**Breakfast Around a Charcoal Fire**

By Alan H. McLeod on July 4, 2019

**Introduction**

Several times I have felt that Jesus invited me to *Breakfast Around a Charcoal Fire* the same way as Peter in John Chapter 21.[[1]](#footnote-1) John 21 is the story about Jesus preparing a hot breakfast on a charcoal fire for several of his disciples after his resurrection. The charcoal fire was symbolic of the three occasions, where Peter denied knowing Jesus after his arrest (John 18:15-27). The risen Christ uses the charcoal fire to remind Peter of his denial, but he also does something more. Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. Three times Peter responds, yes, and Jesus recommissions him for ministry three times. Peter is charged to feed and care for his sheep. The story of John 21 is not only about forgiveness but restoration. It is also my story.

For many years my walk with Jesus was at best lukewarm like the Christians in the church of Laodicea (Revelation 7:14-22). Thank God, by his grace and faithfulness, he drew me back later in life to the close walk with Jesus I enjoyed as a younger Christian. As a result, I began to engage more in lay ministry in a local church. The problem was that the more involved I became, the more guilty and ashamed I felt about so many wasted years. Then one Sunday morning visiting family out of state, I attended another church. Providence was at work. The Pastor preached a sermon on forgiveness and restoration based on John 21. It was as if I heard Jesus personally ask me the same question asked of Peter–"Do you love me.” My answer was a resounding, yes Jesus; I love you. Jesus green-lighted my passion for ministry to step on the gas and not look in the rear-view mirror but look forward to serving the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

I finish my first course at Liberty University this week in the Master of Arts Theological Studies Program. The challenge now is how to narrow down a broad calling to ministry to a more specific kingdom role, which introduces the next subject, discerning Spiritual Calling.

**Discerning Spiritual Calling**

George Hillman outlines four ways that a Christian can discern their calling:[[2]](#footnote-2)

1. Discover your unique and divine design.
2. Engage in a *Dance of Discernment* based on prayer, meditation, and leading of the Holy Spirit.
3. Seek and gain community affirmations.
4. Pilot test your calling.

Just like a snowflake, each child of God is unique. However, this uniqueness is not random like snowflakes, but part of God’s divine design and plan. Each Christian is born with unique talents (Psalm 139:13-16) and shaped over time to serve God’s purpose (Eph 2:10). Heritage, personality, natural abilities, Spiritual Gifts, life experiences, and passionate inclinations determine a Christian’s unique shape.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Hillman defines what he calls a Dance of Discernment, which is a metaphor for an intensely personal relationship with God.[[4]](#footnote-4) Meditating on the Word of God, continuous prayer, and being sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit establishes intimacy with God. A Christian should not expect a miraculous voice out of heaven but rather anticipate that God’s calling will be received in quieter and gentler ways over time through this Dance of Discernment.[[5]](#footnote-5)

The third way, according to Hillman, a Christian learns their calling is through community affirmations.[[6]](#footnote-6) Other Christians speak truth into the lives of other Christians. Christians should also seek wise counsel from other members of the community.

Pilot test your calling is the fourth way Hillman recommends discerning calling.[[7]](#footnote-7) An internship is one practical way to pilot test your calling.

**Life Story as an Aid to Discerning Calling**

Gail Seidel writes, “Understanding and accepting my story becomes a tool of personal spiritual formation.”[[8]](#footnote-8) Seidel explains that because God is sovereign, each Christian’s story is uniquely orchestrated and providentially created to bring him glory. Therefore, when a Christian understands and accepts their life journey, it becomes a tool of personal spiritual formation.[[9]](#footnote-9) Since Hillman in the previous section connects life experience with discerning one’s calling, documenting one’s life story, as Seidel suggests, provides a useful tool. Seidel recommends a structure where the facts of your life are listed chronologically under the categories of heritage, heroes, high times, and hard times.[[10]](#footnote-10)

**Personal Action Plan**

Paul said in Philippians, “Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus (Phil 3:13-14).” I view discerning my calling in ministry as a dynamic process. As of now, I plan on retiring from my secular career in 14 months. I hope to then transition from part-time ministry to full-time ministry as well as complete my MATS. To continue my journey of becoming more like Christ with an increasing ministry focus, I see three priorities:

1. Keep dancing the Dance of Discernment that Hillman so beautifully articulates. That means more concerted and disciplined prayer and listening during my *quiet times.* Learningto listen to God’s call in this season of my life will keep me on his path.
2. Remain active in serving the local church. Hillman’s says our functional calling is broader than our vocational calling and “Everything that brings you into a relationship with other people is a part of your functional call.”[[11]](#footnote-11)
3. Prayerfully construct and document my life story, as Seidel suggests.

**Recommendations for New Seminarians**

New seminarians should be fully engaged in Hillman’s Dance of Discernment. This dance is also a metaphor for, “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well (Matt 6:33).” Continuously seek Jesus, not a degree, and you will find the strength and discipline to complete the hard work of the seminary.

***About ALAN H. McLEOD***

Alan McLeod is pursuing a Master of Arts in Theological Studies degree at Liberty University’s School of Divinity. Alan’s involvement in lay ministry includes positions as an Elder, Church Finance Advisor, Church Revitalization Specialist, Men’s Ministry Leader, Teacher, and Small Group Discipleship Leader. He is currently a Business Transformational Improvement Executive with over 40 years of experience in the banking and manufacturing industries. Alan received a BS in Electrical Engineering from Villanova University. While at Villanova, he was active with Campus Crusade for Christ (now CRU) and local evangelism missions.

**Bibliography**

Pettit, Paul, ed. *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ*. Wordsearch. Kregel Publications, 2008.

1. Unless otherwise noted, all biblical passages referenced are in the New International Version. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. George Hillman, “Calling and Spiritual Formation,” In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ,* edited by Paul Pettit (Kregel Publications, 2008), 203. Wordsearch. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.com>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid., 203. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Hillman, 210. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Gail Seidel, “Life Story and Spiritual Formation,” In *Foundations of Spiritual Formation, A Community Approach to Becoming Like Christ,* edited by Paul Pettit (Kregel Publications, 2008), 217. Wordsearch. Retrieved from <https://app.wordsearchbible.com>., 217. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Seidel, 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Seidel, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. George Hillman, 201. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)