

THE INTEGRATED PASTOR: TOWARD AN EMBODIED AND EMBEDDED SPIRITUAL FORMATION

TODD WILSON¹

This is partly an observation, partly a confession. I'd like to call it a disquieting observation from a middle-aged pastor. After more than two and a half decades as a Christian, and a decade and a half as a pastor, I have come to this conclusion: pastors can be godly and yet dysfunctional at the same time. They can be both holy and not whole. They can be both biblically faithful and yet psychologically maladjusted. They can be both spiritually mature and emotionally immature.

Pastors can love evangelism yet fear those of a different race or the opposite sex. They can be “prayer warriors” and “control freaks,” powerful preachers and domineering spouses, faithful shepherds and disengaged or overbearing parents. They can love Jesus and be addicted to food, pornography, or pain medication.

While these are unsettling juxtapositions, they are, sadly enough, empirically verifiable. This is why we must learn to swallow the sobering truth that pastors can possess real spiritual depth and yet live lives that are riddled by psychological compulsions and emotional reactivity.

To reiterate: pastors can be both godly and dysfunctional—holy and not whole, spiritually mature and emotionally repressed, biblically faithful, and psychologically maladjusted.

I know this to be true from observation. But I also know this to be true from experience—personal experience. My own experience. I told you this was partly observation, partly confession. Now is time for the confession.

For many years of my ministry I would say that I was godly and dysfunctional. I have no doubt that if you lived with us for a week, slept on our couch, observed me throughout my day, you would come away thinking, “He’s a pretty godly guy. He loves Jesus. He loves the Bible. He loves the church. He cares about his wife and children and making a difference in the world for Christ.”

But if you came and lived with me in the early weeks of January 2015, you would also see that I was fairly dysfunctional. At least, that’s when I came to confront the reality of it for the first time.

¹ Todd Wilson is the President of The Center for Pastor Theologians, in Oak Park, Illinois.

I was granted a three-month sabbatical from my regular church responsibilities—a delicious season of pastoral bliss with no sermons, no meetings, no counseling sessions, no leadership decisions, no management difficulties, no long-range planning or goal setting, not even any compulsory reading or studying or writing.

To be sure, I had big plans for my sabbatical: I was going to finish one contracted book manuscript and start working on another; I was going to reread all fifteen hundred pages of Calvin's *Institutes*; I was going to memorize the book of James; I was going to plow through a three-foot high stack of books; and I was going to brush up on Hebrew.

When I shared these plans with my elders, one of them wryly said, "Are you going to do anything else?" Clearly, my compulsions had already gotten the better of me, but I was perhaps the only person at the table who couldn't recognize it. So I doubled down on the insanity and reassured them that all would be well and that this three-month season of ostensible rest was going to be what I called, ironically enough, a "working sabbatical."

But rather than dive right into all the work I had planned, I figured it would behoove a godly pastor like me to exercise a little self-restraint and Christian character by taking the first week to simply do nothing. It was a sabbatical, after all!

So that is what I did.

But I must confess, it didn't go well. My strategy of rest worked for about two days. By Wednesday of week one I was starting to unravel.

Perhaps you've known someone with a serious substance abuse problem, or you may have come alongside that person as he was trying to kick the addiction. It's not a pleasant experience. Without their chemical of choice people start to unravel, mentally and emotionally. They get irritable, edgy, panicked, overwhelmed with persistent cravings.

That was me by the middle of week one of my sabbatical. I was a godly pastor going through withdrawal. I was an addict who needed a hit—not of whiskey or meth but of accomplishment and achievement. Christian psychiatrist Gerald May defines addiction as "a state of compulsion, obsession, or preoccupation that enslaves a person's will and desire."² That, sadly, was me. I was irritable, edgy, panicked, overwhelmed with persistent cravings for getting things done—and I was driving my dear wife insane!

"Todd, you've got to do something about this!" she admonished.

And so I did. I knew just what to do.

I went back to work.

On Monday morning of week two of my sabbatical I returned to my normal routine: I got out of bed at 5:00 a.m. and into the pool at the YMCA by 5:30 a.m. I swam two thousand yards, showered, and got to my study at church by 7. There I read my Bible and prayed until around 8, at

² Gerald G. May, *Addiction & Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions* (New York: HarperCollins, 1988), 14.

which point I transitioned to begin the day's work. I wrapped up around 5:30 p.m. and was home for dinner by 6.

And I can tell you, I felt better instantly! I felt the chemical surge of satisfaction in my brain, like I had just taken a hit of my favorite narcotic—or at least a double espresso. My irritability was gone. So too was my edginess, panic, sense of desperation. I was back to my old self—a godly pastor feeding his compulsions with a working sabbatical!

Everything was going swimmingly. But then a friend had the nerve to text me sometime during week three. His text read, “Hey man, isn’t that your car in the church parking lot? Aren’t you on sabbatical?”

Do you remember that scene in 2 Samuel 12:7 when the prophet Nathan says to David, “You are the man!” That was how this friend’s text message struck me. A stinging rebuke. Todd, you are the man! Godly, yes, but dysfunctional, broken, perhaps even addicted. There are powerful subterranean forces at work in your life, controlling you.

A few weeks later, to my own surprise, I found myself in a therapist’s office. I didn’t know exactly why I was there. I had never sat with a therapist before.

“Why are you here?” he asked.

“I think I’m addicted to achievement,” I said somewhat sheepishly.

“Okay. Why don’t you tell me a little bit about your family background,” he said.

Thus began a conversation, and a therapeutic relationship, that continued for many months—one that helped me to see that I was both godly and dysfunctional. I discovered that twenty-five years of growth as a Christian had successfully added layer on layer of spiritual formation on top of some deep-seated compulsions that were still profoundly influencing my life.

THE PROBLEM WITH EVANGELICAL SPIRITUAL FORMATION: A LACK OF INTEGRATION

Godly and also dysfunctional—this is a real possibility for pastors. What do we make of this?

At the risk of oversimplification, all three stories hinge on one word: integration. Or more accurately, four words: a lack of integration. What unites each and every godly and dysfunctional pastor? A lack of integration.

Integration. From the Latin *integrare*, which means “to make whole.” To integrate is to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. To be dis-integrated is the failure to bring together different elements of a single system into a coordinated, unified whole. So for the purpose of this conversation, integration is to bring together the different elements of the human person into a coordinate, unified whole, and to be dis-integrated is to fall short of that purpose.

It is my conviction that most forms of evangelical spirituality fail to foster integration. We prioritize doctrinal instruction and moral development. But we neglect psychological healing. We emphasize the cultivation

of character. But we overlook our deep-seated psychological compulsions, fixations, and emotional reactivity.

You might say that evangelical approaches to spiritual formation often fail to promote integration. Sadly, this means that, if left to itself, evangelical spirituality will breed not integrated but dis-integrated pastors whose ministries may sooner or later disintegrate all around them.

Dis-integration isn't a problem just for pastors. It's a condition that afflicts many Christians. We have dis-integrated pastors, but we also have dis-integrated Christians—sincere followers of Jesus who live with deep (albeit well-managed) psychological dysfunctions.

At the risk of sounding like a grumpy old man, may I say that we see evidence of dis-integrated Christians all around us.

Let me ask this question: Why is it that good Christians don't always make good human beings? They're faithful to their families, consistent in church attendance, read their Bibles and pray for the lost. But they can be, at the same time, rigid, self-righteous, xenophobic, racist, sexist, controlling, narrow minded, emotionally repressed, sexually dysfunctional, bitter, impulsive, angry. In a word, unChristian.³

Or why is it that non-Christians can be more Christian than Christians? Haven't you had that experience, or had someone say something like that to you? It's as though those without knowledge of the gospel can achieve a measure of psychological health and healing that outstrips even what some professing Christians have attained.

Or consider this: Why is it that evangelicals are notoriously clumsy when it comes to dealing with issues like race, sex, and gender? Could it be that all three of these issues—race, sex and gender—are body issues. They concern the body—the very thing that much of evangelical spirituality conditions us to downplay or overlook. Is it any wonder, then, that we struggle to speak thoughtfully and winsomely about these body issues when we spend so little time cultivating a spirituality that concerns our own bodies?

Where am I going with all of this? We need to rethink our approach to spiritual formation. We need an approach to spiritual formation that fosters integration—that brings together doctrinal instruction and moral development with psychological healing.

In short, I'm appealing for an approach that—by the grace of God, through the Spirit of God, grounded in the Word of God—engenders not only holiness but wholeness.

In saying this I'm sounding a note similar to the one Dallas Willard sounded several decades ago. Willard's concern was that Christians weren't attaining Christlikeness. Why not? Not because of a lack of effort, he

³ Gabe Lyons and David Kinnaman, *unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007).

concluded. No, everywhere he looked he saw sincere Christians doing the very best they could.

Instead, according to Willard the problem is our deficient theological anthropology. He explains,

For serious churchgoing Christians, the hindrance to true spiritual growth is not unwillingness. While they are far from perfect, no one who knows such people can fail to appreciate their willingness and goodness of heart. For my part, at least, I could no longer deny the fact. I finally decided their problem was a theological deficiency, a lack in teaching, understanding, and practical direction...As I now see it...the gospel preached and the instruction and example given these faithful ones simply do not do justice to the nature of human personality, as embodied, incarnate. And this fact has far reaching implications for the development of human health and excellence.⁴

We have a deficient theological anthropology, a failure to do justice to the true nature of the human personality, to take seriously that we are not just souls inhabiting bodies, or minds connected to brains. Rather, we are embodied and even incarnate creatures. To put it bluntly, we don't have bodies—we are bodies. Yes, we have a mind and soul too (or at least soulish capacities), but they are far better integrated with our bodies than we've been led to believe.

What, then, would a better theological vision of spiritual formation look like? It would be one that takes seriously the nature of the human person as a psychosomatic unity, that does justice to our embodied, incarnate nature, and that promotes integration of the doctrinal and moral with the psychological and even neurological.

To develop a more integrated approach to spiritual formation would require that we take at least the following three steps: (1) we will need to take the body more seriously, (2) we will need to take the brain more seriously, and (3) we will need to take interpersonal communion more seriously.

Step #1—Take the Body More Seriously

Not long ago I listened to a well-known pastor deliver a powerful message in the chapel service of a well-known seminary. The message was about how to make the most of one's seminary experience. And the pastor's approach was to focus on the essence of the Christian life, or you might say, the essence of spirituality and spiritual formation.

It was an excellent message about glorifying God with your education, delighting in God through seminary, finding joy in Greek and Hebrew syntax, developing your mind by carefully tracing the argument of great books, and so on. And this pastor spoke with characteristic passion and insight. It was moving, insightful, inspirational, challenging.

⁴ Dallas Willard, *The Spirit of the Disciplines: Understanding How God Changes Lives* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1988), 18 (emphasis original).

But at the end of the message the thought suddenly occurred to me: “This is a great vision of spiritual formation, but you don’t need a body for any of it. An angel could just as easily embrace the content of this message as an embodied person. You don’t have to be a human being to do anything he just advocated. In fact, it could have been a chapel message just for angels and archangels rather than seminarians and faculty!”

Here is something we often and easily forget. Every approach to spiritual formation presupposes some understanding of the human person—a theological anthropology.

And what is the dominant theological anthropology of evangelicalism? It is a dualism of mind-body, inner-outer, spiritual-physical—a dualistic anthropology that is, as best as I can tell, indebted to the monumental influence of the great St. Augustine.

As Christian philosopher Nancy Murphy says, “It is in fact the case that most Christians, throughout most of their history, have been dualists of one sort or another.”⁵ Most Christians have assumed that the person has two parts—soul or mind, on the one hand, and body, on the other; or, inner and outer, or spiritual and physical parts.

We owe this dualism, as Murphy notes, to the fourth-century bishop and theologian Augustine.

Augustine (354–430) has been the most influential teacher on these matters [of mind-body dualism] because of his legacy in both Protestant and Catholic theology and because of his importance in the development of Christian spirituality. Augustine’s conception of the person is a modified Platonic view: a human being is an immortal (not eternal) soul using (not imprisoned in) a mortal body.⁶

She adds, “From Augustine to the present we have had a conception of the self that distinguishes the inner life from the outer, and spirituality has been associated largely with the inner.”⁷ Or as the esteemed Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor argues in his *Source of the Self*,

On the way from Plato to Descartes stands Augustine. Augustine’s whole outlook was influenced by Plato’s doctrines as they were transmitted to him through Plotinus. . . . He could liberate himself from the last shackles of the false Manichaean view when he finally came to see God and the soul as immaterial. Henceforth, for Augustine, the Christian opposition between spirit and flesh was to be understood with the aid of the Platonic distinction between the bodily and the non-bodily.⁸

Consequently, Augustine’s modified Platonic dualism merged with Paul’s way of talking about flesh and s/Spirit. Western Christianity hasn’t been

⁵ Nancy Murphy, *Bodies and Souls, or Spirited Bodies* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 37.

⁶ Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 14.

⁷ Murphy, *Bodies and Souls*, 30 (emphasis added).

⁸ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 127 (emphasis added).

the same since. At least, our understanding of spirituality and spiritual formation hasn't been the same. As Taylor says, "Augustine is always calling us within."⁹

Let me try to summarize it this way. Augustine's dualistic anthropology leads very naturally to a dis-integrated spirituality, an approach to spiritual formation that focuses on the mind or soul and not on the body, on the inner person and not the outer, or on the spiritual and not the physical.

But if we want to move toward a spiritual formation that promotes integration, then we need to scrutinize our dualistic anthropology. We need to ask ourselves whether it is the most biblically faithful, theologically sound way of understanding what it means to be human. Or are there not better ways to conceive of the person that are more in line with Christian commitments to embodiment?¹⁰

STEP #2—TAKE THE BRAIN MORE SERIOUSLY

By taking the body more seriously (step #1) we are led naturally to take a second step. We need to take the brain more seriously. Of course, we won't take the brain seriously if we don't first take the body seriously. But once we begin to appreciate the significance of our embodiment for spiritual formation, then we will be better positioned to think more specifically and concretely about what it means to take seriously this corporeal body of ours. This will lead us to take the brain more seriously, so that spiritual formation is viewed, in a very real sense, as brain formation—or brain re-formation!

And yet, how many of us think "brain" when we hear the words spiritual formation? It's like those SAT questions that ask you to identify which doesn't belong: "prayer, Bible study, fasting, and neural networks." For evangelicals the brain is hardly even a category of spiritual formation. But it should be. The reality is that the brain underwrites everything about our spiritual formation—our thoughts, our feelings, our actions. As cultural biologists Steven R. Quartz and Terrence J. Sejnowski nicely put it, "Every nuance of yourself, the fabric of your experience, ultimately arises from the machinations of your brain. The brain houses your humanity."¹¹ Perhaps I can put it a tad bit more provocatively: there is no spiritual formation without brain formation or re-formation.

I recently came across an illustration that drives home this very point. Let me give you an advanced warning: It's an awkward and troubling story. But it's powerful and to the point. Back in 2000, a forty-year old man, a Virginia high school teacher, was arrested for making sexual advances

⁹ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 129.

¹⁰ For extended reflections on this question in line with the overall direction of this essay, see Warren S. Brown and Brad D. Strawn, *The Physical Nature of the Christian Life: Neuroscience, Psychology, & the Church* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Steven R. Quartz and Terrence J. Sejnowski, *Liars, Lovers, and Heroes: What the New Brain Science Reveals About How We Become Who We Are* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 3.

toward his stepdaughter. His wife called police to come and arrest him. When the police arrived, they found he had been, for some time, collecting pornographic magazines and visiting pornographic websites. He was convicted and required to attend a mandatory twelve-step recovery program for sexual addicts.

But he failed the program, because he couldn't stop making advances at the other women in the program. So the judge was going to sentence him to jail time. But the day before his sentencing, he drove himself to an emergency room, complaining of a raging headache. Doctors did an MRI and discovered that he had an egg-sized tumor on the right frontal lobe of his brain. So they operated on him to remove the tumor. And to everyone's surprise, the lewd behavior and pedophilia went away with the removal of the tumor.

However, a year later the tumor started to grow again. And, remarkably, so too did the inappropriate sexual behavior. So the medical staff decided to operate once again. And, stunningly, when they removed the tumor for a second time, so too did the illicit sexual desires dissipate, for a second time.¹²

A fascinatingly true story that tells us something about what it means to be a human being. We are morally and spiritually dependent, so to speak, not only our bodies, but on our brains. Consider how closely linked morality and personality are in this story—how a damaged brain can bend behavior, or how an otherwise moral guy can do some really immoral things if his brain isn't working right.

My wife Katie and I have seven children, three biological and four adopted from Ethiopia. The two youngest, twin boys, we adopted when they were just six months old. The other two we adopted when they were ages six and eight. The twins are now ten, and the older two are eleven and thirteen. Having seven children is a wild ride! But having four adopted has definitely added to the adventure. We've learned a lot about parenting and families and adoption and, not least, ourselves. But we've also learned a lot about the brain. Renowned psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk has written a highly acclaimed study of trauma and healing so aptly titled *The Body Keeps the Score*.¹³ Over the last decade of parenting four adopted children, Katie and I have learned that the body does indeed keep the score. The traumatic events in a child's life—things like abandonment, emotional or physical abuse, and neglect—often scar the body by doing things to the brain, affecting its wiring and firing and, ultimately, its integration.

Neuroscientists now tell us that brains can be scarred, that the body does keep the score—or, to be more precise, that the brain keeps the score. The brain holds onto the trauma of the past. The experience is embedded

¹² The story is told in Malcolm Jeeves and Warren S. Brown, *Neuroscience, Psychology and Religion: Illusions, Delusions, and Realities About Human Nature* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Press, 2009), 63–65.

¹³ Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma* (New York: Penguin, 2014).

in the circuitry of the brain—perhaps not as explicit memory, the kind you can recall like looking at a photo album. But it will be stored as implicit memory, the kind you re-experience emotionally even though there may be no “memories” or visual images coming to mind.¹⁴ So, the child who has experienced trauma in his or her life carries those memories—bears those scars—in their bodies, in their brains. And those memories, whether explicit or implicit, affect everything about that child—the child’s attitudes, actions, emotions, reactions, mood, and all the rest.

But there is another layer of complexity to the situation. Human beings have developed an ingenious yet costly way of coping with trauma. We disconnect our minds from our bodies, so that we can live up in our heads, not down in our bodies, as it were. As a defense mechanism, we disconnect our minds from our bodies, so as to distance ourselves from the painful memories stored in our bodies (i.e., in our brains). In other words, we dis-integrate in order to survive.¹⁵

Think about the spiritual formation of a child who has suffered significant trauma. We realize that to form our children spiritually, especially our adopted children, we cannot simply put pressure on their wills to compel them to “do what Jesus would do.” Nor can we simply “shepherd the child’s heart” without attending to the child’s brain. Instead, we have had to step back and take not just their bodies but also their brains seriously. We have had to come to terms with the fact that there will be no lasting spiritual formation without deep psychological healing—the healing of brains, new neural networks created through kindness, care, compassion.

My wife Katie and I have come to another important realization—in this fallen world we’ve all been traumatized in different ways and to varying degrees. We’ve all been roughed-up by this abusive world. Each of us has had to endure a certain kind of abuse, neglect, or trauma. All of us have had damage done to our bodies, to our brains, so that none of us is entirely whole. We’ve all been dis-integrated through the ravages of sin—personal, social, cosmic. For each of us, the body does keep the score.

We may not see obvious effects of trauma in our lives because we have added layer on layer of moral and spiritual development on top of our psychological brokenness in a way that effectively muffles its impact. But if we attend to our lives more carefully and probe beneath the surface, we will no doubt discover the subterranean reality of our own psychological brokenness.

What does this brokenness look like? It looks like the compulsions we cannot seem to control, even with our best moral efforts. This brokenness

¹⁴ See Daniel J. Siegel, *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation* (New York: Bantam, 2010), 145-65; Curt Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul: Surprising Connections Between Neuroscience and Spiritual Practices That Can Transform Your Life and Relationships* (Carol Stream: Tyndale, 2010), 63-87.

¹⁵ See Siegel, *Mindsight*, especially chapter 7, “Cut Off from the Neck Down: Reconnecting the Mind and the Body,” 120-44.

can look like strong involuntary urges, the fixations, the obsessions, the emotional reactivity to persons or situations that we cannot quite explain and that seem to emerge from out of nowhere. These intractable features of our lives are telltale signs that all is not well in our body, that is, with our brain.

We are familiar with that famous passage in Romans 12:2 where Scripture calls the Christian not be conformed to the pattern of this world but to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind [nous].” I wonder if healing the brain is at least part of what Scripture has in mind in this verse: the renewal of the nous—not in a dualistic sense as that which is fundamentally distinct from the body, but as the whole psychosomatic unity we call the person.

STEP #3—TAKE INTERPERSONAL COMMUNION MORE SERIOUSLY

There is a third and final step we need to take if we are going to move toward a more integrated approach to spiritual formation. We need to take more seriously interpersonal communion.¹⁶

When we take bodies seriously, we will take brains seriously—as the concrete focus of our embodiment. And when we take brains seriously as embodied and indeed socially embedded realities, then we will naturally take interpersonal communion seriously.

By “interpersonal communion” I mean the communion of persons, or as we sometimes say, “the meeting of minds.” Perhaps we should talk about it as the “bonding of brains.” It is deeply mutual, personal, reciprocal. Christian Smith defines communion as “the mutual giving of personal selves as gifts of fellowship and love for the good of each person concerned.”¹⁷ It is the experience of not just knowing another person but being known by that person.¹⁸

If you have a dualistic understanding of the person, then you will naturally prioritize the mind over the body. You will also inevitably put the emphasis on knowing rather than being known. In fact, “knowing rather than being known” would be a fair description of so much of evangelical spiritual formation, in which the focus is almost exclusively on learning and education and instruction.¹⁹

¹⁶ My emphasis on interpersonal communion draws on the work of Daniel Siegel’s approach. He refers to as “interpersonal neurobiology,” but attempts to frame it in explicitly Christian terms of communion of persons with other persons and with God. For a similar approach, see Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*.

¹⁷ Christian Smith, *What Is a Person? Rethinking Humanity, Social Life, and the Moral Good from the Person Up* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 68.

¹⁸ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 11-20.

¹⁹ Similarly, Brad S. Strawn and Warren S. Brown, “Christian Education as Embodied and Embedded Virtue Formation,” in *Neuroscience and Christian Formation*, ed. Mark A. Maddix and Dean G. Blevins (Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, 2016), 87-97.

For centuries ordinary Christians have understood that profound personal and spiritual transformation happens not as much from knowing as from being known. A new generation of neuroscientists are helping us to see this more clearly.

Why is Alcoholics Anonymous far and away the most successful behavioral change program to have ever existed? Because every meeting begins the same way. “Hi, I’m Todd. I’m an alcoholic.” “Hi Todd.” It’s a place where many people, often for the first time in their life, are known by other people for who they are. AA has discovered something that we as the church sometimes struggle to grasp—the transformative power of interpersonal communion.

Something miraculous happens when two minds, empathetically, meet one another. We know this to be true from experience. But now neuroscientists have the data to back this up. Something literally happens inside of you (i.e., your brain) when you know that you are known by someone else—new neural networks are created, new synapses fire and wire, and your brain is changed, for the better.

Psychiatrist Dan Siegel calls this the experience of “feeling felt.”²⁰ It happens when you sense that another person has entered into your internal world and shares with you in the experience of what is going on inside of you. This is what we call empathy, which is at the heart of interpersonal communion. But it is also the ignition key to personal and spiritual transformation—being known, not just knowing. And not just by another human being, but ultimately, and most importantly, by God himself.

Christian psychiatrist Curt Thompson puts it very well: “The process of being known is the vessel in which our lives are kneaded and molded, lanced and sutured, confronted and comforted, bringing God’s new creation closer to its fullness in preparation for the return of the King.”²¹

CONCLUSION

When we talk about spiritual formation, we are talking about the process whereby a person moves toward maturity in Christ by the power of the Spirit. Spiritual formation is, as Paul puts it in Colossians, about becoming complete in Christ. “He is the one we proclaim,” the apostle writes, “admonishing everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature [teleios] in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me” (Col. 1:28-29). We could say that the telos or goal of spiritual formation is to be teleios or complete in Christ.

The burden of this essay has been to say that we will have a very hard time getting to this telos without taking more seriously the body, the brain, and interpersonal communion. We will not become “complete in

²⁰ Siegel, *Mindsight*, 10-11.

²¹ Thompson, *Anatomy of the Soul*, 13.

Christ” without being known—not only by one another, but by our Lord and Maker himself.

And so we take heart, learn to walk by faith, lean into the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, and the power of God’s Spirit. “For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror,” Scripture says, but “then we shall see face to face. Now [we] know in part; then [we] shall know fully, even as [we are] fully known” (1 Cor. 13:12).