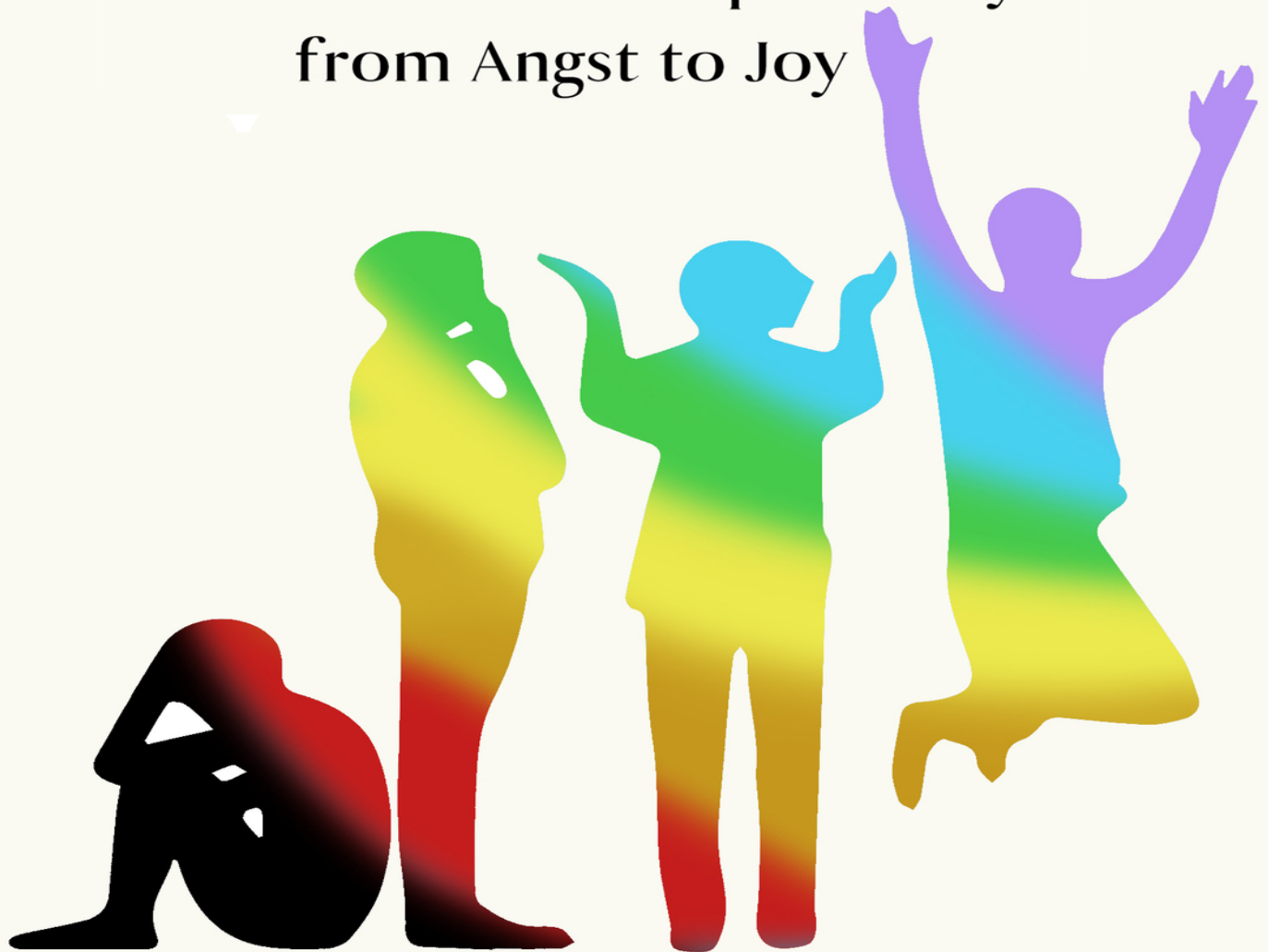


How to take your Spiritual Temperature

10 Dimensions of Spirituality
from Angst to Joy



DALE ALAN YOUNG

HOW TO TAKE YOUR SPIRITUAL TEMPERATURE

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From angst to joy

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Book Cover design by Jeannette Aquino

I dedicate this book to my loving family whose tolerance of my travels, time away from home, and time in my “man-cave” when I am at home writing, has revealed to me a new meaning of living “by grace.”

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Introduction



For years I have led workshops on spiritual assessment. Participants frequently suggest, “You should write a book on this.” They identify with the real-life stories that illustrate the multiple dimensions of a person’s spirituality. They appreciate the tools that enhance self-understanding. After 30 years of providing emotional and spiritual support for the bereaved and people in a health crisis, the writing of this book has allowed me to share insights that may help the reader who seeks understanding of his/her spiritual journey. Understanding ourselves is the beginning of our liberation from spiritual suffering.

Spiritual mentors of the major religions, as well as philosophers of all the ages, have admonished their followers to “know thyself.” Aristotle wrote, “Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom.” Socrates contended, “The unexamined life is not worth living.” And from the Lao-Tzu, “Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is enlightenment.”

Wandering around lost in a cloud of confusion about “who we are spiritually” does not lead us to liberation from what distresses us. Self-understanding of our spiritual landscape leads to freedom from spiritual angst.

How to Take Your Spiritual Temperature is a book that provides the reader with a holistic approach to self-understanding that creates an exciting opportunity for the reader to explore the nuances of his/her spiritual landscape. This unique self-assessment tool focuses on the principal dimensions of life and relationships that impact one’s spiritual life. The essence of our spirituality is not limited to our relationship to God but also includes social and family relationships, self-identity, life mission and purpose, our life story, beliefs and values, intimacy, and meaning. Each chapter focuses on one of ten spiritual dimensions, with true life illustrations that highlight the spiritual dynamics of that aspect of life. At the end of each chapter, the reader may use the tool provided to take his/her “spiritual temperature” as it relates to that life area. Finally, having

completed the self-assessment in each of those areas, the reader will be provided with a tool for interpretation of the results and a suggested approach to work on the spirituality issues identified

1

Current Life Challenges



Spirituality is multi-dimensional, not simply one's relationship to the divine. Exploring one's spirituality involves looking at life meaning and purpose, life story, intimacy in relationships, belonging to family and community, beliefs, values, and justice in addition to one's relationship with the divine.

More and more, we hear people say that they are not religious, but they are spiritual. To be spiritual seems to be in vogue, but what is meant by the word spiritual? How does spirituality differ from being religious?

Alma Hanson lived in Pleasant Pastures Nursing Home following a stroke and a fall that broke three ribs. At 85 years old she had always been active; lived by herself, had an enormous vegetable garden from which she canned fruits and vegetables the old-fashioned way. She walked to the grocery store and enjoyed her independent lifestyle until her stroke.

Rev. Ole Olson would come every week to see her at the nursing home. He would always have the Bible verses picked out before he came. With last Sunday's bulletin as a guide, he would read the scriptures, give her Holy Communion, pray the prayers and bless her with the benediction. He would do those things every time he visited, in that order.

Olga Johansson would also come to visit Alma, every week. She was a neighbor, a friend, and a member of her church since they had been confirmed together by the Rev. Peter Adamson, the former pastor and founder of the church. Olga never prayed, never read the Bible and certainly did not offer Holy Communion. Only the pastor could do that. However, they would talk about the old days, life's struggles and joys, and they would remind each other how God had helped them cope with the losses and the challenges over the years.

Although Alma felt blessed by Rev. Olson's visits, she always felt closer to God after a visit from Olga. Somehow Olga helped her connect to her spiritual wellspring.

In the case of Alma Hanson, it is clear that there is a difference between religious and spiritual. It is not clear that one is of greater value than the other; they both have their value and their importance in the life of Alma. However, religion has more to do with the structures and the institution of faith, while spirituality has more to do with relationships.

The word "spirituality" defies definition, yet we can probably agree that it distinguishes itself from religion. There are many types of spirituality: Catholic Spirituality, African Spirituality, Islamic Spirituality, Hindu Spirituality, Buddhist Spirituality, Jewish Spirituality, Christian Spirituality, Indigenous Spirituality, Gay Spirituality, Celtic Spirituality, Twelve-Step or Recovery from Addiction Spirituality to name a few.

Can spirituality be measured? Can it be assessed? Can we speak of spiritual health? Spiritual well-being? Spiritual distress? Spiritual disease? Spiritual wholeness? Spiritual Temperature?

My understanding suggests that spirituality is the interface between the self and the transcendent; between the self and the sacred. Spirituality encompasses our desire to find life meaning and purpose. Although doctrines and belief systems do not define it, spirituality integrates beliefs, myths, and rituals that seek to connect us to the divine. As in moral development, for example, spirituality is not static but dynamic. Moral development begins in the family, then continues in the cultural context and finally leaps beyond one's cultural group to universality.

Similarly, spirituality evolves and expands. When I learn the language of my parents and social group, I begin to understand and communicate in that language. But, as I learn a second and third language, I begin to expand my ability to articulate ideas and sentiments that transcend my first language. So it is with spirituality. It is multi-dimensional and dynamic.

Theologians may define spirituality in relationship to God, but when we listen to people's life stories, we quickly learn that many dimensions of life have spiritual components. Consider Peggy Sue's life story.

Peggy Sue is a fifty-four-year-old Afro-American with serious respiratory problems, apparently stemming from allergies. Before the sudden onset of this condition, she led a “normal” life. Since the beginning of her health crisis, approximately 18 months ago, she has been severely restricted in what she can eat and where she can go. She makes frequent visits to hospitals and has essentially placed her life on hold. She cannot keep a regular job, because of her frequent respiratory attacks.

“It is tough and frustrating,” Peggy Sue said, “and sometimes scary, especially when I can’t breathe. I feel like I’m going to die.” She added, “I had a normal life, and then I got sick, and nothing has been the same since. Sometimes I get down. I used to be able to do everything: I could run, I could eat what I wanted. I could go out with my friends. I had plans for my life. Now I feel like I’m trapped and can’t get out.”

Peggy Sue feels resentment toward her sister and brother who lead “normal” lives. “I get no sympathy from my family. They tell me it’s my own damn fault. They say I should have quit smoking years ago. They don’t feel sorry for me. All I get is blame from them. So, I have stopped calling them or asking them for any support.”

She does have a close friend, from High School days. They sometimes go out to eat or shop together. She gets good support from her but doesn’t like to bother her or take advantage.

Regarding her relationship with God, she states, “I depend on God a lot. There was one time I was being rushed to the hospital, and I was fighting to breathe, and I cried out to God. I had a really weird feeling, and I have never been able to explain it, but I felt like God reached down and hugged me. Then, I knew I would be alright, and I was no longer scared.”

Although Peggy Sue was born and raised in Georgia, she moved to Miami with her husband twenty years ago to get work, and even though he died two years ago, she remained in Miami. “Sometimes I just want to go back to Hawkinsville, Georgia where I grew up, but since my parents died, there’s no “home” to go back to.” She reflected, “I guess now my church has become my hometown; everybody knows me and makes me feel like I am somebody.”

Her medical condition prevents her from full-time employment. However, she seeks to find some activity that would give her life a greater sense of meaning. “If I was well enough,” she said, “I would love to volunteer at the church daycare program. I have always loved children, even though we never had our own. I am sure if I did that, I would feel like I would have something meaningful to live for.”

We can see in Peggy Sue’s story that spiritual is multi-dimensional. She has suffered many losses, including the loss of her health, the loss of her hometown, the loss of employment and the loss of her husband. She feels rejected by her own family. She fantasizes about going back to her hometown, but in reality, she has no “home” where she could return. Spiritually she is isolated, rejected, and in exile. However, she feels a deep connection to God following a near-death experience and a sense that God was there for her. She struggles to find new meaning for her life amid her health and living challenges. Seeking meaning and purpose in life is certainly a spiritual quest. Seeking community is spiritual. She now recognizes that her church is her new “hometown” and it has become for her a spiritual sanctuary. In sum, her story is packed full of spiritual components and illustrates that spiritual is not limited to one’s relationship to God, but that it is multi-dimensional. Spirituality is like a cut gemstone; it has many facets.

We can begin to explore the facets of our personal spiritual gemstone by looking at our current life challenges. Strong emotions may emerge as we review our current life situation. These emotions may be the keys that unlock the doors to spiritual dimensions.

Consider the following conversation.

“You better not go in there.” The distraught mother stood in the doorway to the hospital room, preventing me from entering.

I looked at her troubled face and then at the others gathered in the corridor. “I’m chaplain Young, and I’m available to visit patients on this unit.” I looked at my patient list. “Is this Eduardo?”

A middle-aged Hispanic man came over and explained. “Our son is so upset right now; we’re all afraid to go into the room. Now is not a good

time to visit.”

“You’re probably right. What happened to your son?” I asked.

The mother explained that Eduardo, her 17-year-old son, had been struck by a car while riding his bike, broke his foot, and was hospitalized in a small community hospital. They put on a cast and sent him home. Ten days later they discovered that the foot got infected and he was rushed to Children’s Hospital. After their examination, the doctors told him that they might have to amputate his foot.

“Since they told him that,” the mother added, “he’s been so angry he refuses to eat, he throws things at the nurses, refuses his medicine and shouts at us until we have to leave the room.”

“Maybe he has the right to be angry,” I asserted. “Let me go in and see if I can help, with your permission of course.”

“It’s your life,” the father raised his eyebrows and shook his head. “Don’t say later that we didn’t warn you.”

I entered and cautiously introduced myself as the chaplain. The brown-eyed young man with short ebony hair sat up against several pillows. A Spanish game show blared from the small TV suspended over the bed. Eduardo reached for the control to turn down the volume. His right leg was in a cast from the knee down. He reluctantly glanced at me and looked back at the TV.

“Are you Eduardo?” I attempted to engage him in conversation but quickly recognized that this was not going to be easy.

The patient folded his arms across his chest. Although he wore the traditional hospital gown, he could not conceal his well-developed biceps and athletic build. He ignored me.

Just then, the phone rang. Eduardo picked up the receiver and said, “Who is it?” His hostile tone of voice continued until he shouted profanity and slammed down the phone.

“It sounds like you’re upset.” I began cautiously.

“You damned right I’m upset,” Eduardo raised his voice. “I’m mad as hell.”

I tried to show no judgment on my face. “Can you tell me about it?”

“I’m angry at the bastard that ran me over.” Eduardo fumed. “He never showed up at the hospital. He ruined my life and he never even called to say he was sorry.”

“Ruined your life?” I asked.

“Karate is my life. I’ve trained for years to be a Karate Instructor. I’m only two months short of earning my black belt. My life’s dream is to start a Karate school, now this bastard runs me over, and the doctors say they may have to amputate.” Eduardo shook with emotion; his eyes flared with anger. “He ruined my life.”

I didn’t know what to say. I knew that to offer comfort at this point would probably provoke more rage. I decided to follow the emotion. “I can see that you’re angry with the guy who ran you over, and you have a right to be.” I paused. “I have an idea. Why don’t you let me be the guy who ran you over? I’ll come into the room to visit you, and you can tell him exactly how you feel.”

Eduardo’s face cracked a smile. He welcomed the idea. I repeated that I would leave and come right back in, but play-act the person who struck Eduardo with his car. “You can say anything you want. Forget I’m a chaplain. Just say what comes out.”

“Agreed!” Eduardo rubbed his hands together like preparing himself for a fight.

When I re-entered the room, Eduardo didn’t even wait for an introduction.

“You son of a whore! Look what you’ve done to me. You f**king bastard! If I didn’t have this cast on my leg, I’d tear you to pieces.” His arms sliced the air as he yelled. “Do you know that I might lose my leg? Do you know what that means to me? No. you don’t, because you don’t give a

damn about me. You didn't visit me. You didn't even call to ask how I was doing?" Eduardo trembled with emotion.

I worried that I might have ignited emotions that would go over the edge, but I stood there and endured the verbal blast.

"You son of a ..." His voice choked. He tried to continue but began to cry. His eyes flooded with tears. He wiped his eyes with the bed sheet. "You didn't care enough to come by and say you're sorry and worse..." Eduardo sobbed, "You didn't give me a chance to say..." He caught his breath. "To say...I forgive you." He buried his head in his hands and cried.

I had followed the emotions with empathy, until that last word, when Eduardo revealed the true angst in his heart. I had all I could do to contain my tears. I reached over and put my hand on Eduardo's shoulder.

"You are so brave." I spaced my words and spoke calmly but firmly. Now I spoke as the chaplain. "It took a lot of courage to say that."

Eduardo looked up and wiped his eyes.

"You just showed me how much love you have in your heart," I said.

He took a deep breath. "I didn't realize I had all that anger."

"And I didn't realize that you were really angry because the guy didn't give you an opportunity to forgive him. That's amazing. You have the heart of God."

Eduardo smiled. "I still need to forgive him. It's not easy."

I suggested a prayer to seek God's help to forgive. Eduardo welcomed the prayer and even added his own prayer words.

When I invited the family back into the room, they were surprised to see that Eduardo had calmed down.

Three days later, Eduardo went into surgery. The doctors had initiated treatment of several days of antibiotics, but didn't promise anything; they

had to open the cast and look at the wound before deciding whether or not to amputate.

When I next visited Eduardo, I learned that the surgical team had cut away the cast and were surprised to find that the wound had healed. There was no need to amputate.

Not all of my hospital visits resulted in such a happy ending, but I share this case as an illustration of an approach that characterizes much of spiritual assessment and care. While nurses and doctors are trained to treat the symptoms, that is; stop the bleeding, relieve the pain, disinfect the wound, etc. etc., the approach of the spiritual caregiver is different. We follow the symptoms, listen to the pain, and hear the angst until it leads us to the spiritual.

The principle is this: the emotions lead us to the spiritual. In the case of Eduardo, I would never have learned that his spiritual issue had to do with forgiveness if I would not have explored his emotions. I had no idea where it might lead me, and most importantly; Eduardo had no idea what emotions and spiritual issues hid below the surface. By allowing his true emotions to surface, we tapped into the wellspring of his spirituality.

This illustration teaches us that the emotions and the spiritual are interrelated. Who would have known that Eduardo genuinely desired to forgive the person who ran him over? Would he have remained angry had he not discovered his need to forgive? Was his anger hampering his body's capacity to heal? Were his negative emotions poisoning his immune system? Could it be that withholding forgiveness impaired his healing? When he prayed for the ability to forgive, did that somehow take the sting from his anger? When the family learned that his leg had healed and there was no need to amputate; they received that news as a miracle. Was there a relationship between Eduardo's willingness to forgive and his speedy healing? Is it possible that there is an intrinsic relationship between health and spirituality?

Emotional distress instructs us; it points to the source. If we cover up or put a band-aid on the angst before it instructs us, then we've missed an opportunity for authentic healing. In the ER, they rarely give pain

medication before they have diagnosed the problem; they need the pain to point them to the source of the problem. In the same way, we need to pay attention to emotional pain; it may point us to spiritual issues.

As we begin the process of taking our spiritual temperature, the starting point may be to look at the presenting symptoms of our current life situation. Where is the pain? To what does it point? Can we identify the angst? What is our primary emotion? Fear? Anger? Anxiety? Sadness? Brokenness? Worry? Loss? Bitterness? Loneliness? Despair? If we were to follow the dominant emotions of our present life circumstance, where would they take us?

Martha G. would lose her temper at trivial things. At home, she found herself irritable with her three children and critical of her husband. At work, she complained about the incompetence of her co-workers until no-one enjoyed being around her. While driving to and from work, her impatience with other drivers kept her hitting the horn and gesturing at those who provoked her. She had no idea that others saw her as prickly and mean-spirited, until one day her best friend, Ana came over for coffee and commented, “You seem agitated. Is something bothering you?” In the presence of Ana, she could not deny her feelings. Martha felt so comfortable with Ana that she began to share. What emerged surprised them both. Martha, over time, had accumulated deep feelings of resentment. She had begun her married life with high hopes of becoming a college music teacher, but soon became a mother, and quickly the tasks of raising a family consumed her life. She never finished university, but instead worked as a secretary. Her husband meanwhile had followed his career dreams and felt fulfilled as a corporate manager in marketing. Martha was the only one among her siblings that did not earn a university degree. She saw classmates and friends climb their career ladders, while she remained frustrated. As she shared with Ana, she realized that she had converted all that bitter energy of resentment and turned it into sarcasm, criticism and irritable moods.

In this illustration, we see that Martha’s “presenting symptoms” camouflaged the emotions at the core of her problem. When she explored those emotions; they led her to the source-- resentment.

This holistic approach to taking one's spiritual temperature explores the multiple dimensions of our spirituality: our life story, relationships, intimacy, life meaning, sense of justice, belonging to a community, our relationship to God, etc. However, one beginning place may be to honestly look at our "presenting symptoms" and identify the emotions that dominate our current emotional landscape. When we listen to our feelings, they may open a door that leads us to the spiritual dimension.

We are not always aware of our own emotions as much as we are sensitive to those of others. Many of us cannot put a name on our feelings. We may need to find a trusted friend who can "mirror" our emotions and help us to see our emotional reflection. Those who like to write may find it helpful to write a poem or a journal entry, identifying the feelings that emerge in the process.

Some readers may find it easiest to map out their feelings on the chart below. The emotions are named and ordered in a format of polarities (opposites). Sometimes we are not sure what we are feeling, but when we see the opposite, it helps us put a name on the emotion. For example, I may not immediately recognize that I am anxious, but when I see the word "calm" and I recognize that I am far from calm, I may acknowledge that my emotional state is closer to anxious.

On the chart below, indicate where you find yourself emotionally by circling the words that most accurately describe your current emotional state. Take a meditative moment to reflect on what's going on in your life right now. You may have a health concern, family or vocational situation that impacts your current emotional state. Review the words on the chart (one horizontal row at a time) and note that each row represents a range of emotions. Circle the word that best expresses your feeling on that row. If you don't identify with any word on a particular horizontal row, circle the "Neutral" in the middle, indicating neutrality on that particular range of emotions and go on to the next row. Circle only one word per row.

Go to the next line, and the next, circling the word on each line that most closely represents your present feeling. Take your time reviewing and circling the words that best reflect your current emotional landscape.

Current Emotional Challenges

1 .	Happy	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Sad
2 .	Confident	Calm	Neutral	Anxious	Distressed
3 .	Courageous	Trusting	Neutral	Fearful	Panicked
4 .	Content	Tolerant	Neutral	Angry	Furious
5 .	Joyful	Happy	Neutral	Sad	Afflicted
6 .	Ecstatic	Optimistic	Neutral	Blue	Depressed
7 .	Composed	Relieved	Neutral	Worried	Tormented
8 .	Grateful	Satisfied	Neutral	Resentful	Bitter
9 .	Fulfilled	Functioning	Neutral	Broken	Fractured
1 0 .	Thriving	Resilient	Neutral	Suffering	Wounded
1 1 .	Passionate	Optimistic	Neutral	Pessimistic	Cynical
1 2 .	Blissful	Peaceful	Neutral	Concerned	Agitated
1 3 .	1 x __ =	2 x __ =	Neutral	3 x __ =	4 x __ =
1 4 .				Total Score	=

To illustrate, let's take the case of Eduardo (the would-be Karate instructor who feared the amputation of a leg.) Observe the chart below that illustrates Eduardo's "current emotional state."

Eduardo's Current Emotional State

1	Happy	Satisfied	Neutral	Unsatisfied	Sad
2	Confident	Calm	Neutral	Anxious	Distressed
3	Courageous	Trusting	Neutral	Fearful	Panicked
4	Content	Tolerant	Neutral	Angry	Furious
5	Joyful	Happy	Neutral	Sad	Afflicted
6	Ecstatic	Optimistic	Neutral	Blue	Depressed
7	Composed	Relieved	Neutral	Worried	Tormented
8	Grateful	Satisfied	Neutral	Resentful	Bitter
9	Fulfilled	Functioning	Neutral	Broken	Fractured
10	Thriving	Resilient	Neutral	Suffering	Wounded
11	Passionate	Optimistic	Neutral	Pessimistic	Cynical
12	Blissful	Peaceful	Neutral	Concerned	Agitated
13	$0 \times 1=0$	$0 \times 2=0$	Neutral	$4 \times 3=12$	$6 \times 4=24$
14.	Total Score	12 rows	Less 2 neutral rows	= 10 rows	$12 + 24 = 36$ divided by $10 = 3.6$

Count the number of words circled in each vertical column and multiply that number by the number in each formula on row 13. Write the total for each column on row 13. Leave the neutral column blank. Add the total numbers on row 13 and divide by the number of rows circled. In Eduardo's chart there were two neutrals, so the total 12 less 2=10. The total number on row 13 would be 36 divided by 10. That is Eduardo's final score for this chapter. Eduardo's score ($12 + 24 = 36$ divided by $10 = 3.6$)

To arrive at your score, count the number of words circled in each vertical column and multiply your total by the number in each formula on row 13. Write the total for each column on row 13. Leave the neutral column blank. Add the totals on row 13 and divide by the number of rows circled. That is your final score for this chapter.

Write your score here _____. You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

Congratulations! You have started to explore your spiritual temperature by first focusing on your emotions. Observe your results on the chart above. Do you see any patterns, clusters or polarities? Were you able to name any feelings that previously you may not have claimed? Do you find your

emotions clustered in the center or at the left or right margins? Are your emotions weighted dominantly on one side or the other? What does this tell you about your current emotional state? What are the dominant emotions? As you focus on your primary emotions, can you identify the sources of those feelings? What's going on in your life that provokes those feelings? What have you discovered about yourself through this exercise?

Not everyone can easily use this kind of tool. Sometimes our cultural or religious background curtails our awareness of our own emotions. Some people come from religious homes where the norm is to be "in the joy of the Lord." If you're not joyful, there's something wrong. Those of us raised in the rugged frontier culture were encouraged to stoically suppress our feelings and accept hardship without complaint.

Did you ever see Batman cry? Can you think of one scene when Clint Eastwood expressed emotional vulnerability? Our super-heroes encouraged us to forge ahead with valor and courage despite our fears, anxieties, and emotional connections. The generation of teens that grew up in the nineties wore T-shirts that proclaimed, "No Fear." From football coaches and drill sergeants to gang leaders, the message is the same: disregard your fears, don't show your weaknesses and don't be a wimp. Is it a surprise that our culture produces individuals with a stifled range of emotional intelligence?

I grew up in a north-European immigrant family in the Midwest. I did not realize until later in life that my German father and Norwegian mother had stifled my emotional repertoire. My father came from a tradition of strict authoritarian rule, and when he disciplined my siblings and me, he would let us choose between the oak stick and the leather razor strap. Swearing, profanity and "talking back" were prohibited. Only my father enjoyed the exclusive right to use profanity. Crying was not allowed, at least not for long. My father would say, "If you don't stop crying, I'll give you something to cry about." (This was an implied threat of physical punishment.) My mother came from a religious tradition of Lutheran piety characterized by hopefulness and cheer. The key emotion endorsed by her side of the family was: happy. If you asked one of her Norwegian relatives how he/she was doing, the response would be, "good." We did not easily express negative emotions. If someone was suffering from emotional pain, the cultural way to express that pain was to respond: "not so good."

People who grew into adulthood in a culture like mine often felt limited when it came to expressing strong emotions. In that culture, the scope of emotional expression ranged between “good” and “not so good.” In my family system, we were not encouraged to explore and express our emotions. Consequently, we didn’t have a large emotional vocabulary to describe our feelings.

When the space shuttle Columbia disintegrated in 2003, nearly 40 miles above the earth, the NASA official charged with communicating the tragedy to the media had an extremely difficult time expressing his emotions about the incident. He could describe the most subtle technical problems, but when trying to express his feelings about the horrific loss of lives, all he could say was, “NASA had a bad day.” Certainly, he, as well as the entire nation, was having “a bad day” but, that may have been a revealing moment for all of us; we may be a people with a serious handicap when it comes to recognizing and claiming our own emotions. For those of us in that category, it may be easier for us to explore our spirituality by focusing on the specific stories that make up the various dimensions of our spiritual life.

Like a multi-faceted diamond, spirituality has many dimensions. Each of the following chapters will walk us through the respective components of spirituality and enable us to gain insights into the multiple facets of our spiritual gemstone.

2

Relationship with Family



Since we were children, hearing the biblical stories of conflicted families in Sunday School; we have known that families have much to do with spiritual formation and identity. We learned of sibling rivalry through the stories of Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers. We learned of status and place in the family, struggles over who gets the father's blessing, who gets rejected and who is accepted. In the stories of Moses, Ruth, Esther, and Daniel, we learned about issues of belonging and cross-cultural loyalties. Issues related to adoption come up in the stories of baby Moses and Ruth. When we discussed these stories, we understood that families were fertile ground for spiritual angst, role identity, status, blessing or curse, acceptance or rejection—all spiritual themes.

Many of the same spiritual themes are played out in the Bhagavad Gita where two armies had gathered in a large battlefield and the warrior Arjuna pulled his chariot between the two armies. He saw on each side his uncles, grand-uncles and teachers, brothers and cousins, sons and nephews and friends. He felt a profound sadness when he realized that family and loved ones on both sides would die in the coming battle. He consults with Krishna for advice. The ensuing conversation weaves spiritual themes with self-identity, suggesting that if Arjuna were to be a good warrior, he would first have to examine his soul.

The story of Siddhartha cannot be ignored. The young prince grew up in a very sheltered and over-protective family. His father did not permit him to go outside the gates of the palace where he might witness suffering. However, the young prince managed to sneak out more than once where he witnessed hunger, disease, and death. The shock of human suffering provoked a strong desire in the prince to leave home and discover the world for himself. In opposition to every effort by his family to shield him, the prince set out on a journey that eventually led him to become the Buddha, the awakened one.

Families have the awesome power to make us or break us. Children will often take on an identity given to them by their family: smart, genius, fool, pretty, joker, black sheep, cute, scapegoat, stupid, saint, angel, victim, weak, strong, etc. On the other hand, some children will defy the role given to them by the family and choose an identity foreign to that which was assigned.

George grew up in a family where the expectation was that he would be a pastor. His father and grandfathers two generations back were all pastors. George had a great passion for being a rock musician, but because his family had raised him as a “good and obedient boy,” he felt that he had to please his father. He went into the ministry, married, had children, became the ideal pastor, but began suffering from depression. He dreamed of quitting the ministry and joining a rock band, but he didn’t have the courage. He did not recognize the power of the resentment that built up inside him until his mid-life crisis when everything fell apart, and he left the ministry. In the case of Pastor George, he had been assigned a role by his family, accepted it, but experienced inner turmoil. He suffered from his struggle to embrace his own identity.

After repeatedly getting caught stealing, fifteen-year-old Steven was sent by a county judge to a group home for delinquents. He had a hard time fitting in with the other seven delinquents but learned that he could gain their acceptance by acting out. He continued to steal in spite of close supervision. Finally, the judge had enough and sent him to a state juvenile detention facility until he turned eighteen. On the day he was scheduled to be transferred, his parents came to visit him. The group home counselors apologized to the father that they were not able to re-habilitate Steven. The father shocked the staff when he said, “Don’t feel bad that you couldn’t help him; I knew from the time he was this high (the father indicated three feet) that Steven was no good.” He said this with his son standing next to him. After they left, the stunned counselors de-briefed the incident. They sadly agreed that Steven didn’t have much of a chance to be a good kid if his family had already decided at an early age that he was “no good.”

In both cases, the family systems of George and Steven were crucial in their formation. Not many of us are born to be a prince or princess, but we can only imagine what a psychological and spiritual struggle it must be for the child designated to be a prince who rejects that role. (Siddhartha, for example) However, most of us do grow up in families with subtle expectations and often

not so subtle role expectations. In some cultures, there is great pressure on the oldest son to take over the father's business. For example, in Chile, among artisan fisherman (where I served as a mission developer) fishermen often took their sons out of school when they reached twelve or thirteen years old. The fathers did not want the son to finish secondary education; they feared that their sons might choose another vocation. The fishermen fathers needed at least one son to take over the boat when they became old and too frail to withstand the ocean elements. Imagine the conflict between a fisherman father and a son who wants to study music.

Perhaps even more significant than the influence on vocation is the family system's influence on character development. We see the power of family influence on character, for example, in the case of Steven who acted out the father's role expectation of a bad kid. Another young delinquent in the same group home grew up in a family that stifled and humiliated him to the point that his physical development slowed. His self-esteem was in the pits. Soon after he arrived at the group home, he began to feel better about himself. Once he was out of his stifling family, he began to thrive emotionally. Soon he began to grow physically and regained a normal height for his age.

The renowned psychologist Erik Erikson described human emotional development that presented psychological challenges throughout life. Each age-related stage suggests a challenge that must be met at that appropriate age. If it is not met, then that psychological challenge is carried over into a later stage. Erikson identified eight stages.

1. An infant develops a sense of trust or distrust in the first year of life. The child is dependent on parents to meet basic physical and emotional needs. If basic needs are met, the infant develops a sense of trust. If basic needs are not met, an attitude of distrust is the result. Five-year-old Rolando stood his one-year old sister on top of the coffee table. He stepped back and held out his arms, saying, "Jump, I'll catch you." When she jumped, he let her fall to the floor and laughed. He thought it was a great joke, but she learned that her brother could not be trusted. That sense of distrust could follow her into adult life.

See if you can identify the emotional and spiritual themes in the following story. Sue had been discharged from the hospital after the birth of her fourth child. When the parish nurse visited her to offer some help, she found Sue to be very illusive; it was hard to get any information or a

clear indication if she wanted help or not. Her three children were under the age of ten. Her husband had his own business and appeared to be preoccupied with business concerns. In the first visit, the parish nurse found Sue to be distant and nervous. Sue kept referring to when her husband would be home, and it seemed she did not want any visitors to the house when he arrived. The children were clinging to their mother and distrusting of strangers. Sue was not able to engage in casual conversation. The children were fed and clothed but seemed strained and unhappy. Sue would not answer questions; in fact, she seemed to become increasingly uneasy when the parish nurse asked more questions. She had never worked outside of the home, yet she seemed to possess some real talent. In spite of the parish nurse's compliments, Sue did not even want to entertain the possibility that she had something to offer the world.

Later the parish nurse heard from a parishioner who grew up with Sue that her parents had abused her when she was growing up. This same childhood friend mentioned that she suspected Sue's husband was abusing Sue and the kids.

It's not hard, following Sue's story, to identify emotional and spiritual themes such as trust versus distrust, self-confidence versus self-doubt, acceptance versus rejection, hope versus despair and finally, intimacy versus alienation.

2. Between the ages of one and three, a child develops a sense of autonomy. Self-doubt struggles against a desire for self-reliance. A child's explorations test the limits. Parental hovering may inhibit the development of a child's autonomy. Getting free of diapers is a big challenge during this stage, and failure may result in self-doubt and shame.
3. The essential task of three to five-year-old children is to acquire a sense of competence and initiative. Children who are encouraged to make their own choices develop a positive self-image. Children who are prohibited from making their own decisions may live in the shadow of self-doubt and guilt.
4. A child in elementary school (ages five to twelve) begins to understand the world and how to succeed in it. They continue to practice their assigned sex role identity, or not. Achieving personal goals adds to self-confidence, while failure to do so may lead to feelings of inferiority.

5. During the teenage years developing an identity is the crucial challenge. Parents may resent the growing reality that a son or daughter feels that his/her peers are more important than family. Transition into adulthood may be encouraged or discouraged by the family of origin. Some parents feel that they have fulfilled their duty by the time a child turns eighteen and invite their child to leave home. On the other hand, in some cultures, a child, male or female is expected to live at home until married. Going away to college may nurture some degree of independence, while at the same time may delay the transition to adulthood. The importance of peers increases while the role of the family diminishes. Adolescence is a time to explore social and sexual identity. The tension between independence and dependence often revolves around getting keys to the car. In High School, I had friends who were given a car when they turned sixteen, while I had to be to use my Dad's car for a prom date. At eighteen I bought my own automobile, and that settled the problem. Owning your own car is another name for freedom. The challenge of seeking a clear identity or vocation may be postponed by college or military service.

6. During the young adult years between eighteen and thirty-five, the challenge is to form intimate relationships. Failure to form an intimate relationship may lead to isolation and possible alienation. In the following story, see if you can identify the emotional and spiritual themes.

Chris is a thirty-eight-year-old successful scientist. His specialty is microbiology and public health. He is one of the pioneers in his field. Success has come from his astounding ability for precise indisputable data in the area of public health research. He works with the CDC and has been instrumental in shaping national and global policies.

However, even with all his career success and international respect, Chris has never had a lasting relationship. Even his own family steps carefully around him. His girlfriends break up with him because he's demanding, cold and secretive. Chris is bewildered at other people's reactions toward him. He is completely unaware of the wall he has built around himself. Recently, Chris confessed to his doctor that he had been raped as a child. This happened in his home during holidays while his parents were completely unaware in the next room. His rapist was a family friend. As Chris grew into adulthood, he was never able to enter into an authentic, intimate relationship. This story illustrates Erikson's stage theory; if a challenge is not met in an early stage, the challenge is carried forward into adulthood and leaves its impact there.

7. The adult years are characterized by “generativity.” This is the time of life to establish a career and grow a family. Adults juggle their time and energy between parenting and career responsibilities. It is a time of productivity and creativity. In the following story, see if you can identify the emotional and spiritual themes.

Janice enjoyed a happy married life before the accident. She had grown up as an only child and desperately wanted to have many children. She and her husband dreamed of lots of kids running around, playing, taking them to soccer and cheerleading, teaching them to cook, play musical instruments, and even helping them with their homework. Recently Janice suffered serious injuries in a car accident that deprived her of the ability to have children. In addition to trying to heal from her physical injuries, she’s been severely depressed. She doesn’t seem to have any interest in family or friends (especially those who have children). She has distanced herself from her husband and generally seems angry and despondent. You may have identified her desire to have a family as the central issue. What Janice most wanted for her life was precisely what she could not attain.

8. Erikson proposed that if a person has successfully met the challenges of the first seven stages, then the mature adult would enjoy a sense of integrity. He/she would feel a sense of accomplishment and well-being—it’s been a good life. He/she may identify with St. Paul who said, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Timothy 4:7)

On the other hand, a person who looks back at his/her life and says, “It’s been a waste. I’ve been a failure in my career and family.” She/he may identify with the philosopher Ecclesiastes who searched for life’s meaning and concluded, “All is vanity and a chasing after wind.” “So I turned and gave up my heart to despair.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14 and 2:20) For Erikson, a life that ends with integrity leads to wisdom, while a life that fails to fulfill, ends in despair.

Erik Erikson studied the emotional and psychological stages of life. When reviewing his contribution to the understanding of the human story, we can see that family relationships are crucial to human emotional development and that many of the outcomes are spiritual, or at least overlap with spirituality. The emotional themes of trust, hope, loyalty, life meaning and purpose, love and care-- all cross over into the realm of spirituality.

I will never forget a stubborn grandmother who refused to sign the consent form for heart surgery. At the time, I was assigned to the cardiovascular/surgical unit at the hospital where I served as a staff chaplain. That day, I walked onto the unit, and immediately a nurse told me about the grandmother in room 4105; how she urgently needed heart surgery, but stubbornly refused to sign the consent form. She asked me if I would go in and “persuade her to sign.” I agreed to see her, but I didn’t agree to persuade her of anything, but rather to listen to her story. After I introduced myself to Agnes, she immediately let me know that they had previously sent in the doctor, the head nurse, the patient rep, and the social worker to get her to sign. She looked me square in the eye, “So now they send in the chaplain. Let me tell you, young man; you’re wasting your time.”

I replied, “I can see already that I am not about to persuade you of anything.” I paused. “What is this surgery all about, anyway?” I asked.

She looked at me warily but proceeded to say, “I have diabetes and heart problems. I lived with this diagnosis for many years. Now they say I need open-heart surgery, or I’ll die. But, let me tell you, I have a deep intuitive feeling that if I do go into surgery; I’m going to die.”

“So, either way, you’re going to die? I guess I see your point,” I said.

She looked out the window, then back at me. “They say I’ll die if I don’t have it; that surgery is my only hope. But, that’s not the issue; I’m not afraid of dying.” She emphasized the word, “afraid.”

“So, what are you afraid of?”

“I’m afraid of what might happen to Freddy.”

“Who’s Freddy?” I asked.

“He’s my darling little grandson.” She reached for the tissues and dabbed her eyes. You see, my daughter, she’s the wild one of the family and ran off and got pregnant. Once she gave birth to the child, she went back to partying. Now I take care of Freddy. He’s so cute, Such a darling, Too bad he’s emotionally challenged. My daughter is so irresponsible. If it were for her, Freddy would be dead by now.”

“Sounds like you take care of Freddy?”

“Yes,” Agnes’s eyes filled with tears. “He’s my life.”

“Does Freddy have anything to do with your refusal to have surgery?” I inquired.

Agnes wiped a tear from her cheek. “If I die in surgery; who will take care of Freddy?”

“Bingo,” I said to myself. And to Agnes, I said, “It sounds like you are most anxious about Freddy’s care, more so than your own life.”

She nodded, “Yes.”

“Would you mind if I shared this with the social worker? She may have some ideas on how we can make sure that Freddy is cared for, no matter what...”

Grandma Agnes gave her consent for me to share her concern with the social worker, who immediately began contacting family members and soon had called a family meeting. The next day, the family gathered in a meeting room down the hall from Agnes’s room. Freddy’s mom showed up, together with several Aunts and cousins. The social worker explained that Agnes urgently needed surgery but wouldn’t sign the consent form until she was assured that someone would care for her grandson Freddy. The mother began to cry and say how inadequate she felt. “Freddy is too much for me to handle.” She sobbed. One by one, the Aunts and cousins in the room offered to help the mom. Soon they had developed a plan of action to care for Freddy during grandma’s surgery and beyond. Then they went into the room and told Agnes of their plans to care for Freddy. Grandma was pleased. She offered forgiveness to her daughter and gave her blessing to the family. She signed the consent form. Later that day she went into surgery and died.

I have told this true story to many people, and they are usually shocked at the outcome. They say, “How sad!” But, I say, “No, Agnes won.” Grandma Agnes accomplished the one thing that most concerned her at end-of-life. She was on a mission to save Freddy. She was not worried about her death. She was at peace with her passing on if that were to be the outcome, but she held on until she was assured that Freddy would be cared for. Her love prevailed. Upon reflection, I believe that Grandma Agnes had

a spiritual intuition that she was going to die and that therefore, she needed to take care of that one most essential task before dying. I believe she fought the good fight; she accomplished her mission. She did not die in despair, but with faith and hope.

Now, take a look at the “Family Relationships” chart below. The chart identifies the dynamics and tensions in family relationships. Circle the words that best describe your relationships. Review the words on the chart (one horizontal row at a time) and note that each row represents a range of emotions. Circle the word that best expresses your feeling on that row. If you don’t identify with any word on a particular horizontal row, circle “Neutral” in the middle, indicating neutrality on that particular range of emotions and go on to the next row. Circle only one word per row. When you are finished, follow the instructions to tabulate your score.

Family Relationships

1 .	Blessed	Somewhat blessed	Neu tral	Not so Blessed	Cursed
2 .	Honored	Accepted	Neu tral	Shamed	Rejected
3 .	Strong Identity	Clear identity	Neu tral	Doubtful Identity	Confused Identity
4 .	Completely Trusted	Somewhat trusted	Neu tral	Somewhat distrusted	Betrayed
5 .	Highly respected	Respected	Neu tral	Disrespected	Humiliated
6 .	Loved	Cared for	Neu tral	Tolerated	Hated
7 .	Unified Family	Committed	Neu tral	Divided Family	Abusive Family
8 .	Highly nurturing	Safe place	Neu tral	Unsafe place	Intimidating
9 .	Reconciled Relationships	Okay Relationships	Neu tral	Judgmental Relationships	Broken Relationships
1 0 .	Strong sense of belonging	I belong	Neu tral	Weak sense of belonging	Alienated—I don’t belong.
1 1	Experienced Grace	Forgiven	Neu tral	Un-forgiven	Condemned

.					
1 2 .	A strong role in the family	Moderate role in the family	Neu tral	Weak role In family	No role or lost role in the family
1 3 .	__x 1=	__x 2=	Neu tral	__x 3=	__x 4=
1 4 .				Total Score	_____

Once you have finished, observe where the circled words are located. Do you see a balance? Do you see that the words circled are heavily weighted on one side or the other? What does this inform you about your family relationships? How do your family relationships contribute to your spiritual identity? Do you feel a connection between your spirituality and the emotional and spiritual formation you experience in your family?

To arrive at your score, count the number of words circled in each vertical column and multiply that number by the number in each formula (Row 13). Write the total for each column on row 13. Leave the neutral column blank. Add the totals on row 13 and divide by the number of rows not marked by “neutral.”. That is your final score for this chapter. Write your score here _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

3

Intimacy in Community



“You might want to visit Sara in 321B.” The nurse hardly looked up from her notes. She looked totally consumed in a patient’s chart.

I sensed that it would be an imposition for me to ask her for the medical picture, or why she would ask the chaplain to visit Sara. I didn’t mind; I preferred to get the story from the patient. I found Sara in her bed by the window. She appeared to be sleeping. I stopped at the foot of the bed and took a moment to observe this forty-something woman who looked gravely undernourished. I turned to leave, preferring not to disturb her nap.

“Yes?” Her barely audible voice summoned me back.

“I’m sorry to interrupt your nap. I’m the chaplain for this unit; your nurse thought you might want a visit.”

“I guess she wants me to get religion before I die.” She cracked a weak smile.

My first feeling tempted me to change the subject, but her comment was too bold to ignore. “Before you die?” I said.

“Everyone knows I’m dying of AIDS; you may as well know too.”

I had visited countless end-stage AIDS patients but had rarely seen a patient so depleted and still able to talk. Sara’s blond hair did not conceal the gray roots that had grown out an inch. The deep wrinkles in her sunken face told of a hard life.

“Sit down.” She patted the bed with her free hand. The other was hooked up to a tube, connected to a clear plastic bottle that hung above her on a metal pole.

I pulled up a chair and positioned myself so she would not have to strain or turn to see me. I didn't know what to do with her statement, "...get religion before I die." Some HIV patients threw in the towel as soon as they got the diagnosis. HIV+ equaled a death sentence. Others fought it like a wild horse that refused to be saddled. In the end, at some point, most patients became resigned to the reality that AIDS (or one of the accompanying illnesses) would kill them. Sara must have reached her own conclusion; it seemed from her statement that she was resigned to her death.

I decided I would invite her to tell her story. "I haven't seen you here before. Have you been hospitalized before?"

"Yes, many times, but they never put me in the AIDS unit. I always came in with other symptoms, like pneumonia."

"It sounds like you've been through a lot."

"You have no idea." She cracked a half-smile. "But I don't want to get into all that. While I have you here. I want to ask you a favor."

"Of course. How can I help you?"

"You are a minister, aren't you?"

"Yes."

She paused and looked up and to the side, suggesting an internal dialogue. Perhaps she wondered if she should ask, but then she came out with it. "I want to be baptized before I die."

That's a pretty direct request. I thought. I wondered what it meant for her. A dozen questions raced across my mind. My denominational tradition requires some pastoral conversation to address some faith issues before a pastor consents to baptize an adult. I wondered what baptism meant for her. I could think of numerous reasons why she might want to be baptized, but I wanted to hear from her. "Why do you want to be baptized?"

"I've always been a believer." She began to tell her story and didn't finish until she had it all out. She revealed that she grew up in a small town in the Panhandle of Florida. Like most families in the Bible belt, she was raised on religion, went to church as a child. Her family belonged to a Pentecostal

church where they practiced “believer’s baptism.” She stated that she wanted to be baptized when she was a girl, but before she was old enough, she ran away from home. She told how her father had sexually abused her, and her mother didn’t protect her. She fled from home and came to Miami in her early teens. She had no recourse but to work on the streets as a commercial sex worker. She completely lost touch with her family and only contacted them when she became pregnant. She returned to her hometown to have the baby, and to give it up. She returned to the streets of Miami. Again, she had no contact with her family until her second pregnancy. She returned home to give her child to relatives. Her family rejected her. She felt shame and rejection from her judgmental family. By then she had become an addict, both to the drugs and to the lifestyle. When diagnosed with HIV she accepted it as one more chapter of suffering in a long life of pain and despair. She had given up on reconciliation with her estranged family, and now, as it seemed that she was nearing the end of her life, she sought forgiveness and peace with God. “I have no one in this world. My life has been a mess. I don’t deserve God’s love, but who else can I turn to? Will you baptize me?”

I am not a priest who hears confessions as a normal part of religious practice. My denomination doesn’t emphasize private confession, except to acknowledge that we all have sinned and have all fallen short of the glory of God. But this was certainly the most sincere confession that I had heard in a long time. “Yes, I will baptize you,” I replied.

Her face lit up. She smiled for the first time. “When? Can you do it now? No, I need to get ready.”

We discussed a couple of options and agreed on Wednesday. It was late afternoon on Monday. She had Tuesday to get prepared. She asked for prayer before I left and thanked me so effusively, I felt embarrassed.

On Wednesday afternoon, I returned. I quickly learned what she meant when she said she needed to get ready. She looked like a doll; clothed in a white dress. Someone had dressed her, done her hair, her nails, and make-up. She had a yellow ribbon in her hair. She greeted me with a weak, but joyful smile. Soon after I arrived, the room filled with people: nurses, medical technicians, social workers, patient reps, dieticians, doctors, even the cleaning staff. Apparently, she had informed everyone that she would be baptized on Wednesday and had invited each one to come. I didn’t waste any time to do the baptism. Everyone gathered around Sara’s bed. I read the liturgy for baptism

and at the appropriate moment poured water on her head, “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.” A nurse had placed a towel under her head, and now she replaced the wet towel with a dry one while patting her head to soak up the wetness. After the concluding prayers, each person went to her and said, “Welcome to the family of Christ.”

Sara beamed. Her voice was too weak to say much, but she mouthed, “Thank you.”

I watched from the foot of the bed as each person greeted her. Soon we were alone. Then, Sara said something that I will always remember.

“You know, pastor,” she smiled, “Today is the first day of my life that I feel like I belong.”

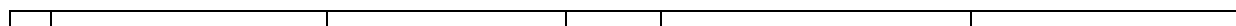
And while choked up a bit, I managed to say, “I’ve never heard a better description of the meaning of baptism.”

A few days later, Sara was transferred to an AIDS Hospice. A social worker had managed to locate and inform her sisters that Sara was terminally ill. They drove from North Florida and arrived before she died. I happened to visit Sara the day her family showed up. I found her to be delighted that a daughter and two grandchildren (whom she had never seen) had also come. As Sara held her youngest grandchild, she said, “Now I can die in peace.”

Sara’s story illustrates several emotional and spiritual themes related to Erikson’s stages. Sara’s abuse by her father certainly launched her life far away from her family. She had lost trust. Her family had failed to protect her. In Miami, she survived, but never developed relationships of intimacy. She felt alone all her life; lacked a feeling of belonging to any community. She remained isolated and alienated from her family of origin until her final reconciliation at end-of-life.

Observe the chart below. How would you observe Sara’s emotional and spiritual temperature? Would you see a cluster of words on one side or the other? After she was baptized, she felt accepted, welcomed, and in her words, “I belong.” We can observe that emotionally and spiritually she moved from alienation to acceptance, from marginalized to a sense of belonging.

Intimacy and Community



1 .	Respected	Valued	Neut ral	Alienated	Marginalized
2 .	Honored	Accepted	Neut ral	Shamed	Humiliated
3 .	Leader Identity	Participant Identity	Neut ral	Doubtful identity	Confused Identity
4 .	Fully Trusted	Somewhat trusted	Neut ral	Distrusted	Betrayed
5 .	Praised	Respected	Neut ral	Disrespected	Humiliated
6 .	Loved	Accepted	Neut ral	Tolerated	Rejected
7 .	Healthy Relationships	Reconciled	Neut ral	Rejected	Broken Relationships
8 .	Many friends	Companioned	Neut ral	Lonely	Isolated
9 .	Celebrated	Welcomed	Neut ral	Exploited	Abused
1 0 .	Strongly belong	I belong	Neut ral	Weak sense of belonging	Alienated
1 1 .	Blessed	Forgiven	Neut ral	Un-forgiven	Condemned
1 2 .	Bliss	In harmony	Neut ral	Conflicted	Persecuted
1 3 .	__x 1= __	__x 2= ____	Neut ral	__x 3= ____	__x 4= ____
1 4 .				Total Score	=

Now, take a look at the chart, and circle the words that relate to your sense of belonging and intimacy in a community. Once you have finished, observe where the circled words are located. Do you see a balance? Do you see that the words circled are heavily weighted on one side or the other? What does this inform you about your relationships? How do your relationships contribute to

your spiritual identity? Do you feel a connection between your spirituality and your ability to form intimacy in friendships and love relationships?

To arrive at your score, count the number of words circled in each vertical column and multiply that number by the number in each formula. Write the total for each column on row 13. Leave the neutral column blank. Add the totals on row 13 and divide by the number of rows circled. That is your final score for this chapter.

Write your score here _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

We have discussed emotions and spirituality, family relationships and now intimacy and community—all components of one's spirituality. Next, we will move on to themes of justice as related to spirituality.

4

Life and Justice



As a hospital chaplain at the main public hospital in a large urban area, I soon learned that whatever was going on out there in the city would eventually end up at the Emergency Department, by ambulance. To name a few: assaults, drug overdoses, health emergencies, robberies, car accidents, drownings, encounters with alligators, domestic violence, sexual violence, and motorist rage. Some people would arrive angry with a strong resolve to get revenge against whoever did them wrong. Others would meet their abuser in the same ER. Some felt guilt and shame, while others felt abandoned by a God who had failed to protect them. Victims of injustice seek answers to the meaning of their misfortunes.

I remember a conversation between a father and son after the son had been hospitalized with a gunshot wound.

When I entered Kenneth's hospital room, the first thing I noticed was the cast on his arm. I asked him what happened and he explained.

"I got shot. I was sitting on the front steps of my best friend's house, and some guys drove by and started shooting at him. I got hit in the arm."

"How bad is it?" I asked. "Is it broken?"

"Yup." He lifted his arm and moved his protruding fingers. "One broken bone, but my fingers are okay."

"It could have been worse," I commented.

"Yeah, I guess. If I didn't have my arm in front of my heart, I might be dead right now, like my Johnny."

"What happened to Johnny?"

“They killed him.” Kenneth looked down. “He fell onto my lap, blood all over me. He died right there.”

The father, who had been quietly observing our conversation, interrupted, “That’s the last time Kenneth gets permission to play outside in our neighborhood.”

“Dad,” Kenneth protested. “I’d rather be dead than have to stay inside all the time-- like a prisoner.”

Let’s take a look at the emotional and spiritual themes in this conversation. As a father myself, I could easily identify with the father’s knee-jerk reaction. He had nearly lost his son and understandably wanted to protect him from future danger. Knowing that his son’s best friend, Johnny, had been killed and that his son, by some miracle, escaped death this time, the father feared for his son’s life. His response was to protect his boy.

On the other hand, Kenneth, at 14 years old, wanted to hang out with his friends, as does any teenager. At that time of life, Kenneth needed to develop strong relationships with his peers. Emotionally, he felt the need to gain some independence from family and to venture out into the world and make friends outside of the family. His statement, “I’d rather die than have to stay inside like a prisoner,” expresses his emotional angst and spiritual theme of liberation from bondage.

One theme that did not show up in Kenneth’s story is revenge. Many people who are victims of injustice feel anger and a strong desire to get revenge. I recall a conversation at the bedside of a teenager who I’ll call James. His buddies had come to the hospital for a visit. I walked in and announced that I was a chaplain. That got a rousing laugh. One of the patient’s friends said with a chuckle, “Pray for him; he needs it.”

When I asked what had happened, I learned that James had been shot. I wanted to steer the conversation in the direction of life-lessons learned, but their only concern was getting James well so that they could get back on the street and get revenge. And when I suggested to James that he might end up dead if he pursues revenge, he said, “That’s what makes life exciting.” His friends all nodded in agreement. I was not on the same page with James or his friends.

South Florida, like many areas in the USA, suffers a high rate of street violence that has left many youths dead and many parents grief-stricken. Parents who had lost children to street violence began showing up at our network of grief support groups. We had trained grief support group facilitators, helped them get their groups started and supported the facilitators with follow-up training, but they were not prepared for the depth of rage and grief expressed by parents whose children had been murdered. That intense grief didn't compare to the kind of grief shared in most common grief support groups that help people cope with the loss of someone who died after a long illness. We decided to offer specialized training for parents who lost children to violence. We called it, "Complicated Mourning due to Violence." We invited only parents who had lost a child to violence (including suicide). During the training, many parents shared how angry they felt and how all they wanted was to seek justice. In the words of one father, "I went to all the court hearings, determined to see that the guy who killed my son pay a high price. I was consumed with anger and a desire for revenge."

Other parents shared their struggles with their religious value system that told them they should forgive. Some parents didn't want to know what happened to the perpetrators, because they wanted to focus on their grief journey, while other parents got involved politically to pressure the police to find the bad guys and press charges.

I remember calling up one mother to invite her to our training. I had seen her name in the newspaper; her son was among many in her neighborhood that had been shot and killed. I explained to her the purpose of our training; to help parents with their grief so that they could support others going through similar grief. Wow, did I get an earful from her! She ranted and raved about how we need advocates to seek justice. "We don't need grief support," she said, "We need justice!"

I got the message. She wasn't emotionally ready for the long hard journey to cope with her grief. Many parents in our training shared that in the months (and years) after the death of their child, they were too angry to be able to do their grief work. Only later did they come to understand the need to embrace their grief journey.

So far, we have seen that when a person suffers an injustice, it is normal to ask, "Why?" It is also normal to be angry and to seek revenge. These themes

make up part of the constellation of emotions surrounding injustice. Let's look at another case.

I met a Puerto Rican woman, married, a mother of four, and who was dying of AIDS. She got infected with HIV from her husband. She had been faithful to her husband, even when she suspected he was having sex with men. When he came home, he'd have sex with her, and she didn't dare to ask him to use condoms. Because of her strong Catholic faith (that condemned the use of condoms), she felt obligated to be obedient to her husband. Upon reflection, she regretted not using condoms and saw her obedience to her bisexual husband a contributing factor to her getting infected with HIV. She didn't blame God, but she dared to question why her church and her God had allowed this injustice to happen to her, while she had been faithful to both her husband and her God. I contend that the issues of injustice infiltrate the territory of spirituality.

Guadalupe is a 17-year-old who had been living with the family of her boyfriend, Yang, ever since she arrived in the U.S. from Guatemala. She had no immigration documents; she came looking for her father who had migrated previously. I met Guadalupe in the Neonatal Unit. She had just been discharged after giving birth the day before and came straight over to see her baby who was in an incubator connected to all sorts of tubes and monitors.

When I visited her, Guadalupe expressed her distress and fears. "I have no health insurance. I have no place to live when I leave the hospital." She explained that Yang's family, from China, had been delighted with her when she was pregnant. They invited her to live with them, and she became a part of Yang's family, but when they learned that her baby girl had been born with critical medical issues, they blamed her, rejected her and the child, and ordered their son to have nothing more to do with Guadalupe.

"I'm sorry to hear that," I began. "This is a lot to deal with right after giving birth." I reviewed in my mind what options she might have to find a place to stay once the baby was discharged. "Have you spoken with a social worker?"

"Yes, the social worker suggests that I apply for Medicaid, but I have no immigration papers, Yang refused to let me apply for my papers. (Another injustice, I thought.) Now his whole family is against me."

“What did the social worker say?” I asked.

“After I explained that I met Yang while working in the tomato fields, (Yang was a crew leader) the social worker said that Yang probably didn’t want me to get my papers because if I did, he would have less power over me.” She wiped tears from her eyes. “Why is God putting me through this?”

Hearing her reference to God, I asked about her faith. She said that she attended a Spanish speaking Pentecostal church.

“Does your pastor know that you are here?”

“Yes, he came, but he wasn’t much help. He read me a passage from the Bible that said I’m supposed to obey my husband.”

“Are you two married?”

“Not yet. We were planning to; it looks like that’s out of the question now.”

Guadalupe sobbed, “I’m scared. I feel so helpless. I want to go home to Guatemala where my family would support me. Here, I have no place to go. What about my baby? She needs special care, and I can’t help her.”

Guadalupe’s story illustrates several themes related to justice versus injustice. Whenever someone asks, “Why is God putting me through this?” that person is in “spiritual territory.” For example, the Biblical character Job, who had lost everything in a day--and whose faith in God was strong—nevertheless demanded from God an explanation for his many losses. He couldn’t understand how God would have allowed these tragic losses to happen to a God-fearing man like himself.

Take a look at the chart below, and you will notice that the words on the right side of the scale reflect Guadalupe’s feelings about the injustice she had suffered. She felt wronged, oppressed, powerless, and guilty. She didn’t express a desire for vengeance, but she certainly felt victimized.

My Life and Justice

1.	It's just	It's fair	Neutral	It's not fair	It's outrageous
2.	Powerful	Creative	Neutral	Weak	Powerless
3.	Vindicated	Justified	Neutral	Wronged	Victimize
4.	Righteous	Dignified	Neutral	Shamed	Cursed
5.	Liberated	Free	Neutral	Humiliated	In Bondage
6.	Empowered	Treated fairly	Neutral	Exploited	Oppressed
7.	Merciful Forgiving	Compassionate	Neutral	Angry	Desire Vengeance
8.	Righteous	Affirmed	Neutral	Embarrassed	Guilty
9.	Protected	Safe	Neutral	Unsafe	Abused
10.	0 x 1 = 0	0 x 2 = 0	Neutral	5 x 3 = 15	3 x 4 = 12
11.				Totals	27

To calculate her score, add the totals for each column. In this example that would be 27. Divide 27 by the number of rows she checked, less the # of "Neutral" rows. $9-1=8$. Divide 27 by 8= 3.37 Her score is 3.37.

When I followed up on Guadalupe, I found her happy to learn that her baby, having been born in the USA, had some rights and benefits that she (as an undocumented new immigrant) did not have. The Social Worker helped her with the paperwork to qualify her daughter for healthcare. A shelter for young mothers agreed to give Guadalupe and her baby a place to stay. They offered counseling, training, and support.

Edna and Joseph recently celebrated their fiftieth wedding anniversary, but they didn't have much of a party. Edna had developed dementia about a year ago (it looked like Alzheimer's) and she no longer remembered anniversaries or birthdays. Joseph now became Edna's primary caregiver, but that became quite a struggle beginning six months ago when someone who claimed to be from her bank called Edna to confirm her bank account information and social security number. By the time Joseph discovered that their identity had been stolen, the con artists had emptied their bank account. Edna and Joseph had been life-long members of Holy Redeemer Church and had faithful and generously given their tithes because they believed that if they gave to God, God would take care of them in their old age. Joseph had retired from a well-

paid government job and had planned on living comfortably on his savings, but now that his savings had been stolen; he felt that life had dealt him an injustice. He believed that God would judge those who stole their savings, but that didn't answer his questions about justice now. He began to think that God was indifferent to this injustice.

Several themes related to justice appear in the story of Edna and Joseph. You may already have identified them: victimized, abused, powerless, abandoned, anger, betrayal, and “why would God allow this?” You may have noticed how the emotional words are inextricably bound to the spiritual themes.

When someone is victimized by an obvious injustice, the violation of human dignity and sense of justice throws the person into a spiritual abyss. A person suffering from injustice can never feel that “it is well with my soul” while experiencing bondage, impotence, oppression, weakness, humiliation, and victimization. When a person has been wronged, he/she may (after initially feeling impotent) seek vengeance in an attempt to do justice. Many crimes against individuals or institutions can be explained by the rage of a victim seeking to make right an injustice.

The fracture of the soul is such that many individuals are very willing to face jail, life imprisonment or even execution to seek vengeance against a perpetrator. The evening television news and the daily tabloids provide us a litany of examples: a father shoots a teenager who had sex with his daughter, a wife poisons her husband after years of domestic violence, a bitter employee attacks an oppressive boss, a man stabs a priest who had abused him when he was a child, a business partner sets fire to the office after discovering fraud. Many of these individuals are willing to accept the consequences of their rage because they feel that they have taken justice into their own hands.

The soul cannot long endure the humiliation and violation of human dignity implicit in exploitive and unfair relationships. It doesn't matter if the perpetrators are institutions or individuals. The emptiness of the soul is such that it demands corrective action. Sometimes the action takes the form of self-destructive behavior; the rage is turned inward. Other times the action moves the individual toward liberation and restoration of dignity. Those who feel that injustice cannot be made right through another injustice may take actions that will bring reconciliation through forgiveness or mercy. Certainly, the dynamic

tension between injustice and justice drives the soul to seek some spiritual peace.

Review the words on the chart below (one horizontal row at a time) and note that each row represents a range of emotions. Circle the word that best expresses your feeling on that row. If you don't identify with any word on a particular horizontal row, circle "Neutral" in the middle, and go on to the next row. Circle only one word per row.

Life and Justice

1 . .	It's just	It's fair	Neutra l	It's not fair	It's outrageous
2 . .	Powerful	Creative	Neutra l	Weak	Powerless
3 . .	Vindicated	Justified	Neutra l	Wronged	Victimized
4 . .	Righteous	Dignified	Neutra l	Shamed	Cursed
5 . .	Liberated	Free	Neutra l	Humiliated	In Bondage
6 . .	Empowered	Treated fairly	Neutra l	Exploited	Oppressed
7 . .	Merciful Forgiving	Compassionate	Neutra l	Angry	Desire Vengeance
8 . .	Righteous	Affirmed	Neutra l	Embarrassed	Guilty
9 . .	Protected	Safe	Neutra l	Unsafe	Abused
1 0 . .	__ x 1 = __	__ x 2 = __	Neutra l	__ x 3 = __	__ x 4 = __
1 1 . .				Total Score	=

Now, take a second look at the chart above and, reviewing your own life story, what themes do you see? You might think of a particular situation where you felt like a victim of an injustice. What words in the chart reflect what you were going through? Can you see any movement from your initial experience

of injustice to changed feelings or perceptions later on--after you gained some distance from the initial feeling of being wronged? For example, did you move from a desire for vengeance to a desire to be reconciled? Did you move from feeling like a victim to feeling empowered? Do you still feel angry or do you feel a need to offer mercy and forgiveness? Were you able to forgive those who wronged you? Did your experience of injustice drive you to work for justice for others? Is your current passion for justice now a part of your spiritual identity?

To arrive at a score, add the number of words that you circled in each column. Write the total at the bottom and multiply by the number in the formula to get a total for each column. Add the totals of all columns and divide by the number of horizontal rows you checked; i.e. Nine rows less the # of "Neutrals." Use that number to divide by. That is your score. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

5

Sexual Identity



Sexual identity can be a blessing or a curse. A young man or woman seeks intimacy. As the Book of Genesis suggests, “It is not good for a man (or a woman) to be alone.” Many of us grew up in a social milieu saturated with religious and cultural values, doctrines and legalistic prescriptions for sexual behavior. I grew up in a small town in the Midwest where young people were socially encouraged to be “normal.” Those who did not fit into normal expectations soon left for the big cities.

Sexual behavior is sanctioned and blessed when it fits into the box defined by the social group. The pregnancy of a young woman during the early years of marriage is celebrated with parties and gifts. Baby showers, baptisms, blessings, and other rituals celebrate fertility. Sexuality is a blessing!

However, when there is an unwanted pregnancy and perhaps the undesired revelation of a sexual relationship not endorsed by the social group, sexuality is not regarded as a blessing. Sexual behavior in those circumstances can become a social humiliation, a source of shame and rejection.

Consider the following story. Bob received a letter from St. Mary’s Home for Children where he had been raised as an orphan since the day the sisters found him in a basket outside their front door. He had been raised by the sisters and eventually went to a Community College, graduated and now lived on his own. He never met his birth mother, and when he read the letter, it informed him that a woman, who might be his mother, had contacted the children’s home. Her story and the dates seemed to match the dates that he had been dropped off at the children’s home. If he wanted, they could arrange a meeting. By then, Bob had come to terms with his own sexual identity and had partnered with Steve. Bob had mixed feelings about meeting his birth mother. For years, and even to now, he had asked why his mother had abandoned him. He had struggled with issues of trust, abandonment, anger, and belonging. Now, that he felt that he was coping well with most of those issues his mother

shows up. He talked it over with Steve, and they agreed to go together and meet the birth mother.

When they met, the physical characteristics, hair color, eyes, nose, and jaw confirmed, at least visually, that this was Bob's biological mother. They had decided to meet at a mall coffee shop, and that Steve would sit several tables away from them to give them some privacy for their first visit.

While Bob agreed, he also insisted that he didn't want to hide his sexual identity from his birth mother. She told her story, how she had been raised by a strict Catholic family in a small town, about a half hour from the big city. She had a Prom date with a classmate, their first date, and it went too far, and she ended up pregnant. She never told her date, and never told her parents. She moved to the city to go to school. As a good Catholic, she would have felt guilty of having an abortion. She decided to have the baby and give it up for adoption. But that wasn't so easy. The adoption process required her to answer too many questions. She wanted to remain anonymous. She did some research and found out about the children's home run by the Catholic sisters. She wrapped the child in warm blankets and put him in a basket and left him, with a note, on the front doorstep, and ran. She apologized to Bob for whatever he might have suffered.

Bob listened to his birth mother's story with great interest and with some compassion. He decided not to judge her sexual behavior issues or her religious beliefs and hoped that she would also be non-judgmental of him. When she finished telling her story, Bob told his story. He recalled his feelings of abandonment and many years of wondering about his birth mother. Why had she abandoned him? She hung on his every word, occasionally going for a napkin to dry her eyes. But, when he told her that he was gay and was living with his partner, her face transformed from a compassionate listener to a horrified and judgmental expression. She said, "Don't you know what the Bible says about homosexuality? Don't you know that you're living in sin?"

Bob was shocked at her reaction. He had anticipated something else. He replied, "You abandoned me to protect your righteousness and social dignity, and now you have the nerve to lecture me about religious values? I'm sorry that I ever agreed to meet you. With that, Bob got up and practically ran over to Steve who saw the distress on Bob's face. "What happened?" he asked.

"Let's get out of here. We should never have come."

In this story, we can observe issues of sexual identity, intimacy, acceptance, and rejection in the histories of both mother and son. The mother suffered social condemnation, likely rejection from her family, humiliation, dishonor, and feelings of guilt for her sexual behavior, evidenced by her moving out of town, telling no one and ultimately putting her child up for adoption.

The son experienced struggles with identity, belonging and self-doubt as seen in his struggles to understand why his mother abandoned him at birth. Additionally, Bob struggled with social acceptance versus rejection as he wrestled with his sexual identity.

Sexuality is related to questions like: “Who am I?” “How do I fit in? (or not) “Am I worthy? or “Am I less worthy because of my sexuality?” Is my sexual identity a blessing or a curse?

David came back from the war anxious to renew the relationship with his wife whom he married two weeks before joining the Marines. His service in the elite Special Operations Command left him psychologically and spiritually wounded. The VA encouraged him to start a PTSD recovery program. He and his wife Kathy needed to get to know each other again; David was no longer the person he was before he went to war. His wife treated him with patient caution when he would forget things or get angry for no reason. She initially felt thrilled that their rough sex meant that they were reconnecting well, but soon she began to suspect that David was using sex with her as a release valve for his pent-up angst. David’s nightmares frightened Kathy. He would wake up in the middle of the night screaming and shouting profanities. He would turn white as a ghost. She began to fear for her safety. They grew apart; neither had the tools needed to repair the emotional trauma that corroded their relationship. Kathy attempted to save David from his trauma by frequently offering herself for sex. She didn’t know how else to calm his troubled soul. After two months of enduring his nightmares and troubling behavior, she wrote him a tender letter explaining why she could no longer be with him and encouraged him to seek counseling. She left. He plunged into depression. His dream of building a normal life had deteriorated into despair. For the next several years, David bounced from one relationship to another seeking comfort through sex while panicking whenever the relationship required authentic intimacy.

In David and Kathy's story, we observe that trauma can complicate sexual relations and that sexual passion is not the same as intimacy. We also observe that sex can be used as therapy but is not always the hoped-for magical elixir.

Soon after retirement, Dr. B, a traditional doctor of family medicine, developed neurological disease. The progressively worse symptoms manifested in tiredness, occasional dizziness, and disorientation, sleepless nights, stiff muscles. He needed to exercise, but he could only manage to walk slowly.

He lives in a retirement home where he socializes with other residents during meals and activity times but has a hard time relating to them. On weekends, most of the other residents receive visits from family, spouses, children, and grandchildren. Dr. B receives no visits from family. He has no children or grandchildren. He has no photos to share when other residents proudly display their photos of grandchildren. Dr. B has been divorced for over forty years since his wife learned that he had a sexual preference for men. The discovery came as a surprise to him and being the open and honest person that he was; he shared his discovery with his wife at that time. She had not been delighted with the news. Although he had not had any sexual relations with men, once the awareness of his desire came to light, he knew that there was no turning back. They divorced amicably.

Dr. B had only one love relationship with a man--a relationship that failed. He did not pursue any others. The loss of family and absence of grandchildren gnawed at him like an open sore, especially on those days when other residents received visits. He would retreat to his room to avoid the pain. One afternoon when I visited, he said, "I wish God would just pull the plug." He wished that God would let him die, the sooner, the better. Better to die than to live in despair, resentment, regrets, and bitterness.

Eventually, he came to terms with his life lived, and began, in his words, "to use the time I have left to pray for the other residents." Rather than judge them, or feel resentment, he would pray for each person that he encountered on his daily walks through the retirement village. Soon he became a blessing to everyone around. He discovered that he had a family; his community had become his family, and for the first time in many years he felt love and acceptance. His newfound relationships inspired him and gave him new life meaning and purpose. His health improved and the symptoms became more manageable with fewer medications. He enjoyed life every day.

A follow up visit found him with reduced physical capacity. He had lost the ability to sleep through the night. He could no longer get up to urinate during the night, without help. He felt frustrated with the staff, and if he had not lost so much money in the stock market, he would have moved out to another place. He described to me his dream life. He had some sexual dreams that were satisfying to him. He described one in which he found himself in a large house in his hometown with many of his former friends. In the dream, he discovered their anxieties. Nothing happened sexually, but lots of innuendoes.

He described his prayer life. He mentioned a mentor, a doctor, who had charisma, which he and his wife could feel when they shook his hand. The doctor would meditate every evening, putting his patients in a basket and giving the basket to Jesus. In the morning he would know just what to do with each patient.

Another mentor had told him his secret for meditation, which was to take his large, complicated problems and reduce them to the size of a golf ball and then throw the golf ball out into the universe. The universe would always provide an answer. He said, "There would always be an answer."

"I have a working relationship with Jesus." He described his meditative practices. "I give Jesus my problems and concerns and then wait and accept that the answer will come. I get the blessing back, always more than I deserve. Jesus does not fail to provide the answers. Life always provides an answer." The next time I went to visit, they informed me that he had passed.

We can see multiple spiritual issues in Dr. B's life story, including issues of sexual intimacy and identity, social rejection, alienation, community and search for meaning.

One young man, let's call him Jacob to protect his confidentiality, left for New York City to study and work. I knew him from our church youth group and summer camping program. While in New York, he fell in love with Mark, the son of a preacher. They both had "escaped" to the big city, in part to discover themselves in a new environment, and in part to get away from small-town judgmental attitudes. They were both struggling artists and had only sporadic income and so were dependent on financial help from Mark's father. Unfortunately, they lived during the early outbreak of AIDS, and both fell ill. When Mark's father learned that his son was gay, he became furious and demanded that Jacob move out. He blamed Jacob for his son's illness. Mark

refused to abandon Jacob, and so the father stopped the financial support and cursed the two of them. When Mark died, Jacob was too weak to work, couldn't pay the rent and faced the reality that he too would soon die. In desperation, he called a hotline, and it wasn't long before a volunteer showed up at his apartment and found him lying on the floor, depressed, hungry and weak. He hadn't eaten in days, and there was no food in the house. The electricity had been shut off. Jacob had come to terms that this was the end.

The volunteer happened to be a retired pastor who had compassion on Jacob and immediately assessed the critical nature of his situation. He moved Jacob to his apartment, and after Jacob regained some strength, decided to move to Florida where the pastor had located an AIDS hospice that would take him in.

At that time, I had been volunteering at a public hospital in Miami, and as fate would have it, the pastor stopped by at the chaplain's office. We met and decided to go for lunch. He asked where I was from. I said, "Wisconsin." He said, "I have a friend from Wisconsin who I brought with me from New York."

"Where, in Wisconsin, is he from?" I asked to keep the conversation going.

"I can't remember the name, but it's a small town. He closed his eyes, thinking. "He always talked about a church youth group that meant so much to him; it had a Native American name."

I said, "Tioshpa?"

His eyes shot open wide, "That's it. How did you know?"

"I was one of the youth leaders of that group, I said, amazed at the serendipity. "What's his name? I will probably know him."

"I can't tell you his name." He became very serious. He told me the whole story of how he found a young man on the floor in a cold apartment in New York City. He told me that he is now at an AIDS Hospice and he soon would be dead.

I said, "Give your friend my name and tell him that if he wants me to visit. I will be happy to come by."

“I can assure you,” he said firmly. “He will not want anyone to visit, and certainly no one from his hometown.”

“Okay,” I said. “But, please give him my name, and let him decide.”

Two days later, I got a phone call from the pastor. “He wants you to visit.” He gave me his name, Jacob, and asked if I knew him. Of course, I remembered him.

“You better come soon; I don’t think he will live much longer. His parents have been notified, and they are on the way.”

The next day, I went to visit. We recognized each other immediately. He seemed extremely frail, thin and weak, but he managed a smile. We talked. We remembered together some of the good times in our mutual hometown. He had participated in the Tioshpa Choir, and we’d had many experiences on tour, like the time we got stranded in a snowstorm in northern Wisconsin.

Then Jacob became serious. He said, “When I came here, I only brought two things with me; my Bible and my Tioshpa Certificate.” He showed them to me. I was speechless. I then realized how spiritually important Tioshpa had been to him. Although he had been judged and cursed by his friend’s preacher father, he had not lost his faith. He was not angry. In his last days on earth, he wanted to reconnect to his spiritual roots. We recalled together the meaning of the Native American word, “Tioshpa” –the gathering of the family. He didn’t have his spiritual family with him, but he brought his Tioshpa certificate, along with his Bible, to have with him when he died. And I thought, ‘what are the odds of us meeting here in this time and place.’ I had spent seven years out of the country, a year in California, a year in South Florida and now Miami. He had spent years in New York City and had only recently come here. What are the odds that the pastor who cared for him enough to bring him here happened to have lunch with me and to make this connection? What are the odds? Only the Spirit of the Living God can make those kinds of serendipitous arrangements. I felt amazed, honored and humbled that I could be with Jacob and companion him at the end of his life.

At your leisure, review the words on the two charts below. The first has to do with intimacy and sexuality and the second has to do with the interface between one’s sexual identity and society. Circle the words, on either side of the chart that capture the essence of your sexual identity. When you are

through, observe which sides have more weight. What does that tell you about your sexual identity as related to your spiritual self?

Sexual Identity

1 .	Fertile	Satisfied	Neut ral	Not so fertile	Infertile
2 .	Powerful	Strong	Neut ral	Weak	Impotent
3 .	Fulfilled	Companioned	Neut ral	Lonely	Isolated
4 .	Clear gender identity	Somewhat clear identity	Neut ral	Somewhat confused	Gender confused
5 .	Creative	Exploring	Neut ral	Indifferent	Stagnant
6 .	Honored	Proud	Neut ral	Shamed/Guilty	Humiliated
7 .	Righteous	Normal	Neut ral	Sinful	Condemned
8 .	Joyful	Happy	Neut ral	Sad	Deep pain
9 .	Blessed	Affirmed	Neut ral	Tolerated	Cursed
1 0 .	Found Paradise	Discovering	Neut ral	Wandering	Exiled
	__x 1=__	__x 2= __	Neut ral	__x 3=__	__x 4=__
				Total Score	=

Public sexuality issues

1 .	Respected	Valued	Neut ral	Alienated	Marginalized
2 .	Honored	Affirmed	Neut ral	Shamed	Humiliated
3 .	Legally Affirmed	No legal Problems	Neut ral	Legal Problems	Legal Jeopardy
4 .	Public Affirmation	Publicly Tolerated	Neut ral	Publicly Scorned	Publicly Condemned

5 .	Ethically Righteous	Ethically Okay	Neut ral	Ethical angst Judged	Ethically distraught
6 .	Harmony	Unity	Neut ral	Conflicted	Divorced
7 .	Admired	Respected	Neut ral	Abused	Exploited
8 .	Defiantly Proud	Proud	Neut ral	Closeted	Shamed
9 .	__x 1=__	__ x 2=__	Neut ral	__x 3= __	__x 4= __
1 0 .				Total Score	=

To arrive at a score, add the number of words that you circled in each column. Write the total at the bottom and multiply by the number in the formula to get a total for each column. Add the totals of all columns and divide by the number of horizontal rows you checked (less the number of neutral rows). For example, Eight rows less 2 Neutrals = 6. Divide your total from the columns by 6. Because there are two charts in this chapter, to get one score, you should average the two scores into one. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

6

Social Situation



Robert was only 29 years old when he began having severe headaches and dizziness. He worked at two jobs; both in the fast food industry where he worked part-time in each. He had no health insurance, so he never went in for an annual health check-up, nor did he go to the doctor for his headaches. He went to Walgreens and bought pain meds. He thought that the headaches were caused by all of the stress in his life; his wife had left him with two daughters. She had a job at a bank and had good health insurance, but when she left, Robert and the girls were without health insurance. After his wife left, he tried to compensate for the loss of income by taking a second job, but that only added to the stress. By the time he found out that he was suffering from hypertension, the damage was already done; he learned that his kidneys were in failure and that he would need a kidney transplant. With no health insurance, Robert felt like the sick man at the Pool of Bethesda who could not get to the healing waters. Robert went to church where they prayed for the salvation of his soul, and he was happy to be saved, but he wondered if God truly cared about his physical health as well. And if he died, would God be indifferent to his girls? Who would help them cope with the loss of their father? Who would take care of his daughters?

What are the social and economic issues here? What are the spiritual issues? How do the social and the spiritual issues inter-relate? Economically, Robert feels instability and despair. Socially, he feels disconnected from his family, but connected to his church family. Spiritually, he feels support from his church for his soul, but his practical issues of caring for his girls seemed to have been ignored. He grieves the loss of his marriage, struggles to remain hopeful, but feels socially isolated. He is beginning to wonder if God cares.

Jonathan is the oldest of six kids raised by their single mom. The father of the two oldest siblings abandoned the family when Jonathan was 4. The father of the other four siblings also abandoned the family, and for the last six years,

Jonathan has had to work to help his mother with the bills. The mother works sporadically cleaning houses. They live in the poorest, most run-down and dangerous sector of the urban area. Jonathan has been robbed more than once while walking home at night from the nearest bus stop. The mother is constantly behind in paying the rent and the utilities. The kids feel lucky if they get one meal a day. Jonathan tries to help his mom financially, but it is hard for him to keep a job. He comes off as feminine to his peers, gets bullied, fights back and gets fired.

That's been the pattern for the last six years. Jonathan never seems to be able to get his head above water; he goes from one crisis to another. He started a home cleaning "business" with his mom, had business cards printed with his phone number, and the next month his phone was stolen. He was run over by a taxi, hospitalized and couldn't pay the bills. He was assaulted by neighborhood thugs and lost two front teeth and had no money to pay for dental work. At that time, he had just started work at a store, but missed work and got fired. He and his best friend were assaulted while walking by a sports bar; they were both stabbed and taken to the hospital by ambulance; his friend died before arriving. Jonathan survived but lost a month of work while recovering from chest wounds.

That was last year. This month, he started a new job, and while walking with a co-worker to get lunch, got into an altercation with thugs. Jonathan was only trying to defend his co-worker. The police showed up and roughed up Jonathan; threw him to the ground and he ended up with a swollen hand. He returned to work, and the boss sent him home to put ice on the hand. He missed three days of work and got fired.

For Jonathan, life is a constant battle to survive, but remarkably he maintains an attitude of hope for the future. His compassionate heart bleeds for his younger siblings, and he often goes hungry so that he can buy food or clothing for them. Many of his problems are related to living in a dangerous neighborhood, but there is no way financially to pay rent in a "safe neighborhood." He never had the money to pay for higher education, so he takes entry-level jobs. He once got a job washing dishes in a restaurant, but his earnings were insufficient to pay for the bus and metro to transport him to work and back. He couldn't afford to work there; he quit. And so it goes; Jonathan's social situation impacts his perspective on life and his sense of

hope. He has issues related to chaos, violence, abandonment, unresolved grief, despair and hopelessness. Clearly, his social situation impacts his spirituality.

Another true story comes to mind that illustrates spiritual themes related to the social situation. One morning while doing my chaplain rounds at a public hospital in Miami, I walked into a room where I saw a man so bandaged up that I almost turned around thinking it would be impossible to have a conversation. His head was completely wrapped with bandages, leaving only spaces for his eyes, nose, and mouth. He had one arm in a cast, suspended by wires. I noticed that his eyes followed me, so I decided to open up the conversation.

“What happened to you?” I asked.

“The cops beat me up.” He deadpanned.

“There must be a story behind that,” I observed. “Why did they beat you up?”

“I stole a police car.”

“I guess that explains it,” I did my best to keep a straight face, but I thought to myself that this guy is not the smartest kid on the block. I was about to ask why in the world would he steal a police car when he began to explain.

“I’ll be honest with you. Chaplain? Or do you prefer pastor?”

“Chaplain is fine.”

“I’m a crack addict. I’m homeless. I hit bottom many months ago, but then I met someone who cared for me. She changed my life. I fell in love with her. Her name is Kathy. I decided that once and for all I would overcome my addiction. So I set out to find a treatment center. I applied to every place that offered treatment, but they all cost thousands of dollars. I have no health insurance. I lost hope, but then, through the grapevine, I learned that a judge could order treatment. A judge has the authority to place an addict in a treatment facility, so I decided that I needed to find a way to see a judge. So, I stole a police car.”

“But you ended up in the hospital instead of a courtroom,” I commented.

“Yes, but they charged me, so I will see a judge as soon as I get released from here,” he said confidently.

“Sounds like a plan,” I said.

He nodded, and with his good hand, he gave me a thumbs up. I imagined that under the bandages, he had cracked a smile. I was a student chaplain at the time and had to write up a verbatim report of the visit. In that report, I observed that his social situation, his health, and his spirituality were all intricately related. He had lost hope. He experienced despair and powerlessness. He was in bondage to a substance. Love gave his life meaning and purpose. Hopelessness led to desperation — his desire to be free from the bondage of crack led to his empowerment. His story overflows with spiritual themes.

What does the social situation have to do with spirituality? While people who are socially rejected tend to feel cursed, people who are accepted socially tend to feel blessed. The roots of this spiritual theme go back to the earliest religious ideas. It doesn't matter if we look at the Hindu or Buddhist or Muslim, Jewish or Christian religions, they all define who gets the blessing and who doesn't, and why or why not. If you are poor, sick, and indigent, the Hindu will explain that your life circumstance is the consequence of your previous life. You may be paying for your previous lifetime transgressions. The Buddhist will explain that it's because of your karma. (It's the same idea; Buddhism grew out of Hinduism.) The Muslim will explain that bad things are happening to you because you are not attending prayers five times a day as is required of a true Muslim.

The Jewish religion suggests that prosperity is a sign of God's blessing, while poverty indicates God must be punishing you for your sins. The concept of a scapegoat illustrates the idea that the sins of a community can be assigned to one individual who then is cast out of the city. The Hindu's have their “untouchables,” and the Jews have their “lepers,” and the Christians have their “sinners,” and they all serve the same function. They symbolize the well-deserved dishonor, humiliation, and rejection of those whom God is cursing. Meanwhile, the Christian evangelist who enjoys extravagant wealth, (private jet, luxury cars, expensive houses, jewelry, and clothing) flaunts that prosperity as a sign of God's blessing. Society, backed by religion, endorses and honors “success” as demonstrated by wealth, power and status.

On the other hand, backed by religion, society isolates and marginalizes the poor, the misfits, the mentally challenged, the sick and disabled. Religion and society join in blaming the marginalized for their social condition. “The poor are lazy.” “Alcoholics are weak and are to blame for their addictions.” Lung cancer patients are asked, “Do you smoke?” (Implicit blame) Society blames AIDS patients for their sexual transgressions. The divorcee gets blamed for the failed marriage.

So, the poor and depressed single mother who struggles to feed her children turns on the television and sees the evangelist preaching a “prosperity gospel” that suggest that if she would only repent and lead a faithful life, she too would be blessed by God. Consequently, in addition to feeling poor and depressed, now she feels guilty for her lack of faith. One might conclude that the social condition of a person indicates whether or not they feel blessed or cursed.

While reviewing your economic and social situation, look at the chart below and circle the words, on each horizontal line that best express your current feelings.

Socio-Economic Situation

1 .	Secure	Content	Neu tral	Vulnerable	In Chaos
2 .	Powerful	Confident	Neu tral	Insecure	Powerless
3 .	Strong Roots	Connected	Neu tral	Antisocial	Uprooted
4 .	Free	Assertive	Neu tral	Victimized	In bondage
5 .	Hopeful	Optimistic	Neu tral	Hopeless	In despair
6 .	Rescued	Welcomed	Neu tral	Ignored	Abandoned
7 .	Adored	Accepted	Neu tral	Bullied	Abused
8 .	Honored	Accepted	Neu tral	Lonely	Isolated
9 .	Highly valued	Respected	Neu tral	Rejected	Marginalized

1 0 .	Very generous	Generous	Neu tral	Self-centered	Greedy
1 1 .	Socially admired	Socially accepted	Neu tral	Victim of discrimination	Victim of racism, violence, sexism, homophobia.
1 2 .	Compassio nate	Helpful	Neu tral	Indifferent	Apathetic
1 3 .	__x 1=__	__x 2=__	Neu tral	__x 3=__	__x 4=__
1 4 .				Total Score	=_____

To arrive at a score, add the number of words that you circled in each column. Write the total at the bottom and multiply by the number in the formula to get a total for each column. Add the totals of all columns and divide by the number of horizontal rows you checked (less the number of neutral rows). For example, Twelve rows less 4 Neutrals = 8. Divide your total from the columns by 8. That is your score. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

Relationship with God



In the previous chapters, we have examined multiple dimensions of spirituality and have come to recognize that spirituality includes much more than our relationship with God. Our life story, our family, or our social situation may have been the dominant force that influenced the formation of our spirituality. Sometimes our quest for justice or life meaning and purpose become the dominant formative experience. In other cases, it may be our sexual identity or social rejection that impacts our experience of the divine.

This chapter will focus on the personal relationship with God. (I am intentionally making no attempt to define God. I invite you to define or discover the divinity as that which best fits with your experience or religious tradition.) My hope is to make this resource available to as wide an audience as possible.

However (in a spirit of self-disclosure) I would like you to know that my personal experience of God began with Baptism and Sunday School and Confirmation in a traditional Lutheran church, with ongoing participation through High School and University years. My faith in God was shaken during my military service, especially while serving in Vietnam. I could not understand how a loving God could allow all the killing, chaos, and suffering of war. By the end of my time in the military, I had decided that if God does exist, I don't want to have anything to do with a God that permits all the injustices of war. Once I completed my military service, I set out on a pilgrimage to recover my soul. However, I would not have described it that way at the time.

I decided to take a year of traveling through the USA and then to Latin America. While in South America, I had a mystical experience that showed me in the most intimate way the love and the Spirit of a Living God. That was life changing. I experienced a "spiritual calling" to give my life in service to God.

Like Jonah, who was called by God to preach in Nineveh, but refused to go, I also resisted the call; I told God that he could wait. Again, like Jonah, who ended up cast into the sea during a storm and swallowed by a big fish or whale, I too experienced a crisis on the third day after my mystical experience. I had refused God's call, and when I was kidnapped and held prisoner for two weeks, I understood it as being directly related to my "refusal of the call." Once I was liberated from that life-threatening crisis, I surrendered to the call and returned home where I began studying scriptures. I did not limit my studies to Christian scriptures but read all that I could find of ancient scripture texts of other religions in hopes of finding a description of the mystical experience similar to what I had experienced. I read the LaoTzu, the Upanishads, the "Bhagavad Gita" and others during a long winter in Wisconsin, isolated in my room hoping to find something that indicated that an ancient writer of scripture had experienced a God whose energy was pure love and whose "now time" enveloped past, present and future and who spoke clear words to the soul. When I shared my story of the mystical experience with my friends; they were very skeptical. When I shared it with my pastor, he asked me if I had been taking psychedelic drugs. I soon learned to be careful with whom I would share my spiritual story because most people thought I had gone off the deep end.

After many months of reading scriptures from other faiths and not finding anything; I returned to the Bible and one day while reading the First Letter of John, the fourth chapter, my mystical experience was confirmed. While reading the words, *This is how we are sure that we live in God and he lives in us; he has given us his Spirit*, the Spirit of God overwhelmed me, and I experienced a repeat of the mystical experience that I had in South America. It was then I decided to read everything written by John. And that brought me back, full circle, to the Christian faith, but now with a profoundly different take on it—now it was experiential, alive, insightful, compassionate and compelling.

During the following year, the Spirit of the Living God continued to lead and guide me into ministry situations and eventually led me to pursue a Master of Divinity at Wartburg Theological Seminary. At first, I had no intention of seeking ordination, but after an intense internship year, served in Chile during a military dictatorship, I learned the value of pastoral care of people in distress. I returned to seminary, completed my degree, married, and was ordained. I first served as pastor of a church in Milwaukee and then was sent to Chile as a

mission developer pastor. I should write a book about that experience, but not now. After returning to the USA, and a difficult period of transition, I completed four units of Clinical Pastoral Education and became a healthcare chaplain. I served as a chaplain in three different hospitals over a period of 28 years. The inspiration and desire to write this book emerged from those experiences of pastoral care.

Now, we are back to the theme of a personal relationship with God. Let me begin with a true story from my time as a chaplain at a children's hospital. The Oncology Unit at the children's hospital presented many heart-breaking challenges. I will never forget a father whose anger so distressed the nurses that they collected money and hired a private security guard when that father came to visit. The nurses had asked me to visit, in hopes that I could calm down the father. His six-year-old daughter suffered from a brain tumor. The doctors were trying to reduce its size using radiation therapy. She came in on a regular schedule for therapy, with a couple of weeks break at home. Her stay at the hospital usually lasted three to four days. The mother and father would rotate visits. My first visit with the father revealed his emotional state.

He was angry at everything and everyone. He complained about the care, the room, the food, the temperature...everything.

I casually mentioned, "It sounds like you're angry."

He replied, "You're damned right. I'm angry." He knew he was speaking to a chaplain, so he took advantage of the opportunity to express his anger at God.

"I'm angry that my little girl got cancer. She doesn't deserve it. She's innocent. She did nothing wrong; how can God punish her like this?"

I thought it better to listen than to try to defend God at this point.

"It's not fair," he continued. "My daughter hasn't sinned once in her life. How can God do this to her? I'm fairly sure I will never make it to heaven, especially as angry as I feel at God right now, but if I ever get face to face with God," he slammed his fist on the tray table, "I'm going to demand an answer."

I paused to let that sink in. I didn't want to provoke him. I then calmly said, "Why wait until heaven to ask God? How about asking God now?"

He looked at me as if I was “off my rocker.”

I continued cautiously, “There was a wealthy man who in one day lost everything, his sons and daughters, his house, and his animals. And he poured out his anger at God and complained about the injustice of it all. He complained so much and for so long that eventually, God answered him.”

The father looked at me with skeptical interest.

“His name was Job. His righteous indignation upset his friends. Even his wife told him to stop complaining, but he continued his verbal assault on God.”

“Did he get an answer?” the father asked.

“Yes, God gave him an answer. You can read about it. His story is in the Book of Job, in the Old Testament,” I suggested. “When you get home, read his story, and the next time you come here, we can talk about it.”

A month passed before I saw him next. When I entered the girl’s room and saw the father, I noticed right away that he was less agitated than the last time I visited.

When I asked him how things were going, he replied, “Going well... a lot better than before,” he managed a smile. “She’s making good progress.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” I replied. “And you seem to be doing better as well.”

“Yes,” he said. “I took your advice and read the Book of Job. I asked God for an answer, and I got it.”

“Great!” He sure got my attention. I wanted to hear more. “And what did God say to you?”

“He said,” the father paused. “He said this is too deep for you to understand.”

Now, I’m thinking, “What kind of an answer is that?” But, instead of communicating my disappointment with the answer, I asked, “And you are okay with that answer?”

The father smiled. “When I received God’s answer, a spirit of peace and calm came over me as I’ve never experienced before. I had a feeling that everything was going to be okay. Then God said, “My understanding is higher than your understanding.”

“That explains why you seem to be so calm today,” I ventured.

“Yes,” he continued. “After that conversation with God, I simply decided to stop resisting and start trusting God. And I’ve felt at peace ever since. And you know what? I think my daughter feels the difference. She’s also calmer, much less agitated.”

“I’m glad to hear that,” I replied.

Following the father’s turnaround, the daughter soon recovered. Her cancer went into remission, and she was discharged. I never saw them again, but I have never forgotten them.

This is another example of how our emotions often lead us into spiritual territory. The father’s anger led him into a dialogue with God. When we follow our emotions and explore where those feelings are coming from, we often end up in spiritual territory.

While this father expressed anger at God for the health crisis of his daughter, others blame themselves or, shall we say, turn their anger inward. One such patient came in with a broken leg. He had broken his leg during a hurricane (we get those occasionally in South Florida), and he interpreted his health crisis as an expression of the wrath of God. He identified with the story of the Prodigal Son who had gone off into the far country to pursue happiness but instead ended up hungry and desperate. He said that he had sought happiness in worldly things, and his broken leg was a sign from God that he needed to return home to God. That meant for him that he needed to go back to church so that his leg would heal. For him, his broken leg became symbolic of his messed-up life. His leg needed to heal, but more than that; his broken life needed healing. Here we have spiritual themes of remorse, repentance, brokenness, spiritual estrangement, and healing.

It is common that a health crisis often leads to spiritual reflection, which may lead to a desire for spiritual healing along with physical healing. When a cancer patient gets the news that nothing more can be done and asks, “Why?”,

it's usually not a medical question. When a patient with a life-threatening illness asks, "Why?" we are thrust into spiritual territory.

A patient's doctrinal belief system often influences how that person experiences illness. The mystic Julian of Norwich prayed for a life-threatening illness so that she could identify better with Christ crucified. Most patients I have visited in hospitals didn't pray for illness to come upon them. Patients who believe that their disease is a punishment from God tend to feel that God is against them. They often have a rigid belief system that views God as a law-giver, a judge, and prosecutor. If they see their illness as a punishment, then they believe that sin must be the cause and repentance is the prerequisite for healing.

Natasha, a 56-year-old mother of four, refused to go to the hospital for scheduled heart surgery. The doctor, the nurse, her family, and friends all pleaded with her to have the surgery done, but she refused. Even her pastor could not persuade her to go in. Finally, an old friend from High School came by, and Natasha confided in her. She shared with her friend that she believed that her illness came because she had refused to accept the request of her pastor to teach Sunday School. She felt that God was punishing her and feared what God might have in store for her if she went into surgery. She confided that her fear of surgery was in truth fear of God. She had a conviction that God was against her and not for her.

Natasha has a long faith history. She grew up in the church; felt called to teach God's word, but got married, had children and never had time to follow her calling. Her friend finally persuaded her to go in and have the surgery. A chaplain was called, and he learned of her fears. He asked her if she had ever felt this kind of fear before.

"When I was a teenager," she replied, "I had to have an emergency appendectomy. I felt terrified. At that time, my family and church came and prayed for me." She smiled as she recalled, "I had the surgery with no problems. I knew that God had been there for me."

The chaplain then asked, "Do you think perhaps that the God who was there for you when you had the appendectomy might show up this time and be here for you now?"

She nodded in the affirmative. They prayed. She went into the surgery and had no problems. Health and spirituality often run together. Natasha felt guilt and fear due to her belief that God is a divine disciplinarian. She believed that God punishes those who disobey, and that impacted her decisions related to consent for surgery.

Medical or physical healing is not always the outcome even when there are faith and prayer. I remember that my Aunt suffered from gallstones, and because she was a Christian Scientist, she fervently believed that God would heal her if she only believed. Instead of going to the hospital for surgery, she prayed and believed that God would heal her. She died at home, believing. My father was really upset with her and especially with her husband for not insisting that she go in for what is a very routine surgery. He felt that surgery would have saved her life. But it was her choice, her faith, and her will.

We usually recognize that faith is a helpful source of comfort and strength and often leads to positive medical outcomes. However, faith can sometimes be problematic. A seven-year-old girl, diagnosed with acute encephalitis, languished in the intensive care unit of a children's hospital. The family had the full support of her faith community. Their pastor came and organized prayer vigils around her bed. In spite of the prayers, her condition went from bad to worse. After days of repeated brain scans, the doctors began to suggest withdrawal of life support. Their pastor came and would have nothing to do with a brain death diagnosis; she asked the family, "Who are you going to believe, the doctors or God?" She insisted on more prayers and would gather the family and prayer warriors from the church around the bed. The ICU staff bent the rules to allow more visitors to the room. They prayed for a miracle, but a miracle did not happen. Out of consideration and compassion for the family, the medical team did not insist on the withdrawal of life support but instead gave them more time. Finally, the doctors gave the parents the bad news that their child was brain dead. Standard procedure at that point would be to withdraw the ventilator and other life support, but they graciously allowed the parents to consult first with their pastor. The pastor insisted that they must "believe God and not the doctors." She urged them to continue to pray for a miracle.

Meanwhile, the frustrated medical staff asked me, the chaplain, to intervene. I spoke with the parents and with the pastor, but they would not budge from their belief that God would heal the child, and therefore, they

would not give their consent to withdraw life support. This stalemate had gone on for several days, when, in the middle of the night, I got a call at home from the ICU. They needed the bed for a patient that was coming in through the ER. They asked me to call the pastor who stood in the way of the decision to withdraw life support. I called the pastor and got an earful from her. She said, “You American pastors don’t believe the Bible like we do (She was from one of the Caribbean nations.) She verbally rebuked me for my lack of faith. I went into the hospital. By this time, it was about four in the morning. I met the parents in the waiting room outside the ICU. They were torn by the dilemma between what the doctors told them and what their pastor said.

Finally, after more conversations with the doctors, they agreed to go in with me, and we would pray for God’s will to be done. They withdrew the ventilator. The child had died. Their pastor was called, but she refused to come in. Perhaps the pastor felt terrible that her prayers had not resulted in the hoped-for miracle. It was a sad and heart-breaking moment for everyone present. I stayed with the parents, offering emotional and spiritual support, as they said their goodbyes to their daughter. I felt that it was especially sad that their pastor didn’t come in to provide pastoral care at the moment they needed it most.

Let’s explore the spiritual components of this story. Faith and trust in God are up front in this story. Belief in God’s power to do a miracle and disbelief in medical staff impacted medical decisions. Faith community support encouraged hope (but was it false hope?). What is God’s will in this? How do we know for sure what is God’s will? And finally, there’s the issue of loss and grief impacted by the absence of pastoral support from their faith community.

Mrs. McGregor lived with her daughter and son-in-law ever since the death of her husband five years ago. I met her in the rehabilitation unit. She was in therapy following surgery on her hip. She did not want to become a burden on her daughter’s family. She had been sleeping in an upstairs bedroom but worried that after her hospitalization she would not be able to return to their home. All the bedrooms were on the second floor. She would not be able to climb stairs. She did not want to go to a nursery home. The only alternative was to move to her other daughter’s home in South Carolina. However, she did not wish to be a burden to her other daughter. The nursing staff called for a chaplain after Mrs. McGregor seemed distressed.

After introducing myself, I invited her to tell me what was on her mind. She told me her story about how she would have to leave Miami and go live with her other daughter. Then she said, “This will be my last move. But, before I die, I want to recover my soul.”

I said, “You want to recover your soul?”

“Yes,” she said with flat emotion. “I lost my soul. I can’t find it. And before I die, I want to get it back.”

“If you lost it and you want to get it back,” I suggested, “Then at some point, you must have had it.”

“Yes dear.” She sounded like an old school teacher instructing a novice. “That’s how I know I lost it; I once had it.”

So, I went along with her on this. “Can you remember the last time you had it?”

It didn’t take but a long moment, and she replied, “Sunday School.”

“What about Sunday School?” I asked. “Can you remember a song or anything from that time when you felt like you had your soul?”

She spontaneously recited two psalms entirely from memory. The second psalm was the 23rd, and I asked her if she would repeat it, very slowly and pause after each phrase to see how it would speak to her now.

She began, “The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want.” She paused.

“He makes me lie down in green pastures and leads me beside still waters.” She continued. “He restores my soul.” She stopped.

“He restores my soul,” I repeated. “There it is...God restores the soul.”

She smiled.

“I think you just found your way back,” I suggested that it was God’s job to restore her soul. That’s what God does. All she needed to do was to reconnect. She had been baptized and raised in the faith. But, somehow along the way, she had lost the feeling of being connected to God. She had described it as a “loss of soul.” I suggested that whenever she feels lost, she might want

to recite those psalms by memory, and they would be like a re-entry point for her.

“Well, sonny, you do a good job,” she smiled. “Now, I remember seeing a picture that hung on the wall in our Sunday School. There was a door, and Jesus was standing in front of the door, knocking.”

“Yes, I remember. We had the same one in our Sunday School.” I replied.

“I guess I’m not lost after all,” she concluded. “All I need do is open the door.”

“And reciting Psalm 23 seems to be a door that lets you back in.”

“Yes, dear,” She smiled. “You can come to visit me at any time.”

When we explore the spiritual themes in Mrs. McGregor’s story, we first see “loss of soul” as the presenting concern. There is also recognition of mortality and the need to get back her soul (get right with God?) before she died. Somehow, she had forgotten her connection to God and had labeled it as loss of soul, but she quickly remembered and easily reconnected. She remembered the psalm and a painting of Jesus standing outside a door. She remembered a saying from scripture about knocking on the door. This became symbolic for her and represented a way to reconnect; a way to restore her soul connection.

Speaking of a door that lets people back into their soul place, it is especially remarkable how the elderly can get in touch with their soul place through a familiar hymn or scripture verse. There’s the story of an Alzheimer’s patient who couldn’t remember her name or her identity, but she pointed to a cross on the wall and said, “See that cross? I can’t remember who I am, but I know whose I am. I belong to him, and that’s all I need to know.”

Sometimes our family system and our psychological dynamics impact our quest for a relationship with God.

“If you knew who I am, you would reject me.” Ted concluded after he spent 45 minutes telling me his life story. He grew up in the rural South in a family that struggled to make ends meet. Ted knew intuitively from a very young age that what his father expected of him and what he aspired to were miles apart. His mother would have supported him in whatever direction he

would have chosen, but her first loyalty was to her husband. Ted's father wanted him to play football. Ted preferred music. His father loved math and science; Ted loved history. Ted figured out early on that he would have to make his way by himself.

Ted jealously guarded his independence. He enjoyed his time alone, reading books or taking solitary hikes into the countryside. He thought before he spoke, measuring each word as he discerned how his words would be heard. He was the opposite of spontaneous. What he desired from every significant relationship was acceptance. His greatest fear was rejection. He sought social acceptance, but when he got it, he didn't value it because he believed that what people saw and liked in him was not truly him. He felt that if they truly knew him, they would reject him. This fear permeated all his relationships, with family, with friends, with teachers, and with co-workers. He did not find a single friend with whom he could honestly confide.

This deep-seated fear had consequences. He never revealed his true identity to his family. His friendships were superficial. His relationships were based on a false self that he projected everywhere and always. His personality became so layered that eventually, not even Ted knew himself. He buried his identity and then wondered why he had no authentic relationships. He became the outlier, the prodigal son.

He found life meaning by attaching himself to the cause of racial justice (probably because he knew this would most upset his father). He identified with the movement to take down symbols of the Confederacy. One of the few white men, he joined Black Lives Matter. He became an activist that opposed racial injustices.

His success in gaining social acceptance through activism blurred his self-awareness. It took years of psychoanalysis before he finally recognized and accepted that his entire social construct was fear based. This deep-seated fear also manifested in his relationship with God. He believed that God understood him to the core and that if God accepted him, it would have to be undeserved acceptance because certainly, Ted felt unworthy of God's love. But Ted could not play that same game with God as he did in human relationships. In his mind, he could rationalize social rejection or social acceptance while devaluing both because people never truly knew him. But God did know him, intimately. God's knowledge of him surpassed Ted's knowledge of himself. If God accepted him, then God must see in him something of value.

This realization brought Ted closer to God. God became Ted's only true friend. Ted could be completely transparent and authentic with God because he experienced acceptance through and beyond forgiveness.

When we observe Ted's story, we can identify several spiritual themes. Trust seems to be a big one. Autonomy, self-identity, self-awareness, and authenticity weave through his life story. The inability to trust a single human being with his true self obscured his self-identity. We see that even though he believes that God knows him, there is still much spiritual work to do on his path to becoming an authentic and integrated human person.

Now it is time to reflect on your relationship with God. Look at the chart below and circle the words that speak to you most clearly about your current relationship with God. Do you feel cursed or blessed? Are you dealing with any guilt or behaviors that you regret? Do you feel forgiven? Have obedience or rebellion characterized your relationship with God? Do you feel alienated or punished? Where has God been for you during your life struggles and challenges? Has God been your strength, or have you felt abandoned? Circle the words that reflect your current relationship with God and then observe your results. What does this say to you about your relationship with God? How would you describe your spiritual identity?

Relationship with God

1 .	Blessed	Redeemed	Neutral	Punished	Cursed
2 .	Thankful	Grateful	Neutral	Bitter	Resentful
3 .	Worthy	Justified	Neutral	Remorseful	Afflicted
4 .	Joy	Happy	Neutral	Sad	Despair
5 .	Bliss	Contentment	Neutral	Anxious	Fearful
6 .	Loved	Tolerated	Neutral	Unloved	Rejected
7 .	Forgiven	Repentant	Neutral	Guilty	Sinful
8 .	Righteous	Obedient	Neutral	Rebellious	Evil

9 .	Saved	Reconciled	Neutral	Disoriented	Lost
1 0 .	Faithful	Believing	Neutral	Doubtful	Antagonistic
1 1 .	Favored	Accepted	Neutral	Indifferent	Alienated
1 2 .	Pure	Clean	Neutral	Unclean	Condemned
1 3 .	Strongly belong	I belong	Neutral	Weak sense of belonging	Alienated
1 4 .	Blessed	Forgiven	Neutral	Un-forgiven	Condemned
1 5 .	Bliss	In harmony	Neutral	Conflicted	Persecuted
1 6 .	__x 1=__	__x 2=__	Neutral	__x 3=__	__x 4=__
				Total Score	=

To arrive at a score, add the number of words that you circled in each column. Write the total at the bottom and multiply by the number in the formula (on row 16) to get a total for each column. Add the totals of all columns and divide by the number of horizontal rows you checked (less the number of neutral rows). For example, Fifteen rows less 3 Neutrals = 12. Divide your total from the columns by 12. That is your score. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

8

Life Meaning and Purpose



“I, the teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem, applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business that God has given to human beings to be busy with. I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun; and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.”

Ecclesiastes 1: 12-14

In the early Jewish tradition, Ecclesiastes, the seeker of wisdom, set out to seek and to search what is the meaning of life. This is a quest for meaning of a king who has lived his life and conquered all and looks back and asks, “What does it all mean?” This is very different from the quest of a youth that sets out on a life journey to seek and to discover his/her life’s purpose or mission. It is also very different from a person who suffers a traumatic loss or who survives a near-death experience that provokes a search for meaning.

The search for meaning may be ignited by a variety of life experiences, including suffering, catastrophe, terminal illness, war, abundant wealth, traumatic loss or a near- death experience, to name a few.

During my twenties, I did a lot of hitch-hiking. One such trip took me through Chicago on a cold winter day, on my way to Washington D. C. I positioned myself near an entrance to the interstate in a location that made it easy for a driver to pull over. A long black Lincoln came to a stop. The tinted window rolled down, and the well-dressed driver offered me a ride. I felt lucky to get out of the cold. After exchanging the initial information of where we each were going, I soon learned that the driver wanted to talk. He revealed that he was the owner of over a dozen gas stations in the Chicago area. He lived in a penthouse, was recently divorced, and his life was miserable. He offered me a drink of Johnny Walker. As soon as I declined, he asked if I’d like to drive because he would rather drink.

He then said, "I'm no different than a wino on skid row, except that I drink more expensive alcohol." I drove, and he talked.

The thing I most remember was his statement, "If you know the meaning of life, please tell me, because I don't have a clue." Of course, I had no answer for him; I was just beginning my life journey. I thought I knew what I wanted in life at an earlier, more innocent age when I attended University. But, that was before my military service. That was before Vietnam. That was before some personal encounters with hate that left me questioning my life mission. I had no answers for him, but his question sure provoked more questions for me. We were half-way through Indiana when he finally had me pull over. I thanked him for the ride, but to my surprise, he replied, "No, thank you! ... for listening." I have often recalled that conversation. Here was a successful businessman who had risen to a place in life that so many people long for and aspire to, and yet he was miserable and lost. Perhaps, in some way, he became my anti-hero. I hoped that I would never end up like him. I learned from him that the search for the meaning of life transcended wealth and success.

Dr. Victor Frankl, a survivor of the Holocaust, proposed the idea of logotherapy based on his psychological principle that the primary human motivation is the search for meaning, and that even in the most difficult circumstances, humans have the freedom and the will to find meaning. Dr. Frankl had observed that those survivors of the Nazi concentration camps who lived each day motivated by a strong purpose were much more likely to survive. (Man's Search for Meaning)

During my second year of theological studies, I worked in a church in an inner-city neighborhood of Denver that had changed from Danish to Mexican. There I met a woman whose story I will never forget. She had gone back to college after a divorce and after having raised her family. Her three grown-up children now lived independently. Her youngest son served in the military. She had recently graduated with a degree in business administration and had started her own business. Finally, she felt some joy and satisfaction due to her success and accomplishments.

She had started to date again and panicked when she found out that she was pregnant. Having been brought up in a Mexican Catholic family, abortion was not an option. She cursed herself for her stupidity and felt remorse for having become pregnant. She felt resentment toward the baby because it

would mean that she may have to stay home and take care of a baby precisely when she was launching a new business.

When the baby came, her situation became unbearable; the colic baby cried constantly. The mother had to drop everything to care for the crying baby. Day and night, the baby cried; the mother was going nuts. Soon after the birth, she answered the doorbell and greeted two men in uniform who informed her that her son, who was in the Army, had been killed. Her grief overwhelmed and devastated her. She cried day and night. Holding on to her crying baby, they cried together.

She prayed and railed against God for her miserable life. Her motherly instinct kicked in, and she cared for and tended to her baby with all her life energy. After a month of crying together with her baby, she received a spiritual insight that transformed her suffering. The insight answered her prayers. What had felt like a curse, to have a baby at an inopportune time in her life, soon felt like a blessing. She began to see that the baby she had so resented had become God's gift to her instead. She said, "If it weren't for that cry baby that constantly needed me, I would never have been able to survive the loss of my son. Being able to cry together with my baby healed my grief and enabled me to get up and face life again."

She found meaning in two life circumstances that at first seemed meaningless. The untimely birth of a child at a time in her life when she didn't want to start another family created unexpected and unwanted suffering that seemed to have no purpose. The other source of unbearable pain came with the news of the death of her youngest son. She felt powerless to change either of those situations. In the face of unbearable suffering, she found life meaning and purpose. Her discovery of meaning transformed her loss and enabled her to cope.

Many of us experience losses, tragedies, and unexplainable suffering. Sometimes we lose everything when we lose a relationship, sometimes a natural disaster destroys our life and livelihood, but we can find some meaning in or after the event. If we can convert that loss into something meaningful or purposeful, then that becomes a source of spiritual strength.

Following the Asian tsunami of December 26, 2004, I traveled to Sri Lanka to conduct a series of grief support workshops. The death toll had been estimated to be 30,000 in Sri Lanka. Before doing the workshops, I wanted to

see for myself the devastated areas and listen to survivor's stories. A social worker drove us down the coast where we saw houses that had been ripped from their foundations. Entire fishing villages had washed away. It is said that 500,000 homes were destroyed that day. The social worker took us to several temporary camps and introduced us to many of the survivors.

I remember a woman who came forward with her story. She had lost everyone in her family. She said, "I don't know why God saved me, but there must be a reason. God must have saved me for some purpose, and I'm going to find out what it is, and I'm going to live it."

In the following days and weeks, when we conducted grief support workshops, we heard many stories of survival and resilience. I learned that families had to re-organize themselves quickly. Parents who had lost children began to take in children who had lost their parents. A fisherman husband who had lost his wife had to locate a sister and bring her to help parent his two daughters. Aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents were recruited to care for their broken families. Amid traumatic losses, survivors found meaning in caring for one another.

Consider this story. I met Manuel when he was already suffering from a terminal diagnosis of cancer. Manuel escaped Cuba during the chaotic Mariel wave of immigration that changed the face of Miami. He had been an artist in Cuba and a participant in an underground counter-cultural movement that resisted the communist regime. Manuel and his friends would subversively plan lightning fast artistic protests—they would sneak out at night and paint a mural on a wall or fence. Manuel's eyes sparkled when he told me of the adrenalin rush he felt when he and his friends hastily painted their anti-Castro artistic graffiti.

He felt a profound sense of solidarity and community with his fellow artists. They risked their lives together. They plotted and carefully, but subversively planned each artistic event, and experienced such joy and profound meaning each time they accomplished the painting of a counter-revolutionary mural. Then one night, a cousin told Manuel that there was a boat waiting that would take them to Miami. He had to decide immediately. He had no time to consult with his friends. He had to make an immediate decision: to leave hastily for freedom or perhaps lose the only chance he would have to escape the political repression. He agonized over the choice.

On the one hand, he wanted his freedom, but on the other hand, he felt that by leaving, he would be a traitor to his artist friends. He had no time to deliberate. He chose freedom.

During those first months in Miami, Manuel was thrilled to be among so many anti-Castro Cubans. The radio stations, newspapers, politicians--everyone in Miami seemed to be anti-Castro. Manuel felt at first like he was in heaven. Then he tried to gather some artist friends and make murals against Castro. But it wasn't the same. In Miami, there were no police chasing them. It didn't feel like a subversive activity. There was no adrenalin rush to anti-Castro artistic expression in Miami—here it was the norm. The thrill of belonging to a counter-cultural subversive movement had evaporated.

Manuel dedicated himself to his art, but it was never the same. His art had lost its meaning. He lost his sense of identity. He grieved the loss of his artistic community in Havana. Soon he began to long to return to Cuba to carry on the struggle with his friends, but that was not possible. His life lost its meaning and purpose. He began to despair his life here. He grieved the life of excitement that he had experienced in Cuba, and although it had its risks and suffering, at least it was meaningful. In Miami, Manuel drifted into a life of meaningless existence. He developed cancer, and when I met him; his despair was so profound that it had overcome all other emotions. He simply waited to die.

Manuel may be an example of what some research suggests; that there is a correlation between one's sense of life meaning and purpose and one's immune system.

Erica Anderson surprised Angela with her statement, "I thank God I got AIDS." Erica had returned from the hospital after a bout with tuberculosis and some readjustments on her AIDS medications. She had requested home communion. Angela, a lay minister from their church, visited Erica for the first time. Angela had prepared herself to give religious support to Erica--communion and prayers for healing-- but found that Erica's story offered more to her than she could provide to Erica.

When Angela expressed her surprise, "You thank God you have AIDS?" Erica explained that her diagnosis and the subsequent health challenges had caused her to re-evaluate her life and had led to a deepening of her spiritual walk with God. In the face of her mortality, she re-affirmed her values and

decided to focus on what is important in life. She explained, “My life now is so much better than it had been before my diagnosis.” She added, “I may never get a cure, but my life has become whole.”

Life meaning and purpose likely will change over time. When life goals are attained by midlife, for example, new goals and new aspirations take their place. Many people change careers several times. Some people experience frustration or cynicism in the career they first chose and decide to go into something more meaningful.

Jorge, a Roman Catholic Seminarian, had abandoned his career as a criminal lawyer and went into the priesthood. He said that he formerly had a good business defending drug dealers but became disillusioned with a career that made good money but didn’t seem to be contributing much to the welfare of society. He opted for a more meaningful profession.

Among hospital chaplains, the story is told of a boy who went into the hospital to donate a kidney to his brother. Both brothers went into surgery at the same time, one to give up a kidney and the other to receive a new kidney. After the surgery, a chaplain went in to visit the brother who had donated his kidney. He asked the boy, “How are you feeling?” The boy replied, “I’m okay, but when do I die?” Then the chaplain understood that the boy believed that by donating his kidney he would die to save his brother’s life. Someone had failed to accurately explain the procedure to the donor boy. All were amazed that he fully intended to die to be able to save the life of his brother. What does that say about the boy’s life meaning and purpose?

Elizabeth married young, and she stayed home to raise her three children. She postponed her career goal until all the children had graduated from High School. Then she went back to school and became a nurse. While raising her children, she felt fulfilled, and now she feels happy that she is in a career that synchronizes with her values and her compassion. Meanings change. What seems to fit our life at one stage is meaningless at another stage. A psychology professor at my alma mater left the University for a Private Practice. While counseling a Native American, he felt drawn into their culture. Eventually, he was invited to their tribal activities and ultimately felt called to become the tribe shaman. He gave up a lucrative profession for a lifestyle and career that significantly lowered his standard of living, but profoundly transformed his life meaning.

The example of Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, illustrates the point. He earned more money than he knew what to do with, so he and his wife formed a Foundation to promote global health. For some people, accumulating wealth is their purpose, while others seek to give back or create a legacy that transcends wealth.

Life meaning tends to change especially at the end of life. Erik Erickson proposed that the final emotional stage of life faces the challenge of integrity or despair. It is a time to reflect on what our life has meant and to come to terms with our life lived. It is also a time to create a legacy. Dylan Thomas famously wrote, “Do not go gentle into that good night. Old age should burn and rave at close of day. Rage, rage at the dying of the light.”

Hemingway had his approach. “I’d rather live than outlive.” My boyhood hero, Abraham Lincoln, said it this way, “In the end, it’s not the years in your life that count, but the life in your years.” For Winston Churchill, life meaning can be summed up in two words, “Never surrender!”

Perhaps the most well-known “Life Review” comes to us from St. Paul. “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.”

Take a look at the chart below and circle the words that most reflect your life meaning and purpose at present. Circle only one word per row. If none apply, circle “neutral” and move on to the next row.

Life Meaning and Purpose

1 .	Enthusiastic	Encouraged	Neutral	Discouraged	Bored
2 .	Meaningful Suffering	Committed	Neutral	Uncertain	Meaningless Suffering
3 .	Clear goals	Calm	Neutral	Anxious	Confused
4 .	Worthy	Valued	Neutral	Not valued	Worthless
5 .	Strong Purpose	Purposeful	Neutral	Indifferent	Lost
6 .	Wise	Clever	Neutral	Hapless	Foolish
7	Hopeful	Engaged	Neutral	Bored	Cynical

.			al		
8	Resilient	Strong	Neutr al	Weak	Powerless
9	Faith-filled Life	Meaningful Life	Neutr al	Meaningless Life	In Despair
10	Inspired	Enthused	Neutr al	Indifferent	Depressed
11	__x1=__	__x 2=__	Neutr al	__x 3=__	__x4=__
12				Total Score	=

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9

Life Story



“He’s frightened of the surgery. Maybe you can calm him.” The nurse at rounds suggested that I visit Darrell in room 2109.

Although I had been informed that early the next day he would be “going under the knife,” when I began the conversation, as I customarily did, I started with a clean slate; I invited him to tell me as much or as little as he wanted about his medical situation. As it turned out, he had been alone all morning and welcomed conversation. He quickly laid out the essentials of his health crisis and put it in the context of his life story. “I retired six months ago. My wife died six months before that. I decided to retire early and do some traveling, but my heart had other plans.” He grabbed on to the bed rail and shifted his weight.

“You’ve had a lot of change to cope with...”

“Yes, you’re right. I guess all the stress settled in my heart.”

“That happens...”

“I thought I’d be able to relax when I retired, but it seems like all the anxiety that I accumulated over the years of work, finally released its poison into my body; I can’t remember the last day I felt healthy.”

“Sounds like you’ve been having a rough time of it.”

“This is not exactly a dream retirement I’m having.” He grimaced as he reached for the water. He took a sip and set the plastic cup back on the stand. “Can I tell you something... just between us?”

“Sure.”

“I’m scared as hell of this surgery.” He glanced at my eyes and quickly looked away.

In that instant of eye contact, I recognized fear. It was more than the healthy fear that keeps us from running into traffic. It looked like fright that bordered on panic--primordial fear. I had seen it in the eyes of a tied-up pony. I tried to remember a time that I might have felt such fear. I easily called to mind the time I had to talk my way out of getting shot by Mexican *campesinos* who didn't like the idea of me camping out on their property. I tried to explain to them the concept of scouting and camping, but they didn't get it. Surrounded by a dozen well-armed Mexicans in the middle of the night, I must have had that "frightened horse" look. I refrained from going into my story; this conversation was not about me.

"Can you remember a time in your life when you have felt this kind of fear?"

He breathed deep and exhaled slowly. "As a matter of fact, a situation just flashed in my mind."

"Would you feel comfortable telling me about it?"

"Sure. No problem." He sat up and adjusted the pillow behind him. "It happened in South America when I worked for an oil company. I'm a geologist, and I worked with a team that went into very remote areas, looking for potential deposits of oil. We were on the jungle side of the Andes when I got kidnapped by *guerilleros*. They forced me to walk with them several days deep into the forest. I had totally lost my bearing. I desperately prayed to God to set me free. One day, I asked permission to take a piss behind a tree. When I looked back at my captors and saw them taking a smoke break, a surge of fear and excitement rushed through my every cell as the thought flashed through my mind, 'Seize the moment to escape.' I didn't hesitate a second; I slipped into the woods and disappeared from their view. My body shook with fright, and I felt propelled by a superhuman force. I ran like a bullet. Soon, I had no fear at all. I felt powerful; nothing could stop me from my flight to freedom. I made it to a dirt road. God must have arranged it; as soon as I stepped out of the jungle onto the road, a jeep came by with two journalists. They picked me up and drove me to safety."

"Wow, what a story!" I said. "It sounds almost like a biblical story."

"Well, I never thought of that." "Which one?"

“Can you think of a story that fits?” I thought of several, but I preferred that he come up with one that made sense to him.

“Well...” he paused. “Jesus flight to Egypt to escape Herod.”

“That works. Where’s God in that story?”

“Which story?”

“It’s the same story isn’t it?” I suggested.

He smiled. “Yes, it’s my story too. God rescued me from death.”

“You’re right. God was there for you.”

“After my escape, I always said, ‘I’m a survivor.’ Thanks to God.”

. “I think you’re very blessed to have a story like that.”

He gestured: thumbs up.

“Do you think that the God who rescued you from death in the jungles of South America might be there for you when you go into surgery tomorrow?”

He grinned. “I’m a survivor, with God’s help, I’ll survive this too.”

When we get in touch with our life story, we often feel empowered by the clarity of it all. Many of us don’t seem to have our own life story; we borrow patterns from others and blend our life into the pattern. I did a survey of baby boomers (as part of my doctoral research) which included a couple of questions about awareness of one’s personal spiritual narrative. I was surprised that only 20% of the participants were able to identify their own spiritual narrative. Those that did “own” their spiritual life story often borrowed that story from the spiritual narrative they absorbed from Sunday Morning Worship Services where they are reminded, “I was a sinner, but now I’m saved.” Or, in the words of the famous hymn, “I once was lost, but now I’m found.” Some people take on that identity as their own spiritual story, without really doing a spiritual life review.

I visited an elderly gentleman in a community hospital who volunteered his life story. He had been working in the maintenance department of a hospital in Las Vegas. “My life was a mess. Following my failed marriage, I

drowned my sorrows in booze. It wasn't long before I was addicted. My life was going downhill quickly. I worked the night shift and met a woman in the cafeteria, a cleaning lady. Since we both worked at night, we often ran into each other. To make a long story short; we got married and came to Florida to start our lives afresh. She helped me get free from my bondage to alcohol, and now we are living in our little tropical paradise. I've never been happier in my life."

"That's a wonderful story," I said. "It sounds to me like a biblical story."

"Biblical?" He frowned.

"Yes," I replied. "It sounds like the Exodus story. The people were in bondage in Egypt, got free, and came to the Promised Land. You were in bondage to alcohol, got free and came to Florida—your promised land."

"Wow!" He smiled. "You're right. I never thought of it that way. You just told me my life's story."

Of course, I didn't invent his life story, but I simply helped him see it and claim it as his own. That, somehow, became liberating and empowering to him. Like the geologist who had been kidnapped in Colombia and who claimed his life story as being a survivor, the ability to name your own life story is empowering. It gives clarity to one's life.

Donald and I met for lunch; the first time in many years. We caught up on each other's lives. As he shared his life story, it was like hearing a life-review. He regretted having married. He and his wife fought many losing battles that left him drained and bitter. He said, "I should have divorced her many years ago. I don't know how I put up with her for so long. Well, I told myself that we stayed together for the kids." He found refuge in the long hours of work. He would leave the house early and come back late. On weekends, he would go fishing or hunting to get out of the way of his nagging wife. His emotional exhaustion left him so drained of energy that he sabotaged his success at work. When it looked like divorce was inevitable, he made sure his business lost money. He was so bitter and angry that he didn't want his wife to benefit financially when they finally went to court. Now, he looks back at his life with resentment, anger, bitterness, and regret.

What can he do now to repair his life story? His life review led him to feelings of despair. He may have to re-build a new life meaning and purpose or pursue some activities that synchronize with his values.

When we review the above three life stories, we observe that the emotional issues are inextricably bound to the spiritual themes. Fear is related to fear of death—issues of mortality. Trust in the medical team relates to trust in God. Trust relates to the spiritual question: Is God for me or against me? In two of the stories, we observe broken relationships, sorrow, loss, regret, anger, and bitterness. These all relate to suffering and loss which lead to questions about the meaning of loss and the meaning of suffering. We see that the emotional themes in the life stories quickly lead us into spiritual territory.

The man who suffered a divorce drowned his sorrows in alcohol and became addicted easily identified with the Exodus story of a people in bondage and suffering and being liberated (rescued, saved) from that bondage and led to a Promised Land. A new love relationship liberated him from suffering, restored his hope and joy. He now felt blessed. These are spiritual themes arising out of the fertile ground of life stories.

Now it is time for you to engage in a review of your life story. Here are some questions that might help you explore your own life story. Look at the chart below and circle the words with which you identify. What are your spiritual themes? How has your suffering informed your life journey? How have your failures informed your life story? How do you reconcile your “life-lived” with your inner soul journey? Jacob wrestled with an angel. With what are you wrestling? Are there any mysteries that weave through your life story? What did you have in your spiritual toolbox during the “conquest” period of your life? What tools do you now have in your spiritual toolbox? How are these different from what you had in previous periods of your life? Once you have identified the spiritual themes in your life story, ask yourself what scriptural story evokes similar themes. Are you now able to name your own spiritual story? What do your spiritual themes reveal to you about your life story?

Life Story

1	Survivor	Succeeded	Neutral	Failed	Loser
2	Found Paradise	Rescued in	Neu	Lost in	Lost Paradise

.		Wilderness	tral	Wilderness	
3	Returned Home	Restored	Neu	Struggled	Exiled
.			tral		
4	Fulfilled dreams	Hopeful	Neu	Regretful	Lost dreams
.			tral		
5	Victorious	Overcame challenges	Neu	Mis-adventures	Overcome by Adversity
.			tral		
6	Mission Accomplished	Satisfied	Neu	Dis-Satisfied	Wasted Life
.			tral		
7	Inner Peace	Content	Neu	Anxious	Inner Chaos
.			tral		
8	Blissful	No regrets	Neu	Some regrets	Regretful
.			tral		
9	Kept the faith	On track	Neu	Disoriented	Lost faith
.			tral		
10	Hopeful	Optimistic	Neu	unhappy	Despair
.			tral		
11	__x 1=__	__x 2=__	Neu	__x 3=__	__x 4=__
.			tral		
12				Total Score	=
.					

To arrive at a score, add the number of words that you circled in each column. Write the total at the bottom and multiply by the number in the formula (row 11) to get a total for each column. Add the totals of all columns and divide by the number of horizontal rows you checked (less the number of neutral rows). For example, Ten rows less 2 Neutrals = 8. Divide your total from the columns by 8. That is your score. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

Beliefs and Values



I answered the knock and opened the door to see a sailor standing there. He was not from my division, and I wondered how he got passed the marine who guarded the officer's staterooms. I had been serving as a Division Officer in the Weapons Department on the USS Boston when we were ordered to Vietnam. Our mission would be to neutralize the Ho Chi Minh Trail between the DMZ and Danang. Before going to the duty station, we had to load up supplies and munitions at Subic Bay, Philippines. We had readied the ship and conducted training exercises before arriving in West Pac and were within days of heading off to the war zone. The sailor asked to speak to "Mr. Young."

"That's me," I said. "How can I help you?" It was extremely unusual for a sailor to visit an officer at night in the officer's area. In fact, it was off-limits for an enlisted man, so I had reason to be very suspicious of this unexpected visit.

"I have a problem," he spoke in a low voice. "The men told me to speak to you; that you would help me."

"What's your problem?"

"My religion does not allow me to kill, and they assigned me to a 5" Turret," he looked up and down the passageway to be sure no-one overheard. He looked terrified.

"Come in." I opened the door and let him pass. I closed the door and asked him to sit. "Let me understand. Your religion doesn't allow you to kill. So...what are you doing in the Navy?" I thought it was rather late to be raising this issue.

“I’m a Seventh-Day Adventist, and we believe we must serve our country. Jesus taught us to render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s. (*Matthew 22:21*) Many Adventists serve in the military. We are patriots, but it’s against our religion to kill.”

“Why didn’t you say something when we were back in Boston?” I asked. “Before we shipped out to Vietnam?” I recalled that, back in Boston, several sailors had objected to going to Vietnam. I had arranged for counseling for one sailor who had threatened to go AWOL. He successfully got transferred. I had made contact with legal advisors at Harvard University to assist those who claimed to be conscientious objectors. I guess the word had gotten out about my activities because the Executive Officer called me in and ordered me to cease. That might explain why this sailor knocked on my door.

“I wanted to serve my country,” he replied. “I was hoping they would assign me to a non-combat duty station, but they put me in the Weapons Department. I thought that scrubbing decks and painting would be okay, but when we got here, they assigned me to load projectiles below a turret. For me, that would be like participating in the killing.”

“Did you speak to your Division Officer?” I knew he needed to follow the chain of command and that he was completely out-of-order to approach me with this concern.

“Yes, I first spoke with my Chief Petty Officer,” he explained. “The Chief advised me to forget about it; to ‘suck it up.’ But, I insisted, and he reluctantly let me speak to the Division Officer. Mr. D gave me a lecture about my duty and threatened to write me up if I didn’t follow orders.”

“You do realize that by coming to me you are going outside the chain of command?” I asked.

He lowered his eyes. “Yes, I know. I don’t want to get you into trouble. I thought about going AWOL, but the men told me to talk to you first.”

“I need to clarify in my mind what you can and can’t do according to your faith.” I took out a pad of paper and a pen. “If I can get you transferred

to the laundry or to the mess hall, will you be okay with that even though the ship goes into combat?”

“Yes!” His eyes lit up.

“We will be bombing the targets that the spotters give us.” I wanted to be sure I understood where his ethical conflict started. “You know we will be fighting every night that we are online. There will be reports of body counts of enemies killed. You’re okay with that?”

“As long as I’m not firing the guns or loading the ammunition,” he clarified.

I wrote down his name, division, and serial number. I didn’t promise him anything, except that I would try to see what I could do.

After he left, I knocked on the door of the Commander of the Supply Department and told him the whole story. I urged him to consider transferring the sailor to a non-combat duty station. I argued that the sailor wanted to do the right thing; he wanted to serve his country, but he felt morally conflicted with his religious values. I suggested that the sailor would be no good to the Navy if he’s written up and sent to the brig. It would ruin his Navy career. The Commander agreed. I learned the next day that they transferred the sailor to the laundry.

This is an example of how our beliefs and values impact our spiritual self. The sailor may not have been able to articulate the moral dilemma that troubled him, but he did know that it crossed a red line for him to load projectiles into a five-inch gun that would lob bombs onto the Ho Chi Minh Trail where North Vietnamese would be carrying supplies by night. His spiritual self-identity would not allow him to cross that line. Fortunately, the Navy was able to accommodate him.

Many years later, when in dialogue with Vietnam veterans, I learned a new term: moral injury. Counselors who have worked extensively with veterans who suffer symptoms of PTSD have learned that there is a spiritual dimension to the psychological wounds of war.

During one of my visits to a country that had suffered a prolonged war, a pastor invited me to do a workshop for widows of war. I don't want to mention the name of the country because the government may deny me a visa the next time I try to visit. The pastor explained that he had many widows in his congregation, some of whom had lost legs or arms during the aerial bombings, but deeper than those losses were the losses of loved ones—husband, sons, and daughters. Too often the women had been traumatized when bombs killed their loved ones in their immediate presence. They not only suffered the psychological wounds of trauma but also survivor guilt.

The pastor said to me, “I don't know what to say to these widows; I don't know how to help them.” I abandoned the idea of doing normal grief support training and instead worked with the women to focus on recovering their spiritual self. Although their path to healing will be long and complicated, having a faith foundation with beliefs and values as well as the resilience to make meaning out of their suffering will serve as building blocks to rebuild their lives.

Another example that illustrates how spirituality is interlaced with beliefs and values comes from a period when I lived and worked in Chile, during a military dictatorship known for torture and missing persons—the disappeared.

Miguel, a former member of our church youth group in southern Chile, joined the national police force in Chile as a way to get out of poverty. After basic training, he served in various places in Chile and eventually was transferred to the Valparaiso area where he had some cousins. He would stay with them during his days off. Miguel, a person noted for his virtue and religious values, was promptly promoted to junior officer and was respected equally by his senior officers and by the men he directed.

Several years after I had last seen Miguel, I received a note requesting me to meet him at a secret location. The note instructed me to go to a neighborhood corner store and ask for him. The person who gave me the note told me to be careful that no-one (meaning government agents) followed me there. I took appropriate precautions and arrived at the time the note indicated. When I asked for Miguel, the man attending the store took me to a room upstairs and said, “Sit down. Miguel will come shortly.” I

waited for a half-an-hour. When he showed up, Miguel seemed extremely nervous. After he told me his story, I understood why.

He had deserted the military, and they were searching for him. He was in hiding in his old neighborhood (not at his family's home) and had risked his life to come out of hiding to meet with me. It was during one of the most turbulent years of the dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet; people were taking to the streets in protest, and subversive groups were organizing to disrupt and create chaos. General Pinochet responded with a campaign of repression that often involved mass search and seizures of entire neighborhoods.

Miguel's military unit in Valparaiso had carried out several mass search and seizure operations. As one of the junior officers, he became aware that in some cases the military would raid the homes of individuals suspected of being in the opposition and would plant arms, ammunition and subversive literature. These operations would usually begin around 3 a.m. when the military would surround a neighborhood and detain all traffic from leaving. Soldiers would then go house to house and take out all the men and force them to stand in their underwear in the plaza. Meanwhile, they would search every house, terrifying the defenseless women and children. This was the kind of operation that Miguel had been involved in, when, by coincidence, they raided the neighborhood where his cousins lived. Unfortunately, Miguel and a friend had left some of their uniforms in the cousins' house. They were discovered during the search and consequently, the household was suspected of subversive activities (assuming that the uniforms were to be used as a disguise in an anti-government operation).

In that neighborhood, on that day, agents of the government planted subversive literature and weapons. Miguel was asked to sign a report that confirmed that the military had discovered the arms and anti-government literature during the search. Aware that the report was false, Miguel refused to sign it. He knew that if he did sign it, his cousins and other neighbors would be arrested, and if the standard procedure were followed, they would be tortured for five days before being formally charged. Then they would be thrown in prison. He knew that some prisoners died during the days of torture. Individuals accused of terrorism and subversion against the state were often given perpetual life sentences.

“As a Christian,” Miguel said to me, ‘I could not have it on my conscience that I collaborated in a lie that resulted in the torture, imprisonment, and possibly death of innocent people.’ His superior officers gave him a direct order to sign the documents. Still, he refused. They suspended him from duty and told him that he was under investigation. During the days that followed, Miguel, off duty, noticed that secret police followed him everywhere he went. He wasn’t sure if they were trying to discover his subversive contacts or if they were simply intimidating and pressuring him to sign the papers. After ten days, he met with one of his colleagues, an officer in his unit, who informed him (unofficially) that he was on the “blacklist” (which Miguel understood to mean that soon he would be among the “missing.”) The Pinochet regime had gained a notorious international reputation for the thousands of so-called “disappeared” persons. Miguel read the writing on the wall; he would have to escape into hiding or wait around to be detained, falsely accused, tortured and—if he survived—perpetual life in prison.

He chose to desert and go into hiding. His wife was expecting a child, and she had to leave her parents home and also go into hiding. He came to me to ask for help to slip undetected out of the country.

Years later, I learned that he suffered depression in Sweden and longed to return to Chile, but fearing arrest, remained in exile. Occasionally he would call friends in Chile. Like many political exiles, Miguel longed to return home. He was paying a severe emotional and spiritual price for his decision to remain true to his religious values.

These true-life stories illustrate the importance of beliefs and values in a person’s spirituality. Beliefs and values are learned from religious teaching, family values, and from the social *milieu*. Each major world religion puts a distinct emphasis on beliefs and values they teach and support.

Jewish teaching emphasizes respect for human life: do not murder, welcome the stranger (hospitality), all life is sacred and therefore it is a duty to aid the most vulnerable. A quote from the prophet Isaiah sums up his values, “...to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, ...to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house, when you see the naked, to cover them,

and not to hide yourself from your own kin.” (Isaiah 58:6-7). Jewish respect for life and aid to the vulnerable leads to the moral imperative to promote justice, “...and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God.”(Micah 6:8)

Core Christian values are similar and often are summed up by referring to the Sermon on the Mount. “Blessed are the poor, the meek, the hungry, those who mourn, and those who are persecuted. Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you. Do unto others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:20-31)

Core values of ancient Greece focused on loyalty, glory, intelligence, and hospitality. Greek medical ethics summed up in the phrase, ‘Do good and do no harm.’ has contributed to the contemporary conversations around bio-ethics.

The core values of Islam are service, worship, and submission to God. Love your brother as yourself. Do no harm to self or to others.

The core values of Hinduism are more complex: Hinduism focuses on development of self and integration of body, mind and soul. They hold truth and knowledge in high esteem. They work for the integration of self at all levels.

The core values of Buddhism address the universality of suffering, the causes of suffering and the path to liberation from suffering.

It is important that we understand beliefs and values as a dimension of spirituality because when we are in a life crisis or experience sudden losses, we fall back on your beliefs and values to pull us through. We may lose loved ones to violence, we may lose our property to natural disasters, we may lose our employment or suffer a grave injustice, but we do not lose our values. Our core values and beliefs become the solid rock on which we stand in the middle of chaos.

In addition to religious values, social and cultural values influence how we behave in daily life and especially during a crisis. Every culture nurtures the values held dear to them. Truthfulness, sincerity, honesty, humility, equality, courage and charity, to name a few.

The Boy Scout movement is a good example of the establishment of a value system. The Scout law may seem simplistic, but they reflect behaviors that can be observed, sanctioned and rewarded. “A scout is trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean and reverent.”

Now it is time for you to identify the values that guide your life. Take a look at the words below and circle those that most reflect your core beliefs and values.

Loyalty	Honesty	Truthfulness	Humility
Courage	Charity	Justice	Equality
Helpful	Obedient	Trustworthy	Brave
Caring	Generous	Service to others	Respect Life
Aid the vulnerable	Kindness	Compassion	Purity/Righteousness
Do not kill	Protect life	Love enemies	Welcome strangers
Free oppressed	Liberate self	Clothe the naked	Feed the hungry
Help the poor	Do good	Do no harm	Comfort the bereaved
Detachment	Mindfulness	Cleanliness	Be true to self

Review and observe the words that you circled. What are the values that guide your life? How well are you doing in keeping and honoring these values in your life? Do these values represent what you aspire to but are not even close to attaining? Are these values that you have already integrated into your daily life?

Rate yourself on a scale of one to four. Circle the number that most closely reflects how you are doing in being faithful to your beliefs and values.

1	2	3	4
“I’m doing great.”	“I’m doing fair, but not perfect.”	“I’m not doing so good. There’s room for improvement.”	“These are my ideal values, but basically I’m failing to measure up.”

To arrive at a score, circle the number at the top of the column. That is your score. Write your score here. _____ You will need this score at the end of the book when you do an overall spiritual temperature summary.

Interpretation of Results



Congratulations! You have done some self-reflection on multiple dimensions of your life. You have identified spiritual themes in many if not all of those dimensions. Now it is time to put it all together. You will be taking the scores from each chapter and putting them on a spirituality wheel.

Before you chart your results, let's review the story of Jonathan, observe his scores and chart them as an illustration of how to do it.

Jonathan is the oldest of six kids raised by their single mom. The father of the two oldest siblings abandoned the family when Jonathan was 4. The father of the other four siblings also abandoned the family, and for the last six years, Jonathan has had to work to help his mother pay the bills. The mother works sporadically cleaning houses. They live in the poorest, most run-down and dangerous sector of the urban area. Jonathan has been robbed more than once while walking home at night from the nearest bus stop. The mother is constantly behind in paying the rent and the utilities. The kids feel lucky if they get one meal a day. Jonathan tries to help his mom financially, but it is hard for him to keep a job. He comes off as feminine to his peers, gets bullied, fights back and gets fired.

That's been the pattern for the last six years. Jonathan never seems to be able to get his head above water; he goes from one crisis to another. He started a home cleaning "business" with his mom, had business cards printed with his phone number, and the next month his phone was stolen. He was run over by a taxi, hospitalized and couldn't pay the bills. He was assaulted by neighborhood thugs and lost two front teeth and had no money to pay for dental work. At that time, he had just started work at a store, but missed work and got fired. He and his best friend were assaulted while walking by a sports bar; they were both stabbed and taken to the hospital by

ambulance; his friend died before arriving. Jonathan survived but lost a month of work while recovering from chest wounds.

That was last year. This month, Jonathan started a new job, and while walking with a co-worker to get lunch, got into an altercation with thugs. Jonathan tried to defend his co-worker. The police showed up and roughed up Jonathan; threw him to the ground and he ended up with a swollen hand. He returned to work, and the boss sent him home to put ice on the hand. He missed three days of work and got fired.

For Jonathan, life is a constant battle to survive, but remarkably he maintains an attitude of hope for the future. He believes God is his last and most reliable source of help. His compassionate heart bleeds for his younger siblings, and he often goes hungry so that he can buy food or clothing for them. Many of his problems are related to living in a dangerous neighborhood, but there is no way financially to pay rent in a “safe neighborhood.” He never had the money to pay for higher education, so he takes entry-level jobs. He once got a job washing dishes in a restaurant, but his earnings were insufficient to pay for the bus and metro to transport him to work and back. He couldn’t afford to work there; he quit. And so it goes; Jonathan’s social situation impacts his perspective on life and his sense of hope. He has issues related to chaos, violence, abandonment, unresolved grief, despair and hopelessness.

After he circles the words on each chart for each of the ten dimensions of spirituality, he comes up with the following scores:

Chapter One: My current situation. - 3.8

Chapter Two: My relationship with family - 2.0

Chapter Three: Intimacy in Community- 2.5

Chapter Four: Justice. – 3.9

Chapter Five: My sexual identity. – 1.5

Chapter Six: My social situation. – 3.9

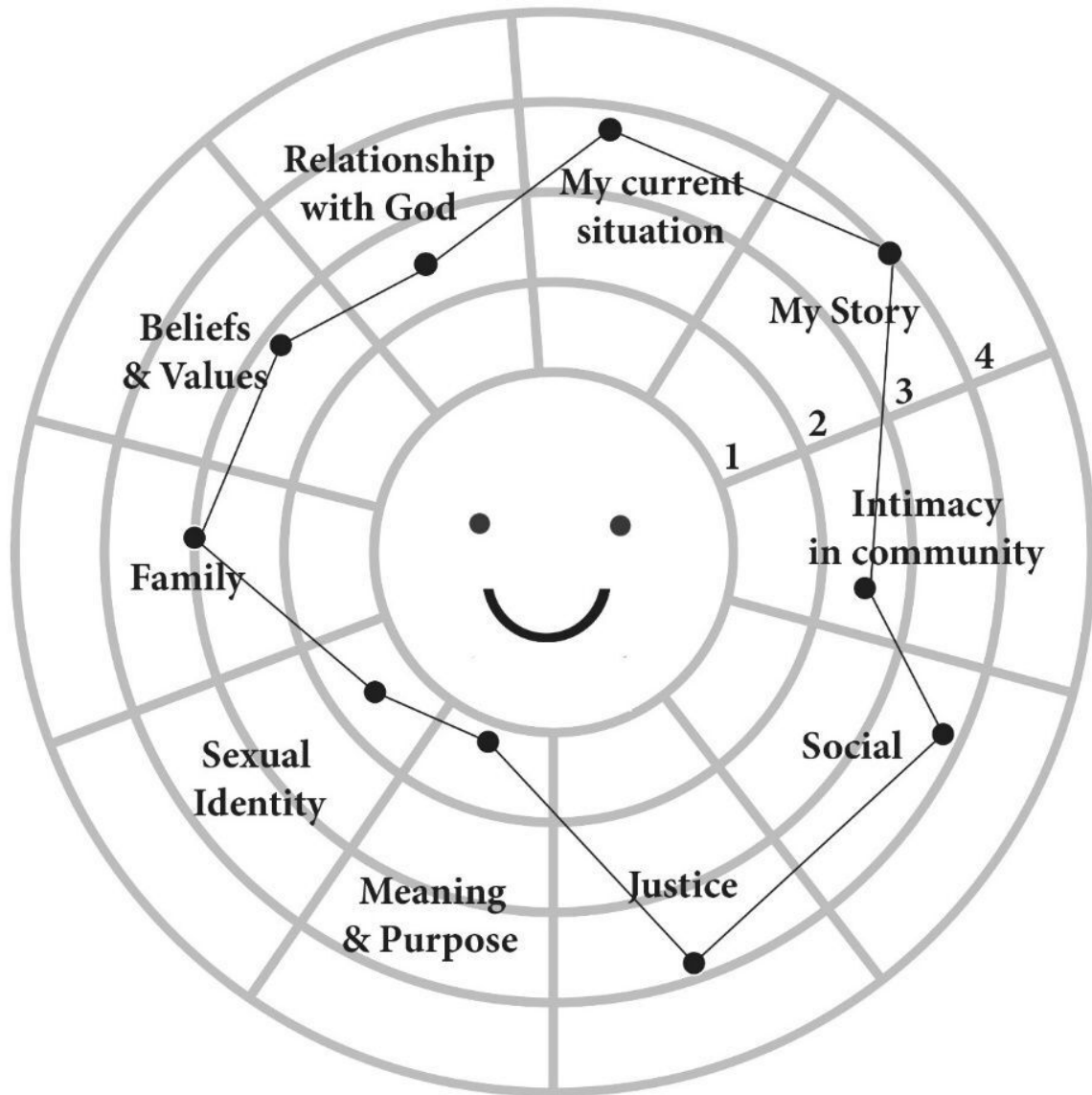
Chapter Seven: My relationship with God.- 2.5

Chapter Eight: My Meaning and Purpose. -1.2

Chapter Nine: My life story. – 3.5

Chapter Ten: My beliefs and values. – 1.9

The next step is to place a colored dot in each dimension on the spirituality wheel, noting that the first circle from the center represents a score of one, the second circle represents a score of two and so on until the final circle which is a score of four. Before analyzing the results, Jonathan will put the colored dots on the spirituality wheel for each of the ten dimensions of spirituality. He will then draw a colored line from one dot to the next around the entire spirituality wheel. His results will look like this:



When Jonathan evaluates his results, he will notice that he has drawn a line that zigzags from close to center to the outer margins of the wheel. Those areas where his line approaches the center represents the dimensions of his spirituality where he is closest to spiritual bliss (see the smile). Where the line approaches the outer margins of the wheel, he will observe that he is farthest from spiritual bliss; thus, his results suggest that in those areas he is experiencing spiritual distress or angst. Where he feels most marginalized is in the area of justice, social situation, life story, and current situation. On the other hand, the dimensions where his results show that he feels spiritually centered are his life meaning and purpose and his beliefs and values. He may conclude that although he is experiencing stress, anxiety

and perhaps despair in relation to his social situation, what keeps him going is his love for his family. His beliefs and values give his life meaning and purpose.

When he reviews and reflects on his life as he experiences it now, he may see some areas in which he would like to focus. He may wish to put energy into improving his social situation, or he may accept his social situation as his fate and destiny and instead put his energy into strengthening those dimensions where it currently shows that he has strengths.

Now that we have reviewed the results of Jonathan's spirituality wheel as an illustration of how to chart the scores from each of the chapters, it is time to put your scores on your spirituality wheel.

On the last paragraph of each chapter, you should have a final score. It should be a number from 1 to 4. Write the results below.

Chapter One: Current Life Challenges. ____

Chapter Two: Relationship with family. ____

Chapter Three: Intimacy in Community. ____

Chapter Four: Justice. ____

Chapter Five: Sexual identity. ____

Chapter Six: Social situation. ____

Chapter Seven: Relationship with God. ____

Chapter Eight: Meaning and Purpose. ____

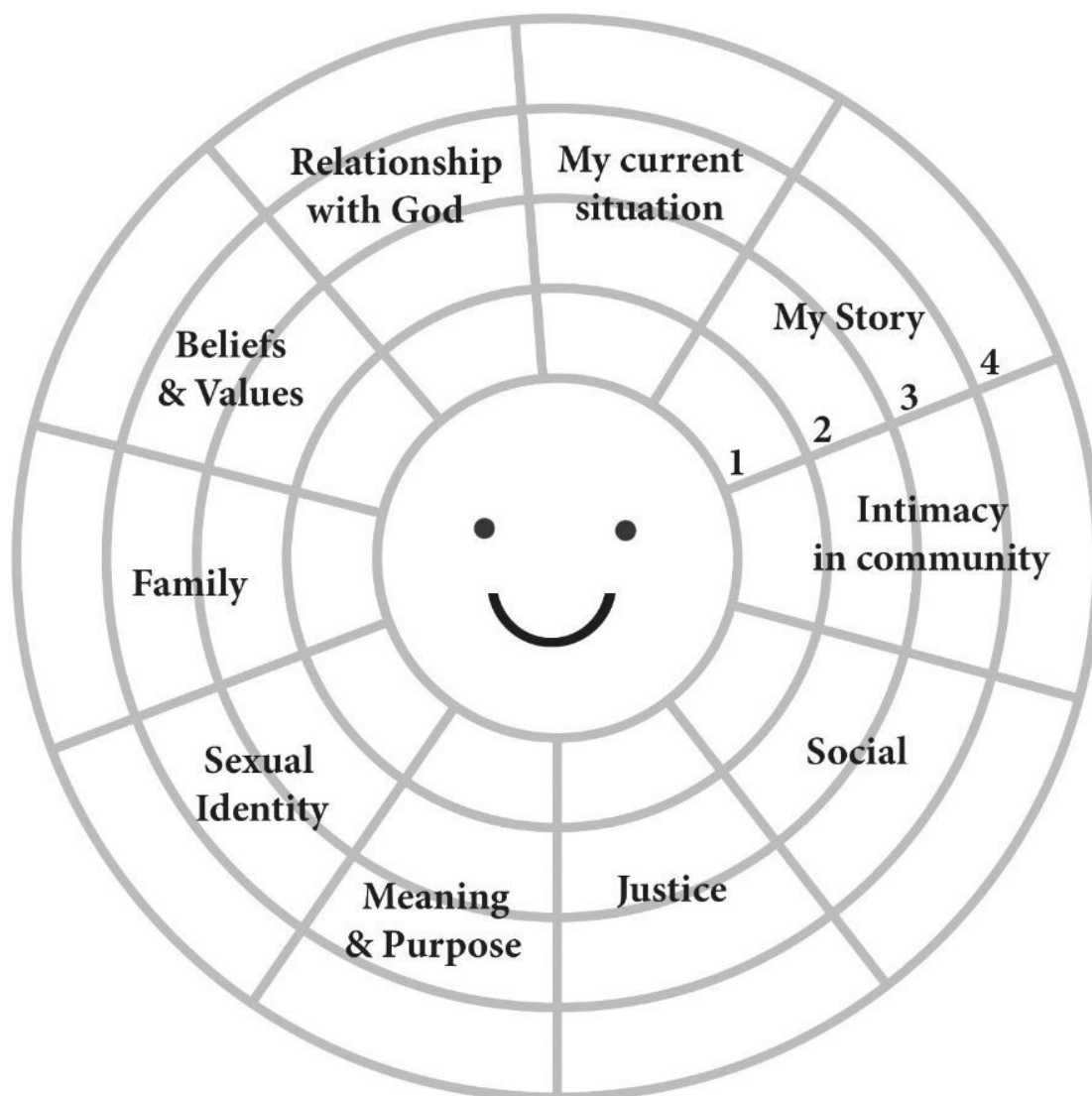
Chapter Nine: Life story. ____

Chapter Ten: Beliefs and values. ____

The next step is to transfer those scores on to the Spirituality Wheel by placing a colored dot in the appropriate area of each of the ten dimensions. Note that the first circle from the center is a one, the second circle is a two,

the third is a three and the outer band is a four. Go ahead now and mark your chart.

When you have finished, draw a colored line connecting all the dots on the wheel.



Now you are ready to interpret the results. Note that the center of the wheel represents spiritual bliss, joy, and peace. In other words, the center represents, “It is well with my soul.” As you observe the line you have drawn, note where the line most closely approaches the center. What does that say to you about those dimensions of your spirituality that give you happiness, peace or bliss? These are your spiritual strengths. These

dimensions are a source of joy or spiritual wellness. These are your spiritual assets.

Using the metaphor of spiritual temperature; the center is hot, and the outer bands are cold. Most of us experience a blend of both. We may be “hot” in some areas and distressingly cold in other dimensions of spirituality.

Now notice where the colored line approaches the outer margins of the spirituality wheel. These are the areas where you experience the most distress, anxiety, or despair. Where the line goes toward the outer margins, there you have the indicators of spiritual angst. What does this say about your life now?

If your colored line circles the inner circle in the range of 1 and 2, never deviating into the two outer bands, you are either extraordinarily blessed, or you may not have an accurate self-awareness. No offense intended, but some of us like to think that every aspect of our life is joyful bliss. We may resist any negative thoughts and choose to live in a happy bubble. If you suspect that might be the case with you, ask a life-partner or close friend to review your choice of circled words in the ten dimensions of spirituality. Perhaps an objective assessment of someone close to you will provide you with a more realistic emotional profile. I have used this tool in couple’s counseling and often they correct each other’s answers and in doing so become more self-aware.

As you reflect on your results, observe again where the colored line is closest to the center of the wheel. Observe which dimensions of spirituality provide you with strength and grounding. When you are going through a storm of life, these are the dimensions of spirituality that will make you more resilient and hopeful.

In my family, the story is told of my great grandfather who had a very successful wagon making business in Iowa. A fire burned it to the ground; he lost everything. Yet, he had his work experience, his good reputation and moreover he had nine children to feed, clothe and shelter. He had a strong commitment to his family which gave his life purpose and meaning. His difficult life story equipped him to cope with hardships. His faith in God

gave him hope. He rebuilt the business and it became more successful than the business that had burned to the ground. If we were to chart his story on the spirituality wheel, we would see that in the areas of social situation, justice and current life situation, he would chart on the outside margins which would reflect the distress, anxiety and grief of having lost his business. We would also see his colored line navigate toward the center in areas of relationship with family, life meaning and purpose, life story and relationship with God. We would see that the distress represented in some areas would be more than balanced by the strengths in other areas.

In this illustration, we can see that some dimensions of spirituality seem to be temporary or situational. The source of our current spiritual distress may be the loss of a job, a divorce or an abusive relationship. We may experience anxiety and fear and stress during a health crisis. Those sources of distress are deeply felt in the moment, but over time the emotional weight may diminish. On the other hand, there are dimensions of spirituality that seem to be more of a permanent part of our being. A life story that has built resilience, a commitment to care for a sick child, a struggle for justice, or an enduring love for a partner may all be sources of life meaning and purpose. These are spiritual assets that enable us to cope with all kinds of momentary distress and anxiety.

Observe again those dimensions of spirituality where you are at the outer margins. These may currently represent areas of pain and distress. There is emotional pain, for example, in the loss of a loved one. There is also spiritual pain which may be rooted in guilt, shame or loss of one's life meaning and purpose. Emotional and spiritual pain can be a good thing when it awakens us to the source of the cause. For example, if you are feeling the pain of solitude and loneliness because you have burned the bridges with your family, the pain may have awakened you to the cause. Perhaps you remember saying foolish things to your loved ones which you now regret and are beginning to understand that you may have caused the broken relationship. It is your pain of loneliness that awakens you to the need to seek reconciliation with your loved ones.

Another example of how you may use this tool comes from the life experience of a couple who lost their son to a horrific act of violence at school. Both parents were devastated and angry at the perpetrator. They

attended court hearings and followed the court case to be sure that the perpetrator received just punishment. Attendance at court hearings tended to trigger their grief and anger to unbearable emotional intensity. They began doing grief work and attended a grief support group. Soon they converted their anger into a passion to help other parents whose children were victims of violence. They attended training workshops to learn how to facilitate a grief support group and soon formed their own at their faith community. By embracing the pain of loss, they began to transform their anger and grief into compassion for others and passion for justice. How were they able to do this? They leaned on the strengths of their values, their faith and love of family while embracing the pain of loss. This illustrates how to use the spiritual temperature tool.

When you feel dizzy and are about to faint you grab onto something solid to support you. In that same way, when you are going through a life crisis (you track on the outer margins of your spirituality wheel), and you feel disoriented and inner chaos as you address those distressing issues, you reach out to grab onto something solid. While you address the issues that provoke distress and angst, you embrace those dimensions of your spirituality that hold you up and strengthen you.

In chapter nine you read about the geologist who feared death after being kidnapped by the FARC in Colombia. He survived and integrated that experience into his Life Story. Many years later when he felt fear of death (going into surgery), he remembered his Life Story (grabbed onto something solid) and the recollection that he was a survivor and that God had rescued him from danger gave him the strength and assurance to proceed with the surgery. This also illustrates how to use the spirituality wheel; as you become aware of your distress, angst, pain or marginalization you simultaneously look for those dimensions of spirituality that give you strength and connect you to your spiritual core.

The conclusions of this model of spiritual assessment take us back to the beginning assumption that self-understanding is the beginning of liberation from what ails us.

Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom. Aristotle

Knowing others is wisdom; knowing yourself is enlightenment. Lao Tzu

The Kingdom of God is within you. Gospel of Luke (17:21)

If you do not know yourselves, then you exist in poverty, and you are that poverty.

Gospel of St. Thomas (3b)

There are three things extremely hard: Steel, a Diamond, and to know one's self. Benjamin Franklin: Poor Richard's Almanac

Let me humbly join the masters who exhort and admonish us to know ourselves and invite you to take this journey to know your soul. While doing some soul work of my own, I wrote the following poem.

Connecting to Soul

I leave behind the person
I had become. I emerge to be
Transformed into the one
I had always been destined to become.
I connect to the soul that I am.

When I feel the connection
The joining of myself and soul
I experience a new freedom
Total transparency throughout
No fear of rejection
No inhibitions about expressing myself
I have come to my true home
No longer a stranger to myself
No longer anxious about acceptance
Free to be me spontaneously
Like moving into jazz until I melt
And become one with the rhythm
So, my self and soul merge into one.

About The Author



Dale Alan Young travels the globe to lead grief support training in the aftermath of natural disasters. After thirty years of providing emotional and spiritual support in healthcare and faith communities, the author shares authentic stories of ordinary people struggling to understand “Where is God in this?” The author is a Board Certified Chaplain and has a doctorate in ministry. He understands that spirituality is a much broader theme than one’s personal relationship with God. Dr. Young contends that whenever a person in crisis asks “why?,” he or she is in spiritual territory. This book helps the reader go deeper into the ten dimensions of spirituality in order to enhance the reader’s understanding of his/her spiritual self.

If you found this book to be helpful to you on your spiritual journey and would like to help me get this resource out to more readers, please write a brief review on Amazon.com. You can find guidance on how to write a review by going to:

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You will find my author page by going to:

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Thanks for reading and God bless you on your life’s journey.