Wisdom Walking: The Four Stages of the Alchemical Process of Pilgrimage
Dr. Gil W. Stafford (Copyright © 2015)
A Study Guide for When Leadership and Spiritual Direction Meet by Gil Stafford

This is a six-week study guide. This material is not to be sold in any form. It is solely for the use of individual and group study in conjunction with Gil Stafford’s book, When Leadership and Spiritual Direction Meet (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014). Stafford’s book should be purchased from an approved book dealer.

The small group facilitator should prepare well in advance of the first meeting by becoming very familiar with the study guide and the unique process used to lead the sessions. Each member of the small group should have a copy of When Leadership and Spiritual Meet and this study guide. The study guide does not replace reading the book. Therefore, without reading the book, the participants are at a disadvantage.

Introduction

Let’s go Wisdom Walking. We’ll be taking a long journey down the pilgrim’s path. Traipsing through the forest of life. Climbing over the mountains of adversity. Enduring the climate of challenge. During the course of countless miles and numerous days, our walk will build our capacity for inner wisdom—the ability to discern the delicate nuances of our inner life and the world outside us.

I’ve taken numerous wisdom walks. Some were called pilgrimages. I walked Ireland coast-to-coast, alone. I’ve walked the Wicklow Way with several groups. I have also journeyed the wisdom walk of life. I’ve walked with my sister who has Prader-Willi Syndrome. She is physically and mentally handicapped. I’ve walked to death’s doorway with my mom. I failed at being the president of a university. I’ve changed careers in mid-life. Wisdom walks take many forms. We will be using this study guide as a form of Wisdom Walking.

For many years, I thought my mentors were simply wise—I had no idea how they became that way. I assumed because they had lived longer and had more experience they had wisdom. As I’ve gotten older, I’ve been assured by mentors while age and experience does give us the opportunity to become wiser, we will not be any wiser if we avoid the hard work of processing and honestly reflecting on our experiences, both good and bad, successes and failures.

By good fortune, or as Carl Jung would say, through synchronicity, years ago I met Scott Haasarud. He has spent a good portion of his life studying Jung. Scott has shared his ideas and interpretations of Jung through his spiritual direction practice, of which I have been one of his clients for twelve years. I am not a therapist. I am, though, steeped in the ways of Jung through Scott’s influence and my own reading, study, and research. I’ve spent a great deal of time learning from people Robert Bosnack, Edward Edinger, James Hillman, Bill Plotkin, Eligio Stephen Gallegos, and several others whose work has been significantly shaped by Carl Jung. Their work is woven throughout this study guide and my life.

I have focused much of my study of Carl Jung on his work in archetypes and alchemy. Several of his books wrestle with the concepts of the integration of archetypes and alchemy—leading to an understanding of the human process of individuation. Jung was a pilgrim. A world-traveler. Seeking to learn about the universality of archetypes across cultures. While at the same time, he confronted his own unconscious, the anima, the soul. His work on the psyche, archetypes, and
Alchemy has broadened my understanding of what happens to someone’s mind, body, and soul when they go on pilgrimage and encounter the Divine. Through my work then, I have begun to see life itself as a pilgrimage—a wisdom walk.

Wisdom Walking is the alchemical four-stage spiral process of pilgrimage. Let me unpack that very loaded sentence. I have equated the four stages of Wisdom Walking with Jung’s personality typology most commonly found in the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. My focus is on what Jung called the interior functions, sensing, intuition, thinking and feeling. I use the functions in a different order as well use of the term “imagination” instead of intuition.

**Step One** is sensing. During a wisdom walk, we use our five senses to gather data about our experience. We see, hear, touch, taste, and smell on the journey. Our mind and body are the first active agents in our interpretation of our experience. During this stage try not to think about what your sensing. Simply let your senses gather data.

In **Step Two**, we engage our thinking. We begin to intellectually process what we see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. We actively reflect on what we are sensing.

During **Step Three** we acknowledge our feelings about the data our senses have gathered and what our intellect has reflected upon during the experience. What emotions are being evoked on this long walk? My own experience has taught me to expect the unexpected—long forgotten emotions rising to the surface during a wisdom walk. I’ve found myself sadly crying in the middle of long day’s walk for no apparent reason. Only after my emotions surface could I begin to realize that I was dealing with something I had suppressed years ago.

**Step Four** is when the imagination is liberated. I use the word imagination because we all can relate to the idea of imagination. Imagination is the creative juice of every child. And that inner child still lives within us. We just have to set him or her free. During this stage we can begin to imagine a new possibility for our life. We can expand our consciousness. We begin to see our Self, the best part of our conscious life, being influenced by our unconscious, our dreams. We also come to realize that the integration of our conscious and unconscious life can be influenced not only by the consciousness of creation, but our unconscious may be able to hear the still small voice of the Consciousness of Creation, God. In this hearing, we may begin to imagine a new way for us to live, move, and have our being in the Being of the world. The fourth stage is where the psychic gold is being created, the gold of an integrated life. Through integration, we can begin to experience our lives as individuated—Jung’s term for the union of the conscious and the unconscious in a fully developed and mature adult.

Because of the constant application of emotional heat on each step, the alchemists called these four stages, **blackening**, **whitening**, **yellowing**, and **reddening**. While the medieval alchemists were the forefathers of modern chemistry, Jung believed they were also experiencing a psychic pilgrimage—a journey into the unconscious collective archetypes. Alchemy, pilgrimage, and wisdom walking, are not linear processes—they operate in spiral. Each time you go through the four-stage process you can gain new insights and more experience, which in turn, build a larger capacity for processing your next pilgrimage of wisdom walking.
Specific Use of this Study Guide

This study guide is intended for use in book and bible studies provided by the author. A trained small group facilitator will lead each session. The study will take the individual and/or the group through the four steps of Wisdom Walking each week of the study. Each session will follow the same format. 1) An opening prayer. 2) Group check-in. 3) A brief introduction of the Bible materials or the book being studied. 4) A guided tour through the four steps of Wisdom Walking. 5) Using Eric Law’s mutual invitation (described below), the facilitator will lead the group in sharing what each person gleaned in the study. 6) The facilitator guides the group through a discussion of the reflection questions. 7) A closing prayer. It is important that the facilitator and the group follow the model.

Mutual Invitation

Episcopal priest Eric Law developed Mutual Invitation in his groundbreaking book The Wolf Shall Dwell with the Lamb (Chalice Press, 1993). Law’s work was originally created as a way of providing a safe environment for full participation within multi-cultural groups. He envisioned Mutual invitation as a means of ensuring that each member of the group would be invited to speak. In some cultures (and among some introverts) they will not speak unless invited to do so. Some minority groups and some introverts will often sit quietly and let the dominant culture and the extroverts control the conversation. Law also created this process to open a space for individuals to have the opportunity to express their opinions and feelings without fear of being “told” what is best or how to feel or think.

There are two parts to the process. First, the facilitator models the process. He or she asks the first question and then answers it within an appropriate time frame, usually less then two minutes. Then the facilitator invites someone else to answer the question. (Going around the circle encourages people to stop listening and think only of their own answer to the question. Not knowing when you will be asked to speak encourages you to listen.) The person that has been invited may respond to the question. Pass. Or pass for now meaning they have an opportunity to answer the question at another time.

Second, no one may comment about what someone else has said. The speaker must refer only to his or her own answer. This protects each person in the group from the fear of being put down, or that his or her answer may not be correct. The point of the process is for people to learn holy listening, of each other, and of the Spirit. The method is simple and effective. However, I have found that groups have a very difficult time following the guidelines. The facilitator must prepare the group for the procedure and remind them each week of their agreement to follow the mutual invitation process.
Session One—Introduction and Chapter 1 The Integration of Leadership and Spiritual Direction

(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

Opening Prayer: O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read and reflect on the material. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

Group Check-in: The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

Background for Session One

The leader’s purpose must be intertwined with her personal work. My purpose is my life’s calling. Purpose is a larger concept than my job. Purpose and the functions of the job are not the same. Functions are tasks. My purpose is to be an integrated, non-dualistic soul, living life in God who is in me. (20) Leadership is an art. Spiritual direction is a charism. The two meet in the transept of the heart. The work of the heart is the ‘seeing through the third eye of the heart,’ the mysterious place of the new and the now, the seen and the unseen, where the possibility of the divine within the community can emerge. (21) The pastor incorporates the art and skills of spiritual direction into every aspect of her leadership, preaching, teaching, counseling, casual interactions, emails, phone calls, even business meetings. (22)

Martin Thornton’s writings on leadership and spiritual direction are a model for Stafford’s ideas in this book. Spiritual direction is the act of guiding groups and individuals, first by listening to them. Second, by assisting the person in their soul pilgrimage—helping them to make decisions as to how they will live, move, and have their being in the world. Thornton calls this “soul-making.” Stafford writes that Leadership is episodic while spiritual direction is a way of life. Decision-making, the risk of soul-making, then, is the intersection of leadership and spiritual direction.” (23)

Richard Foster writes, “Spiritual direction is concerned with the whole person and the interrelationship of all of life…Spiritual direction takes up the concrete daily experiences of our lives and give them sacramental significance.” (26)

The four roles of the spiritual director are:

1) The steward of sacred safety—The spiritual director must be circumspect when it comes to the spiritual, emotional, psychological, and physical safety of all her directees. (29)

2) Holy Listener—Listening may the most important role of spiritual director. (30) To become a better listener, I imagine God listening to me. The skills and practices of Listening can be learned and improved upon with effort and time. (33)
3) Advocate of Silence—Why do you feel tension in silence? What makes you uncomfortable in silence? How long can you hold silence? The purpose of silence is to invite God to speak. (39)

4) Wisdom teacher—Wisdom is the product of a deepened prayer life, experience, training, and education. “The director is only God’s usher, and must lead soul’s in God’s way, and not his own,” wrote Thomas Merton. (38)

Martin Thornton wrote that 1) the spiritual director must listen rather than talk, 2) allow for direction to be a long process, 3) the director is a guest not an authoritarian figure, and 4) both the director and directee share a mutual love of God. (41)

**Reading for Session One (from page 34)**

Hugh O’Doherty can hold silence better than anyone I have met. He is a professor at Harvard and faculty member of the Clergy Leadership Project (CLP) of which I was a participant. Our CLP class consisted of twenty-five experienced Episcopal clergy. We gathered for workshops on leadership at the beautiful Trinity Conference Center in West Cornwall, Connecticut.

We met each morning in a lovely conference room with a low ceiling and a fireplace in the corner, giving the space a homey feeling. The eight-foot tables were placed in an oblong egg-shape with an opening at each end. At the “head of the circle” were the typical podium, projector and other electronic equipment we have become used to seeing in any classroom. Our group had come to expect whoever was facilitating the day would begin by standing near the podium and giving an introduction for the session. Because I have come to expect every conference and workshop to start this way, the familiarity is comforting and kept me at ease.

Hugh O’Doherty is a gentle Irishman. He has spent thirty years working on peace and reconciliation issues with paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. Hugh is of average height, fit build, with shocking silver hair and crystal blue eyes. His accent is pleasant and enticing. He has a fetching charisma about him.

On the second morning of classes with Hugh, he stood where every other teacher had begun the daily session, the same place he had stood the day before. However, this day, he stood with his hands behind his back. Saying nothing, Hugh looked slowly around the room, making and holding eye contact with each of us. As his eyes finished circling the room he maintained his silence. Again, only moving his head, the fetching of his crystal blue eyes captured our silent attention. Time stood still. The room was silent. The birds stopped singing. I could not hear my neighbor’s breathing. I could feel the tension rise within my interior.

The monkey in my mind was asking, “What was he doing? Was he waiting for one of us to break the silence? What if I asked a question? Would I be reprimanded and asked to remain silent?”

After about ten minutes of silence, my inner monkey mind began to calm, but it was replaced by the tension of the unknown. If I kept silent, what would happen? How long could I remain in the silence Hugh was holding?

Timidly, after about fifteen minutes, one of my classmates broke the silence and asked an innocuous question.
But, Hugh would not be distracted by a question he thought would let us “off the hook.” He responded with his own questions. “How did the silence make you feel? Was the silence moving you do anything?”

Someone asked in a mild retort, “Was it the silence moving me to do something or was it my response to silence that would move me?”

Hugh asked, “What power is there in the tension created by, and in, silence?”
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

**Sensing:** What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

**Thinking:** What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

**Feeling:** What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

**Imagination:** In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.
Session Two—Chapter 2 The Leader as the Steward of Sacred Safety
(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

Opening Prayer: O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read upon the material. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

Group Check-in: The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

Background for Session Two

The spiritual director and leader is responsible for everyone who comes into their care. The trust of safety is heightened when we acknowledge that every person is created by God and carries the presence of God within them. (48) As humans, we are God’s beloved creation, heirs, sons and daughters. We carry the very genetic imprint of God in our life. (50) Foundational to the theology of safety is one’s understanding of the person as a whole, complete in mind, body and spirit. This theology is based on the Genesis story of creation. (51) I treat other people with the realization I am responding to the God within them. “Our understanding that the image of God is created within each person moves us from an intellectual acknowledgement of our responsibility to care for the other to a deeper, mystical, impassioned fervor for the care of the presence of God and Jesus in the everyday encounter with every person. We love our neighbors as our selves and experience the transformational work of that love in our life. (54)

Leaders must work to ensure each person’s physical, emotional, and spiritual safety. Physically safe and accessible facilities are the minimums for our congregations. The leadership must train its laity and volunteers to manage the facilities, know the procedures in case of emergency, and how to deal with those people who might be unsafe for the community. (57-59) We must also train every person in our congregation who is a leader about the safeguards against sexual abuse of adults and children. (59-61) This also means that pastors must take every step to ensure the safety of parishioners during all forms of rites and rituals.

Providing emotional safety is taxing work. Leaders must be able to “lean in” to the situation. (64) Creating emotionally safe space demands non-judgmental acceptance. The leader must relinquish their power and communicate their own vulnerability. (65) Creating safe emotional space in public settings like funerals, congregational services, or business meetings can be like walking on a tightrope. (67) The leader will need to maintain a non-anxious presence in the face of conflict and emotional displays.

Too many times we assume the church is spiritually safe space. However, that is not always the case. Churches tend to attract people of like-mindedness. We presume our congregations are hospitable. And they are; to people who are like them. The question is, can we create spiritually safe space for people whose beliefs are much different than ours? Honest dialogue, open questions, and deep listening are required in order to create spiritually safe space for those of differing religious beliefs and opinions. (78) Providing spiritual safety may also include encounters with the demonic. (79-81)
Redemptorist Renewal Center at Picture Rocks is a sunbaked spiritual hideaway in the Sonoran Desert. The center is perched in the southwestern foothills, overlooking Tucson, Arizona. There is a labyrinth on the property, made by volunteers with hundreds of hand-sized stones gathered from the nearby wash. The labyrinth is modeled after the one on the floor of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartes. It is round, depicting the circle of life, about thirty feet in diameter. Around the edge of the circle are 128 half-moons representing the lunar cycle. The labyrinth is divided into quarters, the seasons of life. Even though on first observation the labyrinth may look like a maze, it is not, for there is no getting lost in a labyrinth. The walk does take a serpentine path to the center, the womb, representing our physical and spiritual birth. As we leave the womb we enter the winding path of life until we reach the end of the circle, death, and passing into the next life.

On the most pleasant of February afternoons in the desert, I began to walk and pray the labyrinth. My prayer was, “God speak, I will listen.” The sound of my steps on the course sand and pebbles caused me to slow my pace and go deeper into my prayer. My footprints joined those of thousands who have worn this path. The stones lining the path have been in this area for millions of years before they were called into place as a labyrinth, as if it were the vocation of the stones to mark this way of prayer. The stones will be here for an untold time after this retreat center has long been forgotten. The stones, having been created by God, are held in the memory of God, just as each of us, formed by God, is also held.

I walked and prayed. A few turns into my prayers I began to recognize that the stones of the labyrinth represented the people I have encountered in my life as spiritual director, pastor, and priest. God has created each stone and each person. Some stones were grey, some reddish, some green, some blue, some white, some flat, and some rounder than others. Time and weather must have etched on some of the stones stars, moons, and night-crawling creatures. Some stones were smooth, and some were jagged, varied as the individuals I see daily. I walked the labyrinth carefully, acknowledging each stone but careful not to disturb its place.

At some points, especially at the turns in the path, a fellow pilgrim walker, I assume, making a corner too sharp, has disturbed a stone. I am called to stop. I sense the need to speak to the stone. I ask the stone if it wants to be returned to its place on the path. This particular stone acknowledged my presence and affirmed its desire to be in its original position. Gently, carefully, not lifting the stone, I nudged it back into its intended place. This is my role as a leader and spiritual director in the community I serve. I walk in prayer with the people. And, if given permission, I attempt to help the individual find her place, a safe place, where she can live out how she hears God calling into her vocation.

As I prepared to leave the labyrinth, the appointed psalm for the week was fresh on my lips. “For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him. He alone is my rock and my salvation.” Here in the silence among the stones I have met the presence of God. I turned to face the path of stones, made the sign of the Cross, bowed, and offered the salutation, Namaste, the God in me recognizes the God in you.
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

***Sensing***: What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

***Thinking***: What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

***Feeling***: What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

***Imagination***: In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.
Session 3—Chapter 3 The Leader as Holy Listener

(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

Opening Prayer: O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest the text. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

Group Check-in: The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

Background for Session 3

Listening is a learned skill. But leaders of a Christian community must be more than good listeners. They must be holy listeners. They must be present like Jesus. They must listen like Jesus. (86) Like spiritual directors leaders must, 1) listen rather than talk, 2) exercise patience, 3) be a listener more than an authority figure, 4) listen to what the Spirit is saying. (87)

There are three dimensions to holy listening, listening to the Spirit, listening to the other, listening to the self. “To listen is to swallow the word of the Lord into the depth of my soul, where the words begin to shape and form my inner being, to transform me into the leader God is calling me to become.” (89) We can hear God best in solitude, consultation, and community. These circumstances, though, can make us uncomfortable and they can also be risky. When we listen to the Divine and respond to what God is saying, we will experience transformation. (89-94)

Margaret Guenther says that holy listening is an act of being fully present with all of my self to the person sitting across from me—as if I were listening to God. (95) I must hear what is being said as what is not being said. The listener must rely on non-verbal clues to hear all of the story, body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, eye contact (or lack of it), tattoos and body piercings. Ask the person to tell their story. What kind of music does the other person listen to? Listen to the person tell about their dreams. (98-99) Listen to the culture and the context in which the community resides. (101-103)

To listen to my self is important spiritual work. Thomas Merton wrote, “For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self.”

There are several techniques to help us in our self-discovery. Keeping a private journal is a safe manner of working out some of our issues in life. By keeping a journal over a long period of time it is also an opportunity to reflect on our progress along the journey. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and the Enneagram are excellent personality typology tools to help us understand our inner self. (107-109) These are tools of listening to the conscious self, however we must also pay close attention to the unconscious self. Integration of the conscious and the unconscious is vital work for the leader. Dream work is one way to access the unconscious. (110-112).

Adam McHugh wrote, “People who think before they act and listen before they talk can be very effective leaders. They reflective, thoughtful person may be able to learn, and
encouraging learning, in ways that people who can’t stop talking are not able to.” (112) Peter Senge wrote, “Reflective openness starts with the willingness to challenge our own thinking, to recognize that any certainty we ever had is, at best, a hypothesis about the world.” (113)

**Reading for Session 3 (113)**

The best way to know you are listening is to ask those to whom you intend to be listening, “Do you feel I am listening to you? Do you feel heard?” Ask those closest to you—spouse, partner, and trusted confidant. Ask employees. Ask leadership teams and key volunteers. “Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock and the door will be opened for you” (Matthew 7:7). Ask those around you if they felt heard—and take to heart what they are saying. Listening is holy work, a spiritual practice that is worth every ounce of energy that we dedicate to hearing the important matters of another. Holy listening is God work. We pray and God listens to us. We have no greater calling than to listen in turn to those whom God has entrusted us to lead. The sheep know the voice of the Good Shepherd. We must know and listen to the voice of our people. Listening is a full-time vocation, the most important vocation.
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

**Sensing:** What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

**Thinking:** What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

**Feeling:** What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

**Imagination:** In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.
Session 4—Chapter 4 The Leader as an Advocate of Silence

(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

**Opening Prayer:** O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest the text. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

**Group Check-in:** The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

**Background for Session 4**

Thomas Merton said, “When we have really met and known the world in silence, words do not separate us from the world nor from other men nor from God, nor from ourselves, because we no longer trust entirely in language to contain reality,” (115) Silence can be an entity, like a spirit demanding great respect. The presence of silence can have a thickness like incense hanging heavy in the air. When silence appears as a spirit, a presence, then a great deal can be learned if silence is willingly embraced. In these gifted moments, the presence of silence must be listened to as if it were the greatest sage of holy wisdom, the very voice of God. (116) Meister Eckhart wrote that, “Nothing is more like God than silence.” (121) As leaders we must abide in the presence of personal silence, other’s silence, and God’s silence.

As leaders we can follow Jesus’s example of abiding in personal silence. Jesus withdrew into silence (Luke 5:15-16) and there heard to voice of God (Matt. 14:13, Mark 1:35, 6:45-46, Luck 4:42, 6:12 and John 6:15). (122) The ancient monastics cultivated a life of silence. Using methods like lectio divina we can sit in silence with sacred scripture and teachings of the saints, by ancient and modern. Other practices like centering prayer, yoga, and solitary walks are opportunities to engage the Divine and hear God’s voice in the silence. (125) These experiences can be practiced on brief silent retreats. (126) Silence is a power source for leadership. The leader must embrace through the experience of “mini-deaths and resurrections.” These experiences build our capacity for strength to lead in moments of conflict and stress. The strength gained in silence allows the leader to engage in adaptive leadership using Ronald Heifetz’s ideas of “getting on the balcony” and “finding sanctuary.” (129)

A community that practices group silence will, 1) have a deeper empathy for one another, 2) discover new solutions to problems, and 3) be better equipped to hear the Spirit and be in union with God. Catherine de Hueck Doherty wrote, “When you are in love with God you will understand he loved you first. You will enter into a deep and mysterious silence and in that silence will become one with the Absolute. Your oneness with God will overflow to all your brothers and sisters.” The leader can develop the skills and comfort of sitting in silence with other people in one on one settings as well as group situations. The practice of silence can then carry forward into business and decision making circumstances. (134 -135) The congregation
can develop the practice of silence at age levels using curriculum like *Godly Play* (for children) and *The Art of Engaging Holy Scripture* (for youth through adults).

Abiding in God’s silence can be frightening because we have thought that God’s silence may indicate absence, disappointment, disapproval, or anger. However, the silence of God may be God’s own suffering. Stafford says that being present to God in God’s grief, “will shift our expectation from a God who is constantly on call to medicate us when we are licking our wounds, as suffering leaders, to a position of gaining healing strength from the God who knows our suffering and appreciates our presence in God’s times of pain.” (144) Stafford writes that “God’s silence is an opportunity for leaders and the community to be still before the Lord, humble ourselves, be ever more present to the heartbeat of God, and expose ourselves to the sensitivities of God— in other words to feel what God is feeling.” (145)

**Reading for Session 4 (141, 146)**

As I hold my sleeping grandson, I know he hears my heartbeat, and I pray he is hearing my love. He cannot understand the words of love I whisper, but he feels my gentle kisses on his cheeks. He may not comprehend why my tears of joy make my face shine in smiles, but he smiles back, and then I am swept away into the paradise of eternal love. I crave to hear God in this way, and I know I must be hearing God each precious minute I am with my holy grandchild. I believe when we as leaders steep ourselves in the presence of silence, listening to the heartbeat of God, swept away in our craving to hear God, we can trust the voice of God’s Spirit to speak to us in our own silence and in the silence of others. The leader who is permeated with silence in the very core of her being will lead humbly, focusing on the needs of others with wisdom, a wisdom which comes from abiding in the presence of God’s silence.

Near Prescott, Arizona, there is an outcropping of red rock, rounded and made smooth by millions of years of wind. While the wind itself makes no sound, its movement across the rocks creates a noise we can hear. The wind blowing on the red mounds of rocks sculpt the stones into artistic monuments in testimony to the wind’s presence. In the same way the wind shapes the rocks, silence will shape the people if the spiritual leader and the congregation have the courage to stay present in the silence. By advocating for silence in his or her personal life, in corporate worship, in meetings, in personal encounters with those seeking counsel and discernment, and in teaching opportunities, the leader can create an environment where the spiritual power of silence can be experienced in every aspect of parish life. Silence will prepare the hearts of the people to hear what the Spirit is saying. In silence the people can discover a stillness allowing the formative hand of the Spirit to mold the soul of the community. Silence, over time, will become the evidence of the Spirit’s power of presence among the people. Indeed, the advocacy of silence is a challenging endeavor, because the leader will be asking the congregation to fully embrace silence in worship and spiritual formation, placing themselves in the windy element of the formative Spirit. Yet, if the challenge is taken up, the results for the leader and the community will be a lasting work, a monument.
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

**Sensing:** What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

**Thinking:** What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

**Feeling:** What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

**Imagination:** In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.
Session 5—Chapter 5 The Leader as Wisdom Teacher

(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

Opening Prayer: O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest the text. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

Group Check-in: The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

Background for Session 5

Wisdom is one of the powers of gained from the positive energy of love, speaking across time, generation to generation. Wisdom grows in the heart like a garden that is tended with love. Wisdom is humble and supple, opening to learning new truths of lasting value. Wisdom is path walked for the sake of others in the love of the journey. There is no single way of wisdom, just some roads easier to travel. John O'Donohue wrote, “Wisdom, then, is the art of balancing the known with the unknown, the suffering with the joy; it is a way of linking the whole of life together in a new and deeper unity…Ultimately, wisdom and vision are sisters, the creativity, critique, and prophecy of vision issues from the fount of wisdom.” (149-150) We must seek the teaching of sister wisdom through the sages in our life—listening and learning from her about how to make sense of the journey we have traveled. She will teach us how to effectively discern meaning from the archetypal myths. Wisdom, through her guides, will build within us the desire to balance the confidence coming from what we know in life with humility we gain by recognizing what we do not know. She will help the leader manage the suffering and joys of leadership. Wisdom prevents the leader from sinking too low in times of struggle, nor rising too high in moments of success.

The vision rising out of the fount of wisdom is not a strategic plan, a mission statement, or a big hairy audacious goal. The leader who is a wisdom guide will see a vision that liberates the congregation to become the people God is calling them to be. (150)

Every leader needs a wisdom teacher, spiritual director, and/or mentor in their life. This person must listen, offer council, and challenge the leader at times. Every leader who intends to be a wisdom guide must constantly be studying their craft. Nature is also a source of wisdom for the leader. Being in nature. Listening to nature. Learning from nature. (156)

Wisdom leaders must learn the art of storytelling and preaching in order to paint a picture of vision that the people can clearly see and understand. Wisdom teachers are storytellers, parabolist’s in the tradition of Jesus. Some are gifted at telling stories. But most everyone can learn to tell stories that will capture the imagination of those who are listening. Preaching is a also a learned art. Storytelling and preaching are the number one way that congregational leaders
communicate with their congregations. The sermon as the moment of teaching is the most important fifteen to twenty minutes the leader has each week.

**Reading for Session 5 (165)**

Of course, God is always the central character of the sermonic story. Incarnational preaching implies that the preacher, to the best of his or her ability, is constantly showing, not telling, how God is the center of his or her life and how the hearer might likewise gain from the experience of this incarnational union with God. Incarnational preaching is, at its best, heard when the hearer is witness to the communication going on between the preacher and God.

Yale theology professor Miroslav Volf suggests in *Against the Tide: Love in a Time of Petty Dreams and Persisting Enmities*¹ the preacher should deliver his sermon as if God is anxiously waiting to hear what he has to say. My best preaching happens when I can, with integrity and enthusiasm and without engaging in group therapy, express to God what is happening in my life. I am talking to God as if I am talking to my spiritual director and I am waiting to hear what God’s response is to me. If I have a conversation with God in front of my congregation and they witness this dialogue, maybe they will hear God speaking wisdom to me, and just maybe, they will gain some direction from God while prayerfully listening in. You might counter God already knows what is transpiring in my life. I believe, though, a good story always bears repeating, even to God. Indeed, if God is the heavenly Father, surely he enjoys my simple and childlike stories. At least, I pray, God is as patient with me as I was with my son, who by the age of five loved to tell a good story, over and over again. This is not to grant the preacher permission to frequently retell stories or repeat sermons. But again, if the sermon story is good enough and well delivered, it could become as popular as a favorite hymn or a beloved poem.

The point of telling a good story as the heart of a sermon is not necessarily to entertain the congregation, though it will, but for the sermon to be a means of offering group spiritual direction for the congregation. Preaching as spiritual direction is only effective when God is a meaningful partner in the conversation going on between the preacher and the congregation.
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

**Sensing:** What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

**Thinking:** What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

**Feeling:** What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

**Imagination:** In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.
Session 6—Chapter 6 Leadership in the Discerning Community

(Before and after the prayer allow one minute for silence.)

Opening Prayer: O Holy One, of all that was, and is, and will be; today we seek your guidance as we study the Holy Scripture. May we be willing and open to read, learn, mark, and inwardly digest the text. We pray that we may practice holy listening by being willing to listen with open hearts to those in our group and to the Spirit. Bless our time together. We pray in the Name of the Holy undivided Trinity. Amen.

Group Check-in: The facilitator will ask each person in the group if they would like to share one thing that is going in their life this week. Each person should keep their comments to two minutes to ensure everyone has time to share and to respect the time constraints of the small group session.

Background for Session 6

Diana Butler Bass wrote, “Discernment does not simply confirm our hunches or intuitions. Instead it is a perilous practice that involves self-criticism, questions, and risk—and it often redirects our lives.

Richard Rohr wrote, “Good leaders must have a certain capacity for non-polarity thinking and full-access knowing (prayer), a tolerance for ambiguity (faith), an ability to hold creative tensions (hope), and an ability to care (love) beyond their personal advantage.” Rohr is describing what it means to lead by spiritual direction. (179)

The web-like interconnectedness of relationships between the leader and the congregation creates a dynamic of social and spiritual interaction between the people forming a congregational energy, a way of life together. The people worship together, play together, work together, and make decisions together. The leader who is attentive to the web of spiritual energy, especially by leading the congregation through spiritual direction, will foster a community of discerning individuals and hopefully, a discerning community. (179)

In order to lead a discerning community by way of spiritual direction, the leader needs a real sense of being called by God to lead this way. The risks are great especially if the congregation wants the leader to be a CEO. The leader will need spiritual guides as well as people in the congregation who are also involved in spiritual direction and support the pastor in leading through this model. The leader needs to have several practices in place, such as journaling and Integration Mapping, to support them on their path. (187)

The community also needs spiritual practices that will guide them in being a discerning community. Using discernment committees (189) to support others in making major life decisions will set an example for the church in making major decisions about the life of the community. (194) The community of discernment will move beyond comfortable and typical models of decision-making towards trusting the Spirit and taking risks in the process. (200-203)
Reading for Session 6 (202)

I realize some groups may never be willing to “draw” the decision out of the hat and voting may be the only way to “make a decision.” But because I have spent a great deal of my life in professional and college sports, I believe situations creating winners and losers in churches only cause future problems. Often the “losers” in a contentious vote are constantly looking for another chance to “win back” what they feel they have “lost.” My experience has been there is no such thing a win-win scenario. Processes, like discernment create an environment where each person will be able to accept the final decision, even if they disagree, and move on, rather than leaving the congregation or figuring out how to get the decision overturned. Words matter. If we use words like “win,” then, indeed, there must be winners. When there are winners, then there are losers. Only the winners suggest there is such a thing as win-win. The winners achieved their goal and feel confident that they must be right, because they won. The losers, on the other hand, are waiting for a “better day.” There might be a final circumstance that is “best” for everyone, but my experience is that everyone will want his or her own definition of “best.” Words are how we communicate and some words, phrases, and terms should not be in the Christian lexicon. I believe “win-win” is one of those phrases.

Christians follow the path of Christ, who emptied and humbled himself. We are fetched to do the same. Leaders must move the people into thinking about decision-making as “give-give,” where we put the needs of others first. We must use methods of discernment and decision-making that includes an opportunity for everyone to be heard so that collectively the community can hear what the Spirit is saying. Discernment keeps the church focused on its vision, not allowing the congregation to be pushed by the winds of the latest “successful” program, or as one of our leaders likes to say, “the latest shining object” intended to “grow the church.”

A discerning community uses its practiced process to hear the Spirit when considering new programs and suggestions. If the community has discerned wisely before making the decision, then most likely the vast majority of the members will move forward after the decision has been made. We fervently pray that fewer congregants will have hurt feelings, because the decision has rested in the hands of the collective and the Spirit, not the ballot box. A discerning community will be willing to wait upon the Spirit and trust the process. If one more person feels included and one less person is hurt by a decision, then the process, while more complicated, is worth the time spent.
Reflect on the Reading

Individually process through the four stages using the space provided below for your response.

Sensing: What are you Sensing; hearing, smelling, touching, tasting, seeing in the reading?

Thinking: What are you Thinking about what you sensed in the reading?

Feeling: What Feelings emerge as you walk through this reading?

Imagination: In this fourth stage it’s time to let go of any preconceived notions. During this stage we let our Imagination take control. What in the text has opened your Imagination about the possibility of a new future in your life? Maybe you need to draw a picture, write a poem or song in order to express your imagination?
Discussion Guide

1) The facilitator will guide the group through a discussion of the four steps using Mutual Invitation.

2) The facilitator will then lead an open discussion:

   What insights did you gain from listening to others in the group?

   Was there a passage you strongly agreed with or strongly disagreed with (even one not mentioned in the background materials)?

   Was there an insight from the reading that you plan on taking away from tonight’s study?

   The final question to ponder, “I wonder how my relationship with the divine has been enriched through today’s study?”

3) The facilitator will make the assignment for the next session.

Closing Prayer:

O Holy One, Divine of all that was, is, and ever will be, we ask you to pour your grace of love on us. Grant us the strength to follow in the path of love taught by Saint John the Divine. Encourage us each day to abide in your love, for which we are eternally grateful. Hear our prayers. Know our hearts. Guide us safely home. We pray in the name of God’s Son, the symbol of God’s love in our midst.