“When I was a child, I spoke and thought and reasoned as a child. But when I grew up, I put away childish things.”

~1 Corinthians 13:11, New Living Translation
The Plan:
*Construct a Spiritual Lifemap Mosaic depicting Images of My Evolving Awareness of God*

When I arrived at my fiance's woodworking shop, I had a plan, a bag of my materials, and 29+ years of experience in spiritual practices and questioning that had brought me to that moment. My materials included rocks, glue, a piece of pine wood measuring about 8"x36", and brushes. To assist with the process, my fiance, Brock, would contribute first and foremost his patience and love of me and the creative process. Additionally, he supplied an edger, a planer, a table saw, clamps, a nailgun, and various handtools, including a wood burner—the most important tool for me. He also provided a beautiful piece of cherry wood that he would make into a frame and a clear substance called bar-topper. While this artistic piece became a combined effort, the story it tells is my own as is the idea for the project. As this statement continues, I will detail how the idea for this mosaic—which depicts images of my evolving awareness of God—developed and describe briefly how my understanding of the nature of God has evolved throughout my life.

**Class Experience: The Psychosocial and Spiritual Aspects of Health and Sickness**

In August of 2011, I experienced a number of "firsts" at Bangor Theological Seminary. It was my first course on the Portland campus and my first time meeting many classmates and staff who work and learn in that facility. Along with the first time I had to worry about feeding a parking meter while in class, I also sat in my first course in the discipline of pastoral care. This was an incredibly clarifying and freeing moment in my educational experience. For the first time, I felt at home in the material being studied and discussed. A sense of right-ness overwhelmed me as, throughout the class, I noted the ways in which both my heart and my mind were fully engaged.

As the class discussed issues of theodicy, I began to contemplate the seemingly unanswerable questions we face in life. Personally, I frequently experience those questions as tension that I can feel throughout my chest and lungs. When I am in these places of constriction, my senses of freedom and creativity are severely diminished. As I continued wondering about these “big” questions, an idea for a final project inquiry emerged.
Project Questions and Proposal

• What spiritual practices, both ancient and more modern approaches to them, can one use when facing internal conflict/personal struggle?
• How can spiritual practices offer freedom and release from the tensions of these spiritual/emotional struggles? Is there a direct connection between spiritual practices and the difficult questions about life that one may be facing?
• Interested in spiritual practices relating to creativity, specifically, I decided to "play with" these practices on my own. I believed this would ultimately take the form of artistic and creative expression.

Reading, Research, and Experience: A General Overview

As I engaged in numerous journal articles and a number of books, I came understand that my original question, though not misguided, reflected a lack of knowledge around two very important traditions—counseling and spiritual directing. I happen to have interest in both of these fields of study and praxis and so it is quite fitting that my research question would clarify my interest in and definitions of each. I now understand that although spiritual practices are always available and useful, there may be times when therapy is more appropriate if there is a specific problem to be addressed. “Such counseling, which is usually short-term and problem-oriented, is entirely compatible with spiritual guidance, as long as the chosen therapist respects the subject’s religious commitments. The therapist may well help someone explore the dark, but the spiritual guide is concerned with leading the seeker to the light.”¹ This piece of reading helped me to further clarify my search. There are traumatic experiences in life with which people need specific therapeutic help. These are not the experiences I am seeking to address in this project. I am seeking assistance in larger questions of theological, spiritual, and religious import. These are questions which revolve around purpose, meaning, struggle, shame, and direction. These questions might arise out of either a lack of spirituality or a spirituality that is no longer compatible with a belief or set of beliefs one has previously held. In this way, I am interested in

spiritual practices which can lead people “to the light.”

I also did some reading regarding conflict. Surprisingly, most of the journal articles and books that I found entertained conflict resolution between two opposing parties. As I looked for writing regarding intrapersonal conflict, I was directed back toward spiritual guidance and counseling. Though I was initially interested in specific spiritual practices, I found myself captivated in articles related to spirituality. These articles were defining spirituality over, and occasionally against, religion. I have explored many aspects of spirituality including embodied spirituality, a framework for conceptualizing spirituality, and, among others, confusion in the field of youth work regarding how to approach spiritual practices with youth. It is clear that curiosity around the topic is increasing while clarity seems to be elusive.

Along the course of the past month, I have gained much clarity regarding my call at this seminary. I am, by nature, a very spiritual person. Let me clarify that self-definition.

Commenting in a journal article regarding a study conducted at Loyola College in Maryland, the authors write that “Spirituality… is most concerned with one’s personal relationship to God or a higher power.”2 Rachel Kraus at Ball State University states, “Spirituality is generally understood as a personal search to connect with the sacred.”3 Finding a spiritual identity is metaphorically compared to “finding and maintaining an inner compass” by a group of authors raising to consciousness the need for many organizations to engage in the spiritual development of youth.4 Each of these definitions share in common that spirituality is something personal and frequently involves a communion or connection, in some way, with the Sacred or Divine. Thus, when I write I am a very spiritual person, what I mean to say is that my own personal connection with the sacred and divine in my life is not just important, it is an integral aspect of my very nature and personhood. I do not engage in spiritual practices only to reach some level of connection or transcendence. I engage in spiritual activities because they give me life and breath. Without them, I am a shell of myself.

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**Reading, Research, and Experience: Spiritual Practices**

As luck, or fate or destiny, would have it, I engaged in a weekend of spiritual exercises offered by my church, the Community of Christ, in early September. Fortunately, this immersed me in an opportunity to learn about a number of Christian spiritual disciplines and practices including Centering Prayer, Dwelling in the Word, Fasting, Fixed Hour of Prayer, Praying in the imaginative style of St. Ignatius, the Prayer of Examen, rest, practicing solitude and silence, experiencing submission and humility, and writing a Rule of Life. Also at that time, I took a spiritual types inventory which then offered suggestions as to what types of spiritual practices might best suit my particular style. Upon leaving that weekend, I began engaging daily, sometimes twice a day, in the Prayer of Examen (see Appendix A). I also felt called to spirit lead fasting for the first time in my 29 years and have begun partaking in 24-hour fasts.

Continuing my search into spirituality and conflict, I found that the connection between the two was not as direct as I would have liked or expected. There were many journal articles regarding the increasing importance of spirituality in people’s lives and in professional circles. In addition, *The Heart of Conflict* by Elinor Powell⁵, specifically examined interpersonal conflict and spirituality as opportunities for growth. Though my understanding of spirituality as it is being defined in academic circles expanded, I was not entirely satisfied with my journal search linking specific spiritual practices to the big questions we face in life. I began to question whether perhaps my original project proposal was too misguided and considered re-framing my work. Before I did this, however, I began to examine spiritual practices in the hope that increasing my knowledge in that field would guide me.

A book from The Ancient Practices Series entitled The Sacred Journey describes "the principal ways of forming or organizing the religious-specific or devout life."⁶ Seven ancient practices have emerged from a Judeo-Christian heritage as standard disciplines. "Three of the seven--tithing, fasting, and the sacred meal-- monitor or inform the physical body in space. The other four-- fixed-hour prayer, the keeping of the Sabbath, the observance of the liturgical year, and pilgrimmage--pace human life within the fourth dimension of time itself."⁷ The ancient

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disciplines, distilled down to their essences as described by Foster, seek to help us gain information about our bodies within space and time. The direct connection to the more current catchphrase of "embodied spirituality" was and is obvious. "Embodied spirituality... views all human dimensions--body, vital world, heart, mind, and consciousness-- as equal partners in bringing the self, community, and the world into a fuller alignment with the Mystery out of which everything arises." This connection gave me pause to consider more fully the inherent trust I have grown to appreciate between my body and my Spirit. Because I do believe that my body houses my Spirit, I have given constrictions inside myself attention in terms of having the opportunity to learn from them...or at least pay attention to them rather than ignore them. Having made this connection between ancient practices and modern approaches to understanding spirituality, I felt a great sense of freedom, and a nugget of direction for my project began to form. A source of some of the most major constrictions of my life began to sense a place for creative output. Two more journal articles gave me the final inspiration and direction I needed.

**Spiritual Lifemaps:**

"Spiritual lifemaps are a pictorial delineation of consumers' spiritual journeys." In a journal article from the National Association of Social Workers, spiritual lifemaps are described as providing patients with resources and inviting them to tell the spiritual highlights of their lives, highs and lows, in images. Hodge, and others, comment that growing numbers of persons seeking therapy could benefit from the opportunity to explore his/her spirituality, yet "few resources have appeared in the literature to help practitioners operationalize spiritual strengths." The benefits and advantages to this activity are manifold as discussed in Hodge’s journal article, but suffice it to say for the purposes of this artist's statement that two major benefits attracted me. First, a spiritual lifemap allowed for creative output, one of the original components of my project proposal. Second, I read the following, "a lifemap... might be used to

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10 Ibid, 77.
operationalize spiritual strengths to overcome presenting difficulties."\textsuperscript{11} The lifemap was a specific practice used to address an inner difficulty. Marcheta Evans and Martha Atkins in their article "Making Meaning Using Creativity and Spirituality" write, "a number of creative interventions can be used by counselors working with clients in their search for meaning and significance."\textsuperscript{12} Bolstered by this statement, I reasoned that if the lifemap could be used to tell a lifestory, it could also be used to tell a specific aspect of the spiritual landscape of my life. The spiritual lifemap can be used by therapists in order to help patients discuss and re-frame, if need be, the story of their lives. I needed an opportunity for both of these things.

**My engagement with the complete process: An Over-view and Summarization**

I began this project with a tri-fold approach. First, I read and researched both spiritual practices and internal conflict and the relationship between them. Ultimately, I chose two specific spiritual practices to incorporate into my daily and weekly life which were new to me—one traditional approach to spiritual disciplines, fasting, and one less well-known practice, the prayer of examen. Second, through some deeply personal reflecting, I attempted to formulate a question which would hopefully allow me to address a source of some of the inner tension and conflict I have experienced throughout my life. Because of the nature of this search, the question was difficult to form. I composed two questions—What is the nature of God? How has my concept of God changed throughout my life? Third, as I read, researched, and reflected, I looked for a way to “answer” this inner struggle in a way which would allow for some creative output. It seems important to note that this type of spiritual searching is not experienced in the linear fashion in which it has been presented here. Each “fold” of the project shaped and informed the others as I engaged in this process of searching. To the completion of my spiritual lifemap mosaic, I now turn.

**Spiritual Lifemap Mosaic: Brief Descriptions of the Mosaic Images**

As stated above, this mosaic is a pictorial delineation of a specific aspect of the spiritual landscape of my life. Specifically, the wood-burned images in this mosaic depict traditions and


\textsuperscript{12} Marcheta Evans and Martha Atkins, “Making Meaning Using Creativity and Spirituality,” *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, vol. 2(1), (2006/2007), 44.
experiences of significant impact on my awareness of the nature of God. Using mostly widely
recognized symbols that have become deeply personal in meaning through my own experience,
this mosaic is an opportunity for me to discuss how my concept of God has evolved throughout
my life. As I describe some experiences with certain symbols, it will become clear that my
awareness of God evolved, at times, as a result of inner turmoil and great struggle. Allowing my
concept of God to change and grow was not always easy. For this reason, the opportunity to
discuss and re-frame my experiences appealed to me greatly. As a result, I can now look back on
these moments with inner peace and even joy. I sense significant satisfaction as I turn to a brief
discussion of the images in my mosaic.\footnote{The black rocks in this mosaic were picked up by my nieces, Brock, and I on a family picnic and boatride to the Sea Duck Beach on Beals Island, where I grew up. September 4, 2011.}

\textit{The Cross and Christianity}

I grew up in a family of strong Christian heritage and faith. My family environment was
one of unconditional love and caring. The community in which I grew up was and is very small.
It is an island off the coast of DownEast Maine. I grew up with a natural desire to be in church,
participating in as many ways as possible. Congregational life was always rich and rewarding for
me, and church was an extension of family. It was a loving, supportive environment with truly
beautiful, inspiring, and spiritual people all around me. My foundation in faith, education, and
journeying individually and as part of a community is strong.

\textit{Symbols for Islam, Judaism, and Hinduism}

When I was 19 years old, I participated as a staff member on a weekend retreat for high
school students. It was a retreat sponsored by my church, the Community of Christ, which
allowed these youth to experience a Muslim mosque, a Jewish synagogue, and a Hindu temple.
At each place, leadership from the place of worship talked with our youth. The weekend was
profound for me. By the time I arrived back at my home in Maine, I was in a state of confusion
and disbelief. I started questioning how it could be possible for God to be all the things people
had just told me God was. How could God encompass all of those things? I arrived at my sister's
house in tears, yet very quickly I did sense some peace in her companionship. I didn't have any
good answers, but my real search had begun. If God was available in all of those religions, where
else could I find God? Religions no longer satisfied my longing for a personal explanation of God's nature.

Reiki and the Cho ku rei

In my early twenties, I took part in more of the energy- and breath-based practices of the Eastern traditions. I frequently practiced yoga and QiGong. This lead me to a growing awareness of the energy flowing throughout the human body system. With increased curiosity, I took three weekends of Reiki training throughout the course of two years, ultimately becoming a Reiki master and unpaid practitioner. After my first reiki initiation, I had one of the more profound realizations of my life. I knew, beyond doubt, that I was/am a healer. Reiki and reiki training have placed me in a long tradition of healing that is gentle and true. Recognizing healing in the Jesus tradition began to reconcile me again to Christianity. I started to question how much of the Jesus story was not in the Bible. Though this raised more questions than answers, again, I sensed peace at having made another connection about God's nature and my connection with God. God is a healer and so, too, can we be healers.

Lotus Flower

In my first semester at Bangor Theological Seminary, I took an Introduction to Buddhism. As part of this course, we were asked to meditate 10 minutes a day and keep a journal of our experiences in meditation. My experiences with meditation were pure and meaningful. Because of my previous experience with energy work, I made some connections with the pure white light of meditation and consciousness rather quickly. I state this only to say that meditation felt like a natural progression of where my own spirituality was already leading me. Meditation was an answer to an unspoken prayer of my heart. This was all for the greater good except it raised some new questions that disturbed me quite deeply. If God and the energy of God are so deeply embedded in my body, in my mind, how can God also be outside of us? How can we pray to this God? Is God both the truth we experience in meditation and somehow a God to whom we can pray? My faith in prayer faltered greatly, and for quite some time, perhaps my entire first year at seminary, I struggled with the popular Christian concept of God. I also looked around all we were studying at seminary, and began to even lose faith in our common practice of worship and church. Through all of this, in meditation, I knew there was something so real and true about
the essence of life that my faith was not in vain.

_The Lake with Multiple Paths of Approach_

For the past 4 to 5 weeks, I have been practicing the Prayer of Examen. As the prayer was explained to me, I was instructed to enter the time of prayer gracefully and gently. The more familiar I became with this process of prayer, the more I began to visualize myself in it. As I approached God in prayer each day, I found that my approach was different depending on my levels of well-being. If I were agitated, it was harder to greet God gracefully. If I felt great, it was effortless to jump into the prayer with gratitude and thanksgiving. All the while, I had swirling questions about the nature of God which made approaching God in prayer challenging. Was I approaching a God in me, in my mind and body, as in meditation? Was I approaching a God outside of myself?

While I can’t recount the sequence of events that lead to the final image on my mosaic, it is currently the most accurate representation of my own spiritual intimacy with God. In this image, God is represented by the water. I am a swimmer. In my mind, there are various approaches to the water… paths, jumping in, waterfalls, a rock in the middle of the lake, etc… but the ultimate goal is to be in touch with that water, to be in touch with God. Some days, I am completely bathed in it. Some days, I just wade in it. My inner peace in this context comes from the knowing that God is both inside me and outside of me. I am composed largely of water, yet it exists outside of me as well. When I am in the water, I am most at peace, yet if I need to guard and protect myself from being completely overwhelmed by God/the water, I can sit beside the lake as well. There, I am still in the presence of God, but I can contemplate my approach.

Conclusions:

I leave this project with appreciation for the time spent in research and contemplation and joy for the mosaic Brock and I created. I also leave this project with more curiosity about spiritual guiding and practices. Finally, I leave this project in peace. Amen.
Bibliography


Prayer of Examen—my approach to God, this allowed me to consider a new vision and allowed for a fresh approach daily... God was unchanging, I could be as I am

Formulating the question—Meditation, allowed the question to come, Native American quote, allowing the wisdom to come to me

Creative Output—Spiritual Life Chart, quote, “allows the patient the opportunity to talk about...”, seemed a natural connection. I needed an opportunity to talk about them. To give my conceptuality of God an output. I didn’t need to hold on to it anymore. This provided a major sense of release.

Embodied spirituality—??? How can I use this paper?

Describe the project: The true artist’s statement portion of the paper. Use the embodied spirituality paper here... ???

CLOSE: As it became increasingly clear to me that my project proposal was going to lead me down the path of learning more about spiritual direction,

“The major function of the spiritual guide is to help the seeker remain on the way. Real changes come about not through some clever insight of the spiritual guide but because both guide and seeker are open to God’s presence in their lives. The guide helps seekers overcome fear and resistance, encourages them to
take their commitment seriously, and tries to keep them from despair by pointing out the many subtle changes that are taking place along the way.” (vii. Jewish Spiritual Guidance)

“A familiarity with psychology is useful, not because the spiritual guide will treat psychological problems but because the need may arise to assess whether psychotherapeutic counseling is warranted. Such counseling, which is usually short-term and problem-oriented, is entirely compatible with spiritual guidance, as long as the chosen therapist respects the subject’s religious commitments. The therapist may well help someone explore the dark, but the spiritual guide is concerned with leading the seeker to the light.” (viii. Jewish Spiritual Guidance)

“Why practice spiritual guidance? For three simple reasons: love, gratitude, and joy.” (xi, Jewish spiritual Guidance)

Resource:
For this Land: pg. 130 Allowing wisdom to come to us...
ADDRESS theBIG QUESTIONS WE FACE IN LIFE... hone in on this... probably for future research... this will likely link to mercy and salvation talk...

The events of that weekend sparked a question in me. Is there a qualitative difference in spiritual practices of input versus spiritual practices involving output? While I recognize these terms “input” and “output” are my own, I have not yet found in my reading anything that distinguishes these two aspects of the spiritual journey. If spirituality is about personal connection and relationship, then it seems to me that there are times when I will be more of a receiver and times when I will be more of a giver/creator. In terms of an over-all spiritual journey, perhaps this question is not important. Yet, my paper and question wanted to specifically focus on creativity and output in order to help with problems that were concerning someone... or me. In that context, there needs to be some examination of the two. How do they relate to each other? In what ways does connecting with the Divine feed me the wisdom and peace I need to create? What do spiritual practices provide? ... on the flip side... can expressing my own confusion just as it is in creative output be a spiritual practice? If I am in touch with the
Divine, will all of my creative output be sacred? How do I know when I need to sit in my own discomfort in the company of God, and when creating something will benefit my well-being? Looking back on these questions, I realize that my background in the study of languages is strongly impacting my thought process. Please let me explain. I frequently taught Spanish using a methodology called TPRS—Total Physical Response Storytelling. In this system of language immersion, students are provided with three basic words each day. These words are both translated back into the students native language for clarity and then given a “sign”. Students are required to do the sign and say the word in a variety of situations. Then comes the magic. Stories are told using ONLY words that students know, repeatedly. The words are circled and used over and over again. A short story is told and then questions are asked about the story. Input is received from the class, making the stories spontaneous and frequently hilarious. At the end of a 40 minute class, most students could repeat central elements of the story back to me, the teacher, in the target, not native, language. They spoke Spanish, simple and basic, by a system that relied fully on COMPREHENSIBLE INPUT. I only said words to them that they could comprehend. The input I provided them was completely comprehensible in one way or another. It was at their language level in a context in which they could understand and succeed. Before students could speak the language (output the language), they needed to receive continued and disciplined input. Now that I have made that connection, I am coming to explore the topic of spirituality in this context. How much input from God, connection with God, do I need before I can output anything that is genuinely of God?

Fasting:

At present, I have completed two 24-hours fasts. Through each of these experiences, I have paid considerable attention to my body. I also engaged in meditation and prayer throughout the fasts. It was in the midst of prayer and contemplation that my creative project began to come into view. I was considering times in my life when I have prayed to God very differently than I do now. In a state of quiet listening, I felt the dissonance between my current state and my early childhood prayers asking God for certain blessings of various sorts for various persons and places. I then began to consider how my concept of God had
changed, by necessity, throughout my life. At various points, I no longer experienced inner peace as life's events came up against my neat and tidy expectations of God and life. Images of the evolution of my growing awareness of God throughout my life began to emerge. I experienced these images as a surge of inspiration and clarity that I felt I could share with others. This came as a result of a journal article from the National Association of Social Workers about Spiritual Lifemaps.