

**Jill E. Gendreau**  
**CL 7512**  
**Pastoral Identity, Leadership, and Spiritual Life**  
**Final Project**

## **INTRODUCTION**

“But what does that have to do with *real* life?” Have you ever found yourself asking this question? Or has someone else asked you that question? At Soul Café, we have “words” on the ceiling, but they are not “just words,” they are our theological assertions about God and what we feel God is doing in the world and in particular, in our part of the world. People who come to Soul Café often ask us about those words—which are really our beliefs. And often, I imagine they think: “But what does that have to do with *real* life?”

This project is a 7-week Bible Study designed to begin a conversation around the question: “But what do our beliefs have to do with *real* life?” Does it make any difference to the way we live our lives? How? When? Why? This leads to a discussion about the connection between beliefs and faith practices.

In this study, I have used as my primary resource Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship. Most of what is written in Faith Practices: What They Are and Do and Faith Practices as “Marks of the Church” in Weeks 6 and 7 come directly from Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz’s writing in the Living Faith resource. In addition to this, I have also used some materials from our week-long seminar at Luther Seminary in January 2004 as well as some material from Volf and Bass’s Practicing Theology.

Four of the seven weeks of this study have been completed, i.e., with the group at Soul Café, as I get ready to turn in this project. You will see comments in some of the first 4 sessions that are in a **blue font**. These are comments, questions, etc. that came up in the course of the study and which I felt were important to include as part of this project. (You will also see some other colored font—red, purple, etc. Those were used for my benefit on some items that I wanted to highlight in discussion.)

What follows is the Initial Project Ideas, Weeks One through Seven of the Bible Study, and a Summary.

## **INITIAL PROJECT IDEAS**

### **Project Proposal—Draft #3**

## Explorers on the Expedition

THE ACTUAL PROJECT (i.e., what I'm going to "do," Craig)

A 6 to 8-week Study

Do an overview of some of the traditional faith practices. (4 weeks)

How do different faith traditions codify the practices? (See Disciplines for Christian Living: Interfaith Perspectives)

Which of the practices does Soul Café embrace? Do we practice them differently than a "traditional" community of faith? How are they the same as those of a "traditional" community of faith? How does our context relate to this? (2 weeks)

*Develop a "rule of life" for Soul Café with some kind of visual reminder of this (see Power Surge), and maybe also focus on helping individuals develop a rule of life. (See Living Faith Day by Day.)*

How do these practices form/inform/reinforce/challenge our beliefs? (2 weeks)

How do our beliefs form/inform/reinforce/challenge these practices? (2 weeks)

Resources: Living Faith Day by Day, Farrington; Practicing Theology, Volf & Bass  
Other resources?

## THEOLOGICAL & BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

As we stand on the threshold/at the liminal space, informed by the perichoretic God, that which is formed in us is a desire (?) to enter the expedition which will take us to places we never anticipated.

Theological assertions:

- God stands on the threshold with us.
- God goes to the places we never anticipate, i.e., is an Explorer on the expedition with all the other explorers.

Biblical foundations:

- Baptism of Jesus and then being sent/driven/led into the wilderness by the Spirit (see the synoptic gospels).
- Luke 10
- Exodus (Moses)
- Hosea
- Acts
- What are the practices in these texts? What are the beliefs that inform/form them?
- And how do the practices inform/form the beliefs?

What are the beliefs which are formed on the threshold and on the expedition? (See words on the ceiling at Soul Café.)

What are the faith practices in which we engage on this expedition? How do these support/impact/affect/relate to that which is being formed in us?

How do these beliefs and practices move us to be a sign pointing beyond ourselves (“It’s not about you”) to the reign of God?

## **Project Proposal—Draft #2**

### Explorers on the Expedition

As we stand on the threshold/at the liminal space, informed by the perichoretic God, that which is formed in us is a desire (?) to enter the expedition which will take us to places we never anticipated.

Theological assertions:

- God stands on the threshold with us.
- God goes to the places we never anticipate, i.e., is an Explorer on the expedition with all the other explorers.

Biblical foundations:

- Baptism of Jesus and then being sent/driven/led into the wilderness by the Spirit (see the synoptic gospels).
- Luke 10
- Exodus (Moses)
- Hosea

What are the beliefs which are formed on the threshold and on the expedition? (For Soul Café, these words now adorn our ceiling.)

What are the faith practices in which we engage on this expedition? How do these support/impact/affect/relate to that which is being formed in us?

How do these beliefs and practices move us to be a sign pointing beyond ourselves (“It’s not about you”) to the reign of God?

Fritz has invited me to consider asking this: how do we invite others to share in/to take “shares” in the expedition?

Resources:

## **Project Proposal—Draft #1**

“What are the obscure/marginal/edgy places to which God is calling us?” The bible study which I created for the last project ended with this question. Little did I know how

faithful God would be in dancing with us in the midst of this question and delighting when we began to form some answers. Heidi, one of our Soul Café “regulars,” who was a part of that bible study, called me a few weeks ago. She said, “Jill, have you ever noticed how Soul Café seems to ‘attract’ people on the fringes?” She was referring to some Soul Café “regulars” who displayed mental disorders, although there are other fringe kind of folk who also participate at Soul Café (singles, those who are disenchanted with “the church,” etc.). We talked for a while about the Philippians 2 study and how these were some of the obscure/marginal/edgy people with whom God was calling us to identify.

Dana is nearly 80 years old and a Soul Café “regular.” Although he is a member of the UCC congregation in Hood River, he claims that in his congregation (where he worships regularly), he can’t talk about the kinds of things we talk about at Soul Café. He challenges the imaginations of his fellow brothers and sisters in Christ and regularly makes them angry and uncomfortable. (I keep telling him that’s why it is good that he continues to be a part of that fellowship of believers!) The other day, Dana and his wife brought into Soul Café a 6<sup>th</sup> grader from the local middle school. Ellen, Dana’s wife, serves as a mentor and tutor for her. This energetic 6<sup>th</sup> grader was in Soul Café for all of about 10 minutes when she burst out with, “Can I volunteer to work here?” We have 3 other teenagers who have volunteered to work at Soul Café in much the same manner.

Church as apostolic—participate in “sentness”

Church as catholic—participate in one’s context—especially the obscure/marginal/edgy places

How big is the gospel we preach? Big enough to propel the church into its apostolicity? Big enough to propel the church into its catholicity? Big enough to move God’s children to say, “Can I volunteer to work here? Can I volunteer to work in this incredibly challenging and frightening and fulfilling mission that God has already set into motion?”

This project will focus on a group process of spiritual formation that intends to move the participants to consider and experience....

- Belief & Practice—the importance of both/and—living in the “real world”

Journey into this as spiritual formation

Drawing us out of ourselves and into the world

Welker: pouring out of the Holy Spirit is not just for individuals but for the sake of the world

- Hosea: before you speak the prophecy, I want you to experience it—how we experience being drawn out of ourselves and into the world—how living this is an actual “speaking” of the prophecy
- Helping people live into a missional imagination...helping people experience the fullness of what God has done and is doing in the world
- Theology of baptism and vocation relates to “life in the real world”

The church—helping people to discover and identify where they belong in life, in the world theologically

- See Marty Stortz, “Gathered and Scattered: Worship and Service as What It Means to be the Church”

## THE ACTUAL PROJECT

### Explorers on the Expedition: Welcome to the Real World

#### Week One

Tuesday, February 3, 2004

#### Opening Discussion

10 minutes

“But what does that have to do with *real* life?” Have you ever found yourself asking this question? Or has someone else asked you that question? When? About what?

Refer to words on the ceiling at Soul Café. Are they “just words”? If not, what are they?

People who come to Soul Café may ask us about those words/beliefs: “But what does that have to do with *real* life? Does it make a difference with the way you live your life? How? When? Why?” Over the next 7 weeks, we’ll be exploring together to discern answers to these questions.

Pray

#### Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>1</sup>

50-60 minutes

Acts 1:1-11

- Restoring the kingdom to Israel vs. the kingdom of God
- We don’t have to look to the heavens for the kingdom of God; we only need to look in front of us each and every day of our lives.
- The kingdom of God as the redemptive reign of God in Christ Jesus—the now and the not yet—as the people of God/the body of Christ/the church, we have the privilege of understanding ourselves in relation to this.
- Can you see the “now” of the kingdom? All the power of God is already manifest.

Acts 2:1-24, 32-33, 36

Through the Holy Spirit, we’ve been given power to live in the “now” of the kingdom.

Matthew 13:24-30

Matthew 13:36-43

Good seed—children of the kingdom

Sowing in the world

How do we live in the eschatological future?

---

<sup>1</sup> Ideas developed from a lecture by Craig Van Gelder, “Developing a Missional Ecclesiology: Biblical and Theological Foundations for the Church and Its Ministry,” January 12, 2004, Luther Seminary.

Acts 2:37-47 through Acts 6

How we live in the eschatological future

What we share in common in light of the fact that we share Christ in common

New Behaviors

- Gathering
- Sharing the story
- Giving of resources
- Faith when facing adversity
- Protecting community integrity
- Addressing issues of justice

Ephesians 2:19-22

New Creation

- Citizens of a new nation
- Members of a new household
- Living stones in a holy temple as the dwelling place of God

Welcome to the Real World

20 minutes

Focus question for the week: do you feel like you're living in the "real world"? Why or why not?

Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

Extra note about Week One: what follows is a response to Week One's session from Sandy. I have pasted it in as I received it, without grammatical or punctuation corrections (very difficult for a former English teacher to hold herself back from doing, I might add).

“BUT WHAT DOES THAT HAVE TO DO WITH REAL LIFE?”  
a response from Sandy McIsaac

I've asked that very question myself and had it asked of me...and as we read Acts chapters 1-6 some interesting thoughts come to mind. Especially since that was the lead in question.

During the reading I thought about how much the disciples are like me. There they are asking Jesus if he is going to restore the kingdom of Israel now. After all, you've risen from the dead and obviously have the power to do some wild things.

Thinking about what the disciples asked in that question was interesting to me.

I can hear the disciples now, “Are you going to restore the kingdom of Israel back to the people, will we have our land, be the owners of it, be back in control and power?”

Jesus answer leaves them confused I’d bet, “You don’t get to know the time. Timing is the Father’s business. What you’ll get is the Holy Spirit. And when the Holy Spirit comes on you, you will be able to be my witnesses in Jerusalem, all over Judea and Samaria, even to the ends of the world.” Then with that he was lifted and disappeared in a cloud.

I smiled at that ending. Such a twist I thought. I can imagine the disciples gawking up and then looking at each other saying, “Hey where are you going and what does that have to do with the real life of Israel? Did that make any sense to you? Why can’t he just say what he means, and what’s the Holy Spirit anyway?” I know I’d be giving sideways glances to my friends if that was me and that little curled lip, shrugged shoulder headshake thing would follow.

I love how two other men appear and ask, “Why do you just stand here looking up at an empty sky? In other words, is that what God wants you to be doing, standing there staring up at the sky? Hop on it and get to God’s work, let the Holy Spirit lead you.

Over the next chapters of Acts we looked to see how the disciples did God’s work and lived together in the kingdom.

They repented and were baptized, shared meals, prayed, praised God, taught and studied God’s word both in the temple and at home. They were in fellowship, they healed, and they told the story and were willing to suffer. They were of one heart and one soul, everything was held in common. They laid hands on people, talked back to authority; were fearless, confident, and bold. They stretched out their hands to others and experienced signs, and wonders. And God’s light shone through them.

As I experienced this bible study I was awed. During an earlier bible study we identified ways God worked in the bible and transferred that to ways God was working at Soul Café. What came of that bible study is evident on the ceiling at Soul Café. There are wonderful words up there of how God is working in our own community.

It’s been interesting to watch, people that walk in for the first time raise their eyes to the ceiling. When a person takes that form their mouths naturally drop slightly and it was that picture that I saw when I read about the disciples getting caught staring up in the sky by those two men that had suddenly appeared. It is the same expression.

Only upon lowering their eyes could the disciples see what they needed to do to restore the kingdom of Israel, and perhaps they never did come to the clarity that I have after reading those passages. I need to lower my eyes and greet those who come through the doors of Soul Café, not stand beside them and stare at the words on the ceiling too.

For some people engaging with them isn't as enormous sounding as those words we identified in Acts. For some it is simply making a mocha and smiling. For others it is sitting and talking about a young girl's overdosing on drugs, or perhaps how someone is handling divorce. Or maybe it is making potatoes for the free Community Meal and eating with strangers, sharing in whatever it is that comes up in their conversation.

And what does that have to do with REAL life...

EVERYTHING!

After all, God sent men in white robes to stand beside the disciples. Maybe that is what I'm suppose to be, a woman standing beside people who come in and stare up at the ceiling.

## **Explorers on the Expedition: A Way of Life in Relationship with Jesus in the Kingdom of God**

### **Week Two**

**Tuesday, February 17, 2004**

#### Opening Discussion

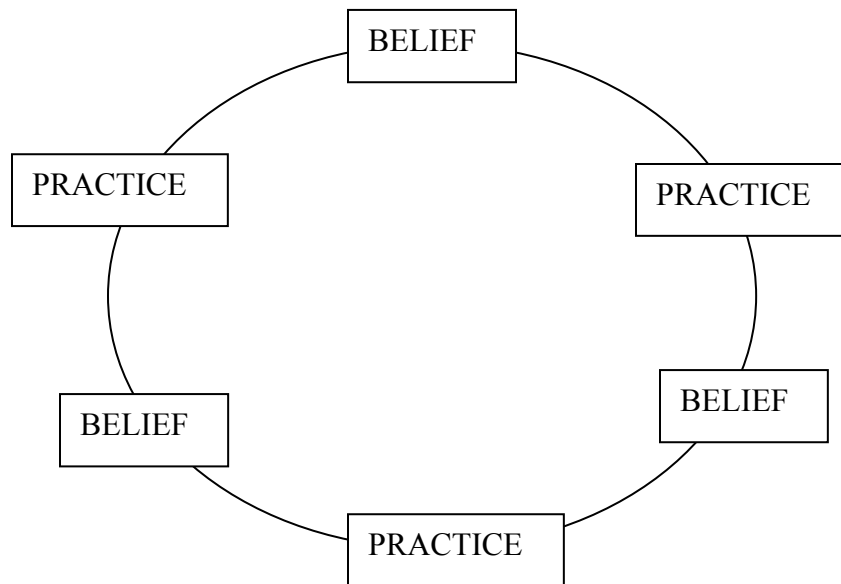
10-15 minutes

Focus question from last week: do you feel like you're living in the "real world"? Why or why not?

"At the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within a pursuit of this way of life" (Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, p. 247).

What is the author saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

We began to enter a conversation re: belief and practice and which comes first as a result of the talk about this quote.



Pray

**Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>2</sup>**

**50-55 minutes**

Luke 5:1-11, 27-28 (A Way of Life in Relationship with Jesus)

- individuals (Peter and Matthew)
- **Jesus offers an invitation** to both Peter and Matthew. **What is the invitation?** It is NOT a request to agree with an idea or set of teachings. It is NOT a request to join an institution or organization. **Jesus invites Peter and Matthew to himself.** The thing that attracts Peter and Matthew is the One who issues the invitation: Jesus.
- **Jesus' invitation is a call to a relationship with the living Christ.** The invitation is freely given, and the response is an act of faith. **Faith as described in this reading from Luke is a matter of taking, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the first step of obedience in following Jesus.** The response is an evidence of faith.
- **Faith is inseparable from obedience.** When the invitation is issued and the response is one of obedience, the Spirit has worked faith. **What does the close connection between faith and obedience say about the faith life? What does it mean to live the "obedience of faith"?**

<sup>2</sup> Ideas developed from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, pp. B-5 through B-11

- When we began discussing this, Heidi shared how she had a problem with the word obedience. She said, “When we have to be obedient, we don’t feel like we have....” Heidi didn’t seem to have the word to complete the sentence, so I said, “Control.” And she said, “Yes, that’s it.” On February 15, 2004, Bishop Bill Gregg from the Episcopal Diocese of Eastern Oregon, had preached at the worship service I had attended. He talked about this issue of control and our desire for it and gave a great illustration. Most of us have had experiences with the 2-year old who we ask to do something and he/she simply says, “No.” There is no way we are going to get him/her to do what we want (pick up the toys, go to his/her room, etc.) unless we resort to “control” (i.e., picking him/her up and physically moving him/her). Bishop Gregg pointed out that when we do this, our focus becomes “control” rather than on the relationship we have with that 2-year old.
- So we began discussing: what if obedience is NOT about control? What if obedience is all about relationship? Jesus doesn’t want obedience so that he can be in control. Jesus wants obedience so that we can be in relationship with him. Obedience = relationship NOT control
- In The Cost of Discipleship, Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes: “The call goes forth, and is at once followed by the response of obedience. The response of the disciples is an act of obedience not a confession of faith in Jesus” (p. 57). **What do you think of this observation? Has it been true for you or for others you know?**

Belief = that to which we give our heart—not intellectual assent

Have you experienced receiving a call or invitation from Jesus? If so, when?

How do you show obedience to Jesus in your life? How can others tell that you live in relationship with Jesus?

Talk about the difference between inviting people to join an institution/organization and the invitation to a relationship with Jesus.

Luke 6:20-49 (A Way of Life in the Kingdom of God)

- Jesus gives us a new view of reality, a new view of life. **According to this text, what is this new life in the kingdom of God like?**
- **In accepting a new view of life, we leave something else behind.** It is the way we used to view life. This is the beginning of the process of exchanging one view of reality for another. It should come as no surprise that such a change will also include changes in behavior, attitude, habits, self-understanding, motives, etc. **As you test the waters of living this new life, what are some of the changes you have experienced? Have some changes been easier than others? If so, which ones? Why?**

“The disciple is dragged out of his relative security into a life of absolute insecurity (that is, in truth, into the absolute security and safety of the fellowship of Jesus), ... out of the realm of the finite (which is in truth infinite) into the realm of infinite possibilities (which is the one liberating reality).” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 58)

Talk about this quote.

**A Way of Life in Relationship with Jesus in the Kingdom of God 20 minutes**

Focus question for the week: is it important for you to make a difference in this world? Why or why not?

Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

**Explorers on the Expedition: Transformed Kingdom Life in the Real World  
Week Three  
Tuesday, March 2, 2004**

**Opening Discussion 10-15 minutes**

Focus question from last week: is it important for you to make a difference in this world? Why or why not?

“The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the following two propositions hold good and are equally true: only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 63)

Believe—give one’s heart to

Obedient—in relationship

So what if we say, “Only he who [gives his heart to God] is [in relationship], and only he who is [in relationship] [gives his heart to God]”? The group came up with this with no prompting from me! Talk about discernment!

What is the author saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Group members made the connection between belief and practices, which we began talking about last week.

Pray

**Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>3</sup> 50-55 minutes**

*(45 minutes)*

Group 1—read Luke 9, 10, 11

- Make a list of those things you find most challenging in these chapters

---

<sup>3</sup> Ideas developed from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, pp. B-13 through B-15

Group 2—read Luke 12, 13, 14

- Make a list of those things you find most challenging in these chapters

*(5-10 minutes)*

Groups begin to report back.

Group members found themselves calling out, “Challenge!” Here is the list of things which they found most challenging:

#### Luke 9, 10, 11

No clothing, food, water

Staying with strangers,

The work

Feeding the people

Keeping the secret of not telling who Jesus is

Denying self and taking up cross - losing life for Jesus

The experience of Jesus’ robe white - scary

The disciples experience reprimand around the healing

The energy expenditure and their needing to rest

Confusion around just what Jesus wants

How to take the test instead of how to experience the moment

It’s a challenge to feel chosen and realize you don’t have all the answers

Challenge for organized religion that they don’t hold the answer about what’s “right”

Being a lamb among wolves

Not moving and why is it so important

Eating what they set before you

Shaking off the dust and you conform to them not they conform to you

Taking care of strangers, beat up, unknown why

Feeling like the one who has to take care of people

Believing to ask, seek, knock, (fish & egg)

Easier to obey rules than deal with justice and love

#### Luke 12, 13, 14

No secrets

Whom to fear

Denying God

Greed

Being rich toward God

Not worrying

Seeking the kingdom of God

Understanding what Jesus is saying

Entering through the narrow door

Inviting poor, crippled, lame, blind

Bringing in poor, crippled, blind, lame

Hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters

## Giving up everything

My note: the group who read chapters 9-11 addressed the challenges as they applied to their lives (which is what I intended) more so than the group who read chapters 12-14. The other group approached it more as “this is challenging to read.” Interesting how groups can hear instructions differently.

### Transformed Kingdom Life in the Real World

20 minutes

Read Luke 9:18-26; 46-62

Focus questions for the week: What does a “transformed life” mean to you? How have others been a model for you of a “transformed life”?

Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

## **Explorers on the Expedition: Transformed Kingdom Life in the Real World (cont.) Week Four Tuesday, March 16, 2004**

### Opening Discussion

5-10 minutes

Focus questions from last week: What does a “transformed life” (transforming—one group member said it makes more sense to say “transforming” because transformation” is something that is ongoing) mean to you? How have others been a model for you of a “transformed (transforming) life”?

Some answers:            Seeing a bigger perspective  
                                  “It’s not about you.”—focus on others  
                                  Simul Justus et peccator—my response to someone who said,  
                                  “‘Well, it’s hard for me to name any models because so many people have let me down.’” It seemed she was looking for someone who was perfect, so I shared this concept with her. She found it very helpful.

Pray

### Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>4</sup>

50-60 minutes

*(20-25 minutes)*

Complete group report back from last week of challenges in Luke 9, 10, 11 and 12, 13, 14.

See last week for list of challenges.

---

<sup>4</sup> Ideas developed from a lecture by Rick Bliese, “Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,” January 14, 2004, Luther Seminary.

(30 minutes)

Luke 9:18-26; 46-62

- **Only by knowing Jesus intimately, understanding who he is, observing the power of his love to transform lives, and allowing his love to flow through our lives in ministry to others are we prepared for the rest of the story.** Jesus tells his disciples first what he will experience: suffering, rejection, death, and then resurrection. **If this is what is in store for Jesus, what should Jesus' followers expect? What does it mean to you to "bear a cross"? How does "bearing the cross" fit with today's expectations of the "good life"?**

#### **Good life as defined by whom?**

- **Jesus invited his followers to be bold in their proclamation of who he is. As they followed him, they were introduced into the Kingdom of God.** Jesus taught them about the nature and characteristics of that Kingdom. The question was, were they ready to live in the greater reality of that Kingdom? The world view of this Kingdom of God is dramatically different from our own. (Recall what we've discussed during previous sessions.) **How is Jesus' definition of "greatness" different? How is competition handled in the Kingdom? What do those differences mean to us as we seek to live in Jesus' Kingdom?**

#### **Transformed Kingdom Life in the Real World**

**20 minutes**

(See the end of this session. There is a "clean" copy of this for photocopying/distributing purposes.)

Living the life of faith is not just about holding certain beliefs. It's not just about memorizing the words on the ceiling at Soul Café. It's about experiencing how those words/belief impact our lives and the way we live.

Living the life of faith is about living into the reality of Pentecost and the reality of our Baptism—that we have been given power through the Holy Spirit and named and claimed and empowered as God's children—to experience the "now" of God's kingdom....to experience the fullness of what God has already done for us through Christ....and to practice certain "behaviors" in light of this.

God's intent is that life/all of creation will flourish! Living the life of faith means participating in the world for the sake of the world. **(Conversation: This is hard for many people in the church. Fear of becoming "worldly." Does that mean God is only in the church? Madeline L'Engle: "God has pitched His tent in the excrement of life.)** This is what it means to live in the "real world."

Jesus challenges us with a new view of reality called the Kingdom of God. His invitation is to live the reality of his Kingdom now. As we accept the deeper demands of this call, our lives are completely transformed and become integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This freedom is only through obedience to Jesus and all he commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others.

Focus questions for the week: How is Jesus calling you to “live the reality of his Kingdom now”?

### Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

Handout for this week:

#### **Transformed Kingdom Life in the Real World**

Living the life of faith is not just about holding certain beliefs. It’s not just about memorizing the words on the ceiling at Soul Café. It’s about experiencing how those words/beliefs impact our lives and the way we live.

Living the life of faith is about living into the reality of Pentecost and the reality of our Baptism—that we have been given power through the Holy Spirit and named and claimed and empowered as God’s children—to experience the “now” of God’s kingdom....to experience the fullness of what God has already done for us through Christ....and to practice certain “behaviors” in light of this.

God’s intent is that life/all of creation will flourish! Living the life of faith means participating in the world for the sake of the world. This is what it means to live in the “real world.”

Jesus challenges us with a new view of reality called the Kingdom of God. His invitation is to live the reality of his Kingdom now. As we accept the deeper demands of this call, our lives are completely transformed and become integrated into a wholeness that is possible only through Jesus. This freedom is only through obedience to Jesus and all he commands. Such a transformed life becomes a model for others.

#### **Explorers on the Expedition: Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life**

##### **Week Five**

**Tuesday, March 30, 2004**

#### Opening Discussion

10-20 minutes

Focus question from last week: How is Jesus calling you to “live the reality of the kingdom now”?

“To be conformed to the image of Christ is not an ideal to be striven after. It is not as though we had to imitate him as well as we could. We cannot transform ourselves into his image; it is rather the form of Christ which seeks to be formed in us (Gal 4:19), and to be manifested in us. Christ’s work in us is not finished until he has perfected his own form in us. We must be assimilated to the form of Christ in its entirety, the form of

Christ incarnate, crucified and glorified.” (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 301)

What is the author saying? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

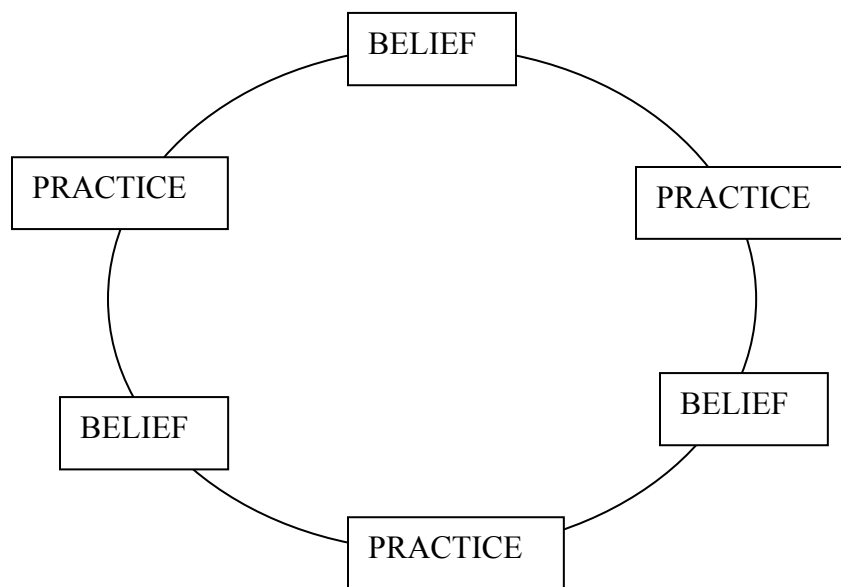
Pray

Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>5</sup>

50 minutes

As we live a transformed Kingdom life in the real world, we are challenged to integrate our relationship with God into every aspect of our lives. (Or perhaps it’s not a matter of integrating. Perhaps it’s a matter of recognizing that our relationship with the Triune God IS a part of every aspect of our lives.) This is a commitment that involves dedication to both beliefs and practices. Our focus now turns to practices.

*(From Week Two)* “At the heart of every good theology lies not simply a plausible intellectual vision but more importantly a compelling account of a way of life, and that theology is therefore best done from within a pursuit of this way of life” (Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life, p. 247).



*(From Week Three)* “The idea of a situation in which faith is possible is only a way of stating the facts of a case in which the following two propositions hold good and are

---

<sup>5</sup> Ideas developed from a lecture by Rick Bliese, “Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,” January 14, 2004, Luther Seminary.

equally true: only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.”  
(Dietrich Bonhoeffer, The Cost of Discipleship, p. 63)

A definition for practices: any socially meaningful activity; complex, social activities that pursue certain goods internal to the practices themselves

A definition for Christian practices: things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ

- Practices resist the separation of thinking and acting and thus the separation of Christian belief/doctrine from the Christian life.
- Practices are social, belonging to groups of people across generations.
- Practices are rooted in the past but constantly changing and adapting.
- Practices articulate implicit wisdom from the community.

Christian practices involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing. They are activities imbued with the knowledge of God and creation. (*My comment: often, we enter with blissful ignorance and come to profound awareness.*) **How have we experienced this very thing at Soul Café?**

Christian practices are social and historical; they are activities people engage in together over time.

Christian practices share in the mysterious dynamic of fall and redemption, sin and grace.

Christians don’t master the practices; they enter into the practices to engage God more fully OR to be engaged by God more fully.

Thinking about faith practices

**Name some faith practices that you have observed or of which you have been a part.**

Refer back to Week One and the New Behaviors in Acts 2-6.

Acts 2:37-47 through Acts 6

How we live in the eschatological future

What we share in common in light of the fact that we share Christ in common

New Behaviors

- Gathering
- Sharing the story
- Giving of resources
- Faith when facing adversity

- Protecting community integrity
- Addressing issues of justice

Ephesians 2:19-22

New Creation

- Citizens of a new nation
- Members of a new household
- Living stones in a holy temple as the dwelling place of God

Are any of these practices evident in your life? Are any of these practices evident in the community life at Soul Café? If so, how have they shaped you/us? How have they opened you/us to the work of the Spirit? How do our practices at Soul Café fit or not fit into the definition of Christian practices (see above)?

### Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life

20 minutes

Focus questions for the week: what does the term “faith practices” mean to you? How would you define “faith practices”? As you go through the week, pay attention to your faith practices? Are there some things you practice that you weren’t aware of before?

Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

### **Explorers on the Expedition: Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life (cont.)**

**Week Six**

**Tuesday, April 13, 2004**

### Opening Discussion

10-20 minutes

Focus questions from last week: what does the term “faith practices” mean to you? How would you define “faith practices”? As you go through the week, pay attention to your faith practices? Are there some things you practice that you weren’t aware of before?

“‘Are you a practicing Christian?’ a friend asked in the course of a conversation. ‘No,’ I laughed, ‘I got it right the first time.’ The truth is that I need all the practice I can get. ‘Getting it right’ is exactly the wrong way to think about faith. Faith is more a matter of ‘being got’ than ‘getting it.’ American philosopher of religion H. Richard Niebuhr put it this way: ‘We sought a good to love and were found by a good that loved us.’ The words of the hymn ‘Amazing Grace’ put this truth to music: ‘I once was lost, but now am found....’ Like a flare from a floundering ship, practices position us to be found.’”

(Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics, PLTS, Berkeley, CA, “Faith Practices, Faith Lives: A Lutheran Perspective on Faith Practices” in Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, B-25)<sup>6</sup>

Discuss what the author is saying.

Pray

## Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>7</sup> 50 minutes

As we live a transformed Kingdom life in the real world, we are challenged to integrate our relationship with Jesus into every aspect of our lives. This is a commitment that involves dedication to both beliefs and practices. Our focus now turns to practices.

Review from last week:

A definition for practices: any socially meaningful activity; complex, social activities that pursue certain goods internal to the practices themselves

A definition for Christian practices: things Christian people do together over time to address fundamental human needs in response to and in the light of God’s active presence for the life of the world in Jesus Christ

- Practices resist the separation of thinking and acting and thus the separation of Christian belief/doctrine from the Christian life.
- Practices are social, belonging to groups of people across generations.
- Practices are rooted in the past but constantly changing and adapting.
- Practices articulate implicit wisdom from the community.

Christian practices involve a profound awareness, a deep knowing. They are activities imbued with the knowledge of God and creation. (*My comment: often, we enter with blissful ignorance and come to profound awareness.*) How have we experienced this very thing at Soul Café?

Christian practices are social and historical; they are activities people engage in together over time.

Christian practices share in the mysterious dynamic of fall and redemption, sin and grace.

---

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics, PLTS, Berkeley, CA in “Faith Practices, Faith Lives: A Lutheran Perspective on Faith Practices” from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, p. B-25.

<sup>7</sup> Ideas developed from a lecture by Rick Bliese, “Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,” January 14, 2004, Luther Seminary.

Christians don't master the practices; they enter into the practices to engage God more fully OR to be engaged by God more fully.

### Thinking about faith practices

Name some faith practices that you have observed or of which you have been a part.

Refer back to Week One and the New Behaviors in Acts 2-6.

Acts 2:37-47 through Acts 6

How we live in the eschatological future

What we share in common in light of the fact that we share Christ in common

#### New Behaviors

- Gathering
- Sharing the story
- Giving of resources
- Faith when facing adversity
- Protecting community integrity
- Addressing issues of justice

Ephesians 2:19-22

#### New Creation

- Citizens of a new nation
- Members of a new household
- Living stones in a holy temple as the dwelling place of God

Are any of these practices evident in your life? Are any of these practices evident in the community life at Soul Café? If so, how have they shaped you/us? How have they opened you/us to the work of the Spirit? How do our practices at Soul Café fit or not fit into the definition of Christian practices (see above)?

### *New for this week: Expanding our knowledge of faith practices*

#### An (Incomplete) List of Christian Practices

- Honoring the Body
- Hospitality
- Household Economics
- Saying Yes and Saying No
- Keeping the Sabbath
- Discernment
- Testimony
- Shaping Communities
- Forgiveness
- Healing
- Dying Well

- Singing Our Lives to God

Discuss these practices. Have you participated in any of these? If so, how have they shaped you/your community?

### SO WHAT?!

Why all this talk about faith practices? What's the big deal?

## **Faith Practices: What They Are and Do<sup>8</sup>**

### **1. Faith practices confer identity**

Though practices seem to tell us what to do, in reality, they tell us who to be.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland to group of young people wanting to know what it meant to be Catholic: "Go to mass every Sunday, and work in a soup kitchen every week for 6 months. Then you'll know what it means to be Catholic." The bishop was telling the young people that immersing themselves in God-shaped and God-shaping activities is central to the faith.

As God-shaped and God-shaping activities, faith practices both bring us into a tradition and serve as the face of that tradition in the world. Because they bring us into a tradition, practices help us know who we are: we know ourselves as the people who do these kinds of things.

**How is this true/not true for us at Soul Café?**

Many abandon faith practices because it doesn't "do anything" for them. Is the question, "What will this do for me?" even the right question? More than doing something *for us*, living a set of faith practices over time and in a committed and disciplined way does something *to us*.

**Do you agree or disagree?**

Faith practices also serve as the public face of a tradition in the world. They not only identify us to ourselves; they also identify us to others.

**How is this true/not true for us at Soul Café? If it's true, what's the "tradition"?**

"[Children] do not need the freedom to choose their own religious faith practices; they need a first language of faith. If they do not have a language for religious experience, they will have trouble identifying it. After all, how could a child of the desert begin to describe snow? Why would she need to?" (Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz)

**Do you agree or disagree?**

---

<sup>8</sup> Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics, PLTS, Berkeley, CA in "Faith Practices, Faith Lives: A Lutheran Perspective on Faith Practices" from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, pp. B-25-B-29.

## **2. Faith practices reflect and define relationships**

Christianity is not primarily about accepting certain doctrines or living up to certain obligations—though those are part of one’s faith life. Christianity is primarily about being in relationship. All the rest follows.

**Discuss in regard to the conversations we have had regarding the perichoretic God.**

A relationship with God is not a private hotline to the sacred. It shapes all other relationships. See The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:38-39). The three-fold relationship depicted here—God, self, community—defines our religious practices.

Without God—practices become mere group activities.

Without the loving relationship to self—practices become exercises in false humility and homemade martyrdom.

Without the community—practices become experiments in private spiritual wandering.

**At Soul Café, do we practice the three-fold relationship of God, self, community that is depicted in The Great Commandment?**

## **3. Faith practices teach and train the emotions**

Think about the cultural “practice” of watching TV. What emotions/feelings are evoked?

**Discuss this.**

Faith practices train the emotions in ways that are God-shaped and God-shaping.

**Discuss faith practices of participants that are examples of this.**

St. Benedict’s practice of praying the Psalms—the psalmists paint with a rich emotional palette that carries all colors of the rainbow. (See Psalms 22 and 23 as examples.) There is room in relationship with God for everything: rejoicing and despair, consolation and abandonment, judgment and mercy. Reading the Psalms lets the word color us, bringing out the many hues in our experience with God and our neighbor.

## **4. Faith practices are deeply traditioned**

Faith practices are done together and over time; they presume community and history.

**Discuss this in relationship to what we practice/don’t practice at Soul Café.**

In the background of faith practices is Scripture; Scripture informs faith practices.

(Ex: baptism is traced back to the command of Jesus in scripture)

In the foreground of faith practices is the church’s teachings or doctrines. They furnish a certain framework for faith; faith practices show us how to walk in that framework. (Ex: church’s teachings/doctrines about baptism and eucharist)

**How do the Scriptures and the church’s teachings/doctrines inform what we practice at Soul Café?**

## 5. Faith practices train us in the way we see our world

Faith practices become “eye exercises” by which the Spirit corrects our vision, aligning our eyes in communion with God. One can read the works of Aristotle without realizing that there were poor people in the city of Athens. They were simply invisible to him. But had Aristotle’s vision been corrected by the lens of Scripture, he would not have missed seeing “the widow, the orphan, the stranger in your land.”

How have our faith practices at Soul Café corrected our vision, aligning our eyes in communion with God?

Faith practices are not activities that we choose to do (ooooh, that smacks against the individualism in our culture, doesn’t it?), but rather, activities which, if we do them in a disciplined and regular way, over time choose us.

Have you experienced this—faith practices “choosing” you?

### Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life 10 minutes

Focus question for the week: as one of your faith practices this week, pick some times during the week (every day, every other day, etc.) and read a Psalm. What emotions come forth for you? How does the Word “color” you, bringing out the many hues in your experience with God and others?

### Closing Prayers & Holy Communion 10 minutes

## Explorers on the Expedition: Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life (cont.)

### Week Seven

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

### Opening Discussion 10-20 minutes

Focus question from last week: as one of your faith practices this week, pick some times during the week (every day, every other day, etc.) and read a Psalm. What emotions come forth for you? How does the Word “color” you, bringing out the many hues in your experience with God and others?

Pray

### Biblical & Theological Foundations<sup>9</sup> 50 minutes

As we live a transformed Kingdom life in the real world, we are challenged to integrate our relationship with Jesus into every aspect of our lives. This is a commitment that involves dedication to both beliefs and practices. Our focus now turns to practices.

---

<sup>9</sup> Ideas developed from a lecture by Rick Bliese, “Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life,” January 14, 2004, Luther Seminary.

Review from last week:

### Expanding our Knowledge of Faith Practices

#### An (Incomplete) List of Christian Practices

- Honoring the Body
- Hospitality
- Household Economics
- Saying Yes and Saying No
- Keeping the Sabbath
- Discernment
- Testimony
- Shaping Communities
- Forgiveness
- Healing
- Dying Well
- Singing Our Lives to God

### SO WHAT?!

Why all this talk about faith practices? What's the big deal?

### **Faith Practices: What They Are and Do<sup>10</sup>**

#### **1. Faith practices confer identity**

Though practices seem to tell us what to do, in reality, they tell us who to be.

Archbishop Rembert Weakland to group of young people wanting to know what it meant to be Catholic: "Go to mass every Sunday, and work in a soup kitchen every week for 6 months. Then you'll know what it means to be Catholic." The bishop was telling the young people that immersing themselves in God-shaped and God-shaping activities is central to the faith.

As God-shaped and God-shaping activities, faith practices both bring us into a tradition and serve as the face of that tradition in the world. Because they bring us into a tradition, practices help us know who we are: we know ourselves as the people who do these kinds of things.

#### **How is this true/not true for us at Soul Café?**

Many abandon faith practices because it doesn't "do anything" for them. Is the question, "What will this do for me?" even the right question? More than doing something *for us*, living a set of faith practices over time and in a committed and disciplined way does something *to us*.

---

<sup>10</sup> Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics, PLTS, Berkeley, CA in "Faith Practices, Faith Lives: A Lutheran Perspective on Faith Practices" from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, pp. B-25-B-29.

Do you agree or disagree?

Faith practices also serve as the public face of a tradition in the world. They not only identify us to ourselves; they also identify us to others.

How is this true/not true for us at Soul Café? If it's true, what's the "tradition"?

"[Children] do not need the freedom to choose their own religious faith practices; they need a first language of faith. If they do not have a language for religious experience, they will have trouble identifying it. After all, how could a child of the desert begin to describe snow? Why would she need to?" (Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz)

Do you agree or disagree?

## **2. Faith practices reflect and define relationships**

Christianity is not primarily about accepting certain doctrines or living up to certain obligations—though those are part of one's faith life. Christianity is primarily about being in relationship. All the rest follows.

Discuss in regard to the conversations we have had regarding the perichoretic God.

A relationship with God is not a private hotline to the sacred. It shapes all other relationships. See The Great Commandment (Matthew 22:38-39). The three-fold relationship depicted here—God, self, community—defines our religious practices.

Without God—practices become mere group activities.

Without the loving relationship to self—practices become exercises in false humility and homemade martyrdom.

Without the community—practices become experiments in private spiritual wandering.

At Soul Café, do we practice the three-fold relationship of God, self, community that is depicted in The Great Commandment?

## **3. Faith practices teach and train the emotions**

Think about the cultural "practice" of watching TV. What emotions/feelings are evoked?

Discuss this.

Faith practices train the emotions in ways that are God-shaped and God-shaping.

Discuss faith practices of participants that are examples of this.

St. Benedict's practice of praying the Psalms—the psalmists paint with a rich emotional palette that carries all colors of the rainbow. (See Psalms 22 and 23 as examples.) There is room in relationship with God for everything: rejoicing and despair, consolation and abandonment, judgment and mercy. Reading the Psalms lets the word color us, bringing out the many hues in our experience with God and our neighbor.

#### **4. Faith practices are deeply traditioned**

Faith practices are done together and over time; they presume community and history.  
**Discuss this in relationship to what we practice/don't practice at Soul Café.**

In the background of faith practices is Scripture; Scripture informs faith practices.  
(Ex: baptism is traced back to the command of Jesus in scripture)

In the foreground of faith practices is the church's teachings or doctrines. They furnish a certain framework for faith; faith practices show us how to walk in that framework. (Ex: church's teachings/doctrines about baptism and eucharist)

**How do the Scriptures and the church's teachings/doctrines inform what we practice at Soul Café?**

#### **5. Faith practices train us in the way we see our world**

Faith practices become "eye exercises" by which the Spirit corrects our vision, aligning our eyes in communion with God. One can read the works of Aristotle without realizing that there were poor people in the city of Athens. They were simply invisible to him. But had Aristotle's vision been corrected by the lens of Scripture, he would not have missed seeing "the widow, the orphan, the stranger in your land."

**How have our faith practices at Soul Café corrected our vision, aligning our eyes in communion with God?**

Faith practices are not activities that we choose to do (ooooh, that smacks against the individualism in our culture, doesn't it?), but rather, activities which, if we do them in a disciplined and regular way, over time choose us.

**Have you experienced this—faith practices choosing you?**

### **Faith Practices as "Marks of the Church"<sup>11</sup>**

Martin Luther exhorted his parishioners to practice the faith. What he identified as the "marks of the church" were nothing less than God-shaped and God-shaping activities given to Christians for their lives in the world. They centered on the preaching and hearing of the Word through baptism; sharing the Lord's Supper; forgiving/asking for forgiveness; ordaining/commissioning leaders; praying, praising, teaching people the faith; discipling or following in the way of the Cross. These "marks of the church" signaled where the church could be found in the world; they told "what, who, and where" the church is.

**What "marks of the church" identify Soul Café to the world?**

Think of the Taize chant: *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est*. "Where there is love, there is God." Think of altering it slightly, and what Luther intends becomes clear. Where there are people baptizing, there is the church. Where there are people teaching, there is the

---

<sup>11</sup> Dr. Martha Ellen Stortz, Professor, Historical Theology and Ethics, PLTS, Berkeley, CA in "Faith Practices, Faith Lives: A Lutheran Perspective on Faith Practices" from Living Faith: An ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship, pp. B-30-B-37.

church. Where there are people listening for the Word of God, there is the church. These core faith practices locate the body of Christ, the church, in the world. They are not the only places where Christ is present, but by engaging in them, we learn to recognize Christ when he is present. We learn to discern Christ's body in the world.

“Where there are/is \_\_\_\_\_, there is the church.” How would we complete this sentence at Soul Café? How do we recognize Christ's presence in the world? How do we discern Christ's body in the world? How do others recognize Christ's presence in the world/discern Christ's body in the world through the “marks of the church” at Soul Café?

Some secondary and perhaps tertiary faith practices: marrying and burying; confirming; blessing a meal; remembering the dead; singing heartily and well; coffee hours or potluck dinners.

As long as these practices organize themselves around the Word of God, they fit in this universe of Christian practices. Faith practices open the way into the heart, which is the place in which the Spirit creates religious experience. Discuss Seven Faith Practices from ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship.

Seven Faith Practices from ELCA-Wide Call to Discipleship

- Pray—the foundation for transformation because it's the way to a close and growing relationship with Jesus
- Study—immersion in the Word opens us to the work of the Spirit through the Word—a work that offers direction and challenge for our way
- Worship—in worship, we are nurtured through regular encounters with God; worship happens both within the community of faith and in one's private devotional life
- Invite—a way to live out our commitment to give away what we have received from Jesus by inviting others to come, follow, learn, and become involved in the way
- Encourage—care for one another by offering spiritual encouragement to others
- Serve—as followers of Jesus, we are propelled into the world to address the hurts of others with the power of God's love and compassion
- Give—giving the gifts we have received; we give for the sake of Jesus and his Kingdom; we learn to give up one reality and embrace the reality of the Kingdom; we learn to distinguish the difference between the world view that Jesus offers and our own western, materialistic, individualistic, rational world view with all its self-seeking values, and more intentionally embrace the one Jesus offers.

What “traditional” faith practices are a part of Soul Café? What are the faith practices that are unique to Soul Café?

Think of Thomas and how he wouldn't believe until he could put his hands into the marks on Christ's body. The marks of the body of Christ in the world are faith practices. They are given to us so that we will recognize and be recognized as the body of Christ in the world.

## Beliefs & Practices in the Kingdom Life

10 minutes

Focus question for the week: what “traditional” faith practices are “choosing” you?  
What new faith practices are a part of your life through your experience at Soul Café?  
What faith practices are “choosing” Soul Café?

## Closing Prayers & Holy Communion

10 minutes

### **SUMMARY**

It is interesting (and at the same time humorous) to look at the initial ideas with which I began this project. It started off gigantic in scope, but with help from the cohort became more focused. Even then, the project took a direction of its own (or perhaps the Spirit’s direction) as it became lived out through the conversations and experiences at Soul Café. The project went (and continues to go) where the Spirit led our community, and it has been fun to be a part of the experience.

Our ceiling at Soul Café is adorned with our theological assertions regarding God (those developed from the first project). Now we are discussing how this conversation about faith practices is leading us to put “something” on the floor and/or walls of Soul Café. That “something” has not yet been discerned, but we will have Weeks 5, 6, and 7 to talk about it. I will keep the cohort informed as things develop.

The one thing this Bible Study does not do is to help individuals and the Soul Café community develop a “rule of life,” something I initially intended on doing. It seems like when this study is completed, however, this would be a natural next step.