

St. John's University – School of Theology

PTHM 465 Pastoral Integration Seminar

*Spiritual Engineering*

*Being Present as Companion for Men in Transition*

*An Invitation*

By

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## MEN ARE STUCK – IS THAT A PROBLEM?

“My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.”<sup>1</sup> This opening line from Thomas Merton’s prayer has been both a compass and an anchor for the men that I have come to companion in my work and ministry as a spiritual director. I understand that I do not *direct* anyone but rather walk with them as they embrace their sacred journey. My role is more of a guide, mentor and compassionate listener. The men’s stories are sacred; all stories are and I am honored to companion those who seek to share their journey with me. It is gift.

It might be a problem that men are stuck. But I propose it to be more of a situation; the reality into which men are *being*. I know. I am a man and I have been stuck. I also have been rooted. Men are stuck, rooted and in transition. They would do well to have a spiritual companion along the way.

This brief exploration will attempt to point to the benefits of having a spiritual companion most importantly while in a transition. That liminal space often between jobs or careers, where life is constantly transitional, always moving from one thing to another while it may seem to be a journey, is often wrought with stagnant areas of spiritual paralysis. That is being stuck. The spiritual companion helps men become rooted in that journey.

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Merton, *Thoughts in Solitude* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1968), 81. The complete prayer is found in the appendix.

## ASSUMPTIONS

To further ground this discussion around the spiritual companionship model of ministry, some assumptions are proposed here to help define a starting point.

**Assumption 1: Men are stuck in transition.** The Merton prayer animates the journey for the seeker, the person stuck in transition and helps to suggest a basis from which to frame the spiritual encounter. This prayer or other prayers put the conversation in a context that is not hopeless but honestly points to a struggle; the reality for which it is. Part of being human and male is to recognize where we are. Where we are *being* in this illustration is stuck and this is the starting point.

Men are in transition and “The Male Spiritual Journey” as described by Richard Rohr and Joseph Martos in their book: *The Wild Man’s Journey – Reflections On Male Spirituality*<sup>2</sup> is a provocative work that discusses male initiation in stages – life is hard, you are going to die, you are not that important, you are not in control and your life is not about you. These stages by Rohr and Martos propose that men are not ready until they are mature men – spiritually. Jesus taught mature men, not children or youth according to Rohr/Martos, as they outline the male spiritual journey that is ascent versus decent. This male transition, journey and initiation includes the integration of the masculine and feminine parts of the human toward becoming authentic masculine. I believe that the spiritual companion can point (the compass) toward this authentic masculine.

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<sup>2</sup> An abbreviated and modified version of this diagram from pages xxxiv-xxxv of their work is found in the appendix.

**Assumption 2: Men are searching.** The research for this work included the development and distribution of an instrument to understand the sensibilities of some men in transition. The *Reflectionaire*<sup>3</sup> is a brief questionnaire to gather some reflections of men as part of this project. This powerful tool is often used as I facilitate and guide executives, professionals and other employees in organizations and companies on retreat. It is most helpful prior to the beginning of a retreat where I attempt to capture the spiritual essence of what the person is searching for and what is most troubling or challenging. This is shared openly yet anonymously with those who participate in the retreat. It breaks through common barriers to an honest and trusting conversation among peers and colleagues. It serves as the catalyst for talking about the things we do not want to talk about. This tool hangs flesh on the bones of what it means to be human and is grist for the spiritual mill, the lens through which to pause and view the path.

Men are searching by the sacred stories they tell. When we listen as companion, necessarily formed and trained spiritual companions, we hold those words in prayer and sacred space. The stories tell of the search, the longing of the man who is stuck in the liminal space of transition.

The sacred stories are the Scriptures as brought forward in the oral tradition and then inscribed as the Word of God in human words. These stories describe a search from which we connect our own story to that ancient tradition.

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<sup>3</sup> James A. Nepl, *Reflectionaire – A Survey of Men in Transition*, (Saint Cloud, MN: 2006), is found in the appendix.

The search for understanding, the sojourn of the God seeking peoples and Anselm's *Fides Quaerens Intellectum* seem to suggest a search not unlike today's male quest. Jesus' own story of journey included many companions and as I understand it, unless he was alone in discernment, he was often companionship another in some ministerial way. And even in isolation, the Father was with the Son.

**Assumption 3: Men Benefit from a Spiritual Companion.** The spiritual director companion assists men in approaching fulfillment. Is it not one's desire to be fulfilled? A question I often ask a directee in a spiritual encounter is, "Other than money, why are you doing what you do?" This guiding question is a deeper reflection and pondering of man's desire to seek alignment with God. God and money are often in conflict and to reconcile that paradox is often the quandary men are mired in. Work and money are comfortable bedfellows and when taking money out of the equation, men lie alone. The spirit guide listens, prays and does not judge, but creates space for a vulnerable examination to take place that is often uncomfortable because it can lead to what God wants and might not include the pursuit of consumable materials. Men benefit from being able to acknowledge their inner desires of the heart.

Society today equates men with a purpose and that typically is work – a job. If man is not working, then men are not worth anything. Case in point – When you attend a function, a conference or large gathering where there is networking and connecting time, what is the most often asked question during introductions? I suggest that the question is, "What do you do?" We compare ourselves to others and attempt to rank ourselves

thinking of our worth by what we do. We need to consider that *who we are* is more significant to understanding and fulfilling our purpose. I propose the next time you are in a position of introduction ask, “What do you value?” or “Describe your deepest desire for me” or “Other than money, why do you do what you do?” These types of questions help us define and understand purpose. While we do not often ask ourselves these questions the companion mentor can and often will pose them as part of the visit.

Pointing to meaning like the compass is another benefit of working with a spiritual guide. Just as we don’t baptize ourselves, we are in relationship with another and in community because we are *being*. Others in our community, our partners, friends, colleagues can point to meaning, but those conversations are often friendly and superficial, safe and non-threatening. The mentor will often be more challenging. Just what the man needs and he needs meaning. The man needs to matter.

“The purpose of life is not to be happy. The purpose of life is to matter, to be productive, to have it make a difference that you lived at all.”  
- Arthur H. Prince

The ultimate benefit of the relationship with the spiritual companion is being in community with God, self and others. This then is part of our theology. The model for this is found in the historical Jesus, the authentic male in the ultimate authentic relationship. How am I authentic as a Christian male? When is my relationship in a vulnerable communion with others? How do I approach an understanding of self and my relationship to self with God? These queries and others like them are often “put in the center of the room and talk to” with the presence of the spiritual companion.

## SOME THEOLOGY – WHERE IS GOD?

The spiritual companion or director I believe assists in moving others from being stuck to being rooted. A transformation of man stuck in society to man rooted in God. Here, in Psalm 131 – *Song of Quiet Trust*, David sings of an ascent ancient full of hope for today’s modern man in transition:

O Lord, my heart is not lifted up, my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things too great and too marvelous  
for me. But I have calmed and quieted my soul, like a weaned child with its  
mother; my soul is like the weaned child that is with me. O Israel, hope in the  
Lord from this time on and forevermore.<sup>4</sup>

The work of Wilkie Au from which I have gathered the notion of being stuck,  
beautifully expands the companion relationship with God and self:

In trying to walk the distance with soul, it’s important to periodically ask ourselves: “Am I rooted or stuck?” To be rooted is to find ourselves at home with who we are, yet ever open to growth, to actualizing more of the potential contained in the rich mystery of our being. To be rooted is to feel a confident adequacy in being an autonomous self, yet feeling a deep desire to share ourselves with others in friendship and community. To be rooted is to be peaceful and productive, content and creative, intimate and generative. In short, to be rooted is to find that our lives bear rich fruit for ourselves and for others. A blossoming, fruit-bearing tree is rooted; a root-bound plant is stuck.<sup>5</sup>

Au compares being stuck with Scriptural images: the Samaritan woman at the well, living a dreary life of compromise and resignation, hopeless that life might be different for her and the fleeing Israelites wanting to turn back to bondage in Egypt where life was cramped and unfulfilling, but safe and familiar.

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<sup>4</sup> All scripture texts are taken from *The Harper Collins Study Bible, NRSV*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1993).

<sup>5</sup> Wilkie Au, *The Enduring Heart – Spirituality for the Long Haul*, (New York: Paulist, 2000), 10-11.

Then Au lists several ways we find ourselves stuck. Here are a representative few:

- when we let past failures, poor decisions, missed opportunities make us unforgiving of ourselves and cynical about life.
- when we let envy of others consume us rather than gratefully acknowledging our own blessings and developing our own gifts.
- when fear of failure prevents us from trying new things.
- when anger about past disappointments and losses shuts us off from reconciliation with a God who wants to be close to us.
- when we despairingly stay in a miserable life situation because we cannot trust enough to opt for change.
- when we let fear rule our lives.<sup>6</sup>

Getting in touch with our understanding of “stuck” is what is important according to Wilkie Au. Once we do that, we can move on. We begin to take root and with a decisive heart search the beginning of a spiritual way toward the God of relationship. If God intends for man to be in relationship then how is man in relationship with self and others? What is the guiding role of the spiritual companion?

So it is with the men I walk with. I guide them through their transition, that liminal space between jobs where they often feel worthless because our society does not condone people, men in particular, sitting and spending time pondering the vocational call of the Spirit. As a spiritual director I attempt in solidarity with another, to embrace the tension of not-knowing whether the next step on the path will be on solid ground. The threshold between the rooms of work/job and leisure/fulfillment is sometimes very narrow. This is not to say that work is not fulfilling or cannot be thought of or embraced even as leisure. But for the purposes of this investigation, another assumption is proposed: most men are not fulfilled in their jobs.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 11-12.

I suggest that most men do not know that they can be fulfilled in their paid positions and with the guiding conversation of another they can begin to approach a realization – that there is a blending between head and heart – a balance of faith and reason to move toward a contented fulfilled centering of a deeper knowing that one is where God desires.

A few stories of the life of men might illustrate how this dynamic works in reality, in sharing sacred stories we honor both the stories and the men who share them as valid, personal and authentic. The story is who they are and this is sacred and of God.

### A SACRED STORY

Cory<sup>7</sup> is a man who remains in transition, as we all are – moving to something else the Spirit intends - his significant moment of transition was when he was dismissed from his position with a company after many years of success. This took place about one year ago. I am honored to have been a companion to him, and it is gift that I continue to walk with Cory (and others individually and as part of smaller men’s groups). This is Cory’s story as I witnessed it:

One day at Noon, during our usual weekly Scripture Reflection Group held at a local non-profit organization, Cory arrived to take his place as usual. (We begin the group with a brief informal gathering time of about 15 minutes, then promptly at 12:15pm the door closes and the room becomes silent). I sensed that Cory was concerned, somewhat agitated, but not overtly anxious. I was aware that something was stirring, unsettled with him yet said nothing and remained present. During our reflection time his comments on

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<sup>7</sup> Not his real name. Permission has been obtained from “Cory” to use this spiritual encounter in this work.

the readings and sharing was particularly insightful he connected the readings to his work and shared openly how he had been dismissed from his position. His words were respectful of his (now) former employer, “I don’t blame them. We were bought by a larger company and they don’t need me anymore. They have their own people and are consolidating. I would do the same thing, it is a good business decision. It makes good economic sense.” I could sense Cory rationalizing the whole experience. Thinking it through, justifying it in his mind while wrestling with the deep feelings in his heart that wreaked of anxiety, fear, maybe abandonment, frustration, meaninglessness. What was he going to do? He had worked his way up the corporate ladder over twenty-some years. He was in management – the upper crust. Now he was seemingly “nothing,” and that holds men stuck, a very uncomfortable place to be. What next?

Cory’s struggle was palpable to me in that room that day and remained so for several weeks. Time after time, Cory would connect the reading to his life’s journey. He was searching and stated so. He often was the first to arrive at the reflection and listened deeply to others reflections and words, gratefully receiving prayer and affirmation from the men in the room who had earlier walked the same path. It was a sight to behold. It was not syrupy or corny, but a genuine tending to the inner soul of a man walking his uncertain trek.

Cory would often share some of his options regarding next steps: buy a business, find partners and start a new business, take a position with a similar company and continue doing what he was doing (this is typically attractive in that it is usually the safest). The guys would continue to check in with him about progress, “How are you Cory? Have you made any decisions about a direction? What’s new with the transition? Any new options

surfacing? How are you doing?”

After several weeks of these conversations between the men in the room I returned to my office one particular day and emailed Cory the Thomas Merton prayer beginning with “My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going...” I thought it might help Cory sift through some of his options and consider the providential nature of God in the midst of the chaos. End of story, so I thought.

The very next week Cory approached me at our weekly reflection stating, “Jim, you don’t know what you have done. That prayer you sent me – incredible. Thank you very much for emailing that Merton prayer. It has changed several things. Even Delores (Cory’s wife) talks about how much that means to her and how it has cleared up so much. We both feel so much more at peace, content. How do you do that?” I cannot answer that question from Cory and an answer is not necessary.

I stood as if watching a man in slow motion take a 300 hundred pound millstone from around his neck and propel it into the sea like the athletes at an Olympiad throwing the hammer. Cory never lost faith. He stayed in the tension of the liminal space, the time/space between knowing and not knowing. Operating in *Kairos*<sup>8</sup> he wrestled but didn’t wrestle alone. Cory wrestled with his reality, faced it. He talked to it, talked with others and with God. Cory faced himself in the presence of other and in the presence of the Spirit of God. Cory recognized the gift of another offering a moment of time to reflect, consider and perhaps respond to God’s invitation.

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<sup>8</sup> “God’s time, the appointed time in the purpose of God, the time when God acts (e.g. Mark 1.15, the kairos is fulfilled – “The right time has come”).

Cory has recognized a transformation and is responding to gift. The blessing, the real miracle is that I was able to witness this and be present for the moments of grace that drifted through the members of this minor Christian community of men and in the personal one-on-one encounters like this one with Cory.

The following selection further illustrates the sacred story of this man Cory. These powerful words depict how the Spirit of God is in every struggle, every conversation, every relationship. Note the implied presence of the spiritual companion listening for the moments. Although he describes the role as “trick” it is a deeper function than mere magic. The role of the spiritual director as companion is valid, needed and inevitable if men are to approach a sane authentic and fulfilled masculine self as God intended.

They are moments, rather, that catch us, grip us, hold us, almost beg us to take notice and thereby be moved beyond...

The trick, is to listen for them. We need to pause to notice it, reflect on it, let it touch us, let it move us.

This really isn't very complicated: For example, you go to lunch with a friend, but I instead of talking only about “the weather” instead of chattering about nothing you talk about what's really going on. You explore your life. You ask tough questions. You ask the ultimate questions.

What you have when you do this, is a moment of grace. What began as lunch, can end as eucharist or reconciliation or healing or whatever you call it.

Only when we are touched and moved by the everyday events and people of our lives, can we be touched and moved by God, whoever he or she may be.<sup>9</sup>

Cory's story continued in my office some weeks later when he delivered an envelope in gratitude. “Delores and I want to say thank you for what you have done,”

Cory said. After a few more words are exchanged Cory left just like he came in.

I remain in my chair, pray in gratitude and bask in the moment of what just unfolded in

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<sup>9</sup> Bill Huebsch, *A New Look at Grace – A Spirituality of Wholeness*, (Mystic, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1988) 90-91.

the room. How great is this journey? What gift to companion another and see the transformative work of the Spirit, the Trancendent One active and vivid.

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit (JN 2:8).

As a spiritual mentor, we do not know when, where or how an encounter will be of such powerful gift. The Holy Spirit mediates and guides the conversation. The companion and the seeker most often need to get out of the way and let the Spirit go where it chooses.

### THE COMPANION

Men want to talk but need to have space created for that to happen. A spiritual director companion creates that space and listens intently to the man reveal his desire.

*...as listening to God on another's behalf rather than listening to another on God's behalf.<sup>10</sup>*

Men have stories to tell that are full of pain, anger and despair *and* they have stories of joy, hope and love. The stories are real, valid, sacred and who men *are*. These stories become healing once shared. Men are liberated and affirmed when they begin to understand their gifts, purpose and worth. Talking about what their gifts might be as they recognize them, hearing themselves talk and receiving an affirmation from another are part of the companion journey so necessary to understand fulfillment.

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<sup>10</sup> Reader Response, *Presence*, Volume 12, March 2006, 6.

Ed Sellner's work writing about C.S. Lewis's role as mentor and tutor for Bede Griffiths who later became a Benedictine monk and author of his own story of conversation is a powerful story of companionship:

Conversion did not happen suddenly for either of them, but involved a long process of shared questions and common readings. Like the conversion stories of others before them, the turning point for both men came in solitude when they surrendered to a Higher Power, and knelt and prayed. Within two years of Lewis' conversion Griffiths experienced his own form of liberation, what he identified as "the turning point in my life." It came in his London room when a great inner struggle began in which he was being called "to surrender the very citadel of myself." As the struggle continued for hours Griffiths responded to an inner voice demanding that he make a retreat (a term he was not acquainted with at the time). Returning to his room he opened the New Testament, read the words of St. John, and "suddenly the meaning of what had happened dawned in my mind: through all these years I had thought that I had been seeking God. Now I suddenly saw that all the time it was not I who had been seeking God, but God who had been seeking me."<sup>11</sup>

Conversion does not happen alone. The relationship with God, self and others as told above happens in community and with a companion. I cannot think of a time, story or moment when a man was self-converted or transformed or accompanied himself on his journey. Sellner has found a classic where we see that in the companion journey one surrenders to self but only in responding to another voice, another guide...God.

As spiritual beings we are always in transition. We are either creating or destroying. How do we recognize the difference? When do we know if our transition is healthy and helpful or unhealthy and detrimental to the growth of the man and his spirit? The spiritual companion can point like a compass to this reality and together they walk the path as the story of Siddhartha describes:

At his side lived Govinda, his shadow; he traveled along the same path, made the same endeavors. They rarely conversed with each other apart from the necessities of their services and practices. "What do you think, Govinda?" Siddhartha asked at the

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<sup>11</sup> Edward C. Sellner, *Mentoring-The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship*, (Cambridge: Cowley, 2002), 39-40.

beginning of one of these expeditions. “Do you think we are any further? Have we reached our goal?”<sup>12</sup> Siddhartha placed his hand on Govinda’s shoulder. “You have heard my blessing, Govinda. I repeat it. May you travel this path to the end. May you find salvation!” In that moment, Govinda realized that his friend was leaving him and he began to weep. Siddhartha wandered through the grove deep in thought.<sup>13</sup>

Who really is our companion, our friend? When are they friend, when are they mentor? What is the difference between simply sitting at the local tavern while hoisting the iconic beer, proverbially solving all the worlds problems and entering into an intentional spiritual encounter to explore more deeply a walk through the muddy, swampy interior of where the heart lies? I believe these questions are fleshed out in the responses to the *Reflectionaire* and that this instrument has fostered the importance of the spiritual companion in the life of the man in transition.

One more piece from Ed Sellner further solidifies the role of companion. In his work, *Mentoring – The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship*, entitled “C.S. Lewis as Spiritual Mentor,” he describes Lewis as Tutor, Letter-Writer, Preacher and Soul Friend (the Celtic *anamchara*).

This is perhaps the most common characteristic of Lewis’s guidance: a willingness to share his sacred journey in all its joy and sorrow. Describing his life and others’ as a - “wandering to find home – no one can mark the exact moment at which friendship becomes love.”<sup>14</sup>

Sellner’s use of Lewis’ words are so helpful. More from him that speaks so much to the importance of the companion on the journey in transition:

As his life draws to a close Lewis enunciates a principle underlying all mentoring: “We are members of one another whether we choose to recognize the fact or not.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hermann Hesse, *Siddhartha*, (New York: New Directions, 1951),12-13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>14</sup> Edward C. Sellner, *Mentoring-The Ministry of Spiritual Kinship*, (Cambridge: Cowley, 2002),44-45.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED? HOW DO WE RESPOND?

The results of the *Reflectionaire* provide the thoughts and feelings, desires and stories of holiness that men have deeper within.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps their words when expressed in written form will give evidence to what meaning there is in discovering fulfillment through awareness of one's inner desires as companioned by a brother of the gender. We know that through sacred story, deeper conversation and walk with another in companionship men can learn to approach fulfillment and seek to understand their purpose. The spiritual companion is the guide that often points to meaning in another's life.

What have we learned? Men need other men to listen. Brothers in community is what gives life to vocational purpose and provides compass. Spiritual directors and companions offer men the gentle guidance men need to be able to say things that are otherwise taboo. Men connect with men. How do we learn to listen to and walk with brother men in transition, when we ourselves are transitioning? That is one of the many challenges that God and God's pilgrims place in our lap. How do we respond to this opportunity? Our response is in companionship. In relationship with God, self and others.

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<sup>16</sup> The methodology of gathering reflections included a broadcast email message to men and an article in the local diocesan newspaper – *The St. Cloud Visitor*. These anonymous words are not designed to be scientific but reflective of a representative demographic of men while on the journey of life.

## *APPENDIX*

### *The Reflectionaire*

**1. What is your age?**

56, 44, 61, 48, 28, 54, 54, 65, 51, 65, 46, 47, 44, 60, 48, 73,

**2. What occupation did you most recently have?**

College Administrator, General Manager, Middle Management in Large Corporation, Marketing Consultant, Cub Foods, IT Project Manager, Executive Director for Non-Profit, Strategic Planner, CEO & General Manager, Electronic Technician, Plant Manager, Sales & Management, Associate Pastor, Director of Career Development, Continuously employed for 25 years, Purchasing Agent in Hospital.

**3. Why are you no longer working? (If you are working, tell about when you were not employed.)**

I have not been unemployed.

Branch relocated – burnout and desire to find socially and spiritually rewarding work.

Encouraged to leave employment (right-sizing) after 28 years at the age of 50.

Unsure. It's been so long since I've been unemployed.

I thought I would have better things to do than replace produce. I thought I was wasting my time rather than meeting people or developing a relationship.

The company was bought and stripped of assets, then closed. I was not “working” for 18 months.

My job was eliminated as VP for Corp. Development for a church related business. The CEO that created the position was fired – they felt they no longer needed the position.

Retired and too active in volunteer and family activities to work.

The company's leadership, culture and needs changed and shifted away from “developing within the team.” In my case, given the new leadership and culture, the company made the correct choice replacing me with someone who had more experience in quickly meeting the current needs.

I am now retired.

I am currently employed. I was terminated from my previous position.

Fired.

I went through a time of unemployment back in 1990-1992. It was the most miserable time of my life. I was unable to use my gifts such as creativity. I struggled greatly with depression and anger toward just about everyone. It was very difficult on my wife. Life was a drudgery. It was the most painful time in my life as I was newly married, had a house payment and a child on the way. The uncertainty was horrible. For a while we had to live with my wife's parents – which was a nightmare. I still suffer from this experience of spiritual abuse and being unemployed for that period (I did have jobs but none were doing what I was trained to do).

Grant money ran out and no new grants written.

I can't remember a time when I wasn't working at least part-time (in high school and college).

In '91 (I was 58) the hospital decided to "down size" and offer "early retirement" for those who had been employed over 20 years there.

**4. What prevents you/paralyzes you from moving to the next step whatever that is?**

Overload of things to do, work on the easier tasks instead of the most important.  
Time.

I don't know for sure what "it" is yet. Regardless, mostly lack of funding, lack of confidence, lack of clarity – all summed up as FEAR.

No longer have financial need to do so.

Lack of self-confidence.

The fear of not knowing what is in the future of that step.

Self doubt causes me to just sit at times and vegetate.

What prevented at the time was that I had no vision of what to move to. I also had to spend lots of time with God about this, because the job that was eliminated was one that I felt he had called me to. It had resulted in my moving of my family to a different state and they did not want to do that. The job itself had not gone well. I felt the organization had marginalized me. So, I had to spend time with God trying to sort out what actually happened.

Limited time due to family obligations.

The fear that was driven by insecurity was my biggest challenge. I had spent the majority of my career in a single, stable company and never spent time worrying about my financial security. That security was taken away and I had no experience dealing with a "career change".

Retirement.

I am in control of moving to the next step but will hesitate as relocation will most likely be necessary.

Fear.

Fear of being unemployed, of going back to that time. With all the responsibilities I have (5 children, a wife, bills, etc) I don't know how I could do it again. I want so desperately to leave my current church but I feel trapped. Life right now is like a heavy fog that has set in – the air is heavy with humidity.

Chronic illness.

I am considering a career change in the next 5-7 years. This is scary as I will most likely be giving up a good income and a fair amount of independence.

We had just paid off the mortgage on our house, and the youngest of our three children was just completing her higher education. We had “put down our roots” in our community, but I felt just too young to retire. There we limited job opportunities for “senior citizens” but I didn't want to relocate.

##### **5. Describe your feelings while in the space and time between occupations:**

Have not experienced this.

Joy and apprehension. Satisfaction and confusion. Excitement and disappointment.

More lonely because I am less connected – thus more isolated and less motivated.  
N/A.

Knowing where I will be. The fear of the future. Wondering if the next occupation is the right fit for me.

Frustration – over qualified/under qualified for jobs that were open.

I felt angry and betrayed by God. I had given up so much and had gotten so little in return.

N/A.

The FUD factor:(fear, uncertainty, doubt). Fear of taking care of the needs of my family. Uncertainty of where the next opportunity would come from. Doubt that I had the skills to succeed outside of my longtime employer.

I feel at a loss in my life at the moment.

I was bitter at my previous employer as I knew my termination was no just.

Moreover, my employer was not fair to others and I was not able to speak out in their defense or strong enough to join their cause.

Anxious – crabby.

Misery, depression, anger, hatred, spite, did I mention misery

I was so angry. What fed the secondary emotion of anger was disappointment in myself and others, helplessness, severe hurt, incredible frustration, deep fear, absolute injustice – those were the major feelings.

Empty – lost – without worth.

I am not between jobs yet, but I can image it to be a time of much anxiety.

Out of boredom (and to supplement my pension) I took a job as a weekend night desk clerk at a local motel. I also worked a seasonal job (local potato farm) which was dirty, fatiguing and long hours, but I enjoyed working outside.

**6. With whom did you have conversations about your situation? Were those encounters helpful, insightful, peaceful?**

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Jim Neppel among others...various community (business and political) leaders and oh yes...God! All helpful.

Spiritual Director – yes, that is helpful.

N/A.

I did not have a conversation with anyone.

My wife, closest friends – they gave me hope.

I talked to friends and other "spiritually attuned" people. I talked to a monk up at St John's monastery that I had come to know. His comments were very helpful. He helped me see that if I had not taken the risk that I did (even though it did not work out very well), I would have been disappointed in myself and always wondered what could have been.

A friend and my spouse. Helpful and insightful – yes. Peaceful – no.

My wife and my bible reflection group. I became closer to my wife than I had been in years. My reflection group helped me focus on the bigger picture, the bigger reward...trusting the power that had really been taking care of me and my family through the years. Helpful, insightful, peaceful?? You bet, I don't know how I could have maintained without my wife and my friends.

With my spiritual director.

I discussed my situation with many of the employees that were terminated prior to me or left on their own. These conversations were comforting and reassuring my future was bright and my change was driven by good deeds rather than bad.

Pastor, friend, wife.

At the time we had just left a church we were serving and it was a bad departure so we were not on very good terms with members of the church. We had a couple other pastors who left before we did to talk to so that was helpful to a certain degree – it really seemed to feed our anger – making us feel justified in our negative emotions – we found a good church (Church of the Open Door) in Minneapolis that was a “healing” place for us as they majored in healing from spiritual abuse.

My son.

Good friend and my therapist who has become a close friend. I am able to open up to a few select people and share my concerns and feelings about most subjects or problems.

My wife always knew that I had enjoyed gardening, so when there was an opening at the local greenhouse, she urged me to quit my other employment and pursue the horticulture experience. Again, it was tiring work, but I thoroughly enjoyed the miracle of plant propagation, the interaction of gardeners and the feeling of accomplishment at the end of the day. I joked: “If I didn’t work here, I’d pay to get in.” (the greenhouses).

## 7. What causes you to feel fulfilled? When are you most content?

Completing a complex project with direct benefit to students.  
 This seems to be changing. One of the frustrations.  
 When working with others in their development.  
 A job well done...spending time and connecting with family. Content when I am able to focus on family without any work distractions (which isn't too often).  
 The people that are around me makes me feel fulfilled. If they have a positive outlook in life and are fun to be around and respectful it makes me fulfilled. I feel most content when I get positive responses from my supervisors at work that I am a hard worker and that I well do good in the company.  
 Current work (totally different field) is very rewarding, makes me feel alive.  
 When I am aligned with my best understanding of God's will for my life. When my mind and heart are put right and integrated.  
 A successful outcome for a volunteer activity. When a family member is happy.  
 Fulfilled - when I feel I have contributed to a result, particularly if it positively impacts other members of the community. Content – When I can focus and reflect on the many blessings I have received and not on whether I will be able to retain those gifts (particularly the material things).  
 Doing service work for the Lord.  
 Successful team efforts at work, mutually respectful relationships at home.  
 When I am feeling that I am contributing to work, society.  
 When I am able to help and care for people. When I am able to flow in creativity and free thought.  
 When I am doing the work God has requested of me. When I am in prayer.  
 I am most content when I am in right relationship with the ones closest to me: my children, my girlfriend, my God and myself.  
 At age 63, not quite ready for the proverbial “rocking chair,” I took a class for Master Gardener training. It was a dream come true. I got a glimpse at the magnificence of My Creator! The required volunteer services to the community have been very rewarding....each day, every season is anticipated and rewarding.

## 8. Describe your life journey in a word:

Random, Learning, Dedication, Searching, Overcome, Stumbling, Union, Service, Awakening, Empty, Peace, Adventurous, Seeking, Awe, Authenticity, Interlude.

**9. Describe your life journey in a sentence:**

A very easy start, with a life crisis in the middle caused by an unexpected divorce and learning that LIFE is going to still be a fun, complete journey, just different than I expected.

From happiness to pain, from blessings to hidden blessings, from wanting to needing, to (almost) peace and contentment.

My life journey is one of dedication to learning, earning and serving family, Church and God.

Searching for true fulfillment & contentment.

I have faced many obstacles (including almost death) in life.

I have never ended up where I thought I was going.

Anointed and consecrated, set apart, to be in union and communion with God.

Laboramus Sustinere – We work to assist.

I am moving from a self centered materialistic existence (with just enough charity work to keep me OK with my past) to a life focused more on God's word and service to Him and His people than on my own personal attainment.

At this time in my life, I do not feel fulfilled at all.

Work hard at home and work while leading by example and enjoying it along the way.

I travel on the path with other pilgrims.

That my life would be "drawing without an eraser."

It continues to be filled with surprises that humble me.

I "don't have to be good...(I) only have to let the soft animal of (my) body love what it loves." (Mary Oliver)

Thanks to my gift of Faith, I cherish the past but look forward to the future.

**10. Do you currently have a spiritual director/companion?**

Not really.

Jim Neppel, although not frequently. Also, a great bible study group.

Yes – to help hold me accountable.

No. Probably fear...finding out that I'm not who I think I am and that my values and work are misdirected.

Yes, God. I have faith in him because he saved my life when I had an unknown brain injury in 1993 which no doctor ever heard of.

Yes – it was suggested to me.

Yes. I am a spiritual director myself. I feel it to be a necessary part of my journey to have someone to watch the milestones with me.

Indirectly. I have a friend who is a deacon and we talk frequently. But he is not a "spiritual director" per se.

Yes, whether he realizes it or not. He helps me keep my mind and focus on track.

Yes I do.

No. I don't know why I don't have one.  
 Yes. She helps me talk about the things I don't want to talk about.  
 Yes.  
 Yes, I do!  
 Not a professional but 2 or 3 very close friends.  
 My spiritual companion is my beloved wife of 49 years.

### **11. As you consider your continuing journey, what is your deepest desire?**

To continue living a healthy, fulfilling life.  
 To bring joy to God, people around and myself.  
 To gain greater wisdom and peace.  
 To find true contentment and obtain an inner sense of security.  
 To be happy.  
 To figure out what God wants me to do.  
 Out of union and communion with God, to be a loving shepherd to others – to know my sheep – for them to know me.  
 Feeling that my life had more value than just occupying space and time.  
 To understand my purpose in life and fulfill it. Yes, I've read the book.  
 Getting my family back together.  
 To be content as a father, husband, son and brother that we all get along for the remainder of our lives.  
 To love and be loved.  
**FREEDOM!**  
 To learn how to be a better servant – to walk the middle path – to plant the seeds of peace.  
 To continue to listen with my heart, with compassion, to the calls and signs that are ever-present in the universe. I desire to be open to those calls and follow them.  
 I hope that my three kids, seven grandkids and two great grand-daughters lead wholesome faith-filled lives and follow the will of God.

### **12. What do you believe God wants of you as you walk the path of life?**

To be kind, reach out to those in need, make the physical, emotional, spiritual environment that I am in a better place.  
 To listen, respond when called, be content when not.  
 To grow in my relationship with one another and with God.  
 To follow his ways in showing kindness, respect and love for each and every person I encounter. He wants me to be happy. He wants me to focus my energies on what really matters.  
 To be happy and to have faith in him.  
 To share his love and give witness – not always sure how.  
 I think he want me to have more beer and pizza with Jim Nepl.

Needs to keep finding me. So I do what I can to meet the challenges presented to me.

To take care of my family, to focus more and more on His word, and use my gifts and blessings to serve Him and His people.

I believe God wants me to trust and love him implicitly.

He wants me to be a good father and husband and work in peace with others, showing them the way to enjoy their labor.

To love and be loved.

To know that God loves me and isn't like the fundamentalist, conservative evangelicals say God is! Obviously there is more, but right now I am so taken by this as it surrounds me – I am daily battling this image of God that is harsh, versus the image of God that is found in the gospels.

To draw closer to Him.

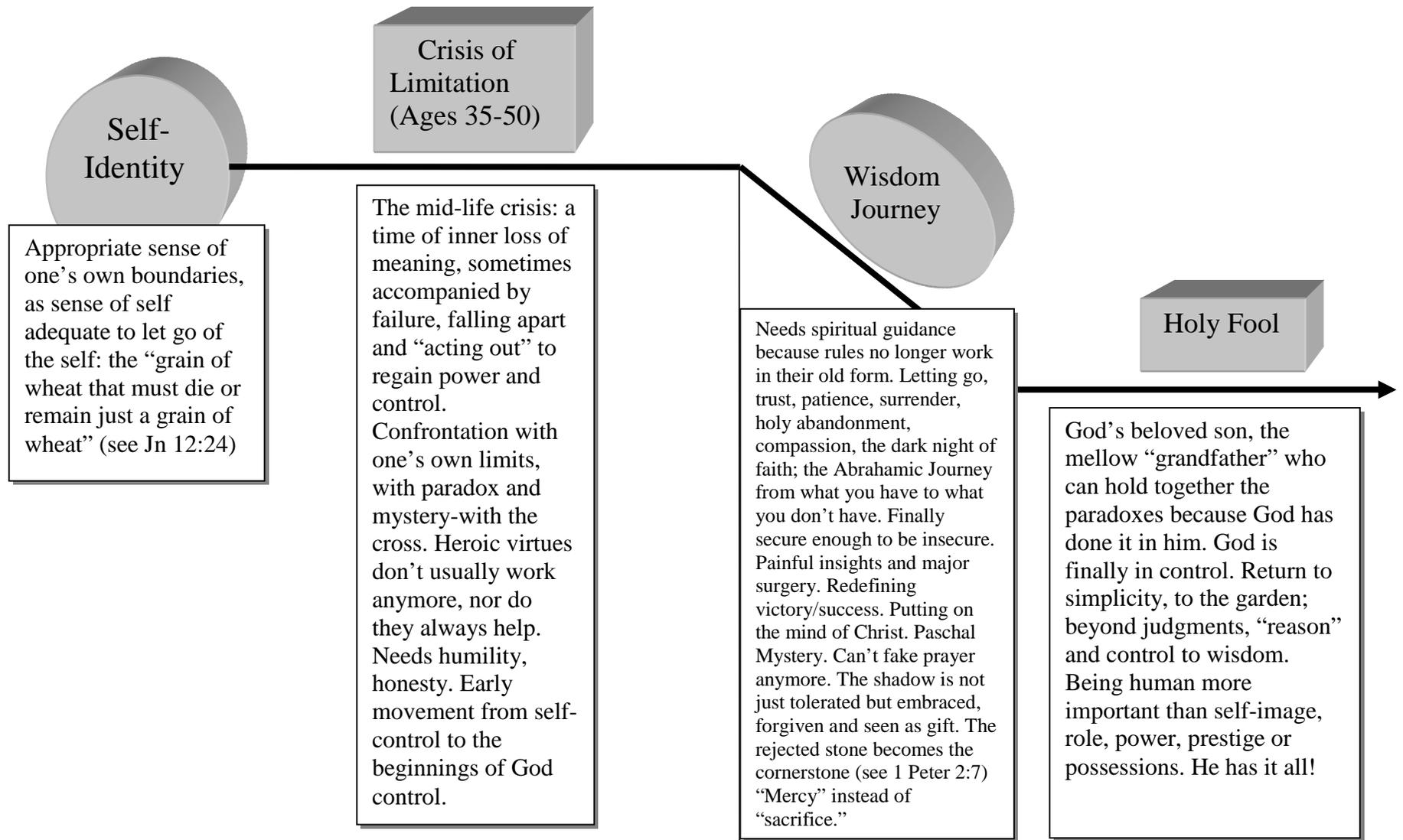
God wants what I want, nothing more and nothing less. I want to be the man I am meant to be, to discover what it is I'm called to in life and live it authentically.

I think God wants me to be a good example for all I encounter as I walk the path of life.

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following your will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing. I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire. And I know that if I do this, you will lead me by the right road though I may know nothing about it. Therefore, I will trust you always though I may seem to be lost and in the shadow of death. I will not fear, for you are ever with me, and you will never leave me to face perils alone.

-Thomas Merton  
*Thoughts In Solitude*

# The Male Spiritual Journey



Source: Rohr, Richard and Joseph Martos, *The Wild Man's Journey – Reflections on Male Spirituality*. Cincinnati: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1996, xxxiv-xxxv.

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