

BRIDGES FOR EVANGELICALS

JOURNEYING INTO CONTEMPLATIVE SPIRITUALITY AND SPIRITUAL DIRECTION



By

Elsa McInnes

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Basics of the Evangelical heritage	2
The Great divides	3
Sacred or secular	
Knowing or feeling	
Doing or being	
Individualism or community	
Mastery or mystery	
Composite portrait of evangelicals who embrace spiritual direction	4
Bridges to expanded landscape and deeper intimacy with God	5
Good spiritual direction	
Expanded images of God	
History , change, growth, journey	
Listening prayer	
God’s varied communication	
Understanding language	
Integrating sacred and secular	
Building authentic relationship	
Summary	10
Conclusion	11
Bibliography	13
Appendix 1:	14
Assisting evangelicals exploring contemplative prayer	
Key transitional bridges	
Stumbling blocks	
Appendix 2:	17
Resources helpful to Evangelicals exploring spiritual direction and contemplative prayer	
Appendix 3:	19
Life history interview questions used in my research.	

Introduction

“I was troubled. People in my church fellowship were becoming suspicious of my prayer pilgrimage. One girl put the anxiety of many others into words: ‘I think you’re going overboard. You’re allowing those mystics to influence you too much. You’re in danger of betraying your evangelical heritage.’ ...It hurt to hear mature Christians express so much criticism and suspicion of those whose experience of God was somewhat different from their own.”¹

Joyce Huggett, writing in 1986, accurately mirrored my feelings and reflected my fears back then as I reached for a new level of intimacy with my God. ‘Betraying’ has a sinister ring, motivating anxious evangelicals to stay within clearly defined doctrinal boundary pegs. ‘Heritage’ has a wholesome rooted ring. Any hint of forfeiting that solid foundation was reason enough for an evangelical to cling to ‘known’ territory.

Yet, like Joyce, I was discovering God beyond my church’s carefully constructed boundary pegs, beyond my limited knowing. While still the core, centre, author and finisher of my faith God was becoming so much more than I had imagined but I was as tentative as a small child extending toes into crashing surf. Since then I’ve discovered there are many evangelicals, like me, hungering for a deeper intimacy with God yet fearing to sell their heritage for a mess of pottage. Some stay stuck and others, hungry for a deeper relationship, proceed with doubts and questions about the validity of some approaches to prayer and faith. That was my journey and I see others on the same path, seeking both God and validation of the journey.

No growing plant cuts off its roots. Neither does it flourish when root bound in a pot too small for its development. Instead its roots, while firmly bedded, need extension to draw increased sustenance for developing an extended aerial structure.

That is one analogy, but I have chosen the analogy of a bridge for this research paper, the Capstone being Jesus Christ. While authenticating core Christian beliefs, it reflects the journey concept, connecting the familiar landscape with the new, not cutting off the old but allowing movement between them both. Often a lot of turbulent water passes under the bridge before an evangelical can both extend their discoveries of God into new landscapes and reclaim their rich heritage with integrity.

This research has grown out of my own experience, been consolidated by much reading and several life history interviews with directors working with evangelicals, and some directees from that spiritual stream. I discovered some common issues faced by evangelicals when first tentatively crossing the bridge to explore beyond their particular spiritual stream. These I will outline. My aim is to see how we, as spiritual directors, can best understand, companion, and resource evangelicals embarking on this journey into the rich arena of contemplative spirituality, bringing freedom to explore new ways of relating to God with integrity while still building on their foundation heritage.

¹ Huggett, Joyce. Listening to God. Hodder and Stoughten London 1996 edition pg 57

What is basic to the evangelical heritage?

Originally the word 'evangelical' simply referred to the 'gospel'. Later it referred to the movement that stressed personal conversion by faith in Christ's atoning death. It is non-denominational, has no founding father, places no importance on ancient historical hierarchies. It embraces wholeheartedly what is spelled out in ancient creeds, adheres to points taught by traditional orthodoxy and stands firmly against all heresies, cults and theological liberalism. Foster defines the Evangelical tradition as '*A life founded on the living Word of God, the written Word of God and the proclaimed Word of God.*' Expanded, the main strengths of the evangelical heritage are:

- (a) **Personal conversion by faith in Christ alone** (being 'born again'), seen as life transforming and the only way to appropriate **Christ's atoning work**.
- (b) **Missionary mandate**. The importance of the great commission to proclaim a faithful interpretation of the Christ event as the greatest of all tasks for a believer.
- (c) **Biblical fidelity**. The written Word is the touchstone for doctrine, piety, order and is taken at face value. It is the only infallible rule of faith and practice. Sound doctrine and historical reality is obtained from it regarding the incarnation, atonement, resurrection, second coming, and judgement.
- (d) **Boundaried beliefs**. Doctrinal fidelity enables the believer to determine right living.
 - The will of God**, by circumstance, scripture, prayer and conviction,
 - Behaviour, and conscience**. Clear separation of sacred and secular, Godly and worldly: the taboos aimed at holiness and purity from a tainted world.
 - Piety**, Commitment to regular bible reading and prayer (quiet times), worship, and fellowship, with resulting testimonies and fruitfulness in life and service.

As with every tradition Evangelicalism poses its own unique problems for those reaching for more in their relationship with God, three in particular: Intellectualism that places much emphasis on right thinking to the exclusion of heart response, legalism, which focuses primarily on adherence to a set of rules as the path to spiritual maturity and therefore majors more on works than grace, and suspicion as a posture (opposition to liturgy as stifling and false, a dim view by some of charismatics, and the warning that meditation and contemplation are more Buddhist than Christian).

Returning to my image of bridges, I hold the view that though the evangelical field is beautiful, sustaining and safe it is not all there is to know, not by a long way. Ideally my bridges would lead out in every direction, expanding the landscape for spiritual growth. The stream represents the 'Great Divides' as I have chosen to name them. My own experience and that of interviewees would suggest that bridging the following divides is essential for on-going spiritual maturity.

The Great Divides

1. Sacred or secular.

At the fall, the point at which humanity lost its way with God, the fabric ripped, flesh and spirit were torn asunder, as humans tried to claim something as their own, distinct from God's. That falsehood, still perpetuated today, puts God and the spiritual in one box, daily human life and the 'flesh' in another, destroying any chance of integrity (whose root meaning is integration) and severely limiting God's avenues for communication. The incarnation reversed the split. God-made-man knit it back together so that prayer and work could be one, all of life become an act of worship, service a liturgy and liturgy a service. Bridging this divide, allows the sacred to be discovered in everything and opens avenues for God to communicate through the 'stuff' of creation, through nature, the media, music, art, symbols, any part of life, for all our senses to be receptive to God's communication, and our faith to be expressed incarnationally.

2. Knowing or feeling, the head or the heart, law or love

Evangelicals have tended to pursue spirituality through the mind to the neglect of the emotions and senses. Not that they disclaim the place of love in the relationship but there is some suspicion of emotional response which may get out of hand. We may lose control. Hymns are largely doctrinal statements and sermons are structured to satisfy the rational mind.

But, to quote Damarest *"We need to supplement theological correctness with a transforming heart encounter with Christ. Orthodoxy and orthopraxy must be wedded to orthopathy – authentic experience of the living God in the heart"*²

Evangelicals cut their teeth on the ten commandments. Many of us grew up seeing the bible as a book of law, only latterly discovering it to be a love letter. Learning ideas *about* God was emphasized over *being* with God. Seldom had we been encouraged to be attentive to God, to practice the presence of God, to personally *experience* God's overwhelming love. Sue Monk Kidd points out that *"God created us in order to share the joy of being alive with us, in order to love us and taste our love, to delight in us and to enjoy our delight. God wants our hearts."*³

3. Doing or being, inner journey or outer service

In an age of information overload it staggers me how little of the mountain of information results in transformation of the inner person, (in-formation). Neither theological correctness or mission activity, good in themselves, are a substitute for a transforming heart encounter with Christ. Baxter puts it this way, *"Men (sic) must be brought into a state of grace before we can expect from them the works of grace."* And that requires an inner journey. The directees I interviewed had been disciplined in churches majoring on observable 'ministries'. Their new struggle was to appreciate the value of self- apart from 'useful ministries' the need for self discovery, to develop the ability to trust God within and just 'be' in God. Anything preceded by the word 'self' was suspect and anything with a hint of 'internal' was considered dangerous navel gazing.⁴

² Damarest, Bruce A. *New Dimensions in Evangelical Spirituality* A paper from the Denver Conservative Baptist Seminary. Date unknown

³Kidd, Sue Monk. *When the Heart Waits*. Harpur Collins, San Francisco. 1992

⁴ Baxter, Richard. *The Reformed Pastor*. Edited by Hugh Martin Ch.DD SCM Press Ltd 1956

4. Individualism or faith community

Evangelicalism has majored on salvation of the individual, and though committed to nurturing each in a local faith community, has often isolated itself from other streams of Christian tradition and from the history of the whole Christian church. Together the many streams of Christian tradition bring a richness and wholeness not found in any one alone. The journey the community of faith has been on for centuries brings depth and breadth of understanding enriching each individual's journey. We need connection with the long history of Christian faith and spirituality with all its richness and diversity and awareness of other Christian streams to recover scriptural balance.

5. Mastery or mystery

Evangelical emphasis has been on knowledge of God and the ability to clearly define the nature and activity of God. Painful questions and doubts emerge when crises or natural faith stage development results in a less clearly defined God; beyond words, larger than previously experienced, more within the realm of mystery. The bible may say 'My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts yours' but evangelicals have been clearly taught that they can know God fully. To bridge this divide is to acknowledge the more we know the less we know, that all definitions and images fall short of the reality of God and to be able to rest in that with security.

A composite portrait of evangelicals who have embraced contemplative prayer and spiritual direction.

While interviewing, I found my own personal experience voiced again and again by others who have expanded their understanding beyond their evangelical heritage to embrace spiritual direction and a more contemplative spirituality. What precipitated the growth? The following were the main catalysts mentioned:

- An awareness of something more, a hunger for greater intimacy with God
- Disquiet with judgementalism and classification of Christian/ non Christian.
- Unease with the separation of secular and sacred and resulting inability to integrate the whole of life.
- A personal crisis raising faith questions concerning God's love and judgement.
- A direct challenge to beliefs by those holding other ideas, generally from other faith streams, resulting in stripping and re-assembling core beliefs.
- Frustration at limitations imposed on emotional expression.
- Inability of the church to give permission and safety to question beliefs and practices in a genuine search for authenticity.

These Christians negotiated turbulent waters in order to enter and benefit from Spiritual direction. The rough patches I identified were:

- Fear of being judged, misunderstood, marginalised, seen as not ‘authentically’ Christian by those of their tradition, especially the leadership.
- A learned suspicion of all other spiritual streams.
- Fear that their questioning may erode their clearly defined beliefs resulting in loss of faith and salvation.
- Fear that some new approaches to prayer may be labelled by their church community ‘new age’, considered a negative influence, resulting in rejection.
- Difficulty in seeking out a spiritual director when grounded in the belief ‘Jesus is all I need’ yet longing for some personal mentoring.
- Fear or guilt at looking for God beyond their church community and the bible.
- Fear of stepping outside their church’s ‘cultural’ box.
- Fear of introspective ‘navel gazing’ and negative view of ‘self’ awareness.
- Distrust of internal knowing, being used to validation from teaching and authority.
- Difficulty seeing silence and solitude as productive for God’s mission to the world and/or feeling alienated from their fellow Christians when choosing this way.
- Difficulty in talking to fellow evangelicals about spiritual direction and contemplative prayer as the new experiences aren’t easily conveyed in ‘Evangelical speak’.

Despite these turbulent waters the grace of God has drawn these and other evangelical Christians on in their quest for authentic relationship. Their faith crisis, hunger for intimacy with God, desire for an integrated wholeness to their life and their many unvoiced questions send them on a search for Christians with whom they can safely explore all that their hearts are full or empty of. From their heritage they bring the centrality of Christ, a deep appreciation of scripture, a strong doctrinal base, commitment to spiritual disciplines, love and service of God, but also a growing awareness that the grace of God is more than their churches have reflected and there is much more to enter into somehow, if only they can find the way and the courage.

Bridges to an expanded landscape and deeper intimacy with God

Amongst those I interviewed there was common agreement on six things that helped them deepen their relationship with God, and expand the horizons of their faith. Their views mirrored my own discoveries from earlier days.

(1) Good Spiritual Direction

When I embarked on a quest for a deeper relationship with God I sought companionship on this journey from directors who provided safety for my tentative venture into uncharted waters: even ‘direction’ was new. To draw a portrait of the spiritual director needed by evangelicals seeking to find a way into the depth and richness in God I draw on my own experience and the comments of others who have ventured this way. A caring spiritual director is crucial to providing a safe environment, without judgement or censorship, in which people can explore who God is and how they can know God more intimately. Wise companionship provides a bridge over the ‘troubled waters’ of transition for those evangelicals questioning the perimeters of their faith journey to date and asking which paths will sustain and expand personal growth in God.

There was clear agreement on the qualities these Evangelical directees and I appreciated in a spiritual director.

- Authenticity, integrity and modelling of an honest Christian life
- The ability to *really listen*, give time, space, privacy.
- Providing room for the full range of emotions and intuition.
- Caring, non-judgemental attitude, and understanding with no ‘finger pointing’.
- Offering freedom to explore doubts, and questions without being ‘told’ what to believe or do. Beatrice wrote, “...*really asking such questions is praying.*”⁵
- Validating their experiences, encouraging their discernment process.
- The ability to make connections between experience and scripture. This is especially important for evangelicals.
- Familiarity with the broad Christian heritage and stages of faith development.
- Providing a theology of journey, acknowledging seasons, deserts, and dark places.
- Ability to provide helpful resources at the appropriate time.

Eugene Peterson defines guide using the word *hogeogenesis* –one who leads you in the way, describing such a guide “*not as a shopkeeper who sells maps of the wilderness but the person who goes with you into it.*”⁶

Having someone go with me, in the sense of listening, caring, talking through new spiritual experiences was a gift I will always cherish. All those I spoke to were greatly helped by directors who fulfilled a companion role as they unpacked their discoveries. More recently, I have been privileged to go with others, bridging the known and the new.

(2) Expanded Images of God.

Evangelicals have great words defining God but their questing may lead them to discover a broad range of images enriching their relationship with God. Sue Monk Kidd writes of her discovery of new ways of seeing and relating to God, “*We’re used to the all-powerful, invincible, triumphant God. But I was discovering the vulnerable God, the God who knows pain and oppression, who enters deeply into our wounds. The God who empties and waits.*”⁷ For those I interviewed, exploration of the full range of metaphors uncovered the treasure of the fullness of God: not just father, but mother, not just the one who commands but also the one who cradles.

Evangelicals have frequently majored on the masculine to the exclusion of the feminine qualities of God, focused more on the transcendent God than the immanent, interpreted God more as judge than lover, experienced more truth than grace, though John tells us in his gospel that Jesus came *full* of both. Exploring *all* the images and metaphors on God described in the bible and reflected in God’s world has enabled me and these evangelicals to embrace a richer concept of God, to reframe or completely dismantle the restrictive box, to relate to God in new and freeing ways, defining less but loving more; being comfortable with mystery.

⁵ Beatrice Bruteau, “Gospel Zen.” *Living Prayer* 22 (July-Aug. 1989): 5

⁶ Peterson, Eugene. *Working the Angles*. William B Eerdman. 1994

⁷ Kidd, Sue Monk. *When the Heart Waits*. Harper: 1992. p 169

(3) The Concept of History, Change, Growth, Journey

A light seems to go on for evangelicals when they grasp the concept of journey. The bible is a rich source of journeys, life stories: the Israelites journey from slavery, through the wilderness to the promised land, Jesus journey from the crib through the cross to the crown, Jonah's story of deep darkness and recovery. The stories parallel our own. One spiritual director said, "*The bible is our own photo album, We find our own story there.*" It's been a relief for some to know that journeys have seasons of dark and light, of wilderness and desert, of rest, consolidation and new growth.

Evangelicals found it extremely helpful to be introduced to teaching on stages of faith development. Discovery that they may be in transition between stages relieved the feeling of alienation, helped them identify with fellow travellers, and inspired confidence in both their own intuition and the God of the journey. Useful sources include Fowler, Jamieson, Scott Peck and Henry Nouwen. A very useful beginning resource is *Faith Development, Resources for those on the Journey* which is a potpourri of material sourced and compiled by Alan Jamieson and Jenny McIntosh.

Introducing Evangelicals to other church traditions, to church history and a range of classics of Christian spirituality resulted in identification, expanded vision, new horizons. A number felt they had been given the missing pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, or they talked about 'the picture coming together'. They experienced a greater sense of integration and connection with the whole body of Christ, redefined in its totality. Richard Foster's book *Streams of Living Water* is a helpful book to start with.

Interviewees valued journaling as it offered rich rewards. They shared how it teaches the art of listening to God, raises expectations of encounters with God, shows patterns of relating and resisting, and confirms the concept of journey. That has also certainly been my personal experience over 20 years. Journaling has been a wonderful key to growth and a rich way to encounter God.

(4) Prayer as Listening

Perhaps the most profound shift for evangelicals is around the nature of prayer. Growing up with the statement "*God speaks to us through the bible and we speak to him through prayer*" it comes as revelation to discover the primary activity of prayer is to *listen* for the living word whether from the bible or beyond its sacred pages.

Evangelicals stress the bible as the 'word of God' and are familiar with the study of scripture centred on exegesis but may not be schooled in meditation the focus of which is to internalise and personalise the word so that it becomes a living word for the reader. Whole new vista's opened for those who discovered the ancient arts of *lectio divina*, meditation and contemplation: heart listening in which the reader seeks "*the word exposed in the words*" to use Karl Barth's expression. I, along with most others I spoke to, discovered that reading the bible is not the same as listening to God. There is no space in this paper to expand on these important ways of listening to God's word but of particular value in introducing, explaining, and validating these ways of praying are the books *Listening to God* by Joyce Huggett and *Prayer* by Richard Foster.

Spiritual directors I interviewed spoke of the fear evangelical directees experienced when first moving from verbal prayer to listening and from study of scripture to entering it imaginatively. They struggled with the apparent inactivity of silent prayer. They needed encouragement and linking of their own experience back to relevant scripture to trust their own 'inner hearing' and confirm the value of silence.

(5) Discovering God's Varied Communication

Evangelicals have always looked to God to speak through the bible and supremely through the life of Jesus, the Word made flesh. These are the foundational 'words' but they ring out in countless ways afresh in all facets of life "*not a newness word but a newness word*" to borrow one of Joyce Huggett's phrases. Evangelicals have been cautious of symbolism. It's helpful to recall that words themselves are symbols. For the evangelicals in my research, it has been very freeing to explore the biblical pictorial imagery and symbolism describing our relationship with God: an infant nursing at its mother's breast, a tree planted by water, a house on a rock. Some we have been more familiar with: wine and bread symbolising Jesus body and blood, baptism symbolising dying and living in Christ, the bride, the body, a wedding feast, but there are many more symbols to spark emotion, communicate God's love and motivate our wills and hearts to respond.

To explore the varied ways God communicates, directees found it helpful to look afresh at how Jesus used imagery to make his point: grains of wheat, sparrows, lilies, fig trees, sheep, dough, fish, coins, a housewife, parents, a farmer – the stuff and people of ordinary life. Through dreams, visions, music, art, poetry, dance, nature, the eyes of a trusting child, and the concrete jungle itself, God speaks. In expanding awareness of God's varied communication directees found it helpful to ask, "*Where have you met God?*" or "*What is God saying to you through*?" Directees found that internal knowing developed with encouragement. It was important to link the experiences back to scripture for confirming the integrity of the experience and building the directees trust in their own discernment.

(6) Understanding the Language

What God communicated in the past is in written form, But language is a living changing thing and the original meanings can be lost, misinterpreted or changed altogether over time. Some key words of our faith have suffered in this way. Or perhaps it is we who have suffered through faulty interpretation.

I found 'Be ye perfect,' an impossible command, unaware its root meaning related to maturity which is developmental and allows for growth and change. How freeing to discover that. 'Theology,' which we take to be the study of God originally meant union with God which shifts the focus significantly to embrace the heart as well as the head, a God who is both immanent and transcendent. 'Liturgy' comes from a word meaning service. Worship was seen as service and service as worship, integrating expressions of faith. The meaning of 'salvation' is to make whole, to integrate which is a process - not a once only commitment. Sin, so often understood as a list of actions breaking God's law is more correctly an attitude of excluding God, breaking his heart. Shiela Pritchard's article *Wells not Fences* inspired in me a total rethink of the word conversion whose meaning is to turn, not to have arrived. That challenges in us the categorising of Christian/non Christian

Good directors supported people's faith journeys by helping them examine the words and meanings they ascribed to them. Meditation and contemplation, considered 'New Age' by the boundary keepers, are as old as Christianity itself. In the context of Christian spirituality they differ vastly from Buddhist usage of the same words. It helped greatly when these differences were explained. To this end *Prayer* by Foster and *Listening to God* by Joyce Huggett have proven very useful. I know these writers answered my doubts and gave me confidence in these authentic Christian practices. They also assisted me in explaining such prayer to others who queried these methods.

(7) Integrating the Secular and Sacred.

Evangelicals who entered spiritual direction were frequently dissatisfied with the sacred/secular division. They expressed a yearning to see God in all of life and all of life in God – to become people of integrity (integrated) One expression of the yearning for integration was seen in the desire for worship and service to include the whole person – body, mind, soul, spirit. The evangelicals I interviewed had seen that the bible depicted life in God would involve the whole person, spirit, soul and body, as Jesus great commandment also confirmed. They found a new freedom to worship through dance, to pray while walking, or while sipping a hot mug of coffee, to express prayer through varied body postures.

Beyond this internal integration is the question, "*What is sacred in the world and what, if anything is not?*". Marjorie Thompson writes "*God is Lord of our whole life....The spiritual life is not one slice of existence but leaven for the whole loaf.*"⁸ It was Luther's conviction that "*all useful good things are sacred. The thrust and logical conclusion of his teaching was that ours is a sacramental world.*"⁹ The evangelical stream moved from this sacramental view of life wherein the world was not only created 'good' but constantly revealed the spiritual reality to those with eyes to see. The directees I interviewed were seeking to integrate their worlds: to see the sacred in babies, blocked drains, and busy schedules. Brother Lawrence's book *Practising the Presence of God* was helpful for those seeking to discover work and worship as a seamless expression of faith and love. Henry Nouwen says leaders have to respond with "*an articulate faith in God's real presence – that the incarnation of God's word makes every event an opportunity to be led deeper into the heart of God.*"¹⁰

One qualifying comment, important for Evangelicals is to clarify that integration does not mean absorption and tolerance of all, melting the distinction between good and evil, which must always be clearly discerned. Kenneth Leech issues a timely warning, "*There is a real danger that spirituality will be more and more 'commodified' absorbed into the market world of consumerism. A central task of spiritual discernment will be to disentangle the values of the gospel from those of the dominant culture.*"¹¹

⁸ Thompson, Marjorie J. Soul Feast. Westminster John Knox Press, Louisville:1995 p15

⁹ Foster, Richard. Streams of Living Waters. Harper Collins, London: 1998

¹⁰ Nouwen, Henry. In the Name of Jesus. Crossroads Publishing Company:1989 Pg 66

¹¹ Leech, Kenneth. Soul Friend. Moorehouse Publishing: 2001 introduction

(8) Building an Authentic Relationship

Coming to God as we are, warts and all, is difficult for Christians encumbered by ‘oughts’ and ‘shoulds’ or the image of the perfect Christian. Often Evangelicals found church was the last place they would risk being real. It should be the safest place. Any authentic relationship involves both head and heart, including the full range of emotions. For Christians used to the censorship of certain emotions it was helpful for them to explore the psalms in depth and to examine the range of emotions both there and as expressed by Jesus and for directors to validate expression of the full range of emotions in communication with God. With emotion frequently seen by Evangelicals as the enemy of the intellect and an obstruction to truth it was a challenge to the ones I spoke with, to allow God access to their more ‘negative’ emotions but very enriching of the relationship. I learned some years back that frustration, tears and anger are also the language of prayer: that an authentic relationship develops in mutual freedom, discovering the freedom to express what is in me and learning to give God that same freedom of expression.

Building an authentic relationship involves self awareness. Directors I interviewed all spoke of the wariness of evangelicals to explore their own reactions, to become self aware, to trust their own inner knowing of God. God’s invitation to the inner journey was frequently drowned by their attention to the nervous murmurs of their particular church communities. Yet awareness of God and awareness of self are closely linked. Authentic spirituality involves both. Directees found it helpful when directors encouraged them to pay careful attention to their experience of God, reflected back what they were saying and linked their experience back to relevant scriptures. Exploring God’s longing to transform the inner self, highlighting the danger of supposing we can transform the world while not opening to personal transformation. and teaching the link between self awareness and God awareness, assisted in dispelling self criticism of the interior focus. Ultimately the developing relationship with God was evidence enough of its value.

Finally the measure of authentic interior growth is exterior expression, reflecting a growing awareness of God, self and others in the whole of life. Kenneth Leech in the introduction to his revised edition of *Soul Friend* refers to “*the struggle for an authentic spirituality which will support and strengthen social and political action.*”¹²

Only an authentic spirituality will do this. Directees I interviewed sought directors in whom they saw life and faith woven as one, describing them as ‘authentic’ and ‘real’ That was their own hunger: to be authentic Christians, warts and all outworking their faith in the whole of life.

Summary

My own journey and the journey of those I interviewed have been greatly enriched through attention to the eight areas I have outlined. Matthew 28:19 so well known to evangelicals as their mandate for mission, hangs like the deck of a bridge between two great foundational ramparts of that bridge. the ‘**who**’ of Jesus in v18 declaring all authority is his and the ‘**where**’ of Jesus in v20. where he promised to be with us for ever. In one form or another the questions asked by those evangelicals coming for

¹² Leech, Kenneth. *Soul Friend*. Moorehouse Publishing: 2001 Introduction

spiritual direction, exploring contemplative prayer, revolved around the ‘**who and where**’ of God in relation to themselves and their faith walk over the decking. They were not seeking to move ‘out’ but ‘on’, extending the boundaries of their Christian tradition into new fields of nourishing intimacy with God and compassionate connection with others. Journeying this way myself, and finding great richness in doing so I now enjoy supporting others in their quest for an authentic dynamic relationship with God. I discovered common agreement amongst the people I interviewed and those I currently direct concerning which books have been most helpful in this quest. I have listed these at the conclusion of this paper. The most helpful ones have been written by people rooted in scripture and Christian tradition and not easily sucked in by the prevalent culture of contentment and narcissism. The Holy Spirit’s leading is imperative and timing of the steps of the journey important as God relates uniquely with each person, but the paths have similar markings.

Conclusion

To support others as a spiritual director I believe it is imperative that I belong to a vital Christian community. I share Kenneth Leech’s view that

*“The spiritual needs of the present day cry out for a strong rooted Christian community. The ministry of spiritual direction grows from a life of prayer, discipleship, and the struggle for holiness. It is a by product of that life and only makes sense with it.”*¹³

It concerns me that the evangelicals I interviewed and others I know of have had to swim against the stream to find spiritual direction and mostly it has been neither connected to nor endorsed by their own Christian communities. It was more often looked on with suspicion. Perhaps dialogue and honest communication between those practising spiritual direction, those receiving it and the leadership of those Christian communities may begin to remove obstacles to growth in intimacy with God.

My analogy of bridges falls down if the picture becomes one of movement out of one landscape entirely into a new one. Perhaps that is where the plant image I first suggested provides a more accurate picture, of an extended root system allowing for expanded fruitfulness. For the purpose of crossing any of the bridges is not to be separated from the old pasture to simply revel in the new and certainly not alone. The isolation of spiritual direction from Christian community is fraught with danger. Kenneth Leech issues a timely warning *“This ministry is in danger of being trivialised, professionalized, enclosed within an elitist and inward looking enclave. Spiritual direction must be reclaimed in the service of the Kingdom of God.”*¹⁴

¹³ Leech, Kenneth, Soul Friend. Moorehouse Publishing 2001 Introduction

¹⁴ Leech, Kenneth, Soul Friend. Moorehouse Publishing 2001 Introduction

It is my belief that spiritual direction needs to become a natural activity within each Christian community, whereby people hungry for God might be companioned safely on their journey, helped to explore their honest questions. finding freedom to explore an ever expanding relationship with God from a secure deeply rooted base, to follow with confidence where God leads on this journey of a lifetime, rejoicing in their heritage and building on and beyond it to the glory of God and the establishment of his kingdom.

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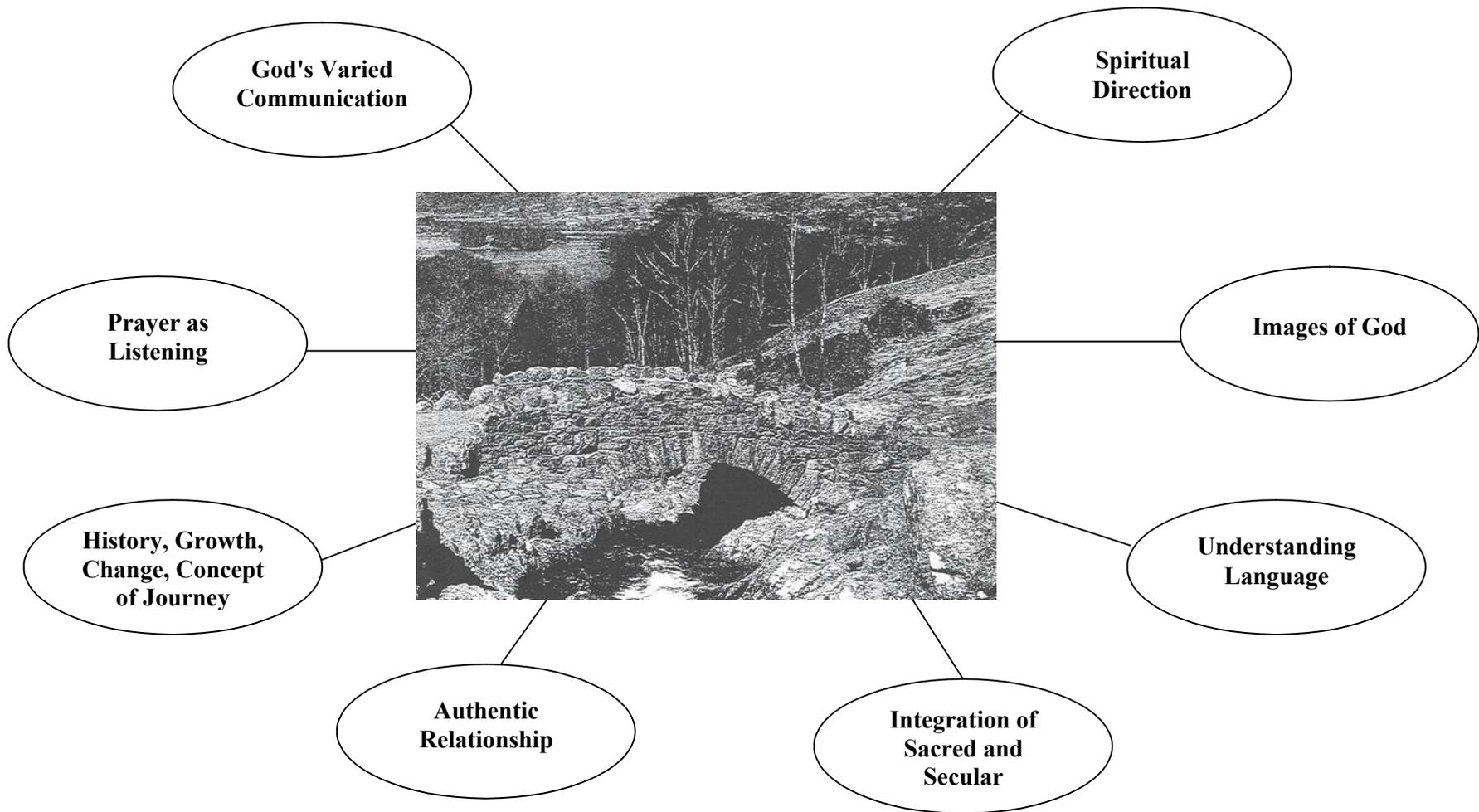
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Appendix 1

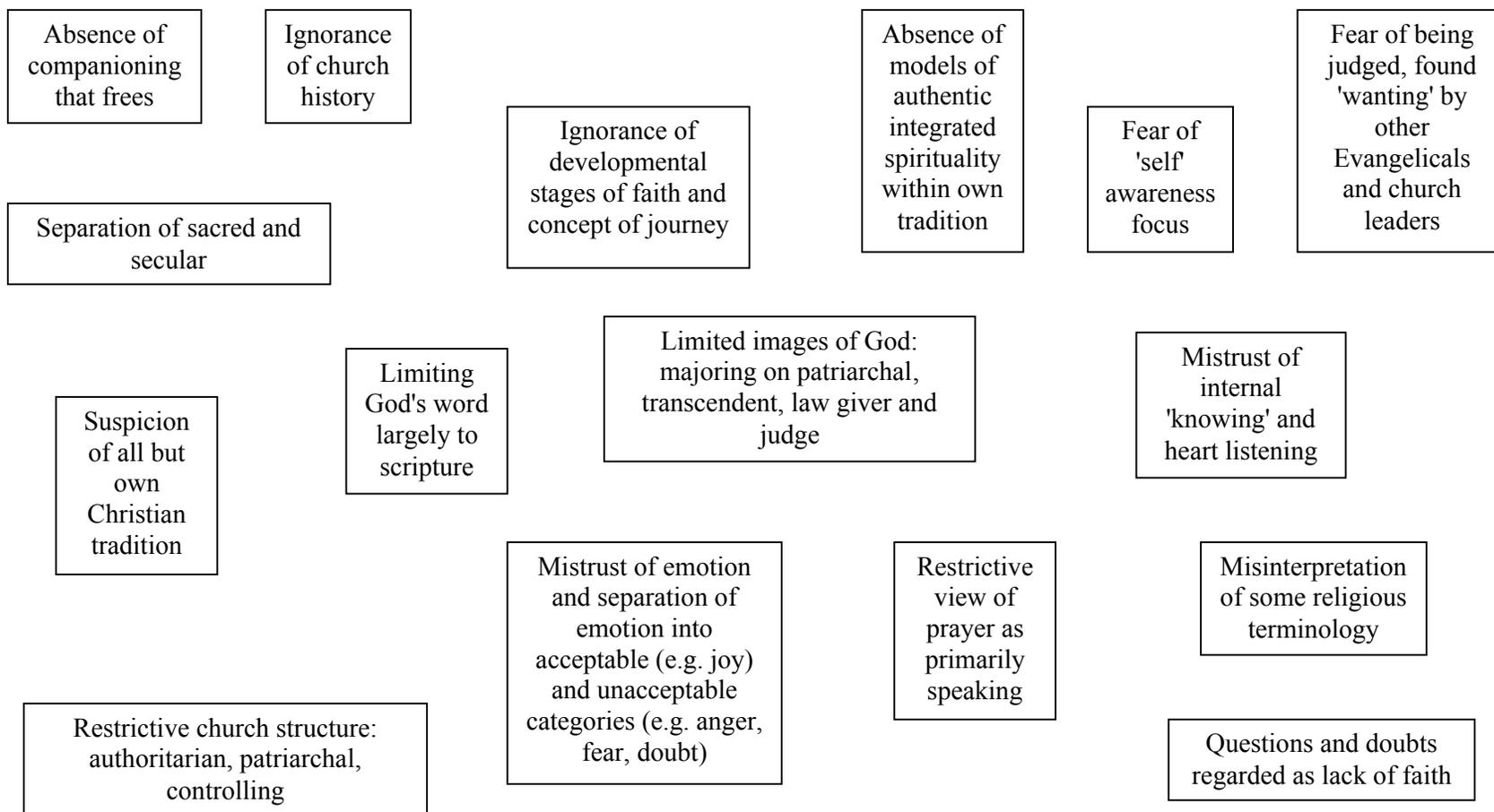
Assisting Evangelicals Exploring Contemplative Prayer (summary)

- Validate experience: past and present, not either/or but both. It's one continuous journey.
- Explore biblical images of God: gender, simile, metaphor. e.g. wine, water, bread, father, mother, way, life, vine, eagle
- Encourage faith as relationship with full range of emotions. use the Psalms
- Teach stages of faith Development. Draw parallels with Bible stories, Jews, Jesus, Jonah, Job etc.
- Introduce concept of journey and seasons, dark and wilderness times. e.g. follow Moses journey and seasons. Resource [Psalms for the Road](#)
- by Joy Cowley
- Explore stories: the bible story -our photo album, Jesus story, our story.
- Explore variety of ways God speaks: e.g. visions, angels, voices, metaphor, nature, dreams. Relate to scriptural examples.
- Broaden concept of prayer beyond talking to God and asking. Encourage authentic expression and careful listening. Validate through biblical examples and historical Christian experience.
 - Permission to feel and be authentic e.g. Psalms and Jesus range of emotions
 - Use of imagination, meditation and contemplation See Jesus use of metaphor, pictures. Refer to [Listening to God](#) by Joyce Huggett and [Prayer](#) by Richard Foster.
 - Explore personality and prayer
 - Value of solitude, silence and waiting as keys to listening to God. Refer to books by Henry Nouwen and Sue Monk Kidd.
- Introduce other streams of Christian tradition. e.g [Streams of Living Water](#) by Richard Foster.
- Introduce classics of Christian literature.
- Encourage journaling for growth in self awareness and spirituality, to confirm the journey and facilitate listening.
- Companion them: giving freedom to question and doubt, and encouragement to trust their own discernment.
- Unwrap and demystify words: e.g. spirituality, contemplation, meditation, holy imagination, dark night, spiritual director.
- Redefine words whose root meanings have been lost or distorted: e.g. conversion, repentance, perfection, sin, salvation, integrity, information, liturgy.
- Re-integrate sacred and secular, whole of life and incarnational living. e.g. [Psalms Down Under](#), [Aotearoa Psalms](#), and [Psalms for the Road](#) by Joy Cowley.

Key Transitional Bridges



Stumbling Blocks Identified Through Interviews



Appendix 2

Resources

The following resources have proved particularly helpful to Evangelicals exploring spiritual direction and contemplative prayer.

Journey and Faith Stages

- Bunyan, John. Pilgrims Progress. Ambassador Productions: Northern Ireland, 1992.
- Cowley, Joy. Psalms For The Road Catholic Supplies (N.Z.) Limited. 2002
- French, R M. (translator) The Way of a Pilgrim. Triangle: London, 1986.
- Fowler, James. Stages of Faith. San Francisco:Harper & Row, 1981.
- Hawker, Paul. Soul Survivor. A Lion Book, 2002.
- Hurnard, Hannah. Hinds Feet in High places. Tyndale House: London, 1986
- Jamieson, Alan & McIntosh, Jenny. Faith Development. Resources for those on the Journey (material compiled from many sources available from Spirited Exchanges Ph 04 472 1920 e-mail: Spiritex@paradise.net.nz)
- Jamieson, Alan. The Churchless Faith. Philip Garside Publishing: Wellington 2000.
- Kidd, Sue Monk. When the Heart Waits. Harper and Row: San Francisco,1990.
paperback edition: Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1992.
- Peterson, Eugene H. Working the Angles. William Eerdmans Publishing: 1987.
(Faith journeys beyond evangelical Pentecostal and Charismatic churches)
- Pritchard, Sheila. Wells not Fences. Article from Reality Magazine
Available BCNZ by phoning 0800 999 777.
(very good for exploring the on-going nature of conversion and challenging bounded set thinking where people are either 'in' or 'out'.)

Prayer

- Borst, James. Coming to God Eagle, Guildford, Surrey. 1992
- Chester P.& Norrisey, Marie C. Prayer and temperament. The Open Door Inc: 1984.
(Drawing on the Myers Briggs Type Indicator, showing the relationship between human temperament and prayer.)
- Cowley, Joy. Psalms For The Road Catholic Supplies (N.Z.) Limited, 2002
- Cowley, Joy. Aotearoa Psalms Catholic Supplies (N.Z.) Limited, 1989.

- Cowley, Joy. Psalms Down Under. Catholic Supplies (N.Z.) Limited, 1996.
- Nouwen, Henri. With Open Hands. Ave Maria Press: Notre Dame Indiana, 1972.
- Foster, Richard. Prayer. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1992.
(Excellent coverage of many ways of praying)
- Foster, Richard. Celebration of Discipline. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1980.
(good sections on meditation, prayer, solitude, guidance)
- Fowke Ruth. Personality and Prayer. Eagle: London, 1997.
(Framework and freedom to explore new realities in prayer best suited to personal need.)
- Huggett, Joyce. Listening to God. Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1986.
(Very useful classic for exploring the range of ways to meet and hear God)
- Huggett, Joyce. Learning the Language of Prayer. The Bible reading Fellowship: 1994.
(Exploring every aspect of prayer while reflecting on the nature of the God to whom we pray.)
- Kidd, Sue Monk. When the heart Waits. Harper and Row: San Francisco, 1990.
paperback edition: Harper Collins: San Francisco, 1992.
(emphasis on listening and active waiting through transition times)
- Maloney, George A. Called to Intimacy. Alba House: New York, 1983.
- Mitton, Michael. The Sounds of God. Eagle: London, 1993.
(Hints drawn from the contemplative, evangelical and charismatic traditions.)
- Ward, Heather. Streams in Dry Land. Eagle: London, 1993.
(Praying when God seems far away. Learning to wait.)

The Nature of God

- Huggett, Joyce. Learning the Language of Prayer Bible Reading Fellowship, 1994.
(Exploring every aspect of prayer while reflecting on the nature of the God to whom we pray.)
- Yancy, Philip. What's So Amazing about Grace. Zondervan Publishing House: Michigan, 1997.
- Yancy, Philip. The Jesus I Never Knew. Zondervan Publishing House: Michigan, 1995.
- Yancy, Philip. The Bible Jesus Read. Zondervan Publishing House: Michigan, 1999.
- Yancy, Philip. Soul Survivor. Paperback edition, Hodder and Stoughton: London, 2002.

Appendix 3

Exploring Bridges For Evangelicals - Journeying Into Contemplative Spirituality and Spiritual Direction

Life history interview questions used in my research.

With Directees who come from an evangelical heritage

1. What helped you embrace spiritual direction and contemplative spirituality.
2. What ideas, theology, experiences, judgements (if any) troubled you while exploring this new spiritual stream and why?
3. Were these resolved for you and if so how?
4. What were the most helpful shifts to experiencing a new way of being with God and what brought those about?

(Some prompts may be necessary e.g. 'changes in how you relate to God' or 'how you understand and experience prayer' but I would prefer to see both directees and directors share what comes to mind as most significant with few prompts.

With Directors

1. From your experience of spiritual direction, what have been the major sticking points for evangelicals exploring contemplative prayer? Why do you think these have posed a problem?
2. What did you find was most helpful for them? Reflect on:
 - appropriate style, techniques, focus of direction that proved beneficial
 - experiences that validated the journey for these directees
 - any reading, teaching that proved particularly useful in resolving certain issues for them.