

## Introduction

During a course on Spiritual Direction several years ago, an old friend reminded me of something that I had said to her long before I followed God's call to be a pastor. She recalled this statement coming from my mouth: "I want to make God real to people." When I heard those words spoken back to me, the one who had first uttered them, I found myself without words for a moment. Is it possible that fifteen years later my goal has not changed in the least? To make God real, is all that I could ever ask in my ministry with Zion. My prayer to the Lord is that, in ten or fifteen years, when I am called to another transition, Zion's members might say that I helped them to see a real, wonderful, loving God.

In this present moment, the church board is the focus of this prayer and the subsequent assignment for two reasons. First, I spend a significant amount of time working alongside the church board. The time together offers a tremendous opportunity for exposure to my spiritual leadership and encouragement. Another reason to focus efforts upon the board is based upon the argument that those in leadership profoundly impact organizations. This is the leadership body called upon and affirmed by the congregation to offer spiritual leadership. As the board goes, so too the congregation.

The plan is to inspire the board members to spend time praying a form of prayer loosely resembling the prayer of *Examen*. The prayer will be referred to as the prayer of God Sighting. Each board member will be given a journal with questions for weekly reflect. If the prayer produces its intended outcome, each person will grow in daily awareness of God.

In order to grasp the setting of the assignment, I will briefly review the context of the church and the board. The practice of developing awareness will be considered from a secular leadership viewpoint. What is the prevalent cultural obstacle to the development of awareness? Is it possible that North American culture is far too busy to find time for critical reflection?

Once a solid case for the cultural need for awareness has been established, wisdom dictates a theological study as the next step. A lifetime of working with Mennonites informs me that any new initiative will fail if not driven by good biblical theology and practical instruction. Finally the rationale behind the project will be considered, and the results explored. My own reflections upon what was learned and what might happen next will conclude the experiment and study of awareness.

#### *Brief Context of Zion Mennonite and the Board*

Zion Mennonite Church is located in the Souderton Borough, which is a small town of six-thousand, seven-hundred people. Located approximately twenty miles outside of the City of Philadelphia, one might assume Souderton to be a place of ethnic diversity ranging widely with respect to socio-economic demographics. However, the town is predominately white with an average family income of far exceeding the national average. One factor that cannot be overlooked when considering demographics is the heavy Mennonite population. The local community is dotted with Mennonite churches, including three of the largest churches within the denomination (not Zion). A plethora of Mennonite owned businesses and surnames dominate the phone book. Despite the close proximity of the Philadelphia suburbs,

the Mennonite influence has established a rural blue-collar small town feel in Souderton, with a no-nonsense work force. As the population grows, however, the Mennonite influence appears to be slowly losing its grip on the community. One example of the changing population is witnessed by the rising numbers of Indian, Vietnamese, and Latino peoples who are moving into the area seeking jobs in the city and dwellings on the outskirts. Factors such as the slow but steady change in local culture and the aging population of membership are creating a time of transition for Mennonite churches. Local Mennonite churches are seeking new ways to reach out to the community, and to look outside of the traditional Mennonite families for new members. We struggle to integrate new styles of worship, and wrestle with retention of our own young families.

Zion is a congregation of business-minded folk that closely resembles the community within which it resides. Zion's people are educated, hard-working, and passionately opinionated. Reflecting the average Mennonite demographics for the area, members are primarily white professional business people and community leaders.

As the local Mennonite church is in a time of transition so too is Zion's leadership. Our senior citizens have been a particularly strong group of leaders. In 1968 they moved the congregation into a new building on a large campus with dreams of a bright future. They spearheaded the first public library in Souderton, as well as the first nursery school program. One of our most respected members, the first Mennonite lawyer in the community, wrote the constitutions for a conglomerate of area businesses, as well as for the local Mennonite High School, a large non-

profit center for behavioral health services, and several retirement communities. Another Zion member was the first orthopedic physician in the county and his twin brother is a long time state representative. These gentlemen, along with many other frontrunners, led the church and our community for dozens of years. As aging tends to dictate, they are transitioning out of those leadership roles and find themselves ready to pass the baton. Their circumstances situate Zion in a transitional phase. Our congregation is seeking new leaders to emerge and guide the church into the next stage of the future. The current board is preparing to take that lead.

The board task is fairly tricky. They are faced with leading the congregation into the future with the same sense of urgency and hope as their predecessors, while still including those seniors and others in the process. In order to lead with confidence the board has been working to develop a sense of discernment. The board wants to discover God's will for Zion in this generation with the same certainty that the previous leaders felt when they broke ground for the new building. "Where is God in this?" is a question that is being asked on a regular basis. Where is God moving in Souderton, in the lives of Zion members, in worship, in mission, and in the lives of the board members? This project of praying through out God Sightings is designed to give the board one new tool with which to engage that question.

Before going further, it may be helpful to offer more detail about this particular board. There are nine members who have been selected through a discernment process to be the representative body of the church. The members speak for

various age groups, Sunday school classes, and mission interests, as well as having a variety of skill sets from administrative skills to financial savvy. Currently there is one senior citizen and retiree, one school administrator, one business owner, and six others who work full time in white-collar positions. There are two young adults under the age of thirty, six members fall within the ages of forty to fifty five, and again one senior citizen. There are four men and five women. They are professional and busy. The board members openness to spiritual practices range from one member who currently meets with a spiritual director on a monthly basis to another who struggles with the idea of slowing down to spend long enough to spend five minutes in pursuit of God. Thankfully, the board loves Christ and Zion Mennonite church. Each member truly desires to find God moving and participate with that movement at Zion.

### **Assessment of Need for Awareness**

#### *Leadership and Awareness*

On our church board, the lessons and rules of the secular world are inseparable from our church work. This is inevitable, due to the makeup of the board. They are not only leaders at church but in the secular work place as well. Does awareness cross the boundaries of both? How do we convince the board members to participate? They will be convinced as they realize that Jesus worked at being aware of God, and business leaders value awareness.

### *The Awareness and Discernment of Christ*

If a leader is judged by those who follow his or her lead, then who can argue that Jesus has had a massive impact as a leader? Who can claim a more followers or a greater impact on history? It is my opinion that Jesus is the penultimate leader of history. If we are to consider leadership, our reflection must start with him. The goal of the work being done with the church board of Zion is to encourage habits of reflection that lead to Christlike behaviors. It is my belief that the Christlike growth process will develop better leaders as a by-product. Was Christ concerned with awareness and discernment? If the answer is yes, how did he go about practicing reflection and developing that awareness?

One of the prayer practices of Jesus was to find a quiet place to rest and reflect. Jesus often pulled himself out of the fray to discern what was transpiring around him, to become more aware of God and what God might be calling him to do. In preparation for the coming crucifixion, Jesus spent time in the Garden of Gethsemane reflecting on his purpose and the task ahead. In John chapter five, verse nineteen, Jesus states that he does nothing that he does not see the Father doing! What wouldn't I give to be that aware of God moving? Awareness of God, self, and surroundings appears to have been an integral practice for Jesus during his time of ministry. The example of Christ's discernment and prayer life develop a persuasive argument. As followers of Jesus, we should do as Jesus did. That alone is reason enough to work at practicing prayers of awareness. In order to be completely thorough in the discussion on awareness it seems prudent to consider that secular world's perception of awareness. What do authors writing to business

leaders have to offer in this conversation?

### *Leadership Gurus on Awareness*

Chris Lowney, a leadership author and a former Jesuit says, “There is no doubt that the value of self-knowledge has been rediscovered as almost never before. Self-awareness, always cherished by philosophers, poets, psychologists, writers, and other “reflective types,” is increasingly promoted as an indispensable success tool even in the hard-knuckled arena of the corporate boardroom.”<sup>1</sup>

Ronald Heifitz and Marty Litsky are two leadership gurus who also tout the importance of being aware. “We all get caught up in the action, particularly when it becomes intense or personal and we need most to pause. Self-reflection does not come naturally. It’s much easier to adopt an established belief than create one’s own. Most people instinctively follow a dominant trend in an organization or community, without critical evaluation of its merits. The herd instinct is strong.”<sup>2</sup> Jesus certainly never followed the trends of others. He was deeply self-reflective and trended against “the herd.” Heifitz and Litsky encourage taking time to step away from the fray in order to “gain perspective.”<sup>3</sup>

Why study these cultural trends if we trust Christ with our leadership training? This is in essence part of the discernment. Whether the secular world is opposed to Christ or supportive of his teachings, it is essential that we be aware of the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> Chris Lowney, *Heroic Leadership : Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company That Changed the World*(Chicago: Loyola Press, 2003). Pg, 113.

<sup>2</sup> Ronald A. Heifitz and Marty Litsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading*(Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2002). Pg, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Pg, 53.

trends. Without paying attention to those trends we can neither embrace nor stand up to its curriculum. For the purposes of this argument, it is valuable to contemplate what drives our leadership practices on various levels. Realizing that the broader leadership culture also approves of and promotes awareness in order to develop clear interpretations of their business challenges directly empowers the argument for awareness. It appears that the development of awareness is a positive practice across the board. Why is it so hard? Are there cultural trends that hinder our awareness? What are the obstacles that make being aware of self and God so challenging?

### *Busyness!*

Comprehending that awareness of God and self are vital to leadership and the pursuit of Christ, it may be helpful to consider what hinders our ability to be aware. As people that live in the Northeastern United States, there may be no more potent impediment to awareness than busyness.

In the year 2007 the violin virtuoso Josh Bell took part in an experiment led by *The Washington Post*. He was invited to play his multimillion-dollar violin in the hallway of a busy subway during the morning rush hour. He was dressed casually. His appearance was that of any run-of-the-mill street performer. The experiment was to see how many people would notice this amazing performer. Would anyone support his work with a small donation in the violin case? Can you guess the response?

Bell played approximately forty-three minutes. He played a list of extremely

complex and difficult pieces of music. Out of one thousand, ninety-seven passersby, a grand total of seven stopped for a few moments to listen. Bell ordinarily plays for packed out halls of enthusiasts who have paid over one hundred dollars per seat. Twenty-seven people left money in his violin case. How could this brilliant entertainer go unnoticed?<sup>4</sup>

People were too busy to notice the magnificence that they were exposed to. They were too busy to hear the sound of an accomplished concert violinist deftly playing a one-of-a-kind instrument. How could anyone possibly believe that we might hear the still small voice of God in the midst of the chaos of our lives? Our lives are in crisis. The pursuit of careers, hobbies, sports, exercise, and recreation activities are stuffing our lives to critical point. Jesus could walk right into our homes, and ask for a glass of wine and we would surely overlook his presence. Are Sunday church services a better place to find parishioners ready to see Jesus?

Christ-loving people wake up to their alarm clocks and travel to church to catch up with friends, and sing some songs – if they like them. They hope to hear a sermon that empowers them to deal with the stress and encourage the pursuit of a “good” life. At what time in a service does the congregation take a moment of silence to reflect? When does the average church going Christian find time to contemplate where God is moving in their life? Mystifyingly, droves of people claim that God seems distant. People claim to feel disconnected. They may even ask the question, “Is God real?” Christ-loving people everywhere are sleepwalking through their lives. The prayer of God Sighting is designed to be a spiritual alarm

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<sup>4</sup> Gene Weingarten, "Pearls before Breakfast," *The Washington Post* April 8th, 2007. Pg, W10.

clock, waking each practitioner from slumber. It is an invitation to notice the mighty, awe-inspiring God activity in their lives, in the creation, in the news, and throughout the world.

Zion's church board members are a group of people who want to see Christ, but they are no different from the rest of the world. They struggle deeply with busyness. It is time for a re-awakening.

### **The Process – What Was I Thinking?**

*What does the Bible say about Awareness?*

Jesus took time to be aware of God, time to reflect on where God was leading him, and how he was to respond to the broken world around him. Secular leadership gurus promote the development of awareness. The major obstacle has been exposed. What does the Bible say about awareness? Is this an important concept theologically? Is there a biblical theory behind awareness that exposes what happens when we work at it? Does the Bible give any insight into helpful practices? What can be learned from careful study of the Bible on this subject?

The biblical study on awareness begins and ends with the word "Light." In Genesis chapter one God said, "Let there be light." The light separated the darkness. Light illuminates, makes visible, and opens the door for knowledge and awareness. Awareness and knowledge separates, exposes, and chases away the darkness.

The Gospel of John has more to say about light, knowledge and Jesus. In the first chapter, the author states that in Christ "was life, and the life was the light of the

people” (John 1:4, NRSV). True life is found in the awareness of God, found in the light, Jesus. The opposite of true life would be darkness, evil, and sin.

In chapter seventeen, verse three of the same book, eternal life is equated to having knowledge of God. Christ was sent to expose, to make available eternal life, to make God known, and to offer the knowledge of and awareness of God. The “life” or eternal life, the knowledge of God within Christ, illumines and shares that knowledge with the people. **Christ was and is the “light” that offers the knowledge of God and, therefore, eternal life.**

Jesus even refers to himself as the light that illuminates the darkness in the Gospel of John in chapter twelve, verse thirty-five. “Jesus said to them, “The light is with you for a little longer. Walk while you have the light, so the darkness may not overtake you. If you walk in the darkness, you do not know where you are going. While you have the light, believe in the light, so that you may become children of light””(NRSV).

Chapter twelve, verse thirty-six quotes Jesus, “I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me should not remain in the darkness”(NRSV). It is the light of Christ that guides our way down the narrow path toward eternal life and away from darkness. If having knowledge of God is indeed the gateway to eternal life, then I want all of the knowledge I can get! The disciples were witness to Jesus; the knowledge of God walked with them. Daily, they watched him working and moving in their midst. God placed Jesus on the earth because God wanted to be known. God is **still** moving and working through the Holy Spirit that is in each of our hearts. As the disciples walked with Jesus and

watched his every move, so to it is our job to watch the every move of the Holy Spirit in our lives, in our churches, and in our hearts. If one wants eternal life, the absence of darkness, the goal is **to become aware of God**. As one matures in the ability to see Christ moving, to hear his call, he or she grows in the ability to know Christ's very thoughts, passions, and joy and one becomes more like the one that he or she seeks to know. To be aware of Jesus, to see Jesus, to follow Jesus, to bask in the light of Christ is to have knowledge of God - eternal life.

**Simply stated: to know Christ, the light, is to know God. To know God is to share in eternal life.** Stated another way, to be aware of Christ is to know God, and in turn, eternal life. There is an annoyingly wonderful bumper sticker out there that says it well, "No Jesus No Peace. Know Jesus Know Peace." Could one ask for anything more than to know the peace of Jesus in his or her life? This reflection leads one to consider ways to empower this awareness. Is there a biblical example of a practice that will develop a higher level of awareness?

### *A Biblical Call to the Practice of Awareness*

Saint Paul offers a simple template in his letter to the Ephesians that is reminiscent of a prayer exercise developed by Saint Ignatius of Loyola called the *Prayer of Examen*. The original form is found in Ignatius' writings on the Spiritual Exercises.<sup>5</sup> For the reader's convenience, a copy of the *Examen* is available as attachment B. For the purposes of using language that is more accessible to the

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<sup>5</sup> Ignatius of Loyola, *Ignatius of Loyola: Spiritual Exercises and Selected Works*, ed. S.J George E. Ganss, The Classics of Western Spirituality (New York: Paulist Press, 1991). Pg, 134-135.

board, I have changed the name of the *Examen* to our prayer of God Sightings.

Ephesians 5:8-14 NRSV

For once you were in darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light – for the fruit of the light is found in all that is good and right and true. Try to find what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to mention what such people do secretly; but everything exposed by the light becomes visible, for everything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Sleeper, awake! Rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.”

Note that the first exhortation is to be aware of God moving, to be aware of the fruit of the Spirit. It is a call to be conscious of Jesus. The second exhortation is to “expose” the unfruitful. Let the light of Christ open our eyes to our brokenness, and our mistakes. This is a call to our conscience. The final call is to WAKE UP, to be aware of Christ, and he will surely shine in your life.

Consciousness and the evaluation of conscience are the two major components of the prayer of God Sighting. The third piece of the practice is to embrace the grace of Christ, the light of Christ that destroys our shame.

It is time to quit sleepwalking through our lives and open our eyes to Jesus. Menno Simons the Anabaptist with whom we share a name, said this, “Gentlemen, awake and beware, for the mouth of the Lord says, Verily, verily, I say unto you, except ye be born from above, ye shall not see the kingdom of God.”<sup>6</sup> What more encouragement do we need? This pericope of Paul’s letter opens the door for the project of God Sightings.

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<sup>6</sup> Simons Menno, *The Complete Writings of Menno Simons*, ed. JC Wenger, trans., Leonard Verduin (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1984). Pg, 111.

## *The Assignment*

Each board member was given a notebook or journal – attachment A – with an explanation of the assignment and two pages for group devotional and one page for every week over a two-month period. The board members were encouraged to work through the prayer every night before bed or in the mornings and to journal their prayers for the week.

The basic prayer that the Zion board was asked to work through is this:

1. **First we give thanks** – This is an opportunity to praise God and give thanks for the blessings of the day. During the board group prayer the team was invited to consider the blessings of our church. The rationale for this first step is to remember that we are blessed. It is human nature to fixate on our problems. It takes work to be conscious of our blessings. This step is also the first step of Ignatius prayer the *Examen*. He named this the *examination of consciousness*. In what ways are we conscious of God in our lives?
2. **God Sightings** – The second step of the prayer continues the *examination of consciousness*. It is an invitation to meditate on those times throughout the day that board members noticed God moving or responded to the call of Jesus in their lives. One might consider the places where the fruit of the spirit were noticed. Any moment that the fruit of the spirit are present, so too is the one that created them. Members are instructed to not only pay attention to those times where they saw the fruit, but also to those places throughout the day where one

heard the still small voice of God and actually followed through. This step is the meat of the *examination of consciousness*. I want that board to develop an eye and an ear for God's presence. It seems deceptively easy, but it demands practice. God can be so easy to miss.

3. **Our Blindness** – Step three is easier for those who tend to point out their flaws, yet it can be painful for those who are unwilling to admit their faults. In this step, the prayer is invited to reflect on those moments throughout the day where they may have missed God's presence or call and turned away from God. This is an inventory of sin. Much like an opportunity for confession, Ignatius called this the *examination of conscience*. I debated step three for a moment. It is more important to me that the board direct their focus on the positive places where we see God and celebrate those moments. I do want them to develop the skill of witnessing the light, yet confession was once a powerfully vital aspect of spirituality. Menno Simons often spoke of the need for confession and repentance. I chose to include the step. It is the ugly part of our lives, but without recognizing and naming our sins, how can we hope to move past them? Step four is crucial to our coming back to the light.

4. **Receive Grace** – Finally, the prayer must come back to God's grace. Without grace, there is no moving past our confessions toward hope. This is the cleansing of conscience. I encouraged the board members to pray their own prayer. They were to invite God to empower them by grace to leave those sins

behind and grant them the courage to stand up to the darkness in the future.

As the journal is examined, one will notice that a prayer is provided convenience. To assure that the journal made sense, a board member reviewed the journal before it was handed out. It was suggested that a prayer be offered for those who were unsure of how to pray. I wrestled with this decision and decided to provide one. A standard prayer lacks the personal nature that is helpful for me when I pray. Maybe I left the board off the hook. I am still unsure if I would do that again in the future.

### *Group God Sightings*

For the group process I led the board through each question and invited them to think from the viewpoint of the church. It became a bonding exercise as we shared our sense of blessing at Zion, considered where we each noticed Christ moving, and even pointed to a few instances where we could improve our ministries.

At the end of the journal was made available one page with further questions for reflection. These are the questions that will be analyzed for the evaluation of this assignment. I will say more about these questions in the next section, so as not to duplicate reporting.

## **Review and Evaluation of the Assignment**

### *What happened?*

I collected the data, the journals, from each member of the board who received

them. In reading the journal entries I was touched. What joy to be a pastor! The role of pastor blesses me as people that I love and care for allow me to see a bit of their deepest emotions. This is a gift that I must protect and cherish. No better way than to continue praying this prayer!

### *Review of Questions for Reflection*

#### *What themes or patterns did you notice as you prayed?*

In this question, my hope was to draw the assignee's attention to hot button issues or themes that developed. Noticing themes would open the door for deeper reflection upon key issues and experiences.

The actual responses lead me to believe that the question could have been worded more clearly. For the most part, the answers reflected on the overall process as opposed to reflecting on actual prayer themes. This does not mean that the question was unhelpful. It exposed obstacles to prayer and highlighted the aspects of the assignment that were deemed most helpful. The barriers to the assignment included discomfort over repetitive thoughts and a lack of time available for prayer. The repetitive thoughts were precisely what I was looking for in the original question. It would have been nice to know exactly what those repeating themes were.

Two or three of the responses struck the right cord. Two members found great joy in taking time to be thankful. To deepen the time of prayer, I will encourage them to spend time reflecting at a deeper level on that sense of thankfulness. Upon looking back over the entire assignment, another board member noticed her

awareness of God blooming in the places where she missed God previously. That is fantastic! That comment might just win the award for best testimonial. The purpose of the prayer is to open our eyes to God in places previously unrecognized.

*Did you notice any duplicating themes between your own prayer and that of the church?*

The rationale for this question was simple curiosity. How do our lives and those of the church body parallel one another? The answers that developed mirrored the first question, for the most part. One theme was joy found in being thankful for what we have. Another theme was the lack of sufficient time to pray in life and for our church. One board member noticed that change is an inevitable part of one's personal life as well as church life. Finding God within that change is imperative. If God is in the change, a level of hope and peace is experienced. If not, reparative action is needed.

As I wrestled with the helpfulness of this question, that final response offered a bit of hope. That board member realized that others share his/her personal challenges. Personally reflective prayer can lead to the impression that "I am the only one that struggles with this." That is an egregious lie. We are not alone in our confessions or our moments of deepest God-present joy.

*How has the assignment influenced me as a leader?*

This question is at the heart of the assignment. My goal is to develop the leadership skills of the board. Awareness empowers discernment and knowledge of

the leader Jesus. Did it work? The early indications say, Yes!

One response stated that the prayer encouraged them to be more intentional in reflecting on experiences and making decisions. That is discernment. Another comment highlighted the difficult challenges facing Zion at the present moment. In the midst of long-term planning and the financial crisis we cannot hope to see the future, but we must seek God's leading. Further comments noted the development of greater discernment skills and the realization of the importance of spending time in prayer as a leadership activity. I am biased, but burgeoning growth of the board is evident.

*How has this assignment changed me on a personal level?*

God-centered leader development characterizes the goal of prayer, but certainly I hoped for personal transformation as well. Are personal transformation and board level leadership transformation even possible apart from one another? I expected the comments to this question to mirror the reflections to the previous question. However, the responses surprised me in a positive way.

In response to this question, there appeared to be one overwhelming theme. The board became aware of the deep inner longing to spend time with God. When we are too busy to notice, the human body can go long periods of time without the awareness of hunger, so too does busyness numb the appetite for God. Board members noticed their faith deepening and trust in God developing as they carved out time to be with God. It caused them to intentionally produce time for prayer. Their longing made God a priority. Cool!

*Would you continue to practice this prayer? Why or why not?*

This question was designed to assess the long-term potential of the prayer. Was it really helpful? The overwhelming response of those who participated revealed that they would like to continue the prayer exercise. It should be noted that two members did not participate and one never received the journal. The unreceived journal can only be explained as an administrative error. Further reflection on the lack of participation by the others will be discussed in the summary section.

*Parting thoughts*

I wanted to offer the opportunity for the board to make any comments that were not directly invited by the above questions. Several responses mentioned that a weekly reminder would have been helpful, and another mentioned that further reminders or encouragement to continue would be appreciated. One comment stated that journaling was helpful, but time consuming. The fruit of this question is the reminder that people need to be free to enter spiritual practices in ways that work for them and that accountability, such as reminders, are often beneficial for follow through.

### **Summary of Lessons – What did I learn?**

There is evidence that a majority of the board members recognized a deep emotional yearning for time with God. When space is created to be alone with God,

positive things happen. As we become more aware of God, we begin to see a bigger picture of our surroundings and life as it passes by. Life may even slow down a bit when we take time to reflect on our experiences and search for God's presence. As we transition toward greater awareness of God, our trust and faith is empowered. I believe that the practice of this short assignment encouraged board members to advance their awareness of God. They may have even taken steps toward deeper Christ-likeness.

### *Going Deeper*

What are the next steps? The question was asked, "What is next, how do we get under the surface of our God sightings?" I believe one of the next steps for this assignment would be to look back at the themes or common spots where God was noticed. While praying, stop at one of those instances where God's presence was felt, then spend time reflecting on that moment. How does it feel to know God is near? What message does God have for you? Why is this moment important? It may even be helpful to simply sit and bask in the glow of the moment. What emotions are being felt? Hold onto the joy for as long as possible. Let this feeling empower the rest of the day or come back to the moment as the anxiety of life becomes difficult.

### *Practical Next Steps*

In various ways I am committed to continuing to expand the practice of the prayer of God Sighting in the church. How will I work at this? One option is to

review the journal, tweaking some of the questions for clarity's sake, and invite other groups to try the two-month assignment. Avenues for dispersement would include Sunday school classes, small group spirituality studies, and one-on-one invitations to try something new. The overall template of the questions can be used to facilitate group discernment. Our facilities review committee has used this prayer template to encourage reflection on their process. There may be other committees that would value the time taken to pray together.

The assignment appears to have been a tremendous success. This is true for those that participated. Several members handed in empty journals at the end of the two-month period. Why did they not participate? I did ask for feedback on the choice not to participate, but no comments made it into my mailbox. I assume several reasons. The easiest option is to assume that the members who did not participate were overwhelmed by time constraints and never found the opportunity to pray. That is certainly a good possibility. Yet there is the possibility that this prayer simply did not connect with all of the board members. It is a reminder that people are drawn to varieties of spiritual practices. One size does not fit all.

As the pastor of multiple personality types with oodles of preferences, ways of learning, and engaging, it is imperative that I offer an assortment of practices. It is my bias, that despite our differences, all of God's people yearn to be connected to Christ in some way. Mennonites are not known as a denomination that participates in spiritual exercises the way that Catholics might. We are an active people who sing, read scripture, serve, and fellowship. There are practices for everyone. I will keep trying.

In conclusion, I have found this assignment to be quite fruitful. It has been a blessing and God sighting for me. How about you? In what ways has this paper been a blessing to you? Have you seen Christ in the words on the pages?

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