

Encountering God and His Story: Re-narrating and Re-imaging Participation in God and His Kingdom

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This article is based on a master's level capstone project to design, deliver, and evaluate a week of teaching to engage students of a Youth With A Mission (YWAM) Discipleship Training School (DTS) with biblical imagery of God and his story, to promote dynamic participation in the life of God, his people and kingdom. Through interviews and having students draw pictures of how they view God when they pray, worship etc., the author identified gaps between what students articulate that they believe and how they live their Christian lives. Overwhelmingly students drew pictures that failed to image a Trinitarian God, often depicted themselves distant from God, and failed to include Holy Spirit in describing Christian growth. The teaching was conducted in a multi-cultural group and consisted of students primarily between the ages of 18 and 25. Analysis of results suggests spiritual growth is hindered both by the lack of a Christian metanarrative to make sense of living in a "now but not yet" kingdom, and by the absence of biblical imagery of a Trinitarian God to explain our entrance into Jesus' sonship by Holy Spirit and participation in the life and fellowship of God, incarnating his story and bringing his kingdom to earth. A congruent metanarrative and biblical imagery was found to aid in understanding and experience of participation in the life and fellowship of God, his Church, kingdom and creation.

Background

The purpose of this project was to design a DTS teaching week that provides knowledge, experience and skill to engage with a biblical picture of God and his story, with new ways of encountering the whole story to promote dynamic participation in the life of God, his people and his kingdom. The title of this teaching week is *Encountering God and His Story: Re-narrating and Re-imaging our Participation in God and His Kingdom*.

Modern Christians approach faith and knowledge in ways more influenced by culture than by the reality of God. The influence of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment has devastated the gospel message, divorced practice from belief, and depersonalised faith. As Willard and Ortberg (2013) state we have exchanged knowing, experiencing and participating in God for doctrine of God (4:21). We have reduced evangelism to a contractual entrance to heaven (McKnight, 2011). We have substituted the good news of the kingdom of God as a foundation and reality to build life on, for lip service to a set of beliefs (Willard & Ortberg, 2013). This not only ignores character development, but disrupts deep transformation and conveys imagery of an arbitrary distant God. This compromised gospel results in a Christianity where faith is a never-ending struggle "governed by feelings, traditions, force, 'willpower,' and blind commitment" (Willard, 2009, p. 4). Believers have little understanding of how to live empowered by Holy Spirit. Research by groups such as Barna (2003, 2017) show rates of divorce, depression, pornography addiction, adultery and abuse among church going believers mirroring or closely mirroring national averages in the USA. The rate of abuse, addictions, depression, low self-esteem, and rampant individualism among DTS students

reflects the same. The inadequacy of the gospel to make sense of life leaves students looking elsewhere to find peace and alleviate pain.

For the last 16 years my husband and I have worked with YWAM DTS in The Netherlands and South Africa. For the last five years we have led the DTS department in YWAM Muizenberg, South Africa. In that capacity we oversee approximately 130 staff and students in four schools per year, and teach and train, discipling and dealing with issues that arise. In this capacity, my frustrations with the gap between belief and behaviour amongst students motivated an examination of the foundations of our faith that drive our knowing and being. I wrestled with many questions. How can students look spiritual in worship and ministry but destroy their outreach team through their behaviour and inability to think of others? How did Christianity come to revolve around the individual and their needs and emotions? Why was the DTS resulting in less and less transformation in students and staff? In addition, around 2009 I experienced a shift in our schools. The old modes of instruction didn't work anymore. Teaching that used to be enjoyed and was transformational for students, now offended and made them angry. Scripture no longer convinced students of truth and students increasingly battled in relationships with one another. What are the underlying issues that have changed in this generation? How do we communicate Christianity to this generation in meaningful language that will address real issues and bring transformation? Even mature students are almost always stuck in cycles of habitual sin, deeply damaging issues of low self-worth, with basic misunderstandings about Christianity such as, "Does God withdraw from me when I sin?" As communicated in personal conversation and confirmed in observing practice, they expend much energy trying to feel good enough for, and close to, God.

Literature Review

To grow in relationship with God we must know what he is truly like and orient our entire lives to him and his ways. God is an inner fellowship, an eternal communion, a creating, free-flowing movement of mutual love, mutual self-giving and receiving, mutual testifying and revealing (Torrance, 1996, p. 31), mutual indwelling and in-existing (Coyler, 2001, p. 306). Out of life-in-communion, God created the world and humanity in his image to participate in the life of God as his children. Foster (2001) explains that through ongoing intimacy with God "we are enabled to enter into an ever-deepening re-formation of heart and mind" (p. 61). We are created to love and be loved, give and receive, testify to God and bring him glory, indwell him and be indwelt by him, and freely give of ourselves through the communion of the Spirit within the community of God's people.

Hindrances to Growth

God concept. In my evaluation students do not have a biblical concept of the Trinity and struggle to feel close to God. Discipleship is equated with learning information about God (theology), instead of growing in intimacy with God. In truth, transformation is not as dependent on information as it is on imagination. I note differences between what a student says they believe about God and where and how they imagine God to be toward them. Exposing such inconsistencies helps learners address areas that inhibit Christian growth.

Concept of humanity. A second hindrance to Christian growth is an incorrect or inadequate view of humanity and self-worth. God's original intent was for us to be human, with all the goodness and fullness of life and relationship that entails, including our God-given mandate to steward creation and be fully and actively dependent on him to give and sustain our life. God called his physical creation very good (Gen 2), and we will be physical for

eternity. What God wants from the individual, and what only the individual can do, is become fully themselves, the unique and whole individual that God intended. We need Spirit-indwelt individual and communal routines and rhythms that align our lives with the reality of God and his (already and coming) kingdom. As we participate in the fellowship of God, living in his life and kingdom, we live out full-humanity through Holy Spirit and are transformed.

Greek philosophy. In my experience DTS students' view of humanity and their bodies is more influenced by Greek philosophy than by the biblical narrative. Greek philosophy describes the material world (including our bodies) as bad and something to escape from (Canlis, 2010). This influence results in low self-worth, in students struggling to know who they are, and in students struggling to hear God (if I desire it, it can't be God). Understanding God's intention and thoughts toward humanity opens many areas where students have remained stuck.

Limited view of the gospel. McKnight (2011) describes the true gospel as the story of Jesus Christ seen in its context as the fulfillment of the story of Israel, which is also part of the bigger story of how God is rescuing and restoring the world to himself. Discipleship in this view implies a continual growing toward understanding God's whole story in the Bible so we are transformed as individuals, as Christian community, and then are agents that transform the world around us (see also Boyd, 2004; Canlis, 2010; Coyler, 2001; Jethani, 2011, 2014; Kruger, 2014; Torrance, 1996).

Concept of sin. Students also need a correct view of sin not so much as an act, but as a corruption of mankind and the cosmos. Ours is a problem of dependency, driven and perpetuated by being cut off from the life of God, trying to find life from another source. To become Christian is to exchange our life source and draw life from Christ through his Spirit.

Concept of what Jesus did and continues to do. Through his life, Jesus "re-enSpirit-ed" and reclaimed our humanity; through his death he won atonement for us and creation; through his resurrection he made all things new; through his ascension he made a place for us within the divine fellowship; and through the gift of his Spirit we are adopted into sonship. All things that are available to Jesus – sonship, power, victory, etc. – are available to us as we are united to him through Holy Spirit. The indescribable riches that are in Christ Jesus are available to us as we abide in him (John 14 and 15). Colossians 2:6-7 says, "So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness" (New International Version). The Father made himself constantly accessible and available to us through and in Christ (who is at God's right hand) and we are beloved children as Christ is beloved. As Canlis tells it (2010), the foundation of Christian spirituality is the intimate response of Jesus to the Father, and through the ministry of Holy Spirit I can enter into the experience of that relationship.

Concept of Trinity. Many students exclude one or two members of the Trinity in how they imagine and relate to God, and remove persons of the Trinity from the Trinitarian relationships. In their imagination, they pull Holy Spirit out of Trinitarian relationship into their "reality," to help in their goals and problems, instead of seeing his primary role as pulling us into God's reality where he ministers life and sonship to us. When we do this with Jesus, we miss the reality of entering into his beloved sonship and feeding off his life, and when we do this with the Father we miss the depth of love and intimacy we have been brought into. In addition, many divorce the gifts of God from his being (a gift of eternal life, instead of receive

the Spirit who is eternal life) and imagine and experience them as endowments instead of inclusion and participation in his life. Without clear imagery of each member of the Trinity, students are left to willpower and manipulation and expend much energy trying to feel good enough to come close to God, failing to understand the basic message of the gospel: that God has done it all.

Understanding of Holy Spirit. The active empowerment of the Spirit in the Christian is an ongoing grace to enable us to live as God intended, and thus the role of the disciple is to be actively dependent on this new life source. Holy Spirit ministers to us that we are adopted children of God (Rom 8:15, Gal 4:6); he is the assurance of sonship and guarantor of our future (Eph 1:13). He teaches and guides us into all truth (John 14:26, John 16:13); he is our counselor and helper (John 14:15-26). He is always with us (John 14:16), searching our hearts for places that need to change and grow (Rom 8:26-27) and empowering us to do so (2 Pet 1:3-4). He gives us abilities to do what we need to do when we are unable (Rom 8:26-27). He leads (Romans 8:14, Gal 5:18), fills (Acts 13:52) and controls us (Gal 5:22, 2 Tim 1:7). He changes me (2 Cor 5:17), completes me (Phil 1:6), corrects and convicts (1 Thess 1:5). He gives us gifts to minister to each other (1 Cor 12, Rom 12:4-8). He leads us into the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10). He empowers us (with the same power that rose Christ from the dead) to live victoriously in our humanity, united with Christ through the Spirit with access to the Father's love and goodness (Eph 1:19-20, Eph 2:18). The majority of students have weak imagery of Holy Spirit and little understanding of the role of the Spirit in Christian growth. In the Needs Assessment question of how we grow as Christians, administered prior to my teaching, only one student mentioned Holy Spirit.

Neglect of spiritual disciplines. Another aspect of walking by the Spirit is engaging in spiritual disciplines that re-order and re-orient life to increase awareness, knowledge and experience of God and life in him. Paul encourages (Col 3) us to walk by faith, risk love, open up, confess, repent, reach out, obey, and set our hearts and minds on things above.

Neglect of Christian community. The incorporation into and participation in Christian community and worship are integral for the maturation of believers in Christ (Eph 2:18). It is essential for students to image that they are grafted into Jesus, but not grafted in alone. Christian growth is designed to include others. Christian formation assimilates a new life orientation, a new perception of reality and living conformed to the values of Christian community. We are re-formed through re-narration that occurs through "Communal, embodied rhythms, rituals and routines that over time quietly and unconsciously prime and shape our desires and most fundamental longings" (Smith, 2013, p. 4) and form (or re-form) the neural maps that govern that perception of the world.

Disconnect with Sacraments. The early Church developed Spirit-inhabited practices that engaged the imagination through the body, in which they participated in the reality of God and his story, priming them to see God, the world, and others in certain ways and act accordingly. These include the sacraments of corporate Scripture reading, baptism and communion. In worship we "encounter God and are formed by God in and through the practices in which the Spirit is present" (Smith, 2013, p. 152). Many students experience the sacraments as empty rituals and lack the multi-layered imagery and reality that are bound into them. Threading the Christian metanarrative from past, present and future into these sacraments helps students participate in them in meaningful and transformative ways.

Individualism. Addressing the role of the Church in Christian life and growth comes against the rampant individualism that has seeped into Christianity from Western culture. Many students become stuck in their Christian life because they hold individualistic views of strength and maturity, and view as weakness needing other people and asking for help.

Lack of Kingdom thinking. Lastly, spiritual formation is hindered by a lack of kingdom-consciousness. Students need biblical imagery of God's kingdom intentions. Overwhelmingly, students indicated they struggled with fear of the future and fear about how they fit into the world. Their dominant theology of end times is that the world and their bodies will disappear and what is spirit will remain. Offering alternative ways to understand God's intention for humanity and creation not only brings congruency to the Christian metanarrative, but also frees them to find themselves in Christ instead of lose themselves for him. Campolo and Darling (2007, p. 60) state that our aim should be to cultivate that intimacy with Jesus that empowers us to do Jesus' work: to share that relationship with Jesus with others in ways that help God's kingdom come and God's will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Establishing the kingdom is working with God to reclaim the world under his domain and encompasses both adding people to those who proclaim Jesus as Lord, and extending his influence over the world and its systems now.

Fowler's Stages of Faith

In Fowler's (1981) *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* he describes his findings for how people develop in faith. He asserts that metanarratives govern how people interpret and respond to the events of their lives and are "the characterizations of the patterns of power-in-action that disclose the ultimate meaning of our lives" (p. 277). Fowler contends that conversion has to do with changes in the content of faith (p. 281), and that when there is not much content, there's not much conversion. I contend that we have lost much of the content of our faith, so part of the goal of the present project is to re-introduce a broader and deeper faith content necessary for students to make sense of life and mature as Christians. Fowler identified six stages of faith; individuals in Stage 2 faith typically give meaning to their life through the literal faith story of their parents and do not reflect on it. This was illustrated by a student in this project who answered that she had no questions about the Trinity: she didn't understand it, so she chose to never think about it. Stage 2 individuals understand God in terms of reciprocity, and God is seen as distant (Fowler, p. 149). In my experience this thinking is rampant among DTS students who struggle with their faith when God doesn't give them what they ask for or when they suffer. This is also evident in the practices of many students in prayer and worship, of trying to manipulate God to move closer to them or love them as they imagine him as distant. Fowler (1981) says:

The limitation of literalness and an excessive reliance upon reciprocity as a principle for constructing an ultimate environment can result either in an over-controlling, stilted perfectionism or "works righteousness" or in their opposite, an abasing sense of badness embraced because of mistreatment, neglect or the apparent disfavour of significant others. (p. 150)

In my experience, DTS students oscillate between these two. They believe and act according to reciprocity, but when God does not comply they descend into depression, despair, and introspection over what is wrong with them, and why God doesn't love them.

A factor initiating transition to Stage 3 is the implicit contradiction in stories that lead to reflection on meanings. Young adult DTS students, having newly gained formal operational

thought in their teenage years, are finally able to reflect on their metanarrative. Thus, my curriculum content focuses on a congruent biblical metanarrative to make sense of their real experience of life. In doing so I hoped to expose places in their stories that don't make sense, don't work, or are fragmented and lack unification. I wanted to bring to discussion places where they articulate one thing, but imagine and live by another. I drew them into this process through asking questions such as: what doesn't make sense to you about Christianity or God? Are there places in your spiritual growth you feel stuck? What questions do you have that you want answered? I also asked questions to which they wrote answers and then later drew pictures of how they imagined aspects of their life with God. In nearly every case they wrote an expected Christian answer and then drew an unbiblical picture. This demonstrated to me incongruence between the way they lived their Christian life and what they claimed to believe. I later used these contradictions to show the gaps between what the Bible pictures and what they are imagining and living out of. Fowler (1981) argues that communities that promote growth are those that allow people to articulate their struggles with faith. Stage 3 faith is marked by "the individual's ability to reflect on one's thinking and methods of testing and verifying the assumptions" (Fowler, 1981, p. 152). The individual can now see patterns of meaning arising from the whole story, thus in my curriculum I highlighted the patterns of story and imagery that unify and bind the Christian metanarrative together. In Stage 3 individuals are also painfully aware of how others perceive them and self-worth is tied to this. In my experience, this is a common area that undermines growth in DTS students. Fowler (1981) states that at this time,

God undergoes a re-composition . . . (he) must be re-imaged as having inexhaustible depths and as being capable of knowing personally those mysterious depths of self and others that we will never know . . . Much of the extensive literature on adolescent conversion can be illumed . . . by the recognition of the adolescent's religious hunger for a God who knows, accepts and confirms the self deeply, and who serves as an infinite guarantor of the self with its forming myth of personal identity and faith." (p. 153)

For this reason, my curriculum addresses re-imagining God from distant and angry, to loving and present with us, as well as re-imagining God's thoughts toward our humanity with its body, personality, talents, likes and passions as being "very good." My intent was to provide a metanarrative and imagery from which they could derive a deep sense of self-worth in being human and replace the inadequate stories that fail to provide that. As Fowler (1981) continues, "When God becomes a significant other . . . the commitment to God and the correlated self-image can exert a powerful ordering on a youth's identity and values and outlook" (p. 154).

Fowler (1981) asserts that it is difficult to move beyond the faith stage of the communities (family and church) you are part of (p. 161). For this reason, the context of my curriculum is significant, since during DTS students move into a new community of DTS and YWAM. Again, in Stage 3 the individual has done little reflection on what they believe (p. 162). For the most part, the symbols of Christianity have been emptied of their meaning, so a goal of my curriculum was to thread the images together through the whole of the biblical metanarrative and then tie them into their participation in the sacraments and restore their transformational power. Further, in Stage 3 faith, the individuals' world has expanded beyond family to include a wider world of peers, school, work, society and media. Now, they need a faith that provides a coherent orientation to the world in the midst of its complexity that will sustain their identity into the future.

As Fowler (1981) states, “It is significant when persons at Stage 3 encounter and respond to situations or contexts that lead to critical reflection on their tacit value systems. Under such circumstances they begin to transition to Stage 4’s explicit system.” (p. 162). Again, my intent is to create a safe environment to allow them to encounter a larger, unifying biblical narrative that will help them examine the incongruent fragments of their own. The move to Stage 4 relocates authority in God, a move that is hard to make when you have wrong imagery and see God as distant, angry, arbitrary, and capricious. I intended to enable them to move the authority in their lives from what others think about them to what God thinks and is toward them. In this Stage they start to question symbols, so if symbols have no deeper meaning they can be discarded. By tying imagery and meaning for the walking out of the Christian life to the sacraments, I made a way for students to engage with them in a deeper, meaningful, and transformational way. Fowler (1981) states the dangers of Stage 4 are an excessive confidence in the mind. For this reason, I approached teaching through engaging the whole self (body, emotions, imagination, etc.) to undercut the dominance of the mind only acquiring information in learning (Palmer, 1993, p. 117).

Stage 5 faith sees the inter-relatedness of everything. I laid the foundation for this transition through repetitively showing relatedness of every aspect of the metanarrative and our participation in it in the church and kingdom. Individuals beyond Stage 4 are more likely to deepen and continue in faith as it has become intrinsically motivated and less reliant on personal benefit. Stage 6 faith involves incarnating the story and aligning life according to a reality where hope is in the future kingdom (Fowler, 1981, p. 200). My curriculum supports a coherency for Stage 6 faith, moving students from doctrinal formulations to incarnational participation, where “truth is lived; it is a pattern of being in relation to God and others” (Fowler, 1981, p. 295). The goal of knowing and formation is incarnation, the same pattern as God’s self-revelation in Jesus. Palmer (1993) argues that teaching is not truthful until obedience (incarnation) is practiced. Thus, throughout the teaching I involved students in participating in the content. As Fowler (1981) continues, “Adult living in faith becomes a matter of entering into the master stories that animate the faith of our forebears and of shaping our lives of faith with all their present impingements and challenges in trust and loyalty to those stories” (p. 295). I aimed at every level to lay a foundation of faith to sustain incarnational maturity within the reality of this age, even in suffering, betrayal and death.

The Role of the Imagination and Holistic Ways of Knowing in Transformation

Benner (2011) asserts that human beings are created to know through our bodies, imaginations, perceptions, emotions, and intellect. Smith (2013) suggests that imagination is our primary way of knowing and that what we perceive, intuit, or think is driven by it. Here, imagination is directly correlated to the metanarrative we have absorbed from our families and communities, what we orient our life around. We are formed (and re-formed) by the story we participate in and embody within a community. This supports Fowlers’ (1981) assertions stated above.

Transformational adult educational models proposed by Hendricks (1987), Vella (2002), and Palmer (1993) agree with the above, advocating participatory learning and involvement of the whole person. For this reason, my sessions involve participation where everyone had the opportunity to speak, listen and be actively engaged with and in the content. Since one of my premises is that there is a gap between information students know about God and how they imagine him, hindering Christian growth, I heavily emphasised images, drawing and illustrations throughout the week. As Canlis (2010) affirms, the use of icons or

pictures can help us focus and meditate on truths about God, engaging our senses and bringing clarity to words and phrases that we easily by-pass or become inoculated to. Images help us slow down and take time to see. The gospel needs to be reclaimed as an exchange of reality (metanarrative) that continually transforms and demands immersion, participation and obedience from the disciple to bring fullness to humanity and relationships. Since this reality is based in the persons of God, it demands specific personal, relational, participatory and obedient ways of knowing, where the very process of learning engages students with the content and brings transformation (Vella, 2002).

Willard and Ortberg (2014) contend “The will is transformed by experience not information: we tremendously over-estimate the power of information to transform people.” Tom Bloomer (personal communication) concurs, stating that our culture has received the Enlightenment lie that education is primarily an intellectual undertaking. For this reason, I began my sessions looking at the impact of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment on Christian thought, to expose roots of error that undermine Christian growth and intimacy with God and others. Bloomer also affirmed that learning is primarily about the heart and thus requires a fundamental exchange in how we think (through inhabiting truth), rather than a progression in the way we think. We are transformed as we live in something, be it family, community, culture, or God. Both Torrance (in Coyler, 2001) and Canlis (2010) form robust theologies of inhabiting and participation for transformation and intimacy with God.

Curriculum Design and Methodology

This project was run in 2015 in the context of YWAM Muizenberg Discipleship Training Schools during the January and April quarters. Discipleship Training Schools are multi-cultural and consist of students primarily between the ages of 18 and 25 that dwell in what Fowler (1981) would describe as Stage 2 and 3 faith. Participants were from South Africa, Zimbabwe, Nigeria/England, Singapore, USA, Canada, Poland/England, Germany, and The Netherlands. In the January DTS, 35 students filled out a Needs Assessment, but I did not teach in their school. Participants in the April DTS consisted of 17 female students and 3 male students. The teaching week of the April DTS involved lecture, discussion, activities, small groups, worship, intercession, journaling and informal times to build relationship and engage students with God, his people and his kingdom.

My curriculum is entitled *Encountering God and His Story: Re-narrating and Re-imagining Participation in God and His Kingdom*. The content of the curriculum covers: how we form and know as humans; the Trinity and the internal life of God; creation in and through Jesus; what it means to be human, created in the image of God; sin and the Fall; God and the people of Israel; Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and ascension; the gifting of Holy Spirit and walking by the Spirit; and the Church, sacraments and the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God addresses both living between the times in the “already but not yet” aspect of the kingdom, as well as the fulfillment of the kingdom at the return of Jesus. My goal was to lay a foundation for Christian faith within a congruent, unifying biblical Christian metanarrative and its imagery that would facilitate ongoing growth from Fowlers (1981) Stage 2 and 3, to Stage 4 and beyond (p. 150).

Results

Thirty-five students of the January 2015 DTS 2015 filled out a Needs Assessment, but I did not teach in their school. They drew pictures of how they saw themselves and God in

prayer, in worship, in relationship, and how they pictured God and the world. Of the 102 completed drawings no one illustrated more than one person of God. In most cases the drawing was a single stick figure. Only one student in one drawing depicted God in her and her in God, although she stated she pictured this only some of the time and the other drawing depicted God as distant or absent. Thirty-nine drawings depicted significant distance between the person and God, four depicted a wall between themselves and God. Other pictures contained words: "God is far far away" (when I pray); "God isn't here" (during worship); "No relationship" (depicting relationship with God); "God let go a long time ago" (depicting the world). Other pictures depicted an angry God or God with his back to the individual. When asked, "How do we grow as Christians?" one student of the 35 mentioned Holy Spirit. Twenty-two students ranked their self-worth at six or below out of ten; 21 students ranked intimacy with God at six or below out of ten; and 19 students ranked closeness to God at six or below out of ten.

Thirty-three of the January DTS responded to the Needs Assessment question about salvation, saying it is about being saved from sin (20 students), death (6 students), from Satan and hell (4), from anger (3), pain (2), depression (2), and one each identifying salvation as freeing us from striving to achieve perfection, from myself, ignorance, brokenness, guilt, disintegration, condemnation, emptiness, and the wrath and judgment of God. The students stated they were saved to life (15), freedom (7), joy (4), forgiveness (4), grace (3), love (3), fellowship with other believers (2), happiness (2), and one each said awareness of sin, being a child of God, being a new creation, having a clean heart, heaven, healing, peace, and security.

In the April 2015 DTS, students participated in activities to imagine, engage with, and respond to God according to biblical imagery, walking by the Spirit (entering into the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus), and corporate Scripture reading, worship, (remembering) baptism and communion where they both worshipped God and edified the body of believers. This was assessed by feedback after the activity.

In the April DTS the students drew pictures of the Trinity and Full Humanity during class sessions in which I taught. In the Needs Assessment (prior to the teaching) and Evaluation (after the teaching) they drew pictures of themselves and God when they pray, in relationship, in worship, and of God and his world. In the 16 Needs Assessments filled out by the April DTS, each drew four pictures (a total of 64 pictures). Of these, one image depicts a cross and a dove, all others depict a single figure as God; 27 show distance between God and self/the world (in one space the student wrote, "I don't know how to draw him being disappointed in me"); two images depict the student being indwelt by God.

In the 16 Evaluation form pictures (a total of 64 pictures, done after the teaching), 57 images depict the Father, Son and Spirit. Of the seven images that do not clearly depict this, six are of God and his world and either depict a heart or sun radiating love (two pictures), the word "God" (two), a branch disconnected from the vine (one), and hands holding the earth (one). The other picture is of a student worshipping, and is of her kneeling with the Spirit moving between herself and above. Of the 48 images depicting God and the student, 31 clearly depict the student being indwelt by Holy Spirit. Only one image possibly depicts distance between the student and God, although it is unclear and her other drawings indicate closeness and resting in the life of God.

During the teaching I articulated the Christian Master Story including the creation of the world and humanity in the image of God; the Fall; the people of Israel; Jesus' life, death, resurrection and ascension; the gifting of the Spirit; the Church and the kingdom. In the April DTS of the 16 students who filled out the Evaluation form, 14 answered the first question that asked them to write the Christian Master Story. Of the 14 who answered, nine started the story with creation and seven specifically mentioned humanity being formed in the image of God. Twelve specifically mentioned the Fall, and eight mentioned Israel. Eleven students cited the life of Jesus as being an essential part of the Story, ten cited his death as essential, six the resurrection, and two the ascension. Six students specifically mentioned the gifting of the Spirit, while eight articulated this part of the Story as "being reconciled to God" or "entering into his life." Five students mentioned the Church and six mentioned the kingdom of God. Four students drew on imagery I had offered from the Exodus narrative, two drew on Temple imagery and one student drew the pictures I had constantly shown throughout the teaching.

Of the 15 April DTS students who described salvation in the Evaluation (after the teaching): 15 articulated they were saved to relationship with God or into his life; eight stated receiving the Spirit was part of salvation; seven stated salvation is moving from death to life; seven mentioned they were saved from sin, washed clean and forgiven; six included being brought into Christ's sonship as part of salvation; and five included that they were saved into the Body of Christ.

In the April DTS 2015 Needs Assessment (prior to my teaching) the students described growing as a Christian through reading the Bible (9), prayer (8), worship (5), fellowship with other believers (4), quiet times, (4), listening to the Word (2), meditating on the Word (2), becoming more like Jesus (1), surrender (1), trying my best (1), reading Christian books (1), turning away from sin and toward God (1), and through mistakes, trials and challenges (1).

In the April 2015 DTS Evaluations (after my teaching), the students shared that we grow as Christians through immersing ourselves in the reality of God or "waking up" to that reality (12), reading the Bible (8), the Body of Christ (6), putting off the old man and putting on the new (5), seeking God (4), incarnating the life of God (2), obedience (1), revelation by Holy Spirit (1), relationships (1), and through awareness of who I am in God (1).

How did people grow?

Significant places of transformation for April students are as follows. Fifteen students stated that their major point of transformation was that their view of God changed; six students stated their major point of transformation was gaining understanding of the Trinity; five students stated the visual of the shield of faith we interacted with on the floor was central to this transformation; two students shared that going through the Old Testament about God dwelling with Israel gave them a congruent picture of God that spanned the Bible; five students specifically articulated on their Evaluations that their prayer life had radically altered through the change in how they imagined God and themselves in him, as well as the content of their prayer life (for example, praying for the Spirit who is strength, rather than praying for strength as an endowment); four students stated they now imagined and participated in accessing the Father; and one student stated it had transformed how she approached God.

A second major point of transformation was in understanding who we are in the life of God. Two students shared their major transformation was realising they didn't need to work or try to be good enough to come close to God. Four other students articulated this as

understanding what it means to enter into sonship, and four more as understanding they are adopted into God's family. Two stated this as realising they have value, two that they realised that humanity is very good, and two as understanding that they belong. Along with this, three students stated that a major point of transformation was realising that being in God is a reality and that we just need to "wake-up" to that reality. Other points of transformation shared in the Evaluation were: gaining a whole picture of God's story (one), gaining a picture of Father, Son and Spirit, and being indwelt by God. Other points of transformation communicated were: that their understanding of atonement used to have many points of contradiction, but now it didn't (one person); that now they understood Jesus was their worship and it wasn't about trying to be good enough (one); and two mentioned they had never included Holy Spirit and Jesus in imagining God. One student shared that taking communion as worship to God and edification of the body of believers was a key to her transformation during the week.

Conclusions and Implications

This project sought to help DTS students obtain, strengthen and engage with biblical imagery of God and a congruent biblical metanarrative to enable them to enter into holistic knowledge, experience, and dynamic participation in the life and fellowship of God, the Body of Christ, and his kingdom. I sought to expose the influence of Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment on how students envision and experience the Christian life. Through my experience, the Needs Assessment and learner feedback, I concluded that most students do not have a biblical or Trinitarian view of God when they relate to him, do not understand how they are included in the life and fellowship of God through the sonship of Jesus by Holy Spirit, and do not understand that we grow through living in God, his people and his kingdom. Significant issues that distort spiritual growth in this regard are: students exclude one or two members of the Trinity in how they imagine and relate to God; they remove persons of the Trinity from the Trinitarian relationships; and they divorce the gifts of God from his being, subverting inclusion and participation in his life.

The Christian metanarrative describes that humanity was created to participate in (inhabit) the life and fellowship of God, his people, and kingdom. Since a key to spiritual formation is entering into the Father-Son relationship and dwelling in the reality of our adoption brought about by Holy Spirit, students need biblical ways to image this, as well as its centrality to the Christian metanarrative. DTS teachers need to pay attention to Fowler's (1981) findings that moving students from Stage 2 or 3 faith to Stage 4 and beyond requires taking into account late teen and early twenties developing neural capacities for reflection, as well as providing a coherent metanarrative to make sense of life in the face of the persistent influence of modern western culture. True and lasting transformation requires a re-introduction of faith content to make sense of life in the "now but coming" kingdom.

I also observed that information and activity (even those involving many learning styles and senses) do not bring transformation, but exchanging the picture in the imagination does. Without a concrete change in imagery, students enjoyed participating in the "event" of the activity, but it had almost no lasting change in how they answered questions in their Evaluations from the Needs Assessments. In sessions where I had students draw a new image, reflect and engage with it, there were dramatic changes in their evaluations and in their immediate experience of participating in the life of God: feeling close, included, loved etc. as they came to prayer and worship. This supports Vella's (2002) concept of praxis, that immediate use of content and reflection aids transformation. I conclude that without specifically leading students through processes to change their imagery and engage with and

reflect on that new imagery, students take parts of the information we give them in DTS teaching and apply it over the foundation of Greek and Enlightenment thought and imagery, short-circuiting lasting transformation.

Furthermore, Christian community, symbols and practices that were crucial to the early church have little meaning or value to today's students. We need to reclaim Spirit indwelt individual and communal routines and rhythms that align students' lives with real participation in God and his (already and coming) kingdom. Re-claiming that imagery and content primes students to imagine and participate in God, the world, and with others.

The findings of this study agree with Torrance (in Coyler, 2001), Canlis (2010), Smith (2013), and Fowler (1981) in their assertion that the gospel needs to be reclaimed as a foundational exchange of reality (metanarrative) that continually transforms and demands immersion, participation and obedience from the disciple to bring growth toward fullness. Since this reality is based in the persons of God, it demands specific personal, relational, Spirit-presented, participatory and obedient ways of knowing, where processes of learning engage students in sensitive and holistic ways with the content and bring transformation.

In conclusion, we need more ways of teaching that highlight the fact that imagination overrides information in influencing behaviour and transformation. As teachers, we need a radical shift in our assumptions of what students know *and* imagine about God and Christianity and how they experience God, the Christian community and its sacraments and disciplines. We must not form teaching on outdated assumptions of what students imagine God to be and how the Christian life works, nor form teaching around a gospel message more influenced by Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment than biblical truth. We need to develop more holistic ways of teaching that immerse students in the content and engage them in dynamic participation in the life of God. We must conceive of Christian formation as exchange of imagery. We must understand formation and transformation as participating in or inhabiting something, and we must offer a coherent metanarrative to make sense of life in an already and coming kingdom.

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