holy Spirit to be our guide in reflecting on God's Word.

Prayer is vital for a reflective relationship with God. As Paul Miller observes from his own experience, "We need to reflect on our lives and engage God with the condition of our souls and the souls he has entrusted to our care or put in our paths. In a fallen world, these things do not come automatically."[57] The apostle Paul admonished

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[55] Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957), 39, 43.

[56] Barth, 58–59.

[57] Paul Miller, *A Praying Life: Connecting with God in a Distracting World* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2009), 261.

the Ephesian church to pray "in the Spirit" as a way to reflect on God in the context of

defending one's faith and persevering on behalf of other Christians (Eph 6:18). Dietrich

Bonhoeffer focuses his definition of prayer on "the readiness and willingness to receive

and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one's personal situation,

particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations."[58] Beyond the reception of God's Word

that we examined in the previous chapter, reflection on God (in prayer and in the Word)

connects us to his will in ways that direct and empower our steps to serve and imitate

Christ in the world.

5.1.2 Reflective with Community

In spite of our cultural tendency toward individualism in the Western world,

most of our learning is accomplished in collaboration with other people (i.e. in some

form of community that influences our perceptions and interpretations of life). As

Preskill and Brookfield point out, "We cannot learn to be critically reflective, analyze

experience, question ourselves, practice democracy, sustain hope, or create community

without the necessary involvement of others."[59] The context of our reflective activity

consists of the perceptions and interpretations that others have to offer. Indeed, it is

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[58] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: A Discussion of Christian Fellowship* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1954), 84–85.

[59] Preskill and Brookfield, *Learning As a Way of Leading*, 15–16.

possible to go even further and claim that much of our *thinking* is a participation in what others before us and presently around us have thought. Our common experiences suggest that we develop certain *a priori* "mental structures" that influence our perceptions.[60] Much of what we notice and remember is shaped by our communities of interpretation—those friendships, families, traditions, and organizations that contribute to our faculties of attention and reflection. In other words, "we shape all knowledge by the way we know it."[61]

An example of reflective cooperation is found in the disciples' discussion after seeing Jesus on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13–35). Confused by the recent events surrounding Jesus's death and the report of his resurrection, they welcomed an explanation from their unexpected companion. After recognizing Jesus, they sought out the eleven apostles, who were also grappling with the resurrection, and they all shared their experiences and interpretations with each other. Their sharing with one another confirmed their experience of walking with Jesus.

Robert Bellah's research has shown that people need to belong to a group: "We find ourselves not independently of other people and institutions but through them. …

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[60] Zerubavel, *Social Mindscapes*, 3, 24, 81, 87, 90, 112. Polanyi claims that "we cannot start discovering new ideas, even in science, without first adopting a whole framework of ideas which others have had before us." Michael Polanyi and Harry Prosch, *Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 108.

[61] Polanyi and Prosch, *Meaning*, 194.

We are parts of a larger whole that we can neither forget nor imagine in our own image without paying a high price."[62] These groups establish both affinities and discrepancies with other groups through the narratives that transcend the individuals. As Emerson and Smith explain, "Two important ways that groups provide meaning and belonging are by establishing group boundaries and social solidarity."[63] The reality is that our identity is shaped by discovering the people with whom we are connected and also by pulling back from those who dwell outside our social boundaries. Obviously, the presence of these boundaries has both positive and negative implications. The integrity of both the group and the individual depends on the possibility of thoughtful, critical reflection on how the margins of the group's social identity are constituted. For example, I grew up in a small town in Tennessee where the community was relatively homogenous, so when I moved to New Jersey after college, I was amazed at the diversity in the population. Then as I traveled with my work, I visited other parts of the world and my perceptions of people broadened immensely. My ongoing reflections on the boundaries of my social world have caused me to prefer and expect greater diversity than I ever considered as a youth.

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[62] Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 84. Brookfield points out that people often risk exclusion from a group when they question the group's fundamental assumptions and expectations. He refers to this as "cultural suicide." Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 235.

[63] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 142.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, reflection requires examining underlying assumptions—especially those assumptions that would otherwise remain hidden. Applying perceptive (or "critical") thinking to practices of reflection requires even more than questioning assumptions: it is a social process, accomplished both within and as a collaborative group; it is concerned with power relations and the effects of maintaining or disturbing the status quo; and it aims at transformation and emancipation of those who are oppressed as well as those who contribute to oppression.[64] Paulo Freire notably expressed that critical reflection and social change are closely connected; both the oppressor and the oppressed must come to realize that we are easily deceived by existing power structures.[65] As Miroslav Volf explains, critical reflection includes the voices of others:

> Let it suffice here to note only that we enlarge our thinking by letting the voices and perspectives of others, especially those with whom we may be in conflict, resonate within ourselves, by allowing them to help us see them, as well as ourselves, from *their* perspective, and if needed, readjust our perspectives as we take into account their perspectives. Nothing can guarantee in advance that the perspectives will ultimately merge and agreement be reached. We may find that we must reject the perspective of the other. Yet we should seek to see things from

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[64] On the application of perceptive thinking, see Michael Reynolds, "Towards a Critical Management Pedagogy," in *Management Learning: Integrating Perspectives in Theory and Practice*, ed. John G. Burgoyne and Michael Reynolds (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1997), 315–16; M. Ann Welsh and Gordon E. Dehler, "P(l)aying Attention: Communities of Practice and Organized Reflection," in *Organizing Reflection*, ed. Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 18, 20; Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, xii–xiii.

[65] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 52–53, 76, 123, 125. Regarding our recognition of structural problems, see Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 202–3, 251.

their perspective in the hope that competing justices may become converging justices and eventually issue in agreement.[66]

This sort of reflection on the diverse (and unheard) voices in our community is aimed at revealing the underlying structural causes that might be addressed by collective action. Such collaborative reflection is important for our discussion about formulating responses in the next chapter.

Important teaching practices like formative presence and resilient trust call upon us to reflect accurately on our purposes and behaviors. Our formation as teachers (or any sort of leader) requires the presence of trusted colleagues who will observe our behaviors and provide us with feedback. Otherwise, we cannot see ourselves as others see us and we will not develop into effective teachers. Coworkers and friends can often identify our assumptions better than we can. Furthermore, as they "describe their own experiences dealing with the same crises and dilemmas we face, we are able to check, reframe, and broaden our own theories of practice."[67] Therefore, the role of teacher in the church is not an isolated, delegated position, but rather a member of a supportive team that offers both encouragement and challenges.

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[66] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 213. Italics are original. Volf emphasizes that it is possible to simultaneously *stand within a given tradition* and also to *learn from other traditions*.

[67] Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 35–36.

5.1.3 Reflective with Self

In his famous "last lecture," Randy Pausch made a fundamental observation: "The only way any of us can improve … is if we develop a real ability to assess ourselves. If we can't accurately do that, how can we tell if we're getting better or worse?"[68] Likewise, Paulo Freire's renowned work to help liberate illiterate, oppressed peasants was primarily focused on helping them "think critically about their lives in a dialogical encounter with others."[69] So it is also with our own formation: we are responsible for considering our own behavior, and yet, that reflection requires our diligent attention to feedback from others. In speaking about the bad behaviors that we cannot see in ourselves, Barbara Brown Taylor says

> Our shadows are often behind us, where others can see them better than we can. If we want to hear and see more—even the parts that expose our scornfulness— we need partners from outside our in-groups to keep telling us how we sound. Some of them get tired of doing this, I know, since those of us in the mainstream are not particularly fast learners. The people who stick with us seem to understand that they can benefit as much as we do, since one of the best ways to learn more about your faith is to engage people who do not share it. The more we mix it up with others, the more we find out about who we really are.[70]

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[68] Randy Pausch and Jeffrey Zaslow, *The Last Lecture* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 112.

[69] Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 191. For Freire's discussion about dialogue, see Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 78–79.

[70] Barbara Brown Taylor, *Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others* (New York: HarperOne, 2019), 88.

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The development of a reflective community begins with individual leaders listening to

diverse voices (including self) and constantly identifying and checking assumptions. We

need to know ourselves and that requires more input than merely from ourselves.

The self-reflective teacher is not only aware of his or her role and place in

situational encounters, but also considers how he or she has contributed to the situation.

However, our tendency is to adopt approaches and behaviors that are "a direct response

to how we were taught."[71] We often replicate methods and traditions that affirm our

own growth or position. Even our biases are connected to the underlying narratives that

we have believed. In addition to the assumptions that we already acknowledge, there

are hidden influences that are hindering our ability to work well with those who are

different from us. Privileged behaviors (such as racism, sexism, ableism, and classism)

are perpetuated by refusing to accept and confront our values and prejudices.[72] In order

to become more open about our contributions to various inequities, we might benefit

from considering our assumptions as *emotional investments* that we are actively

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[71] Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 49.

[72] Taylor, "Listening in the Pedagogy of Discomfort," 117. Also see Megan Boler, "Teaching for Hope: The Ethics of Shattering Worldviews," in *Teaching, Learning, and Loving: Reclaiming Passion in Educational Practice*, ed. Daniel Liston and Jim Garrison (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), 122. Those who research white identity have observed that people who are white do not have to think about being white because racism privileges white thinking. Joseph Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism: The Twenty-First Century Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 88.

supporting as protection against threats to the status quo.[73] Our passive neglect may in reality be an active compliance with dominant norms. An initiative to reflect on our assumptions "calls into judgment our current understandings, actions and feelings," and Rollo May claims that such an activity confronts "the actual (as contrasted with ideal) gods of our society."[74]

Critical reflection is risky and it can potentially increase anxiety. Today's "quick-fix" mentality is uncomfortable with the enormity of the problems in our society and has the potential to short-circuit reflective efforts. Yet, Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1). When we trust God and his solutions, our identity and integrity are no longer dependent solely upon the world's judgment (along with its blame and shame). We can bring our brokenness to God and to our friends (or family) in order to see ourselves as we truly are.[75] As teachers, we know that connecting hearts (with people and with God) requires our own heart to be firmly joined with Christ. Our primary strength is not in ourselves. We must remember Paul's advice to his friend Timothy: "Do not neglect the gift that is in you" (1 Tim 4:12).

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[73] Boler, *Feeling Power*, 178, 181, 186, 193.

[74] Foster, *Teaching in the Community of Faith*, 128. Foster is quoting from Rollo May, *The Courage to Create* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1975), 30.

[75] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 73. Honest feedback from friends might prevent our tendency to perceive our own "mirror image" in others. Fiumara says the result of this tendency is that "we find ourselves both perceiving and using others as ever-new ways of reflecting ourselves, by which we seek to create a wider but stagnant consensus for everything that we already believe in." Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language*, 163.

The irony of personal reflection is that we are not capable of making accurate assessments of ourselves by ourselves. We need community in order for our perception to develop a healthy wholeness. One form of constructive engagement is the relationship formed with friends—those companions in life that seek ultimate benefits for each other, often requiring significant investment. Friendships are vital for developing character in oneself, in relationship with community, and in connection with God. The next section examines the nature of friendships and how they are necessary for leadership.

5.2 Developing Friendships

In the context of empathic reflection, relationships that are based on friendship offer a supportive, constructive environment for learning about ourselves and the practices of teaching. The change in ourselves that is necessary for wholeness is enabled by friendships in which "love for that wholeness can be shared."[76] During the classical period of Greece, Aristotle described three types of motivation for having friends: a utilitarian usefulness, a desire for pleasure, and a pursuit of excellence. The latter form is most virtuous, and Aristotle determined that such friendship "appears to consist in giving rather than in receiving affection."[77]

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[76] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 25.

[77] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 218–20 (§1156a5–1156b32), 229 (§1159a26–27).

Thomas Aquinas, a Dominican friar in the thirteenth century, understood friendship as a gift from God; in fact, the blessing of God's friendship gives meaning to our lives.[78] Friendship provides an encounter with another who is distinct from ourselves and can draw us out of ourselves into a new identity. As Paul Wadell observes, "we learn to appreciate what is not ourselves."[79] Jesus regarded himself as a friend of his disciples because he offered himself to them and for them, asking in return that they follow his directions (John 15:12–15). Friends draw us into various forms of connection and intimacy that build mutual identity and integrity. Gregory Boyle suggests that this solidarity strengthens our conception of both God and each other: he explains that a Spanish way of speaking about a close friend is to "describe the union and kinship as being *de uña y mugre*—our friendship is like the fingernail and the dirt under it."[80] We accept and love each other even with the "dirt"—our baggage—that we all bring with us.

Friends embody the previously-described practices of formative presence and resilient trust, and for that reason friendship is an appropriate empathic relationship for

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[78] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 120. Citing Aquinas, "The Summa Theologiæ," II.1.65.5. Aquinas states in Question 65, Article 5, "Charity signifies not only the love of God, but also a certain friendship with Him; which implies, besides love, a certain mutual return of love, together with mutual communion."

[79] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 145, 147. Bellah describes friendship as "a context within which personal identity is formed, a place where fluent self-awareness follows the currents of communal conversation and contributes to them." Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 135.

[80] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 27.

teachers to develop with students and with each other. Indeed, all leaders need friendships.[81] Paul needed Timothy as much as Timothy needed Paul (1 Cor 4:17), even though their roles were different. Although we should strive to have a wide circle of friends, I find that a few close Christian friends are most helpful when I am either tested or facing changes. Both mutual support and reciprocal challenge are present in a friendship, as "iron sharpens iron" (Prov 27:17) and each person helps the other grow. Supportive interactions often begin with shared interests or experiences and mature into commitments to God and each other that exhibit honesty, grace, and generosity. An ability and a willingness to discern the need for accountability and responsibility foster a growing relationship that includes healthy challenges to one another, with each risking vulnerability for the sake of the other.[82]

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[81] Eugene Peterson writes in a letter to a fellow pastor, "The only way the Christian life is brought to maturity is through intimacy, renunciation, and personal deepening. And the pastor is in a key position to nurture such maturity." Eugene H. Peterson, *The Pastor: A Memoir* (New York: HarperOne, 2011), 157. Contrast this statement with Beeley's advice that "we are not friends with our parishioners." Christopher A. Beeley, *Leading God's People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2012), 40.

[82] These attributes of friendship are summarized well by Cloud and Townsend, *Safe People*, 166–67. The necessary balance of support and challenge is described by Mary Hartog, "Educating the Reflective Educator: A Social Perspective," in *Organizing Reflection*, ed. Michael Reynolds and Russ Vince (Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2016), 156–71.

One of the most vital, restorative aspects of the relationship between friends is *forgiveness*. Indeed, Proverbs 17:9 indicates that forgiveness is a means of pursuing friendship.[83] Gregory Jones links forgiveness to God's plan for reconciliation:

> That is, in the face of human sin and evil, God's love moves toward reconciliation by means of costly forgiveness. In response, human beings are called to become holy by embodying that forgiveness through specific habits and practices that seek to remember the past truthfully, to repair the brokenness, to heal divisions, and to reconcile and renew relationships.[84]

We know that God did much more than merely ignore our mistakes. There is evil and sin inside us that causes us to hurt one another—we become enemies because we seek our own selfish gain at the expense and detriment of others. Forgiveness is a significant step in repairing the damage, and Volf claims it is "the boundary between exclusion and embrace."[85] It breaks down hostility and mends the wound of exclusion, and it comes at a cost to the one who forgives. The cost that God paid to restore us was to cover our sin himself—and that required Christ's death (1 Pet 2:24; 3:18). Therefore imitating our Lord means covering the cost of what others do against us.

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[83] There are several proverbs that mention friends; yet, as Brown points out, "Friendship is the central focus of six proverbs (16:28; 17:9, 17; 18:24; 19:6, 7)." William P. Brown, "The Pedagogy of Proverbs 10:1–31:9," in *Character and Scripture: Moral Formation, Community, and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. William P. Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 159.

[84] L. Gregory Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness: A Theological Analysis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), xii.

[85] Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 125.

The cross of Christ reaches beyond the mending of what was broken (i.e. the sinful acts of "exclusion") to include what Volf calls "embrace." The enemy is no longer considered an enemy. Therefore, the call to holy friendships is an appeal for reconciliation between people who are different and broken. It is, as Jones explains, a call "to face the truth about others and yet to struggle to love them."[86] Friends who find ways to embody forgiveness are *formative* in their presence with each other because neither party remains unchanged. Moreover, friends develop *resilience* in the trust they extend to one another as they persist in moving toward reconciliation and breaking down the barriers that identify people as "us" and "them."[87]

In order to maintain a friendship that encourages both accountability and responsibility, the individuals must exercise self-control and self-regulation in such a way that they do not enable or perpetuate unhealthy outcomes. Friedman calls this behavior *self-differentiation,* while Cloud and Townsend describe it as maintaining healthy personal *boundaries.*[88] According to Friedman, there is a natural tendency in relationships to form *emotional triangles* that "create the illusion of intimacy" in order to

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[86] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 267.

[87] Jonathan Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility* (New York: Schocken Books, 2005), 100.

[88] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 18–21, 183–84; Cloud and Townsend, *Boundaries*, 31–50.

satisfy the well-being of one person at the expense of another.[89] Leaders in the church

(and elsewhere) are often drawn into destructive relationships because people want to

exploit the leader's power. Therefore, the leader must take responsibility for his or her

own character and behavior, which often requires difficult actions that emphasize

individuality even while remaining open to others. This is why Nouwen claims that

"real openness to each other also means a real closedness."[90] Each person thinks

perceptively about the relationship and how individual behavior contributes (positively

or negatively) to the welfare of others. Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and

confession are valuable settings for reflecting on the nature of relationships and the

potential for emotional triangles. Healthy friendships consist of people who are

vulnerable enough with each other to expose their inner thoughts and feelings while

also being separate enough to bring the strengths of their own individuality to the

relationship. Genuine mutuality requires both attachment and detachment so that

neither party abuses the other.

A true friend wants what is best for the other person, and that means that each

friend supports the flourishing of that person's own gifts and talents. For Christians,

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[89] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 209.

[90] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 31.

friendship is modeled by God's desire for us in Christ, so we help each other fulfill

God's design for us:

> Holy friends address the gap between *who we are,* whether we are seekers or well along our Christian journey, and *who God calls us to be.* Holy friends orient us toward the future of God's reign, keeping us focused on the End, even while they engage us in deep reflection to help us unlearn patterns of sin and learn patterns of holiness.[91]

Friendships offer opportunities to exemplify empathic reflection. Friends support and

encourage each other to reach beyond brokenness for God's calling. They also challenge

us to face up to the behaviors and attitudes that obstruct God's purposes. Friends are

often the primary catalyst for perceptive reflection and making sense of our lives.

Christian teachers need to have close friendships that support and challenge them in

their development of character and in the work of connecting the hearts of people in

their ministry of education.

5.3 Reflection and Christian Education

An aspect of friendship that we have not discussed is the affinity between

teacher and subject. Students often say that their favorite teachers are enthusiastic about

the topic. These are educators who introduce the study as though they were introducing

a close friend—a friend whose complexity and mystery are fully appreciated:

> The teacher who loves a subject must not try to force that love upon the students. The teacher, like any lover, must be capable of having a lover's quarrel with the

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[91] Jones, *Christian Social Innovation*, 88. Italics are original.

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subject, stretching and testing the loved one and the relationship. In this way students are invited into the negation as well as affirmation, into argument as well as assent, within the secure context of friendship and hospitality.[92]

Modeling reflective practice is a way to convince learners of its usefulness. Reflection and feedback can be used in the classroom as a dialogue between teacher and students—and even between students as they learn how to address difficult problems and situations.[93]

Practices of teaching that foster skills of empathic reflection convey to students that they are valued and appreciated. Parker Palmer relates a story about a discussion between college faculty members in which they were criticizing their students for being unprepared for their classes. The dean told the professors that they sounded like doctors in a hospital complaining about all the sick people and requesting healthier patients. Palmer summarizes, "the way we diagnose our students' condition will determine the kind of remedy we offer." Assuming that students are inept leads to a mind-numbing pedagogy.[94] Appreciating all of the participants in a classroom may be difficult, but it addresses some of the students' most significant motivational issues. Freire says that this practice of reflecting together *with* students prevents them from becoming passive; they

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[92] Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*, 104.

[93] Westberg and Jason, *Fostering Reflection and Providing Feedback*, 43, 68.

[94] Palmer, *The Courage to Teach*, 41–42. Compare the admonishment to mentors by Elena Aguilar: "No one can learn from you if you think that they suck." Aguilar, *Art of Coaching*, 33.

instead become "critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher."[95] For example, Brookfield suggests that teachers model reflective practice by questioning their own ideas and assumptions in class. He says that by doing this, "we create an emotional climate in which accepting change and risking failure are valued."[96] Reflecting perceptively on failures as well as successes, new alternatives and modifications are possible. Organizations that conceal failures and silence any discussion about sensitive issues cannot learn how problems might be connected, and systemic disorders do not get addressed.[97]

How can we determine whether empathic reflection improves the quality of teaching? Eisner suggests that the focus of assessment should be on *qualitative* outcomes such as "the type of relationships teachers establish with their classes, the clarity of [the teacher's] explanations, the level of enthusiasm they display, [and] the kinds of questions they raise."[98] Teachers need to have some trusted colleagues present in their classes so that they can receive constructive feedback and reflect on how to improve. It is

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[95] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 68.

[96] Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 25. He goes on to advise teachers, "The degree to which you are prepared to take the risks you ask students to take and the extent to which you are genuinely open to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning will determine how far students are prepared to do these things themselves." Brookfield, 112.

[97] Mezirow, "On Critical Reflection," 194.

[98] Eisner, *The Educational Imagination*, 179.

also possible at times to conduct reflective feedback with the students, as long as the

teacher has modeled dialogue and built trust in the classroom.

Reflective exercises can help teachers be aware of their effectiveness. The

following sample exercises provide an opportunity for you, the reader, to experiment

with reflective thought. The intent of these assignments is to demonstrate the impact of

empathic reflection.

5.3.1 Practical Exercises

The first activity is a series of questions to stimulate your reflection.[99] Please

write your answers so that you can read them afterward. The objective is for you to

think about what you have learned and how it has changed you.

- Compared with this time last year, what is something that you can now explain to someone?

- What is the most important thing you have learned about yourself in the past year?

- Which assumptions that you had about teaching and learning have been most challenged during the past year?

- How much of your learning is primarily intellectual (cognitive) versus emotional (affective)?

- How much of your learning during the past year has been in an entirely new area, and how much is a refinement, rethinking, or adaptation of something already familiar?

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[99] This first exercise is adapted from Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 75–77.

- Who has encouraged and challenged you in new ways to grow as a leader?

- What events or experiences have been most significant or transformative for you?

After reading your responses, reflect on how you learn and how you influence others. Write down these reflections. As a result, you should have a sense of how you have been changing as both a teacher and a student.

The second exercise is aimed at developing a reflective perspective over a period of time.[100] Start keeping a log (or journal) of events, situations, and perceptions that you encounter each week (or each day, if you already journal your thoughts). Your reflections should be regular but not lengthy, with at least one entry each week. Include the details of events that you remember vividly. The following questions are provided to help you think about what to write:

- What was a moment this week when you felt most connected, engaged, or affirmed in your own purposes and mission?

- What was a moment this week when you felt most disconnected, disengaged, or bored with your direction and activities?

- What was a situation that caused you anxiety or distress—something that kept replaying in your mind?

- What was an event that took you by surprise, shook you up, gave you a jolt, or made you unexpectedly happy?

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[100] This second exercise is adapted from Brookfield, 72–75.

- Who was a significant encourager for you this week?

- With whom did you walk, and for whom did you sacrifice?

- "What's working, and how can we do more of it?"[101]

Schedule some time each month to read your entries, observing any patterns in your responses. As Brookfield suggests, "You may well start to see a range of typical situations that create pleasure or pain for you. The frequency with which these occur will give you clues as to the sources of energy and strength that need to be guarded in your practice. It will also alert you to the energy-draining, debilitating situations that need changing, or at least keeping to a minimum."[102] Consider suggesting this exercise to some of your colleagues and then sharing your responses with each other. Your friends can help identify patterns and assumptions that you might otherwise ignore.

The next chapter draws upon the discussions about receptivity and reflection in order to make practical application in the social networks of our lives. Our responsibilities to others—as both leaders and learners—become clear as we determine how we will implement practices of formative presence and resilient trust in the context of our communities and our commitments.

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[101] Chip Heath and Dan Heath, *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard* (New York: Broadway Books, 2010), 45.

[102] Brookfield, *Becoming a Critically Reflective Teacher*, 74.

6. Empathic Response

Essential to the personal growth of teachers and other leaders is the cultivation of inner character (or "heart"), fashioned both for God's service and as a model for students to emulate. A teacher's heart is shaped and grounded in a particular identity formed in and by a community of Christians. Moreover, the teacher's integrity—the wholeness that glues together the various forces and traits of identity—is sustained through relationships that nurture resilient trust. This formation of character results from what is received and reflected upon by each person, but the process does not end with individual reflection. The way that each person acts upon his or her environment produces the learning that gives the growth, so it is primarily in community that the third empathic skill—*response*—is developed and evaluated. This chapter defines and applies the skill of response.

James, the author of the New Testament book that bears his name, makes the startling assessment that not many should become teachers because "we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (Jas 3:1). The reason for the caution is that our responses as teachers are seldom perfect, and the manner in which teachers represent Jesus Christ affects the community in which Christians live. Therefore, our response

"calls for the expression of love in the social sphere of our lives,"[1] and teachers are in a position to model and describe what that love looks like. God is the one who judges the effectiveness of a local church's response as it reflects his grace and truth. Also, the broader community continually evaluates the church's behavior by the way that its responses recognize patterns of inequity, invite and listen for inclusion, build trust through empowerment, adapt constructively to the complexities of change, and graciously confront fears and conflicts.[2] In this chapter, I will define the terminology that will be used, present a model for thinking socially, and explain how that model works in relation to God, community and ourselves. Then I will discuss a type of connection between people that embodies responsibility. Finally, the topics in this chapter will be linked directly to the roles implemented by church teachers.

There are three interrelated terms that are important for discussion in this chapter: *response*, *responsiveness*, and *responsibility.* H. Richard Niebuhr made the assertion that all action is a *response* to a prior action. Any judgment of morality

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[1] Pazmiño, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian?*, 38–39.

[2] These elements of evaluation, which will provide a basis for the exercises at the end of this chapter, are adapted from the six principles of equitable civic engagement presented by the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, "Race in Conversation. Equity in Practice.," Annual Report 2017/2018 (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University, 2018), 33.

regarding that response depends on how the prior action was interpreted.[3] People

exhibit a *response* as a result of some event producing an impact on their behavior.

Although the extent to which that event is actually received and processed (i.e. reflected

upon) may vary, there is an active transformation (whether great or small) in the

individuals' lives that incites the response. The response is essentially a matter of living

out the learning that was stimulated by the event.[4]

The next term, *responsiveness*, introduces the dynamic of interpersonal and

intercultural relationships. The people with whom a response takes place have "a set of

explicit or implicit assumptions about how the members of a group should relate to each

other."[5] The manner in which these relational assumptions are *interpreted* establishes a

range of opportunities for the parties to move closer together or farther apart.

Furthermore, as Kotter and Cohen observe, "behavior change happens in highly

successful situations mostly by speaking to people's feelings."[6] Therefore, the most

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[3] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self: An Essay in Christian Moral Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 61. Also see John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1922), 173, 199–200.

[4] Ron Belsterling, "A Scriptural Basis for Teaching," in *Teaching the Next Generations: A Comprehensive Guide for Teaching Christian Formation*, ed. Terry Linhart (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 32. Also see Rick Melick and Shera Melick, *Teaching That Transforms: Facilitating Life Change through Adult Bible Teaching* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 4.

[5] Brenda Salter McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation: Moving Communities into Unity, Wholeness and Justice* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 68.

[6] John P. Kotter and Dan S. Cohen, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012), xii.

effective personal responses are often empathetic. In situations that call for

reconciliation, cultural norms and guiding beliefs often determine whether the

responses are successful. The responsive teacher recognizes that the environment is an

emotional system in which the participants function according to their positions in the

network of people and are influenced not only by thoughts, but also by their emotions,

connections, prior baggage, future expectations, and current state of well-being.[7]

The notion of *responsibility* furthers the consideration of a person's relationships

to include society and culture. It is important for this discussion that responsiveness

precedes responsibility because in order to develop responsibility, people must learn to

be responsive *to* someone.[8] Niebuhr explains that our responses form a sort of dialogue

with the expected responses of others: "Our actions are responsible not only insofar as

they are reactions to interpreted actions upon us but also insofar as they are made in

anticipation of answers to our answers."[9] This element of expectation in an interpersonal

context regarding the appropriateness of an action is a form of *accountability*. The

response of a person or group is like a statement in an ongoing dialogue, looking

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[7] Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 197. Larry May similarly points out that "our lives are interconnected and interdependent in ways that run contrary to the myth that we have each gotten where we have by our own individual actions and without the help of others. To recognize this interconnectedness is to acknowledge that we have benefits, and also responsibilities, that extend beyond what we have done or could have done on our own." Larry May, *Sharing Responsibility* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 105.

[8] Gabriel Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co, 1996), 35, 64.

[9] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 64.

backward in order to evaluate culpability and also looking forward with a view to

agency.[10] This duality of perspectives regarding the past and the future causes some

confusion about the purpose and scope of responsibility. Iris Marion Young explains

that a "liability model" which emphasizes fault and retribution dominates much of

Western culture's legal and moral discourse. By focusing blame on specific individuals,

all others are absolved and the majority of people remain unaccountable for their

participation in detrimental social processes.[11] On the other hand, a "social connection

model" emphasizes agency rather than fault and promotes a shared responsibility

among all who contribute by their actions to the propagation of collective structural

problems. Young describes responsibility for structural issues in the following way:

> A sensible understanding of the sources of *any* person's situation, whether poor
> or not, should refer *both* to the structural constraints and opportunities he or she
> faces, *and* to his or her choices and actions in relation to them. Those of us who
> are not poor—or not poor right now—participate in the same structures of
> privilege and disadvantage, constraint and enablement, as those who fall below
> the poverty line at some point. We need to assess *our* responsibility in relation to
> these structures.[12]

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[10] Niebuhr, 64–65. Also see Barbara Houston, "Democratic Dialogue: Who Takes Responsibility?," in *Democratic Dialogue in Education: Troubling Speech, Disturbing Silence*, ed. Megan Boler (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 112–13.

[11] Iris Marion Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, Oxford Political Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 11.

[12] Young, 26. Italics are original.

A responsible agent—contrasted with passive fault-finders—understands the available options and reflects upon them to some extent before acting, resulting in choices that show concern (rather than blame) for how the consequences may affect others.[13]

In his discussion of ethics, Bonhoeffer stated, "Responsibility implies tension between obedience and freedom."[14] There is both obligation (the fittingness or suitability of the action) and creativity (the ability to pursue excellence). One without the other is either too rigid and embedded in the status quo or too chaotic and disconnected from the world. As Gabriel Moran explains, "Responsibility is a term that can function as a bridge between what is and what ought to be."[15] In other words, teachers often find themselves responding to the conditions of students' lives as they really are with a vision of responsibility that reflects how life for a learner could be. Thus, the responsible teacher creates this "bridge" between "what is" and "what ought to be."

The early church understood this paradox between "what is" and "what ought to be" in describing themselves as "resident aliens" (πάροικοι, *ṕaroikoi*, Eph 2:19; 1 Pet 2:11)—people who live within legal structures without being limited by them. That is how Christians stand apart with a heavenly perspective. The Epistle to Diognetus, a

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13 Young, 25, 173.

14 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, trans. Neville Horton Smith (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 249.

15 Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility*, 28.

Christian apologetic written in the second century, expressed the belief that Christians are in the world for the benefit of society: "What the soul is to the body, Christians are to the world."[16] Such a balanced attitude of responsibility is exemplified in the way that the Samaritan traveler in Jesus's parable assessed the situation and responded to the need of the wounded victim in a different manner than the religious leaders (Luke 10:29–37).

An illustration of how the multi-layered character of empathic response works in familiar situations can be found in one of the methods that Starbucks uses to train its employees. While serving customers, there are many opportunities for unpleasant experiences, and the popular purveyor of artisanal coffee has specific procedures for handling complaints. One of the practices employed by Starbucks is called the *LATTE* method: "We *Listen* to the customer, *Acknowledge* their complaint, *Take action* by solving the problem, *Thank* them, and then *Explain* why the problem occurred."[17] Listening and acknowledgement correspond to the skills of reception and reflection discussed in the previous two chapters. The *response* to the situation consists of immediately taking action on behalf of the customer. Thanking the person is a way of being *responsive* by

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[16] "The Epistle to Diognetus," in Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, trans. J. B. Lightfoot and J. R. Harmer (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992), 299 (§6:1). Also see Alan Kreider, *The Patient Ferment of the Early Church: The Improbable Rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 99.

[17] Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2012), 145.

engaging and establishing a relationship of appreciation and trust. Finally, the way that

the employee demonstrates *responsibility* is by offering an expectation of accountability.

The explanation is not so much a justification of the action as it is a recognition of how

the company's processes affect the consumer and might be altered or continued in the

future. The adult education environment in the church is a place where people often

express their dissatisfaction with particular actions of the church, and teachers can

employ a response like the *LATTE* method to acknowledge and resolve problems.

Jesus demonstrated that he was a responsible agent of both grace and truth.

When the people who heard and saw him wanted to know whether he was the one

whom they were expecting (i.e. the Messiah), he told them to look for the answer in

what he was doing: people were cured, evil spirits were sent away, the unclean were

cleansed, and the poor had good news brought to them (Matt 11:2–6; Luke 18–23). Jesus

shared God's grace with people by touching them and responding to their most serious

needs. He also upheld God's honor and justice by being responsive to those who

truthfully desired God's mercy—whether they were Jewish or not. Jesus's responses

took him in directions that many of the Jews did not expect because they did not

understand what it meant to exercise responsibility *to* God and *for* creation (see Luke

4:18–19; Isa 61:1–2). What are the responsibilities that Christians have? Do teachers carry

greater responsibility than others? The following sections describe various empathic

responses that are both responsive and responsible. Like Jesus, everyone can be a visible agent of grace and truth, connecting one's own responsibility to an identity given by God and to a sense of integrity that is nurtured in God's community.

6.1 Thinking Socially

Personal responsibility is molded in the environment from which people draw a sense of identity and integrity. Between individuals, the connection that is created when people are engaged together in constructive responses can nurture—and even repair— each person's wholeness. The key to creating a responsible result is the motivation—i.e. the condition of the heart—that each exhibits toward the other, particularly when one person is perceived as belonging to a higher-status group than the other. There is always a danger that a person will provide "help" in such a way that emphasizes superior social position and constrains the other person to long-term dependency. Assistance should always be offered in a way that "[the] recipient is helped but retains self-control and a large measure of independence."[18]

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[18] Arie Nadler et al., "Helping Relations as Status Relations," in *Prosocial Motives, Emotions, and Behavior: The Better Angels of Our Nature*, ed. Mario Mikulincer and Phillip R. Shaver (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 2010), 186, 194. As long ago as 1835, Alexis de Toqueville observed that people often exercise their dominance over other people by providing them with a certain kind of assistance. Nadler et al., 183. Citing Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (New York: New American Library, 1956).

Responses may also represent local groups (i.e. the various particular "tribes" that comprise our social cultures) or the larger world outside a particular group's affiliations. The actions of each person in a group supports and shapes the narrative that defines what responsibility means to the group as well as the individual, with the result that "my way of appropriating the convictions of my community contributes to the story of that people."[19] The distinctiveness of living the Christian narrative implies a specific emphasis on *being the church* rather than assimilating with the world,[20] while at the same time, the Spirit of God is using Christians to break down factional barriers that divide people into classes or hierarchies.[21] The pursuit of justice—which I define in a Christian context as supporting and empowering people to behave in accord with biblical norms of what is right—is an important concern for teachers who want to exhibit godly character. The Old Testament is clear about God's affinity for justice (e.g. Deut 16:19–20; Psa 27:38; Mic 6:8).[22] Likewise, Jesus gave hope to people who were down-trodden by

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[19] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 134–35.

[20] Hauerwas, 10. Also see Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: A Provocative Christian Assessment of Culture and Ministry for People Who Know That Something Is Wrong* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991), 38.

[21] Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5–7) is a tremendous example of teaching people to move beyond the typical interpersonal barriers associated with wealth, power, violence, legalism, justice, faithfulness, truthfulness, piety, security, loyalty, and judgment.

[22] The Hebrew term for "justice," מִשְׁפָּט (*mišpāṭ*), usually carries a legal connotation, while the typical terms for "righteousness," צֶדֶק (*ṣedeq*) and צְדָקָה (*ṣᵉdāqâa*), refer to the right conduct of people toward one another. Justice and righteousness are attributes that often appear together (e.g. Isa 5:16; Amos 5:24). Harris, Archer, Jr., and Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 752–55 (§1879), 948–49 (§2443c). The typical terms in the New Testament for justice and righteousness are κρίσις (*krisis*) and δικαιοσύνη (*dikaiosynē*). The

society (Matt 12:17–21), and his followers are called to do the same (Matt 23:23; cf. Mic 6:8). Those who teach adults in the church have a responsibility to demonstrate and stimulate responses that connect with the righteous work that God is doing in the world.

Of the many types of barriers that divide people today, systemic racism is a glaring example. For this reason, I will use one of the public responses made by Martin Luther King Jr. as a model for empathic response. His "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" is particularly apposite as an oppressed perspective in adverse circumstances. The movement led by Dr. King was one of many initiatives among black organizations during the Civil Rights era to move beyond the barriers that had been erected by the dominance of white culture. King saw that racism had distorted the character of the white population and that people of color could save the whites (as well as themselves) by demonstrating God's love in the face of mass hatred.[23] After leading a march in Birmingham, he and several others were arrested on April 12, 1963, and he was placed in solitary confinement. Someone secretly brought him a Birmingham newspaper that had published "A Call for Unity" by eight white clergymen in Alabama. King was incensed that these men repudiated his campaign as "unwise and untimely," motivating

former usually refers to a just legal action and the latter is indicative of someone who conforms to specific standards of rightness. Verbrugge, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, 143–44 (§1466), 318–19 (§3210).

[23] Peter J. Paris, *Black Religious Leaders: Conflict in Unity* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1991), 111.

him to quickly respond with an open letter of his own.[24] The "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" was widely published and later anthologized in several books.[25] I will draw upon its contents to demonstrate how Christian responses might be formulated. King addresses the necessary responsibility for justice and injustice, methods of nonviolent response, obedience to law, the disappointing failure of churches, and a challenge to break through the status quo. Perhaps the most significant feature is that King's desire for reconciliation is paramount throughout the letter. He had listened to both his critics and his supporters (as indicated by the quotations and references he includes in the letter), and his reflection on their viewpoints brought him to a point where he could articulately address the situation.

Early in the letter, King explains how he is being *responsive* to his supporters (especially in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference) as well as to the opposition who view his allies as "outsiders coming in." Specifically he claims, "I am in

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[24] Jonathan Rieder, *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail and the Struggle That Changed a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2014), 40–42.

[25] Also titled "Letter from Birmingham Jail" and "The Negro Is Your Brother," the letter was initially published in *Liberation Magazine* (June 1963), *The Christian Century* (June 12, 1963), *The New Leader* (June 24, 1963), and the *Atlantic Monthly* (Aug 1963). The version I am using is an early pamphlet (May, 1963) and includes the clergy statement to which King was responding: Martin Luther King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail* (Philadelphia: American Friends Service Committee, 1963). For an online version, see Martin Luther King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," African Studies Center, University of Pennsylvania, April 16, 1963, accessed November 2, 2019, https://www. africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html.

Birmingham because injustice is here,"[26] and like the apostle Paul, he is compelled to

bring help to those who are calling out (see Acts 16:9–10). Although King's operations

were based in Atlanta, he proclaimed, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice

everywhere."[27] The authorities in Birmingham had not been responsive to the

underlying causes of oppression and distress, so he clearly identifies the steps that he

and his organization are pursuing: fact-gathering, negotiation, self-purification, and

direct action. The segregation and brutality in Birmingham were widely acknowledged,

and the black population had tried unsuccessfully to engage in good-faith negotiations

with those in authority. Despite their deep disappointment, the oppressed people took

the initiative to learn about nonviolent procedures and to reflect upon their own

integrity and readiness to proceed with such action. They reminded themselves that

justice "must be demanded by the oppressed" and that "any law that degrades human

personality is unjust."[28]

Justice is a key outcome of effective responsibility, so some additional discussion

about justice is warranted here. John Rawls is well known for stating that social justice

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[26] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 3.

[27] King Jr., 3.

[28] King Jr., 5, 7. Compare Freire's comment: "This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both." Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 28.

consists of "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights

and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation."[29]

Although there are several general understandings of the nature of justice,[30] there are

two basic perspectives on how people evaluate unjust behavior: *interactional* (how

people are treated when encountered directly) and *institutional* (how people contribute

to collective, structural processes that produce vulnerabilities for some compared to

others).[31] Many Christians view justice as a private matter (i.e. strictly *interactional*)

regarding their personal culpability for harming other people. There are other Christians

who blame collective public (*institutional*) structures to such an extent that they absolve

themselves of personal blame.[32] Neither of these perspectives alone are sufficient

because personal responsibility cannot be separated from the social context. Jesus made

this clear when he said, "just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members

of my family, you did it to me" (Matt 25:40). Our responsibility originates in our

commitment to Christ, the church, and society, all of which embody systems of

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[29] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 6. Also see Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 65.

[30] There are many ways of categorizing different types of justice. Hoffman suggests one approach: "When you get down to actual human behavior, justice can mean many things—punitive justice, retributive justice, distributive justice, meritocratic justice, egalitarian justice, justice based on need. Empathy appears to be congruent with all or most of these justice principles …" Hoffman, *Empathy and Moral Development*, 273.

[31] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 73. Also see Barndt, *Understanding and Dismantling Racism*, 57.

[32] Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 37.

interdependent processes that rely upon the cooperation of the participants. When

processes produce unjust outcomes, the members bear responsibility, even though they

may not be individually culpable.[33] The point is that each of us can reproduce structural

injustice while following the accepted norms. A simple example of how this often works

is the phenomenon known as "gridlock"[34]—all of the drivers are trying to reach their

destinations while obeying traffic laws, but a congested collection of such drivers can

prevent everyone from making progress. Church leaders (including those who teach)

have a specific responsibility to appraise their congregation's (and perhaps their

denomination's) contributions to oppressive conditions and formulate a response that is

aligned with biblical directives regarding justice for the oppressed.[35]

Dr. King explained that the problem of segregation was perpetuated by a

persistently imposed imbalance of power. His letter includes a litany of indignities

resulting from the subordinating power that has been exercised by the privileged

whites, and King pointed out that such groups "seldom give up their privileges

voluntarily." For this reason, King saw the purpose of the campaign's actions as creating

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[33] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 105–6. King asserted in one of his sermons that "we must learn that passively to accept an unjust system is to co-operate with that system, and thereby to become a participant in its evil." Martin Luther King Jr., *Strength to Love* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 14.

[34] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 63.

[35] Some directives for just behavior are found in Pss 10:17–18; 82:1–4; 146:5–9; Isa 1:17; 61:1 (Luke 4:18); Jer 22:3; Matt 25:34–36; Jas 1:27.

a crisis that would "inevitably open the door to negotiation."[36] The objective then—and

also today—was to call upon all parties to accept responsibility for the structures that

have produced unjust outcomes. Both the beneficiaries of such institutions and those

who were marginalized by them are obligated to work on transforming those structures

so that the injustices are not perpetuated. King encouraged the church to become a

"thermostat" rather than a "thermometer"—transforming society rather than merely

reflecting popular opinion.[37] Christian teachers have an opportunity to demonstrate this

restructuring because, as Maria Harris asserts, "all teaching is an exercise of power."[38]

Empathic response in the church is more than humbly welcoming the Other; it is an

invitation "to see yourself as the Other who is a dangerous threat to both God and

neighbor."[39] The Christian's calling is not to fix another person, but to stand with that

person as co-recipients of God's grace.

King called for *love* as the middle way between the extremes of complacency and

bitter hatred. Responding to accusations of being an "extremist" himself, King pointed

out that Jesus was "an extremist for love" when he proclaimed, "Love your enemies"

(Luke 6:27–28). Furthermore, the prophet Amos was "an extremist for justice" when he

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[36] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 5.

[37] King Jr., 12. This metaphor also appears in King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 19.

[38] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 79.

[39] William H. Willimon, *Fear of the Other: No Fear in Love* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016), 13.

proclaimed God's instruction to "let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:24).[40] King called for changes that would be difficult due to the priority that many white Christians effectively place on maintaining the status quo of cultural dominance. In a later work, he spoke to this challenge:

> The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy. The true neighbour will risk his position, his prestige, and even his life for the welfare of others. In dangerous valleys and hazardous pathways, he will lift some bruised and beaten brother to a higher and more noble life.[41]

The sort of risk that King describes goes beyond simple numerical diversity. It is a "second-order change" that requires a fundamental transformation in how people encounter one another and do things together. The diversity may consist of differences in cognitive perspectives, physical abilities/appearance, emotional temperaments, historical narratives, socialization, or experience. The sort of change that enables taking risks for people entails a process of *reconciliation* that focuses on restoring broken relationships and systems through ongoing attention to forgiveness, repentance, and justice.[42] Miroslav Volf explains that reconciliation means dealing with the past "in order

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[40] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 10. King said in one of his sermons, "There will be no permanent solution to the race problem until oppressed men develop the capacity to love their enemies." King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 53.

[41] King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 31. This particular sermon, "On Being a Good Neighbor," focuses on the story of the Good Samaritan.

[42] McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 22, 85.

to keep it from colonizing the future."[43] King gazed through his disappointment in the failure of white church leadership to the hope of future reconciliation. His lament for the lack of empathy exhibited by white Christians is swallowed up in his stirring invocation, "One day the South will recognize its real heroes."[44] The next several paragraphs will discuss how the hope of reconciliation, which is represented in the work of the Christian teacher, is grounded in responsiveness to God, community, and oneself.

6.1.1 Responsive to God

God acts responsibly toward his creation. His responsiveness to humanity is the basis of our expectation that we can be receptive to him, as was discussed in an earlier chapter. Although God does respond to events, his responses are not constrained like ours to depend on prior actions. He is the Creator and thus the primary initiator. It is he who says, "I am the first and I am the last" (Isa 44:6; 48:12; cf. Rev 1:17; 22:13). The reason for the presence of justice in the world is that the Just One who created the world is present in it and desires that all creation reflect his nature.[45] How wonderful it is that the one who fashioned the heavens and earth has not abandoned that creation to its own

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[43] Miroslav Volf, *Flourishing: Why We Need Religion in a Globalized World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 175.

[44] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 14.

[45] Sacks claims, "A world without a Judge is one in which there is no reason to expect justice." Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 173.

devices! This is the Lord who "will not fail you or forsake you" (Deut 30:6; Heb 13:5). It

is he "whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" (Ruth 2:20). This

"kindness" (חֶסֶד, *hessed*) is the foundation of God's loving presence that was mentioned

earlier with respect to the practice of formative presence. As Jonathan Sacks points out,

it is the covenant love that finds expression in responsible action.

> *Hessed* is the love that is loyalty, and the loyalty that is love. It is born in the
> generosity of faithfulness, the love that means being ever-present for the other, in
> hard times as well as good; love that grows stronger, not weaker, over time. It is
> love moralized into small gestures of help and understanding, support and
> friendship: the poetry of everyday life written in the language of simple deeds.
> Those who know it experience the world differently from those who do not. It is
> not for them a threatening and dangerous place. It is one where trust is rewarded
> precisely because it does not seek reward. *Hessed* is the gift of love that begets
> love.[46]

The sort of love that is characterized by *hessed* creates a bond that surpasses the

relationship between friends and the fellowship between mentors and apprentices. As I

will discuss later in this chapter, the connection created by *hessed* is best described as

kinship, and the Father models it for us in the covenantal sacrifices that he makes for

humanity.

Jesus is our exemplar for understanding how we are to respond to the Father.

Before Jesus engaged in ministry, he looked for what his Father was already doing. He

explained this to the Jews who complained about him performing miracles on the

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[46] Sacks, 45–46. Italics are original.

Sabbath: "My Father is still working, and I also am working … the Son can do nothing

on his own, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, the

Son does likewise" (John 5:17, 19). Similarly, no one is in a position to respond to every

perceived need in the world; God is already working, and he guides his followers in

discerning how to participate.[47]

In the context of following God's direction, *faith* is best understood as

responsibility *to God*. When faith is instead construed as an obligation *for* which one is

responsible, then the priority is given to works rather than to God.[48] The ministry of

reconciliation has been given to the church (2 Cor 5:18), but it is a work that does not

begin with the church; *it begins with God*.[49] As Paul explained to the Corinthian church,

reconciliation with God is about *new creation.* Indeed, the very possibility of closing the

gaps between people is "grounded in God's gift of a new creation."[50] The Christian's

role is to be an *ambassador* for the one who makes everything new (2 Cor 5:17–21).

Gregory Jones asserts that forgiveness is central to this plan:

> Forgiveness aims to restore communion on the part of humans with God, with
> one another, and with the whole Creation. This forgiveness is costly, since it

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[47] McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 89.

[48] Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility*, 39.

[49] The following sources all emphasize that the ministry of reconciliation begins with God: McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 90; Emmanuel Katongole and Chris Rice, *Reconciling All Things: A Christian Vision for Justice, Peace and Healing* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2008), 43–44; Sacks, *To Heal a Fractured World*, 149.

[50] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling All Things*, 45.

involves acknowledging and experiencing the painful truth of human sin and evil at its worst. In the midst of such brokenness, God's forgiveness aims at healing people's lives and re-creating communion in God's eschatological Kingdom.[51]

The same attribute of forgiveness that was presented in the previous chapter as a vital component of friendship is also essential for responsiveness toward God and among people. As King explains, "Forgiveness means reconciliation, a coming together again. Without this, no man can love his enemies. The degree to which we are able to forgive determines the degree to which we are able to love our enemies."[52] Teachers in the church model reconciliation by demonstrating such attitudes of love and forgiveness.

6.1.2 Responsive to Community

Ambassadors of reconciliation work in community. In his letter from a jail cell, King emphasized that the work of justice is a community endeavor, and he was disappointed that most of the white churches refused to support it.[53] There was an opportunity (and there are still opportunities today) for Christian leaders to demonstrate how to work toward recognizing and reconciling differences between people. Robert Bellah points out that the common practices and assurances shared by Christians who are dissimilar in many other respects help the church become more interdependent:

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[51] Jones, *Embodying Forgiveness*, 163.

[52] King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 48–49.

[53] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 11.

"Because we share a common tradition, certain habits of the heart, we can work together to construct a common future."[54] When the Christian community exhibits resilient trust—in people as well as in God—an otherwise chaotic world witnesses the value derived from confidence in Christ's lordship. This is a point that is easily missed because many Christians have not fully grasped the meaning of professing Christ as Lord—that he is the one who establishes our identity, direction, and behavior. Just as Christ demonstrated that he is responsive and restorative to all people, so should his followers be to all people. The community of reconciliation recognizes the differences between our neighbors and ourselves not as a threat but as essential for our life in Christ.[55] Cross-cultural perspectives "enhance and enliven the truth claims and life style" of all Christians.[56]

The modern church in North America has often approached education with an emphasis on social distinctions that privilege a dominant culture (e.g. white, Northern-European, patriarchal, educated, middle-class), while other groups are devalued.

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[54] Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 252.

[55] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 86. Clarence Jordan, the founder of Koinonia Farm, asserted that many American Christians behave in ways that belie their confession that "Jesus is Lord." Dallas Lee, *The Cotton Patch Evidence* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 225. Quoted in Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community: How Faith Shapes Social Justice, from the Civil Rights Movement to Today* (New York: Basic Books, 2005), 77.

[56] Charles R. Foster, "Imperialism in the Religious Education of Cultural Minorities," *Religious Education* 86, no. 1 (Spring 1991): 154.

Education should be a means for propagating *good news,* but it has instead been a key

instrument for exercising control and repression of minority or progressive views.

Church education has not always been responsive to the cross-cultural needs of society,

as Charles Foster sternly summarizes:

> In the history of the United States and Canada, the church's education has been
> used to alienate native peoples from their cultural heritage and to oppress
> enslaved and marginalized peoples. It has perpetuated patterns of cultural
> dominance among immigrants and sustained the dominance of patriarchal
> perspectives and practices in the organization of church education and in the
> content of church teaching.[57]

Churches that are responsible to their communities initiate various forms of equitable

engagement with as much of the population as possible, celebrating rather than

controlling its diversity. Such action may necessitate a break with conventional

programs and curricula in order to minister to genuinely expressed needs (as opposed to

addressing contemporary church controversies). Jonathan Sacks astutely directs

religious leaders to pay attention to the outsiders: "The challenge to the religious

imagination is to see God's image in one who is not in our image."[58]

Regardless of our own individual culpability, we are collectively accountable for

fostering a just society. In the parable that Jesus told about a Samaritan helping a

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[57] Foster, *Educating Congregations*, 31.

[58] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 60.

wounded man (Luke 10:29–37), Jesus praised the "neighbor" for taking a substantial risk

and covering a significant cost for the sake of someone who was unlikely to gratefully

reciprocate.[59] The person who asked Jesus to define "neighbor" was a prominent Jew

who was unlikely to ever consider a Samaritan worthy of helping him; in fact, he had

difficulty admitting to Jesus that the Samaritan was one who could help. An analogous

scenario today would be to suggest to Christians that non-Christians might have some

wisdom to offer them! Perhaps that is indeed the point: reconciliation is only possible

when we are present to the world in its differences, attuned to the needs of those whose

faith and behaviors are not like ours.[60] Dr. King made the point that all of our lives are

interrelated: "We are inevitably our brother's keeper because we are our brother's

brother. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly."[61] Christians are the

incarnation of Jesus Christ (i.e. he dwells in his people) for the purpose of reconciling all

people to him, and he blesses those who are reconciled. Jesus admonished his followers

to be radically resourceful in transforming adversarial relationships and seeking

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[59] Willimon, *Fear of the Other*, 56.

[60] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling All Things*, 121. Also consider that Gregory Boyle says, "I don't bring gang members to Christ, … They bring me to Christ." Then later he says, "The essence of our credibility lies not in our rescuing or saving the poor but rather by humbly surrendering to their leadership and listening to them." Gregory Boyle, *Barking to the Choir: The Power of Radical Kinship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 119, 168.

[61] Martin Luther King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), 181.

reconciliation. As Joseph Phelps reminds us, Jesus explained in the Sermon on the

Mount that his followers should be responsive rather than passive (see Matt 5:38–42):

> The "turn-the-other-cheek" admonition is not simply a requirement that we let someone hit us again; it is a call to claim one's worth, to face the oppressor as an equal and to demand to be dealt with accordingly. It initiates an encounter where an oppressor is forced to see the oppressed one as worthy of respect and dialogue.
>
> The "give-the-shirt-off-your-back" admonition is not a requirement to be passive; it challenges the follower to be naked and vulnerable to cause those who are suing you to see the full extent of their action, possibly repent of their oppression, and begin to deal with the oppressed in a redemptive way.
>
> The "go-the-second-mile" admonition does not advocate becoming a doormat for a bully; it is a way to neutralize the dominant ones' power over you by claiming your own power and making the decision on your own to carry their load further than requested.[62]

The practice of formative presence that is integral to effective teaching calls us to be

responsive to our community—outside the church as well as inside the church. This sort

of responsibility is shared by everyone in the group and requires each individual self to

develop responsiveness.

6.1.3 Responsive to Self

Despite his disappointment with white church leaders and the dominant

religious structures, Martin Luther King commended the "real heroes" who have

"carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment."[63] These

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[62] Joseph Phelps, *More Light, Less Heat: How Dialogue Can Transform Christian Conflicts into Growth* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 135–36.

[63] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 13, 14.

people, like King himself, examined their own motives and preparedness for being

responsible to both themselves and to the community. Barbara Houston describes the

scope of such an assessment:

> Taking responsibility for oneself, in this sense, involves acknowledging our situatedness and location, material, historical, and bodily specificity, the interconnections between our own well-being and the existence of others. Taking responsibility for ourselves recognizes that our existence cannot be severed from, or remains fungible with, the lives of others past and future. It is a matter primarily of recognizing and dealing with my own resistances, the internal conflicts, and tensions, which if unacknowledged can operate as obstacles to my being responsive to others.[64]

The responsible self is not lived in isolation, but in connection with others,

acknowledging and addressing the tensions that arise in those relationships.

H. Richard Niebuhr defined responsibility in terms of how people interpret

actions and respond to those actions. The context in which this interpretation takes place

includes perceptions of personal ideals, prevailing norms (laws), and expectations of the

community. Niebuhr describes these three aspects of the self as *man-the-maker* (who is

seeking what is good), *man-the-citizen* (who is seeking what is right), and *man-the-*

answerer (who is seeking dialogue with others). Whereas the first two of these

perspectives—the traditional understandings of personal responsibility—emphasize

what God and people have already done, the third suggests that God is also currently

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[64] Houston, "Democratic Dialogue," 114.

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active and that human actions are in conversation with him as well as with other people. The responsible self organizes its actions around more than God's plan and God's laws; it also considers the participation of people in God's current workings.[65] This definition of responsibility relative to the self emphasizes the responsiveness of the individual to God and to the world. Larry May summarizes how personal responsibility operates in a collective environment by explaining that

> one is always morally *responsible* for who one chooses to be, that is, for choices of attitude, disposition, and character, as well as for one's behavior. One needs to become consciously aware of who one is, as a necessary, although not sufficient, step toward reflectively understanding one's life and then deciding whether to change it.[66]

The connection between responsibility and relationships has been explored by Carol Gilligan, whose research reveals that the moral development of men and women follow different trajectories. Whereas men typically focus on an ethic of justice, fairness, and "rights," women more often pursue an ethic of care and nonviolence. As women perceive the need for personal integrity and men realize the existence of differences between people, both mature in the direction of learning to balance justice and care.[67] Combining the insights of Niebuhr and Gilligan, we can see that traditional notions about personal responsibility emphasize justice, while the more recent concept of

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[65] Niebuhr, *The Responsible Self*, 49, 51, 55, 56, 89, 126, 162.

[66] May, *Sharing Responsibility*, 150. Italics are original.

[67] Gilligan, *In a Different Voice*, 166–67, 174.

responsibility as being *in conversation* contributes an ethic of care. Therefore, developing

the skill of empathic response requires a connection between responsibility and

relationship, as well as a balance between compassion and respect, care and integrity.

This equilibrium is best demonstrated when we, like Jesus, are visible agents of both

grace and truth. The context for developing such character is even deeper than the

apprenticeships and friendships that were discussed earlier. As the wise king said,

"Some friends play at friendship but a true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin"

(Prov 18:24). The following section will describe a kind of kinship that extends beyond

our biological families.

6.2 Developing Kinships

Friends are great, but friendships are limited in their ability to sustain a group of

people for an extended period of time and to produce systemic changes in social

structures. What is needed for a long-term relationship is responsibility to each other

(not simply *for* each other) and a mutual commitment to a shared mission.[68] Jonathan

Sacks suggests that the notion of *family* is a stronger connection than the contractual

relationships found in many economic and political contexts. Describing what the Bible

calls *covenantal* relationships, Sacks explains that they are based on "certain fundamental

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[68] McNeil, *Roadmap to Reconciliation*, 76.

concepts: love, loyalty, responsibility, authority, obedience, fairness and compassion. These are the filaments that hold the family members together."[69] Such intimate and sacrificial relationships are based on the bond created by *hessed,* which is the covenant love modeled by God. *Kinship* is what is created when "we belong to each other."[70] Kinship seeks and celebrates both joy and justice for every member of the covenant family. Kinship is more than serving each other; it is *becoming one* with others—similar to the way that Jesus is an incarnate presence with us. It has also been called *solidarity*, "a relationship among separate and dissimilar actors who decide to stand together."[71] Martin Luther King referred to this kind of communal relationship as the "beloved community," a *brotherhood* that surpasses the character of any specific neighborhood.[72] Samuel Wells says, "What is needed is a company of friends who will care even when they cannot cure, a communion of saints whose membership is stronger than death."[73]

The family (kinship) relationship that binds us together is available because God adopts people and provides an inheritance through Christ's redeeming sacrifice and by

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[69] Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference,* 149, 150–51. Friedman points out that when comparing family systems with other institutions, "the difference is one of intensity or degree rather than of kind." Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 195.

[70] Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 187.

[71] Young, *Responsibility for Justice*, 120.

[72] On the "beloved community," see Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, 53–54; Martin Luther King Jr., *Stride Toward Freedom: The Montgomery Story* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1961), 82; King Jr., *Strength to Love*, 139.

[73] Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 200.

means of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Eph 1:1–14; Heb 9:15; Rom 8:14–17). The God

of heaven who is supreme in all the world summons the world in its diversity to

establish its hope in him:

> [17] For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who is not partial and takes no bribe, [18] who executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and who loves the strangers, providing them food and clothing. [19] You shall also love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt. [20] You shall fear the LORD your God; him alone you shall worship; to him you shall hold fast, and by his name you shall swear. [Deut 10:17–20]

In the world of the early church, Christians regarded other believers as "sister" and

"brother" with an intensity that non-Christians restricted to blood relatives. As David

deSilva explains, "It is now attachment to this Jesus that determines whether or not a

person is in the family, rather than the person's bloodline or natural lineage."[74] The

historian Tertullian marveled at the Christians' love for each other: "how they love one

another, ... how they are ready even to die for each other."[75]

One of the challenges for leaders in the church today is to address the negative

potential that kinship has for becoming exclusive and lacking accountability to people

outside this relationship. On the other hand, kinship that exhibits responsibility to

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[74] David A. DeSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 200.

[75] Tertullian, "Apology," in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. III (Grand Rapids, MI: T & T Clark, 1997), 46 (§39.7–10).

people "is a submission of yourself—your identity, your interests, your ambitions—to the needs of those to whom you're bound."[76] The biblical directive to the church is to produce familial love (made possible by our new relationship with Christ), and to extend it across the many types of differences that exist between people (Gal 3:27–29; Eph 2: 13–14; Col 3:11). Such interconnectedness is often viewed as a threat to established human patterns of homogeneity, but it is also an opportunity to become God's new creation in all of its diversity. Sacks claims that the ultimate test for whether we can build such relationships is whether we can "see the divine presence in the face of a stranger."[77]

Dr. King's letter emphasizes the solidarity to which he was committed with others across the country: "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."[78] The kinship he shared with the oppressed Negro population enabled him to engage in all of their suffering and to speak out against their oppression as offences which he felt personally. King described the humiliation and despair felt by young daughters and

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[76] Matt McCullough, "Wendell Berry and the Beauty of Membership," *The Gospel Coalition* (blog), June 25, 2013, https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/wendell-berry-and-the-beauty-of-membership/. In this blog, McCullough cites Wendell Berry, *Jayber Crow* (Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2000).

[77] Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*, 208. Hauerwas and Willimon make a similar statement: "We serve the world by showing it something that it is not, namely, a place where God is forming a family out of strangers." Hauerwas and Willimon, *Resident Aliens*, 83.

[78] King Jr., *Letter from Birmingham City Jail*, 3.

sons who were deprived of opportunities and distorted by bitterness. He spoke of the

disrespect and fears endured by honest people at the hands of vicious mobs and hateful

officials. When he wrote, "We have waited for more than three hundred and forty years

for our constitutional and God-given rights," he was uniting himself with the hopes and

dreams of his people.[79] This brotherhood is a covenant relationship that is rarely found

outside groups that are suffering together. Yet, it is a solidarity that Christians are called

to create with everyone who serves Christ as Lord.

Church leaders—not the least of whom are teachers—are most effective standing

together with people who inhabit all sorts of situations and appreciating the embodied

expressions of grace that are evident when people are united. Solidarity provides space

for both grace and truth: grace that God heals and raises the fallen; truth in what we

learn about God, ourselves, and each other. Katangole and Rice observe that in the

presence of suffering, "our call is not first to 'make a difference' but to allow the pain of

that encounter to disturb us."[80] Yet, the result is that the bond of kinship does make a

difference; social change becomes possible when people who would otherwise remain

strangers reach beyond themselves to offer formative presence and create resilient trust.

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[79] King Jr., 5–6.

[80] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling All Things*, 84. Nouwen similarly states, "The paradox indeed is that the beginning of healing is in the solidarity with the pain." Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 61.

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Christian education breaks down barriers of difference when no one is considered an "outsider" to God's grace and those who have been marginalized become the leaders in changing everyone's attitudes.[81] No longer are we merely "us" and "them"—now we share our lives and build new inclusive structures together.

Developing kinship with a diverse spectrum of people is not commonplace because it is not easy. The tendency that we all have to associate with people like ourselves—particularly those with whom we already have some connection—makes this a rare form of responsiveness and responsibility. However, it is possible to create such deep and lasting relationships if we begin by developing the receptive and reflective skills discussed in the previous two chapters so that the closeness of kinship connections is appreciated and desired. Christian teachers can encourage their students to follow the example of Jesus by acting as a formative presence among unfamiliar people and creating resilient trust in new group settings. Chip and Dan Heath point out that "as people begin to act differently, they'll start to think of themselves differently, and as their identity evolves, it will reinforce the new way of doing things."[82] Some suggestions are provided in the next section for church educators to nurture kinship among diverse groups.

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[81] Boyle, *Barking to the Choir*, 165; Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart*, 190.

[82] Heath and Heath, *Switch*, 255.

6.3 Responsiveness and Christian Education

There is a conundrum to be faced in this chapter. In earlier chapters, I have emphasized the importance of inner character (i.e. "heart"), suggesting that a missing element in training teachers has been the development of character. Now I seem to have shifted more toward *doing* than *being,* emphasizing response as a form of active expression. However, the action described here is in fact an expression of one's *being* because responsibility is attached to identity and integrity. This sort of action contributes to the completion and validation of our faith (Jas 2:14–26). Empathic responses are demonstrations of the power of God in his people, for as Paul declared to some arrogant Christians, "the kingdom of God depends not on talk but on power" (1 Cor 4:20; cf. 1 Cor 2:4; 1 Thess 1:5). Therefore, a result of using empathy as a lens on Christian teaching practices is a recognition that our responsiveness is neither passive nor a matter of works-righteousness. As I mentioned in the chapter discussing teaching practices, Paul's desire for the church was that "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, as you are being rooted and grounded in love" (Eph 3:17). Jesus is the one who is at work developing our character and directing our behavior.

Every aspect and function of the church is educative;[83] the question is not whether the educational program helps Christians be responsive, but how Christian responses communicate what a congregation believes. Are we cognizant of the message that we in the church are communicating? Does that message match the intentions of the church leaders and align with the church's responsibility to Christ? In addition to classes and curriculum, churches teach people through worship and prayers, through service and generosity to the community, and through the love and truthfulness exhibited in the people. Learning to think and teach openly, perceptively, and socially with respect to all of these roles increases the educational reach of the church. Furthermore, extending the range of people involved in the teaching process can have a significant impact on building accountability and trust:

> If we want young people to develop responsibility, we should give them responsibility. Especially with students who are not succeeding in school, having real responsibility for another human being can make an important contribution to the development of responsible moral agency.[84]

An effective teacher is responsive to the range of differences exhibited in the learning population—a diversity that includes (as mentioned earlier) the students' cognitive perceptions, physical abilities/appearance, emotional temperaments, historical narratives, socialization, and experience. Valuing people in their differences requires

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[83] Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 58.

[84] Lickona, "Developing the Ethical Thinker and Responsible Moral Agent," 65.

consideration of how the teaching connects with the population and shapes their

opportunities for growth. Education that motivates students is guided by "a vision of a

hopeful future" for everyone who participates.[85]

How might teachers prepare themselves and others to create an environment

that is responsive to the needs of a broad range of students? Miriam Raider-Roth advises

professional educators to be intentional about building a diverse learning community

"so that relational supports are in place for the unpacking of new ideas, the release of

old ones, and the discomfort that can accompany this process."[86] Consistent with the

teaching practices presented earlier, appropriate responses to a learning group will

include "listening well to their fears, working to build trust, and demonstrating to them

that change is possible."[87] There is no guarantee that people will accept the

responsibility to think socially, even when the benefits are evident to them. Robert

Banks offers a helpful list of educational initiatives that he attributes to the work of

Parker Palmer:[88]

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[85] Wlodkowski, *Enhancing Adult Motivation to Learn*, 60.

[86] Raider-Roth, *Professional Development in Relational Learning Communities*, 117–18.

[87] Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor ... and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2012), 218.

[88] Banks, *Reenvisioning Theological Education*, 202. Bank attributes the contents of this list to Palmer, *To Know as We Are Known*.

- View the classroom as a context for creating a particular culture, a culture of teaching and learning that encourages personal as well as academic formation.

- Make the classroom a safe place that encourages the fullest participation of students in the learning process.

- Encourage the expression of feelings, doubts, and dilemmas as well as ideas relating to life and service.

- Allow our passion for and response to the truth to inform the way we teach and relate to students.

- Cultivate the possibility of students practicing obedience to the truth inside as well as outside the classroom

Since many churches incorporate traditional teaching methods that emphasize cognitive learning rather than affective approaches, there will be some discomfort in discussing feelings, relationships, and differences. However, most people have a longing to be heard and known, so the environment will develop as the participants perceive it as safe and nurturing.

6.3.1 Practical Exercises

In the introductory paragraphs to this chapter, I mentioned some ways in which the church's response will be assessed both by God and by the watching world. The same components will be used here to structure some exercises for examining empathic response: representing God's truth and grace, recognizing patterns of inequity, inviting and listening for inclusion, building trust through empowerment, adapting constructively to the complexities of change, and graciously confronting fears and

conflicts.[89] Each paragraph approaches one of these specific areas. The objective here is to provide an opportunity to observe the sort of behaviors that indicate both the responsiveness and the responsibility that you (the reader) see in yourself and in the church (and perhaps in the broader community) that you serve. The questions are not specific to traditional teaching roles because every member contributes to the success of education in the church. Please answer each question as yourself in both your role as an individual Christian and in your representative role as a church leader.

Representing God's truth and grace. We are responsible to God when our actions are consistent with the obedience that he desires. The following questions are aimed at examining your relationship with the Lord.

- What are the standards that you rely upon for obedience to God?

- What are some ways that God's Holy Spirit operates in your life (i.e. spiritual gifts, spiritual fruit, divine guidance, etc.)?

- How does prayer affect your actions?

Recognizing patterns of inequity. Becoming responsible to the community requires an understanding of the experiences of its members in terms of both historical inequities

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[89] Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, "Race in Conversation. Equity in Practice.," 33. I have merged the "principles of equitable civic engagement" provided by the Kirwan Institute with the definition of educational equity given by Pazmiño, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian?*, 38–39.

and current challenges. As you answer the following questions, the character of your environment—as seen by those who have been ignored—should become clearer.

- What sort of prejudices or biases have you heard mentioned in your community (even if you have not personally observed biased behavior)?

- How do you respond when you recognize that a negative assumption (e.g. a denigrating stereotype or false attribution) is being made?

- In what ways do you contribute (either as an individual or as part of a group) to oppressive conditions for some people?

Inviting and listening for inclusion. Inclusion does not happen without focused effort. It is not enough to assume that the community is fully represented at meetings and at voting events. Since the most vulnerable people in the community are often "invisible" to dominant groups, their voices are not engaged in much of the local activity. The following questions are aimed at determining who is absent when church and community discussions take place.

- What are some ways in which people are vulnerable within their own communities?

- How do you know when a comment or action is offensive to someone other than yourself?

- How might you be responsive to someone who is offended or injured without diminishing that person's sense of responsibility and dignity?

- What opportunities are there for you to belong to a group that is culturally different from you?

Building trust through empowerment. As discussed earlier in regard to the practice

of resilient trust, one of the ironies regarding authority is that those who share their

authority and power are the ones who truly possess it. Effective leaders observe how

people are working together, and they draw upon those resources rather than imposing

their own methods. The Kirwan Institute concludes, "Building strong communities

starts with recognizing the power that already exists in typically undervalued people

and neighborhoods."[90] The teacher looks for the diverse gifts and assets within the

population, including those whom some might regard as "the least." The questions here

probe for your perception of your responsibility and how you might welcome the

responses of other people.

- List some people and/or things that you are responsible *to.*

- What does it mean to you to be responsible *for* someone or something?

- Within your group (church, business, etc.), who is in charge? In what ways do the leaders (perhaps including yourself) differ from the followers?

- How do you identify other people's giftedness? How do you inform them and support them in using those gifts?

- How do you feel when your help is not needed?

- What does it mean to practice "resilient trust"?

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[90] Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, "Race in Conversation. Equity in Practice.," 33.

Adapting constructively to the complexities of change. Most people resist change, so it must be navigated intentionally and carefully. There are often difficult emotions to acknowledge and uncertain challenges to face. Teachers can lead change by fostering trust and transparency. The questions below consider how the presence and contributions of every person strengthen the group and provide opportunities for transformation.

- What are some ways that the community ought to change in order to treat everyone more equitably?

- What sort of development would help you see (and behave toward) others as vital to the kingdom of God?

- Who are some people who desire improvements in their living conditions? What can you do to help them be in a position to lead those community changes?

- What does it mean to practice "formative presence"?

Graciously confronting fears and conflicts. Most people have fears that are difficult to face and prefer to avoid conflict with other people. According to the Kirwan Institute, this avoidance often leads to the very situations that people are trying to avoid. Differences should be discussed so that they can be navigated and employed as strengths, and such a dialogue is fruitful when the participants can disagree constructively: "In order to discuss our differences constructively, authentic forms of

dissent must be seen as a form of care, not resistance."[91] This final set of questions

explores how you deal with discord that arises from differences.

- Who are the people groups that have recently been disparaged in your presence?

- What would you need to develop in order to be able to speak up when someone makes an offensive or disparaging remark?

- What are some possible ways to respond to injurious comments while remaining responsible to all of the parties in the conversation?

- Dr. King suggested that responsibility is the basis of reconciliation. How are you being reconciled to people with whom you have differences?

Teachers have a responsibility to their students to indicate the way forward to

reach the objectives they share. As I explained earlier, the guiding narrative—which for

Christians is God's plan for redemption in Christ—provides the map for this journey of

learning and development. Part of the teacher's responsibility is to present the current

situation in relation to the ultimate goals, identifying the gaps that necessitate change.

As a result, the students and the teacher are expected to respond with actions that

progress toward the goal. However, the complexities of human growth, along with the

immensity of God's promises, make this journey both frustrating and exciting. The

process of reception, reflection, and response is often chaotic and circuitous. For every

answer, there is a new question, and for every vision of the destination, there are more

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[91] Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity, 33.

mountains to be climbed. The descriptions of empathic skills given in these few chapters

have introduced some methods that can help teachers become both leaders and

followers on this journey. In the final chapter, I will apply these skills—and the teaching

practices that include them—more specifically to the responsibilities of church

education.

7. Implications for a Teaching Ministry

A church education environment is a place for encountering every individual and every learning group where they are in the process of spiritual formation. Teachers and students alike are journeying toward the goals that they understand for themselves, picking up some new ways of thinking along the way while discarding some positions and ideas that no longer fit their developing identity. I have suggested that a virtue of empathy can be used as a lens to direct the attention of church leaders toward attitudes and actions that effectively imitate Christ and develop personal character. The notion of changing one's *heart*—i.e. the inner thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and desires—is a biblical concept that points to one's character as the source of behavior (Luke 6:45). The Spirit of God can change hearts, so the focus of this thesis has been on spiritual practices and empathic skills that the Spirit may use to transform the church—beginning with those who teach. Particular teaching practices (introduced here as formative presence and resilient trust) are exercised through the cultivation of certain basic skills: reception, reflection, and response. This chapter will present some of my realizations about empathy, teaching, and growth, followed by a summary of how the particular practices and skills built upon empathy are constructive elements for Christian teachers.

A ministry of teaching is much more than a collection of classrooms in which designated instructors facilitate the transfer of information. Ministry denotes *service,* and

education as a service concerns the development of people rather than the establishment

of a platform for debating issues. There are numerous activities in a church environment

that share the characteristics of teaching practices. Indeed, everyone has an influence in

some regard. Therefore, the cultivation of receptive skills should not be restricted to a

few members who teach in some official role. Maria Harris points out that teaching takes

several forms, which she describes with New Testament terminology as "koinonia

(community), leiturgia (prayer and worship), didache (teaching), kerygma

(proclamation), and diakonia (outreach)."[1] Such a variety of functions are performed

with the involvement of a sizable portion of a congregation, and all of the participants

have opportunities to foster the spiritual growth of both themselves and others.

Therefore, a ministry of teaching, observed as a whole, looks like a broad network of

people engaged in each other's lives and spiritual growth.

The network of participants in a teaching ministry may be structured in a variety

of ways, and most models include one or more leaders who organize, motivate, and

provide for the ministry. In those cases that employ a pastor as the educational leader,

the dynamics between participants become more complex due to the positional

authority of the pastor. Teachers may be drawn from either the lay or clerical

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[1] Harris, *Fashion Me a People*, 25, 64, 121, 157.

constituencies of the congregation, and I have observed that students usually relate best to teachers who are most like themselves, while cross-cultural and intergenerational discussions also stimulate growth. In any case, people who are asked to lead, facilitate, demonstrate, instruct, collaborate, or connect must be willing participants. Whenever I ask people to lead, I encourage them to exercise their ability to decline the request; then when they say "yes" I know that it is truly a commitment. Also, I find that large teacher-training sessions are useful for communicating information (e.g. policies and schedules), but the sort of preparation that teachers really need is more accessible in one-on-one discussions and small groups. I am convinced, as a result of this research and my experience in developing teachers, that what Christian teachers need for their preparation is a greater sense of wholeness (i.e. integrity) in their own lives and more connectedness to other Christians and the identity that they share in Christ. Therefore, this thesis has focused on developing inner character, primarily from the perspective of empathy and its impact on teaching practices.

7.1 A Passage to Empathy

I began my research with a desire to discover how to develop new teachers in the church. There are a multitude of useful tools and techniques that could have been discussed, but I was more interested in what exactly transforms a person into a *teacher*. What are the essential qualities that a teacher must have? In a Christian context, teaching

is fundamentally about the sort of learning that is rooted in the biblical narrative. Furthermore, learning is basically a *change* that is produced in the heart of an individual and in the character of a group. It is a change that is anchored in the belief that God blesses those who love him and seek him (Heb 11:6). God uses specific connections between people, together with his Spirit, to guide and transform his followers. Teaching is a matter of creating connections in which people are open to each other and to everyone's growth. These connections are characterized by *empathy*. People learn from each other by sharing and examining thoughts, feelings, behaviors, intentions, and values. Therefore, one of the core qualities of teaching is empathy.

In order to describe how empathy equips teachers, my first step was to learn the nature of empathy and how it relates to specific practices of teaching. In this thesis, the ministry of teaching is viewed through the perspective of empathy, using empathy as a "lens" to focus attention on corresponding aspects of teaching. This was a relatively new perspective for me, and I have noticed that being guided by empathy has helped me develop as a leader in three interrelated ways: (1) identifying and committing to a life-giving *purpose*; (2) learning to value *people* in all their diversity and complexity; and (3) identifying specific *practices* that nurture, embody, and exhibit godly character. In this section, I will discuss how these three elements have been factors in my own growth through the exploration of the significance of empathy.

7.1.1 Purpose

Parker J. Palmer has been an exceptional guide to help me understand the nature of teaching as a matter of the heart. His work showed me that teaching is much more than technique: "*good teaching comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher*."[2] My identity consists of every aspect of my life that makes me who I am, and my integrity is comprised of those elements which give me life and wholeness. Teachers who connect with their students are in touch with whatever establishes identity and integrity in themselves and in their students. This connection and the process of discovering meaning help the students live purposefully. As a teacher, I seek better comprehension of who I am and what I should be doing in order to be able to effectively share truth with others. As a trainer of teachers, I realize that I do not give people their identity—no human leader directly does that for anyone. My primary responsibility as a Christian teacher is to Christ who gives a new identity to anyone who follows him.

An individual's sense of purpose is attached to a narrative and draws its strength from the patterns and promises of that story. Stanley Hauerwas, in describing Christian ethics, says, "The development of character involves more than adherence to principles for their own sake; rather, it demands that we acquire a narrative that gives us the skill

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[2] Palmer, "The Heart of a Teacher," 16. Italics are original.

to fit what we do and do not do into a coherent account sufficient to claim our life as our own."[3] Part of my education in empathy has been the discovery that the Christian story is fundamental to every aspect of my life. The narrative of God's kingdom—the testimony of his plan and work among his creation—is the paradigm in which empathy emerges as a key feature in the practices of the church. One of the benefits of this research for me is the realization that there are a multitude of narratives that people follow, many of which offer little guidance in finding life's purpose and meaning. For example, the plot lines that drive "the giant triplets of racism, materialism and militarism" are directed toward things rather than people, resulting in the objectification of humanity.[4] The Christian narrative is more than merely a context for my vocation; it is the paradigm for connecting hearts through the use of empathic skills. The success of spiritual practices is a result of people depending on the Spirit for growth, so as a teacher, I am more aware now that my role is to help people develop their connections to God and his plan.

7.1.2 People

One of the tendencies for teachers is to focus on the content of the lessons to the exclusion of the needs of the students. As an avid researcher, I value content, but the

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[3] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character*, 151.

[4] King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, 186.

subject matter should usually be subordinated to the formation of the learners. Here again, the overarching narrative establishes the purpose, and any topics along the way should point toward that same objective to connect hearts together with God. Once a teacher looks up from the subject matter, the next tendency is to work to make change happen in the students. Good teachers do indeed influence people, but most students are more affected by the teacher's character than by the teacher's desire to change them. This has been a difficult lesson for me personally, since my inclination is to "fix" (or at least explain) problems. The study of empathy has shown me that the help that most people want involves attention to mutually understanding the problem more than formulating a corrective action. Palmer says, "One of the hardest things we must do sometimes is to be present to another person's pain without trying to 'fix' it, to simply stand respectfully at the edge of that person's mystery and misery."[5] Job's friends did well for seven days (Job 2:13), and although they were well-intentioned, the remainder of their time with Job made him more miserable. I have to constantly remind myself that my responsibility as a teacher is not to "fix" people. In fact, I am the one who must first change, and that includes "seeing my need to be changed by people radically different from me—including many of the very people I had come to fix."[6] The challenge is to

[5] Parker J. Palmer, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 63.
[6] Katongole and Rice, *Reconciling All Things*, 45.

allow those whom I would most like to change to actually become the impetus for

change in my own life.

Paulo Freire has been a primary guide to help me develop genuine appreciation

for the value that people have—especially with regard to people who are different from

me. His work led me to see that the integrity that I seek for myself is part of a larger

wholeness that unites the teacher and the student.[7] The teacher respectfully nurtures the

freedom and leadership of the student. Furthermore, the empathic teacher intentionally

follows the students' leadership in order to develop the students' confidence and

competence. Cultivating new leadership requires standing *with* people rather than *over*

them, which upends the traditional model of teaching that portrays teachers as "pouring

into" and "lifting up" their dependent pupils. On the contrary, the students are neither

"empty" nor "marginal." Freire asserts that a liberatory education system does not

"integrate" students into existing structures of domination, but aims to transform the

structures so that students become "beings for themselves."[8] The teacher's best measure

of success is whether the students are becoming what they can be within the particular

narrative that guides them, not whether they are conforming to specific cultural

patterns. Occasionally the student discovers that a better narrative is needed, and

[7] Freire, *Pedagogy of Freedom*, 88.

[8] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 61.

sometimes the student decides to step into a more responsible role. The teacher stands

ready to explore various paths and consequences without coercion. Therefore, I cannot

assume that everyone who hears my teaching or reads about the empathic skills

presented in this thesis will adopt this paradigm. As I model empathic behavior and

clearly articulate the benefits of spiritual practices, others will observe the impact of

standing *with* people to help them grow. Such an example can help other leaders learn to

cultivate Christ's image (rather than their own images) in the adults who are being

discipled. The extent to which I demonstrate my own willingness to grow and eagerness

to welcome others may be the best evidence that an empathic approach has broad value.

7.1.3 Practices

I have long been fascinated by the paradox of faith working through Christian

practices: not only does faith provide a key motivation for many Christian behaviors

and practices, but faith is itself developed through obedience and practices (Jas 2:22).

Faith is both a gift from God and evidence of heart-felt trust and allegiance to Christ.

Faith is not the sort of work that merits a reward, but it is nevertheless nurtured through

particular actions that invite God's presence and the operation of the Spirit. These

actions are commonly referred to as spiritual practices, and one of the questions I

addressed earlier in this thesis concerned whether teaching might be regarded as a

spiritual practice. My conclusion was that teaching can be considered a spiritual practice

if the objective is growth in imitating and following Christ. In other words, the teaching program itself is not the goal; it is a method or means to achieve the true goal of growing in Christ. If we focus so intently on the method that we lose sight of the goal, then teaching is no longer a spiritual practice. I quoted Francis Chan saying, "The real focus is not on teaching people at all—the focus is on loving them."[9]

Craig Dykstra's ideas about Christian practices were a strong influence on my effort to identify genuine practices that relate to the ministry of teaching. By identifying Christian practices as "habitations of the Spirit" where God is the one exercising power,[10] Dykstra's perspective is an improvement on MacIntyre's formulation that focuses primarily on benefits obtained by humanity for humanity. God's Spirit works in the learning participants, "making all things new" (Rev 21:5). Therefore, the practices of teaching must emphasize Christ (who has made change possible), the Holy Spirit (who produces the changes), and the engaged student (who commits to the promise of change). Neither the teacher nor the educational structure is the focal point of the teaching ministry.

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[9] Chan and Beuving, *Multiply*, 44.

[10] Dykstra, *Growing In The Life Of Faith*, 66, 78. Dykstra adds that "education in faith is not ultimately an ethical or spiritual striving but rather participation in the educating work of God's Spirit among us and within us. In this way, education in faith is itself a means of grace" (p. 78).

As I considered what a teaching practice should look like, I was impressed by the

significance of Jesus's approach to revealing himself to the world. Jesus humbled himself

and gave himself freely so that humanity would confess him as Lord and bring glory to

the Father (Phil 2:5–11). In order to follow Jesus's example, the practice of *formative*

presence is aimed at aligning people so closely with Christ that his incarnation becomes

their own, both for the individual and the church congregation. The underlying

components of such a practice were identified by Weaver and Wilding:[11] an open heart,

self-reflection, being fully present, respecting boundaries, and developing emotional (i.e.

empathic) capacity. One of the key lessons that I have learned from practicing being

present with people, whether in one-on-one or group interactions, is the importance of

building trust together. The practice of *resilient trust* is aimed at cultivating godly

integrity for both the individual and the church congregation. In my earlier discussion of

this practice, I presented a useful tool that Brené Brown developed for assessing trust in

teams as well as for individuals. The "BRAVING Inventory" consists of boundaries,

reliability, accountability, vaulting confidences, integrity, nonjudgment, and

generosity.[12] The elements of both of these practices overlap because the practices are

mutually reinforcing. A person's identity (i.e. how the individual's presence is

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[11] Weaver and Wilding, *The 5 Dimensions of Engaged Teaching*, 21, 41, 57, 69, 87.

[12] Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 224–33.

perceived) is made an effective representation because of the veracity and integrity of the individual; moreover, one's integrity (i.e. one's trustworthiness and wholeness) is grounded in the person's compelling identity. The Christian's presence becomes formative through trust, and that individual's ability to trust gains resilience through the strength of his or her identity.

These teaching practices are important for teachers because they encompass the sort of obedience to Christ that produces spiritual fruit. When the leaders in a church congregation demonstrate such practices, the members are influenced and drawn by the Spirit into a broader range of Christian behaviors, and the church grows. Thus, the practices associated with teaching are not just for teachers. When these skills are neglected, the training of adults is usually subordinated to formulaic methods and alternative programs. Thomas Bandy points out that when adult spirituality is not developed, an entire congregation suffers:

> Perhaps the most serious implication is that lack of adult spiritual discipline creates a vacuum that declining church leadership fills with obsessive control. … What they choose to do is institutional management; what they should do is disciplined spiritual growth. The former leads to control because the personal tastes, opinions, perspectives, and lifestyles of individual leaders are uncritically imposed on the church in the course of management. The latter leads to freedom because personal preferences are surrendered to a greater experience of the Holy. Many denominations and congregations talk nobly about moving from

maintenance to mission, but few are aware that disciplined *adult* spiritual growth is the bridge to get there.[13]

The practices of formative presence and resilient trust contain some fundamental ingredients for Christian growth. The six components provided by Brown, together with the five dimensions offered by Weaver and Wilding, point to some specific empathic skills that enable Christians (especially those who teach) to establish and sustain connections that develop character. The following section will explain further what the skills of reception, reflection, and response look like in a ministry of teaching.

7.2 Creating Connections

Martin Luther King explained humanity's condition as every person dwelling "in two realms, the internal and the external."[14] The internal realm is what I have been describing as a person's inner character, moral behavior, or "heart." On the other hand, the external sphere—which is not entirely separable from the internal—consists of the mechanisms, methods, and contributing forces by means of which people live their lives. King asserts that people in America have allowed the means to surpass the ends; that is, the externals of how people go about their lives have become more important and formative than the internals of personal identity and integrity. The challenge before each

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[13] Thomas G. Bandy, *Coaching Change: Breaking Down Resistance, Building Up Hope* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2000), 91–92. Italics are original.

[14] King Jr., *Where Do We Go from Here*, 171.

of us is to (re)discover and nurture the connections between ourselves and others that will develop internal character (or "heart"). For teachers, the need is not only for personal growth, but also for cultivating the social dimension with those whom they influence. As shown in Figure 2, the empathic skills presented in this thesis are the raw materials that comprise teaching practices because they are the basis for connecting hearts.
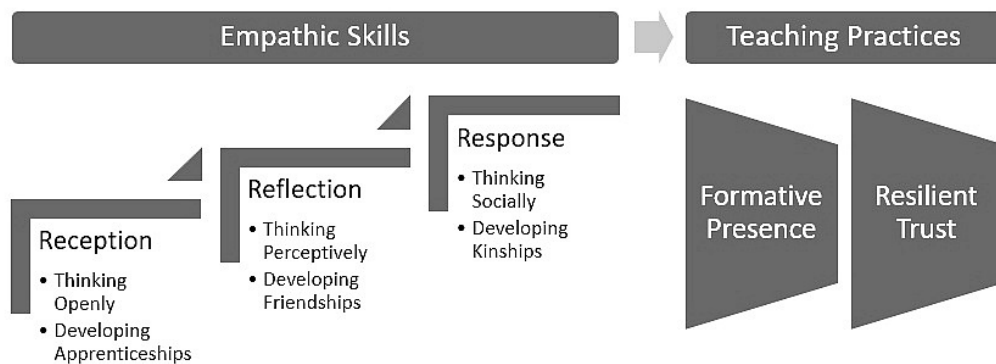

Figure 2: Empathic Skills Supporting Teaching Practices

The three skills of connection—reception, reflection, and response—are not new concepts in education, although the attendant terminology varies broadly. Robert Pazmiño has succinctly summarized the significance of these components:

> Effective education occurs when people listen attentively and sensitively, raise questions based upon what they hear and discern, and share with integrity, as a

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gift to others, the wisdom they have gained. Such education assumes interpersonal interaction and willingness to dialogue.[15]

The skill of receptivity is often embodied in attentive listening and accompanied by the skill of reflective questioning and discernment. Pazmiño eloquently frames responsiveness as a "gift to others," sharing integrity and wisdom. The following paragraphs offer some suggestions and applications regarding each of the skills.

7.2.1 Empathic Reception and Thinking Openly

A key feature of the receptive environment is fearless communication. This can only occur when the participants work to create trust and respect in a safe space that is shared by people who are facing struggles and searching for truth together.[16] Church leaders create such an environment by making effective listening a high priority. It begins with genuine interest, curiosity, honesty, and discretion—qualities that are contagious within a group when sincerity and trustworthiness are evident. Receptive teachers respectfully draw upon the insights and experiences of their students. As I concluded in the chapter that addressed empathic reception, the depth and scope of this characteristic in a group is evidenced by people asking questions, seeking challenges, broadening perspectives, and contributing with excitement.

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[15] Pazmiño, *So What Makes Our Teaching Christian?*, 86. Compare the sources and terminology listed in chapter 3, footnote 132.

[16] Nouwen, *Reaching Out*, 85–86.

Developing the skill of reception is often a difficult hurdle for people because it requires behaviors and attitudes that are focused on others rather than oneself. Church leaders, including teachers, establish the mood and expectations of the group by valuing every person for *who they are* rather than merely for their contributions. As a result, the group behavior eventually moves toward mutual attention and encouragement. Learning becomes an act of reaching out and connecting hearts. Expressions of compassion, vulnerability, generosity, and collaboration indicate an open, receptive teaching environment. Leaders can accelerate this development by engaging in apprenticeships themselves, not necessarily as mentors (although it is helpful to be a mentor), but as learners seeking growth. The benefit of such a relationship is sometimes found in the simple act of being led by people who are not in church leadership positions. The reversal of authority (e.g. a lay person guiding an ordained minister) nurtures trust and transparency so that *both* parties have a better perspective on their behaviors. A church group whose members engage in such close, interpersonal learning are preparing every participant to be a teacher. Ironically, this sort of structure relies less upon the congregation's director of education than on the members themselves working on learning together. The focus is on the learning and mutual growth rather than on the implementation of specific procedures and programs.

This model of receptive learning may seem far-fetched for many churches—

especially those that exercise firm, centralized leadership. However, I have witnessed

(and cultivated) educational movements within a congregation's laity. The place to start

is in listening to Scripture and to God in prayer. All teachers begin as students. They are

encouraged to come to the Lord, and "like living stones, let [them]selves be built into a

spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God

through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5). Reception is developed by spending time with people

and listening to their passions and hurts; it also helps to watch and follow what the

Spirit is doing. As the people around us become more comfortable with dialogue and

prayer and drawing insights from Scripture, they are developing receptive skills that

will help them teach.

7.2.2 Empathic Reflection and Thinking Perceptively

Teachers may nurture sufficient dialogue to engage with people in the learning

environment, and yet a ministry of teaching is much more than talking and listening.

One of the outcomes of productive discussion is an increased awareness of people's

thoughts, feelings, behaviors, habits, intentions, and assumptions. Reflecting upon these

observations, realizations, and connections helps the participants make sense of what

has been said, heard, seen, and felt. Then, as new understandings are applied to each of

the participants' own life situations, opportunities are created for making meaning out

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of these reflections. One of the interesting nuances of the word "reflection" is that we become like ("reflect") that which we ponder most ("reflect on"). For this reason, the apostle Paul told the church in Philippi to think about things that are "worthy of praise" (Phil 4:8).

Maria Harris was a helpful guide for me in understanding how reflection works. She describes a process that outlines how people can think more deeply and perceptively by analyzing a subject and uncovering the assumptions that undergird it. The various components of this reflective process were presented earlier as contemplation, engagement, form-giving, emergence, and release.[17] The construction of relevant meaning, which begins in the "form-giving" step, is one of the key parts of the reflective process. As Laurent Daloz explains, "We must be concerned not simply with how much knowledge our students may acquire but also with how they are making meaning of that knowledge and how it is affecting their capacity to go on learning."[18] Finding meaning in life and in the events we encounter is vital for everyone,[19] so teachers who become skillful in reflection and thinking perceptively can help equip others for many of life's challenges and can provide them with tools for learning.

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[17] Harris, *Teaching and Religious Imagination*, 163.

[18] Daloz, *Mentor*, 244.

[19] I recall a pastor friend of mine, Curtis Stamps, remarking many years ago that "people without meaning become mean."

The basic model assumed here for developing a reflective teaching ministry consists of small groups exploring some challenging topics with a focus on revealing some of the associated assumptions, beliefs, and norms. These forums are not for complaining or gossiping about either the status quo or the current leadership, but rather for the purpose of identifying assumptions. Therefore, the participants should be individuals who already exhibit the skill of empathic reception to some extent. There are usually some assumptions that are uncomfortable to discuss (e.g. power relations and exclusionary behaviors/policies), so the facilitators of this process must support behaviors that build trust and respect. Even if the preliminary experiment in open, reflective dialogue only helps a few people, these few comprise a potent force for empathic ministry in the church.

People who engage in perceptive dialogue, especially when they focus on common concerns, will often develop friendships. In addition to the power of examining assumptions together, friends have opportunities to offer constructive feedback to each other—potentially nurturing growth in areas that other people cannot approach. Church leaders of all types need friends who can discern their character qualities and regularly speak truth to them. Teachers benefit from having friends who will help them be accountable and responsible in their teaching, and such a friend can be either another

teacher or an insightful student. Moreover, our friends are often our key resource for

understanding our own gifts and for making sense of our lives.

7.2.3 Empathic Response and Thinking Socially

While I would much rather focus my thinking on other people's assumptions

and behaviors, I do not have control over other people. I do, however, have some control

over myself. I can examine my *responses* to people and events in order to understand my

attitudes toward them, and as a result I observe how I am *responsive* to some more than

others. As I interpret what I think are the intentions and causes for my behavior, I am

sorting through layers of my own emotions, past experiences, future expectations, and

personal health. All of this contributes to how I characteristically interact with others,

and the self-scrutiny is an effective exercise in expanding my capacity for empathy.

Since responsiveness is always a function of how one operates in connection with others,

the appropriateness of the behavior is a form of *accountability.* To whom or to what do I

choose to obligate myself in social contexts? Sometimes I do not even get to choose what

is appropriate because I am attached in some prior manner to structures (e.g. family,

business, church, club, nationality, culture, etc.) that establish expectations about my

behavior. I have opportunities to exercise both obligations (actions that are expected and

fitting) and creativity (actions that pursue excellence).[20] As a teacher, the balance that I achieve between these two behaviors depends on my relationship with the structures in which I teach and how I choose to critique (i.e. think perceptively about) those influences. As Paulo Freire pointed out, "The teacher works in favor of something and against something."[21] Part of my responsibility to students is to recognize my own social, organizational, and political orientations and to teach appropriately with regard to the pressures that they impose.

Martin Luther King's "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" is an exemplary model of empathic response. King was clear about his responsibilities and how they connected to both his identity and his integrity. The letter explicates his intentions for being responsive to the community (including both his supporters and his adversaries) while pursuing both truth and grace in the face of injustice. Teachers can imitate this model by showing diligence in discovering truths (i.e. looking beyond the dominant resources and histories), navigating social (and institutional) power dynamics in such a way that students are inspired to think for themselves, emphasizing self-examination as the place to begin a response, and directing action toward reconciliation. Dr. King was accused of

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[20] For this discussion in the previous chapter, I drew upon some ideas from Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*.

[21] Ira Shor and Paulo Freire, *A Pedagogy for Liberation: Dialogues on Transforming Education* (Westpoint, CT: Bergin & Garvey, 1987), 46.

being impatient for change, and teachers who imitate his approach will likely be accused of "rocking the boat." However, what King grasped was the urgency of helping his neighbors. In his last sermon before his assassination, he preached about the parable of the "Good Samaritan" (Luke 10:25–37), considering the questions that might be in the minds of the parable's characters as they approached a wounded man on the road. The priest and the Levite knew that they were in a dangerous area and possibly wondered, "If I stop to help this man, what will happen to *me*?" However, a Samaritan came by and reversed the question: "If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to *him*?" Dr. King was thankful to be in Memphis on that occasion to support the sanitation workers' strike, even with the knowledge that his life might be imperiled.[22] There is a risk in being responsive. Samantha Power, who served as United States Ambassador to the United Nations from 2013 to 2017, coined the term "upstanders," referring to people who take a stand on behalf of others. She explained that "every day, almost all of us find ourselves weighing whether we can or should do something to help others. We decide, on issues large and small, whether we will be bystanders or upstanders.[23]

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[22] Martin Luther King Jr., "I've Been to the Mountaintop," in *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.*, ed. Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2002), 219.

[23] Samantha Power, *The Education of an Idealist: A Memoir* (New York: Dey Street Books, 2019), 132.

Teachers who develop the skill of empathic response will be clear (at least with themselves) about their accountabilities, knowing *to whom* they are responsible. Being responsible to God places one in the position of acting in a priestly manner between the things of heaven and earth. Being responsible to the community means supporting any group that is seeking to (re)establish dignity and respect for all people. It also means encouraging churches to have an "open table" of fellowship that bridges cultural divisions. How does this happen? Christian teachers often work in group settings, although a large part of their attention is focused on individual learners who are seeking to find God's direction. Some teachers have official church positions that give them a public voice, but the most effective educators are often the ones who personally join with people who need attention and connection. In some cases, there will be friendships and even kinships that bear fruit as their lives are shared and their responsibilities are honored.

7.3 A Vision for a Teaching Ministry

The three empathic skills—reception, reflection, and response—prepare teachers and students for working together and reaching out to others. The previous chapters have been aimed at helping anyone develop capabilities that will help them teach and lead. This section reveals what education in a congregational setting might look like when these skills are used to construct effective practices. Since the purpose of the skills

is to develop and strengthen the inner character of those who would lead, the manner in which they are modeled, shared, and promulgated will vary in different church contexts. Therefore, the recommendations provided here are intended to be provocative rather than prescriptive.

An empathic learning environment is usually comprised of a network of hearts connected by love. There is always a need for leaders and facilitators, but the primary paradigm is no longer the image of a few elites supplying a multitude of subordinates. Paulo Freire said that

> revolutionary leaders do not go to the people in order to bring them a message of "salvation," but in order to come to know through dialogue with them both their *objective situation* and their *awareness* of that situation—the various levels of perception of themselves and of the world in which and with which they exist. One cannot expect positive results from an educational or political action program which fails to respect the particular view of the world held by the people. Such a program constitutes cultural invasion, good intentions notwithstanding.[24]

God's Spirit provides everyone with opportunities to contribute for the benefit of the whole. Paul's advice to the Corinthian church is still appropriate: "What should be done then, my friends? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up" (1 Cor 14:26). Such an approach has never been an invitation to disorder; to the contrary, it allows more

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[24] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 84. Italics are original.

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voices to be present and unified. In the following paragraphs, I will explain how the

three empathic skills mold the practices of teaching into effective initiatives for a

ministry of teaching.

7.3.1 Formative Presence

The essential model that Jesus presents for all Christian teaching is *incarnation.* It

is the sort of relationship in which we are intentionally *with* people even as we expect

God to be with us. This is the comprehensive fulfillment of *Immanuel*—"God with us."

When people encounter God's presence, it is an identity-changing event, and such a

transformation into Christ's likeness is the objective of this practice. The practice of

formative presence is about revealing Christ through the Holy Spirit, which is much

more compelling for spiritual growth than any set of curriculum or doctrine. The

connection of a teacher's heart with those who need Christ's touch is a catalyst for the

transformation that the Spirit produces in both teacher and student.

The skill of *reception* is first evident in the way that a teacher approaches God.

Jesus said that the greatest command is the Shema (Matt 22:37–38; Deut 6:4–5). Hearing

God with one's heart means loving him completely. Jesus is the Word of God, accessible

to all and the source of spiritual wholeness (John 1:14; Matt 13:23; Luke 11:28). The

practice of formative presence is above all a representation of Jesus Christ in the midst of

people; therefore, the teacher who demonstrates this practice diligently attends to prayer

and models obedience to Scripture. Education in this way becomes a means for knowing and following Christ above all cultural and worldly interests. The presence of the Spirit of Christ is more important than specific programs of the church. In order to cultivate such a priority, the teacher helps the students develop "ears" that hear and "eyes" that see (Matt 13:16). As I mentioned in an earlier chapter, receptive behavior includes "attention, appreciation, and affirmation."[25] When we are fully attentive to people, there is a level of engagement that is recognizable. It may be difficult to give every student full attention in a classroom, so it is usually necessary to emphasize open questions and honest dialogue. The empathic teacher acknowledges comments with gratitude, even if there is disagreement. When students feel affirmed (and not defensive), they are often willing to think more deeply. Indeed, when students perceive that a teacher is willing to learn from them and accept their experiences as a blessing, new opportunities for shared leadership emerge in those individuals.

The skill of *reflection* is both a pondering and a mirroring. Does the teacher share with the students the process of learning and how the teacher's thoughts are being arranged? Most people look for meaning but lack a complete set of tools for finding it, so the teacher who perceptively helps them discover value can also help them to accept the

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[25] Nichols, *The Lost Art of Listening*, 109.

impact of a new insight. One of the main evidences of reflection is the shared discovery

of hidden assumptions. Since people are often not aware of all the beliefs, suppositions,

and interpretations that form their sense of well-being, discussions about assumptions

can be uncomfortable. Therefore, the teacher must be both perceptive and gracious,

demonstrating how to see both sides of an issue and modeling a willingness to submit

one's thinking to critical examination. In other words, the practice of formative presence

fosters reflection by the teacher as well as the student. Every assumption links to a

guiding narrative which makes sense of that direction of thought, and some of the most

effective learning experiences consist of sharing the stories that justify who we are and

how we behave. Within a given narrative, there are healthy ways of establishing and

handling personal boundaries. Friends can help each other reflect upon those areas that

are hidden to ourselves, especially when those friends can offer both encouragement

and forgiveness. Teachers especially need friends who can assess their strengths and

weaknesses.

The skill of *response* entails a mature discernment of how God is working and

how we as his children can participate. The apostle Paul understood the church's role as

being responsible to God, working as ambassadors of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:20). Christ

is the one who is reconciling the world to himself—and uniting people with each

other—so the practice of formative presence is about breaking down barriers between

people and addressing patterns of inequity and exclusion. The inclusiveness of a group's language and conduct is evidence of skillful responsiveness. Since God wants to reconcile the world, Christian teachers should consider no one to be beyond God's grace. Christian teachers recognize a balance (even a paradox) between grace and truth and rely upon the Spirit who exhibits God's presence (his *formative presence*) in those who follow Christ. Ultimately, the Christian's presence resembles what God's Spirit does: equipping, guiding, strengthening, and advocating for his purposes.

7.3.2 Resilient Trust

A teaching ministry that uses empathy as a lens to discover useful practices will emphasize the creation of spaces that welcome wholeness, truthfulness, and openness. Such an environment is built upon trust and trustworthiness, which depend on our faith in Christ, the one who is trustworthy. The practice of resilient trust is fundamentally a practice of expressing steadfast commitment to truthfulness and love in order to imitate Christ and increase solidarity. It is a practice in the sense that we are called to certain integrity-shaping behaviors (e.g. honesty, humility, respect), and it is spiritual in the sense that our actions are subordinate to the work of God's Spirit. Trust is a quality that is cultivated in the soil of faithfulness, and it grows in people's hearts as they learn to be open and honest. The resilience in this practice stems from an expectation that God is

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long-suffering and continually offers grace for our unfaithfulness; therefore, we can

return to him for help with the difficult experiences that hinder our integrity.

The skill of *reception* is evidenced in teaching practices by the extent to which

people expose their own vulnerability and place themselves at risk for others. The

wholeness (i.e. integrity) of others—especially in group settings—becomes more

important than protecting or honoring oneself. The practice of resilient trust is embodied

in acts of welcoming, hearing, and respecting others as they express truth. Empathic

teachers search for common ground among students so that everyone has an

opportunity to participate. They focus on *hearing* truth more than *speaking* it, and they

listen in conversations for who is missing or not being heard. Their classrooms are often

more democratic than traditional environments because these teachers do not view

themselves as ultimate authorities; even in their personal relationships, they seek

opportunities to elevate others and learn from them (i.e. apprenticing). Resilient trust

means that people take priority over curriculum and content, and the visible power

dynamic among the participants consists of sharing rather than controlling.

The skill of *reflection* is demonstrated by teachers valuing the experiences and

stories of many different people, including their own. It involves exploring multiple

perspectives regarding people and situations, including context, behaviors,

competencies, beliefs, identity, and mission. Some of the discussions are messy, yet

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fruitful; for example, examining the use of social power and the persistence of biases can be disturbing and enlightening. Working at the edge of our comfort zones helps us be more aware of the needs of others and do the "adaptive work" to find innovative solutions.[26] Teachers need friendships in which there are reciprocal challenges and honest feedback. Some of these relationships may be between teachers and students, but teachers also need communion with one another. Jesus made time (occasionally taking his disciples with him) for quiet reflection when there were pressures or temptations (Mark 6:30–32; John 6:15). A good habit for Christian teachers is to spend meditative time alone and with others in Scripture, allowing the Spirit to speak through the Word. The Wisdom of Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), a Jewish book of ethical instruction written in the second century BC, underscores the importance of reflecting on Scripture: "Reflect on the statutes of the Lord, and meditate at all times on his commandments. It is he who will give insight to your mind, and your desire for wisdom will be granted" (Sirach 6:37).

The skill of *response* is expressed by teachers in the way that they foster a community of trust—an environment in which people are willing to take risks for one another. Resilient trust responds to problems of injustice by emphasizing agency rather

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[26] Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers*, 22.

than blame and by promoting a shared responsibility for collective structural issues. In my earlier discussion, I borrowed one of the principles that Starbucks employees use as an example of how it is also possible for teachers to take action while establishing a relationship of appreciation, trust, and accountability. A trustful environment handles change and conflict by empowering people to act with integrity. The Lord equips his people with gifts and resources that foster collaboration rather than judgment, gratitude rather than rivalry, and love rather than bitterness. This relationship operates as a sort of kinship by choice, born out of commitment to one another. The characteristic behavior of empathic responsiveness is to give honor to people as they are, recognizing that what matters most is honoring God and accepting his mercy. We start with our responsibility to God and reach out responsively to others.

7.3.3 Conclusion

My intent in this thesis has been to explore many aspects of teaching that relate to the development of spiritual character. With the virtue of empathy as the primary lens on these topics, our journey has included the formulation of some key practices and skills, attempting always to remain connected to the Christian narrative that gives meaning to our actions. In this chapter, a summary of these practices and skills has been presented (see Figure 3). I hope that enough foundation has been established here to stimulate readers to implement these approaches in a variety of congregational contexts,

and also in other environments that desire to strengthen leadership character. For example, lay leaders can share their educational excellence in the congregational setting with other organizations and businesses in a way that creates a positive "spiral" of community flourishing.[27] As I continually experiment with empathic methods of educational leadership, I discover new ways of connecting people together, and those connections are valuable among both believers and nonbelievers—especially when people discover their need to connect with Christ.

Empathic Skills

Teaching Practices		Reception Thinking Openly (Apprenticeships)	Reflection Thinking Perceptively (Friendships)	Response Thinking Socially (Kinships)
	Formative Presence	Prayer; listening attentively; asking questions; initiating dialogue; showing appreciation, affirmation, and generosity	Imitating Christ; exploring assumptions; exercising discernment; discovering narratives; critiquing structures; making meaning	Representing Christ; breaking down barriers; seeking reconciliation; critiquing structures; balancing obligations with creativity
	Resilient Trust	Showing honesty, discretion, and vulnerability; taking risks; listening for missing voices; following the lead of others	Valuing people and experiences; respecting differences; exploring perspectives; setting boundaries; giving feedback	Sharing power; collaborating; navigating social dynamics; being accountable; being inclusive; taking risks

Figure 3: Attributes of Empathic Skills Evident in Teaching Practices

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[27] Jones and Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence*, 21–22.

A Christian teaching ministry is fundamentally an approach to imitating Christ and helping everyone in the church to do the same. As he is incarnate within us, so we represent his identity in the world as a formative presence. Furthermore, as Christ embraces all truth and trustworthiness, so we demonstrate his integrity in our expressions of resilient trust. The most influential teachers are not always those who are the best talkers; teaching adults means engaging people in a learning experience, and that takes many forms. Such a ministry is sustained by the network of people who have observed that their own growth has been accelerated by the spiritual preparation that God provides to teachers. The Spirit of God equips and supports those who are willing to share God's grace and truth.

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Biography

Michael Wayne Andrews is the director of adult education for the Holland Park Church in Simpsonville, SC, and also a member of the board of directors for the Triune Mercy Center in Greenville, SC. He lives in Greer, SC, with his wife, Beth. Mike retired from the telecommunications industry in 2001, after 25 years of managing international research and development projects for Bell Laboratories, AT&T, and Lucent Technologies. During this time, he received five U.S. Patents for innovations in telecommunications products and processes. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering from Tennessee Technological University (Summa Cum Laude, 1977), a Master of Science in Electrical Engineering and Computer Science (with a full scholarship) from the University of California, Berkeley (1978), and a Master of Divinity from Erskine Theological Seminary (2012). While in seminary, Mike received several language awards for both Hebrew and Greek studies. He is an ordained minister affiliated with the Churches of Christ and has served as an interim pastor in both New Mexico and South Carolina. In 2018, Mike published an article in the *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* (vol. 61. no. 1), entitled "The Sign of Jonah: Jesus in the Heart of the Earth." In addition to his deep passion for Bible study and teaching, Mike is an avid hiker, an enthusiastic traveler, an occasional musician, a lifelong learner, an irrepressible photographer, and a die-hard techie.