

# **Come and See**

**Walking and seeing as a way of connecting with  
God, especially in times of transition.**

*The glory of God is a human being fully alive;  
and to be alive consists in beholding God. St Irenaeus.*

**by**

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## 1. Introduction

My relationship with God is often based on words I read or hear. This project took me beyond that realm. The first chapter of John's gospel is full of coming and looking or seeing.<sup>1</sup> Jesus' second utterance there is, 'Come and you will see.'

In times of transition, all that is comfortably familiar ebbs, leaving one bewildered and looking for anchor points. How can one experience the constancy of God in these times? This project explores contemplative walking and photography as ways of seeing and connecting with God, particularly in times of transition.

## 2. Context: Transition

Transition and change are not the same. Bridge<sup>2</sup> defines transition as the way that we all come to terms with inevitable change. Transition can be reactive to specific, external change (e.g. a shift or death), or it may be developmental (e.g. adolescence or midlife), and one may or may not lead to the other. The three phases of transition are: endings (letting go), neutral zone (chaos with creative potential), and beginnings (uncertainty). Reasons for resisting one or more of these phases include: an inability to let go of the piece of ourselves that we have to give up; the length of time it takes (longer than the change itself), and past painful experiences which may resurface.

Ramsey<sup>3</sup> says we can welcome and live joyfully through change by making a commitment to live and work in ways that energise rather than diminish us and by looking at each day with fresh eyes. Developing a heightened awareness of our physical sensations can inform us whether we are creating our lives in nourishing ways aligned with our personal purpose and vision, or not.

We had lived in Thailand for five and a half years and were completing a one-year furlough in New Zealand before returning to Thailand for another term. Our family was in huge change: my son was adjusting to being in his passport culture and preparing to leave 'home' for tertiary study. My eldest daughter boarded in Thailand for five months and then lived with us in New Zealand for seven months. Both girls were doing home and correspondence school for the first time. We were facing many of the issues Thompson<sup>4</sup> and Palmer<sup>5</sup> mention for missionaries returning or in transition. I did not

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<sup>1</sup> The true light that *comes* into the world and *comes* to his own people (v9-11) and the glory of the Father's one and only son being *seen* (v14); John the Baptist's declaration of someone *coming* after him and *revealing* God to us (v15, 18, 30, 31); John the Baptist tells the crowds to *look* or *behold* the lamb of God (v 29, 36); John the Baptist testifies that Jesus is the Son of God because he *saw* the Holy Spirit *descending* like a dove and resting on him (v 32-34); Jesus invites Andrew and John to '*come and see*' where he is staying (v39); Jesus *looks* intently at Simon and renames him as Peter (v42); Jesus tells Philip to *come* and follow him (v43); Philip invites Nathanael to '*come and see*' (v46); Jesus *sees* Nathanael under the fig tree and Nathanael responds to this by declaring Jesus as the son of God, King of Israel (v48-49); and finally Jesus responds to Nathanael's statement by telling him he will *see* greater things (v50).

<sup>2</sup> Bridge. p3

<sup>3</sup> Ramsey. S. 2001. *Living Through Change*.

<sup>4</sup> Thompson, A. *Spiritual Direction through Faith Stage and Cross Cultural Transitions*. SGM project

<sup>5</sup> Palmer, A. *Issues Facing Returning Missionaries And How Spiritual Direction Can Help*. SGM project

have a spiritual director who continued with me in my transition, so finding my own ritual and images were important for my passage.

### 3. Methodology

I wanted to bring together the following components: time and regularity, walking and nature, seeing and capturing that seeing with a camera,<sup>6</sup> and finally a visual or written reflective journal entry (or at least a photo caption).

My ideal ritual consisted of a 15-minute daily walk in nature with my camera, asking God to draw my attention to what he<sup>7</sup> wanted me to see, trying to translate that into **one or more** photographic images, and using the rough framework: 'I see, I think, I feel'<sup>8</sup> to articulate the experience. For each day that the exercise was attempted, possible outputs were photos, photo captions and a reflective journal entry in my 'Sojournal'.

#### 3.1 Time and regularity

I read that there are ninety-six 15-minute periods in a day and felt challenged to intentionally give at least one of those to God each day. **Fifteen minutes felt manageable.** I also knew that if I set a daily goal, it would not matter so much if I missed a day **in the upcoming transition.**

#### 3.2 Walking

Walking is frequently mentioned in scripture, from Genesis when the Lord walked in the garden seeking Adam and Eve who were hiding, and Enoch and Moses who walked faithfully with God, to the repeated command to walk humbly in obedience before God. Jesus was walking along as he called out his first words to the disciples "Follow me," and he walked with those walking to Emmaus as they wrestled with all that had happened. Transition is an agitating time and I knew that my prayer needed to be something physical, engaging more than just the top seven inches of my body. MacBeth<sup>9</sup> and Phillips<sup>10</sup> both notice the calming of the mind with the use of hands in praying in colour (doodling prayer) and walking with a camera in hand, respectively. With the large transitions looming ahead of me, walking was a way to engage the whole of my restless body in prayer. Finlay<sup>11</sup> invites the use of our senses with everyday tangible objects as a way of praying or seeing God using the pattern of centering, savoring, listening, considering and responding. Contemplative walking is intentional walking with an open attitude to receiving God, ideally in wonder and gratitude, but inevitably just as we are.

#### 3.3 Nature

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<sup>6</sup> *In my view you cannot claim to have seen something until you have photographed it.* Emile Zola quoted in <http://contemplative-photographer.com>

<sup>7</sup> I am using the traditional singular male pronoun for God, but do not see God as limited by masculinity.

<sup>8</sup> This activity was based on an exercise in Zehr's *The Little Book of Contemplative Photography*.

<sup>9</sup> MacBeth.

<sup>10</sup> *On days when I walk for the sake of walking, with no camera in hand, my mind is besieged with random thoughts ... On days when I walk for the sake of seeing, the act of looking consumes my consciousness. The mind quiets down, giving way to the eyes, and the world enters through the silent portals. What thoughts occur in that timeless movement seem not to come from outside myself, but to surface from a place deep within, rising from a soul in search of expression.* Phillips p.73-4

<sup>11</sup> Finlay. p.11.

Ojala<sup>12</sup> summarises Biblical and historical texts about how people experience God through creation. In his research, he found that God communicated through his creation metaphorically, and through awareness and realisations. Creation was also received as a gift from God that was often internalized as feelings. Ochs discusses how deism impedes our prayer by declaring God inaccessible if we see the world of things as providing no access to God.

*But if we treat all our thoughts as authorless, being caused and sustained by God but not authored by him **as thoughts**, we put ourselves in a situation where we can never be told anything.*<sup>13</sup>

For my first cycle, walking in New Zealand's clean air and beautiful nature was an easy choice. As we moved into transition, however, nature was not always available to me.

### 3.4 Seeing and Photography

I am not a talented photographer, but I am interested in the concept of 'seeing'.

*I am deeply impressed by the fact that our spiritual seeing is conditioned by our physical seeing. If we go through life oblivious to the things that our physical eyes invite us to notice, it is almost impossible for us to be truly attentive to spiritual realities.*<sup>14</sup>

I had no intention to produce beautiful photos that spiritually inspire others.<sup>15</sup> The camera was simply a tool for recording God's communication to and connection with me through the physical world<sup>16</sup> trusting that the significance of the image would be revealed.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.5 Noticing what grabbed my attention

The language of photography is quite aggressive: we talk about a photo **shoot** and **taking** photos. The difference here, however, is that I am the recipient of an image. I noticed the tension between my desire to take a photo of something because in my opinion it would make a good photo, and maintaining an openness to how God was drawing me – sometimes even to something that I did not want to see, much less photograph!

### 3.6 I see, I think, I feel

Using Zehr's framework of 'I see, I think, I feel' encouraged me to name what I saw and operate in both thinking and feeling modes. Sometimes 'feeling' included exterior physical touching with my hands as well as exploring my interior emotional landscape.

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<sup>12</sup> Ojala, B. *The Communication of God through His Creation*. SGM project

<sup>13</sup> Ochs. p.32.

<sup>14</sup> Juliet Benner.

<sup>15</sup> For examples of these, see the bibliography.

<sup>16</sup> *My satisfaction came not from taking effective photographs, but rather from the wonder of being able to capture moments that mattered to me.* Dorothy Norman quoted in Jan Phillips p.35.

<sup>17</sup> *To make images is a way of ordering one's world, of exploring and understanding one's relationship to existence.... The images we make are often ahead of our understanding, but to say 'yes' to a subject is also to have recognized, however dimly, a part of oneself; to live with that image, to accept its significance is perhaps to grow in understanding.* John Blakemore quoted in Jan Phillips p.53.

### 3.7 Action Research

This type of enquiry 'conducted by the self into the self' is a type of Action Research.<sup>18</sup> After each cycle, insights gained affected how the next cycle was done. I attempted the exercise for three cycles: the months of May (beginning to leave New Zealand and as a pilot), July (fully in transition), and September (settling in Thailand). Although the goal was to walk, take a photo of what my attention was drawn to and write a journal entry, there were days when only one of the three components was present (e.g. driving all day but stopping the car to photograph the bare tree branches that were grabbing my attention, or writing a poem and photographing my illustration of it). Also, there were days when I did none of these things.

## 4. My journey

### 4.1 The First Cycle - Autumn: From sadness and irritation to acceptance and shedding.

During the first cycle we lived in our New Zealand home, but had started travelling to other cities. I completed parts of the exercise on 20 days, taking 29 photos and writing 19 SoJournal entries, plus one entry in my personal journal.

On the first day as I stepped out the door early in the morning, my attention was quickly drawn to the street lamp with its light, the birds flying beyond it and the dark trees around it, with the words: *I need more light even in the breaking of day.* My prayer was to receive (re-see-ve) images that God quickened to my senses, rather than hunting and shooting pictures like a photography homework assignment. I acknowledged that some days there may be no images and kept walking. That day I also saw a tree that I frequently came back to or it came with me when I could no longer go to it. It was there my feelings had a voice.

*A beautiful autumn tree – glorious in its letting go, shedding the old and going into hibernation. A patchwork of colour – greens and golds, yellows and browns. Beautiful in its fading. I see. I think. I feel... incredible sadness. Tears swell in my breast and I contain them like a tight balloon.*

The second day was raining and this reminded me that my time with God had priority over any ability to take a photograph. I chose a route that became my favourite place to walk. I complained that I wanted to walk on the grass, but driveways kept interrupting and breaking it up. I longed to be in the patch of bush, but when I was there, I realised the track was not grass but gravel, with the words: *Did I think life was a stroll in the bush?* I came to another autumn tree, with the words: *Some trees loose their leaves quickly in the winds and rain; others take longer to let go.*

On the third day I did not walk, but wrote a poem (see *Suitcases* in Appendix A) in response to how a woman had prayed for me the day before in my weekly prayer group.

My fourth day began with me venting more frustration. My dialogue with God began.  
*Why do you start with complaining?*

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<sup>18</sup> McNiff.

*I'm sorry God. What do you want to show me? The fallen leaves on the grass? The wheelie bin I need to put my rubbish into – like complaining?*

*An old ponga stump.*

*I don't want to look at that! The stump is stubborn and the last thing to go.*

*So is your sinful irritation.*

My eyes were drawn to another ponga stump that was out and had left a gaping hole. The stump was covered in green growth, and connected me with a desire to be green and full of life. My day one autumn tree was radiant in the kiss of morning sun.

On my fifth day there were blue skies and a lightness in my step. The carpet of dead leaves did not move me: *They're dead and I'm looking for something new!* I found a small daisy in the dewy grass with its face in the sun and **photographed it**. I felt excited, expectant, anticipating God. Then I was drawn to a newly cleared space with the words: *I want you to see what isn't there.* At the end of my walk I saw a koru – symbol of new beginnings. *I feel budding joy and gratitude.*

My sixth day was a different walk: up Mount Maunganui in wind and rain. I tried to see out the wet car window, leaving my camera and glasses in the car: *Lord, how will I see?* The words come: *I want you to listen today.*

*At the top there is no one around, but I see the wet wind blowing up a 'tunnel'. I feel like a tree having its clutching dying leaves stripped from me and I yield until I feel cold and need to move again. Standing in the throat of God as his breath blows away what needs to go so that new life has room to grow in me.*

The ninth day was walking in a different place and my attention was drawn to a lone evergreen tree with the words: *Set apart* and a poem response (see *Set Apart* in Appendix A), which marked my beginning to accept and understand the inevitability of change in my life.

On the tenth day I walked in the same place as my first day and notice a change in my feelings from sadness to greening. A children's playhouse with a tree through the middle of it revealed my desire for God to slowly expand from the middle of me (see *Day Ten* in Appendix A)

Over the next five days my family was travelling, staying at various homes, and speaking separately at different churches. I noted that it was hard to do my project in change!

I was aware of how much I appreciated being back in my familiar and favourite walking route on my sixteenth day, recalling God's voice to me and my journey over the weeks. I noticed the change in the trees, almost bare now, and as I looked closer I saw beginnings of greening among the shedding. I felt relief instead of loss: *Relief! Re-leaf. I see my tree almost bare of its weight of old yellow and brown leaves, shining gloriously in the sun. Thank you, Abba.*

My seventeenth day also contrasted with my first; the whole sky was lit up and brooding in a tension of colours. I thought about God's majesty and power. I felt awe and it was enough.

I was focused on light (its quality and intensity) on the eighteenth day also. I felt like I could see for the first time and was captivated by everything I saw. Suddenly five bright parakeets landed in a tree near me and then onto my path. I felt a surge of delight as I received God's kisses.<sup>19</sup> I saw and I felt, but seemed to skip the deep thinking that day.

The next five days were another long distance trip. I wondered if sitting in a moving car could be my walk, but doubted God would meet me in the same way. However, I was drawn again and again to the bareness of the trees and asked that we stop so I could take a photo. The words came: *Freedom, not emptiness.*

On the twenty-fourth day I eagerly anticipated my time with God and camera on my favourite route: *I see the sunlight bouncing off each individual fallen moist leaf and it is a dazzling pattern of light. I think that each leaf reflects the glory of the sun and I feel a sense of my individual worth. I also see a hedgehog and pay attention to the birds that accompany me, not just with their song, but jumping, hopping, flying across my path. I feel comforted by these little creatures and accept my own smallness. I come to my autumn tree and enjoy its shedding.*

I was restless at the start of my walk on day twenty-eight and feeling like a victim.

*Asking me to be still is like asking the sea to be calm in a storm. It is good to walk. I notice a leaf caught in a twiggly bush – misplaced – is that me? No, I am the bush and I need to dislodge the things that aren't mine. Shedding. Relief.*

I did not do my walk on day twenty-nine, but words came to me so clearly when I was walking to a neighbour's. I wondered if my intentional walking had helped me create space to see and hear God. I had misplaced my pounamu cross for several days but found it that morning.

*So you trust me with your lost things?*

*Yes Lord. Thank you so much.*

*Can you trust me with your lost children?*

I realised the truth: I did not. *Help me to, Lord.*

I spent my last two days on my favourite route. I noticed a move away from thinking:

*I notice a severely cut back palm with a vigorous single full fern branch. I don't think. I feel hope. I am happy to bypass my thinking head and let what I see speak to my heart. I see a large dead tree covered in green moss. I think of my favourite chapter 'What the green moss said' in Joyce Rupp's book 'Dear Heart, Come Home.' It's okay for God to restore me though nature. I feel peace.*

#### **4.2 The Second cycle – Winter: Bareness, goodbyes, anticipation and darkness.**

During the second cycle we slept in 11 different beds in seven locations in three countries and then unexpectedly hit a family crisis on the first night in our Thailand home. I completed parts of the exercise on 12 days, taking 16 photos and writing three SoJournal entries, plus nine entries in my personal journal.

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<sup>19</sup> *God's kisses* is the term I use for a spontaneous moment of joy that we usually ignore. It may be a gentle breeze, a hug or kind word from a friend, a fragrance, a flower. However, I can take a few seconds to acknowledge the source and receive it as a kiss of love from God to me.

This cycle began in the city of Christchurch not long after the June 2011 earthquake.<sup>20</sup> Our time there was spent seeing our son at the end of his first semester of university in Dunedin, listening to friends share their stories of the earthquakes, and visiting supporting churches.

On the first day :

*I feel nothing, numb, waiting. I see a beautiful, huge, bare tree and the soft, weak, cool lighting on it. I do not expect profound revelation but want to be attentive, tuned in to you. I see another golden tree and just receive it. Then I remember the willow tree that has journeyed with me throughout the year from empty loneliness to green gracefulness in company, and now bare, free of shedding, and golden. I sense a hopeful anticipation rising in me – budding promise of fruit as I take up my life back in Thailand.*

The next few days were spent walking, not alone with God, but with friends and family. I enjoyed God in them as we said our farewells. It was important to be flexible and accept seeing and connection with God in ways beyond my ritual.

On the fifth day we had a lot of driving and I was sick. The bareness of the trees continued to speak to me: *with all the leaves gone, I can see the structure. I wonder what my structure looks like and how it will stand with budding, blossoming and fruiting.*

Over the next few days there was more travelling (snatching moments of God's glory in sunsets and clouds), a hospital procedure and accepting hospitality from others as God's gift of grace. Then I spent two nights on retreat.

Of my exercise 'I see, I think, I feel' the last of these was the hardest for me. At first I interpreted 'feeling' as discerning what my emotions were, but on retreat it broadened to physically feeling by touching nature around me. Contemplation was also defined as a sense of wonder. My last Sojournal entry for the month was written on retreat in New Zealand, but it was not the last photo. We flew to Thailand and the first night back in our home, our family was thrown into unexpected chaos and unknowing, isolated from the support we had just left.

My photos in Thailand had the theme of darkness: the black frame around a photograph of a tui (*holding on to hope through a dark frame*); a dark, steep, slippery path with my water bottle (*is it enough for the journey ahead?*) and the monsoon rain overflowing the gutter (*overwhelmed*). Near the end of the month I noticed a few small yellow fungi (*small gifts of beauty and joy*). I responded deeply without words, grateful I still had the capacity to wonder amidst turmoil. On the way back, I noticed what I had not seen before: the whole side of the steps was covered in this little yellow fungi. *We cannot always see what God is doing, but when we look back, we can see how much he has done.*

#### **4.3 The Third cycle – Spring does not come: Learning to see in the dark.**

During the third cycle we were settling in but still in an unresolving family crisis. I completed the exercise on only five days (I had trouble physically breathing for much of

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<sup>20</sup> We had also been in Christchurch the week before the first earthquake on 4 September, 2010.



the month), taking 12 photos and writing only two SoJournal entries, but nine entries in my personal journal.

On my first day (Sept 5<sup>th</sup>) my husband and I drove to the back of a night safari to go for a walk. He walked beside me in silence. I felt depleted and at the end of myself.

*I'm too sad for words, not knowing if I want to be alone or if I'm too scared to be alone. I spend my energy breathing and walking. My eyes are wet and my heart swollen. There is anger there somewhere too. We navigate the mud on the track. Mud. I look at the mud and wonder if I have the capacity to wonder at or find beauty in anything today. Beholding is clouded by my tear-filled eyes. 'So God, can you speak to me in the mud?' Silence. But my body resonates connection with the churned up tyre-pressed mud. I like the mud. I identify with it and wrestle in it.*

I continued walking and heard a lion roaring, not caring if I met it on the track (a wolf had escaped the year before!) and reflecting on 1 Peter 5:8. I told myself that although the lion is close, I am secure. I kept walking and then my attention was drawn to the light reflected in a mud puddle. I started to compose a photo and the words came so clearly: *So Viv, can you see sky in a mud puddle?* This touched my heart powerfully and I gasped. Somewhere between the father of the demon possessed boy (Mark 9:24) and blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:51) I cry, 'Yes Lord, I want to see. Help me in my lack of seeing!' I felt lighter, touched in a deep, gentle way and I was grateful. The day ended with more courage and hope, and this photo became the wallpaper on my laptop, continuing to speak to me each day about seeing in the dark for over a year. This was my first SoJournal entry in Thailand and one of only two entries. Its impact on me is so profound that I did not sense a need for more at this depth. It was enough.

On my second day (8<sup>th</sup>) I helped a colleague by doing a collage in a spiritual direction session. Interestingly, I chose pictures of three women, all turned away with their eyes shut; pictures of pain and trust. That afternoon I walked in my neighbourhood and wondered if God could speak to me in this familiar urban place.

*But it's about me being open to you, isn't it. I open my heart and walk, open my eyes to see, to notice the things I don't pay attention to. Scraggly weeds alongside the road – but wait, this is rapeseed, deliberately planted and tended. A picture of my life – maybe it looks messy, but I trust your planting and nurturing. Thank you.*

On my third day (13<sup>th</sup>) I drove to my favourite place to be with Jesus, a Jesuit retreat centre garden. I spent time sitting with God, then I went for my 'wonder wander' but the first thing that got my attention was crushed snail guts. *Yuck! I don't want to look at that! Maybe this won't work here.* I kept walking and as I turned a corner, colour (pink flowers) leaped out of the greens and greys, and I noticed the texture and light on a moist ginger plant leaf. It connected me to the creator and it was enough.

On my fourth (15<sup>th</sup>) and fifth (30<sup>th</sup>) days, I walked up 500 steps through forest to a temple, appreciating the beauty in small things and my still-present capacity to wonder.

## 5. Observations

Number of:		Days (Walks/Other) <sup>21</sup>		Photos with caption	SoJournal	My Journal
Cycle One	May	20	(16 / 4)	29	19	1
Cycle Two	July	12	(9 / 3)	16	3	9
Cycle Three	Sept	5	(5 / 0)	12	2	9

From a quantitative analysis, the number of days I completed the exercise, especially the walks, decreased by about half each cycle. In New Zealand I could walk out the door and be in nature in minutes. In Thailand I had to drive to get to a place where I could walk in nature. Also, the heat and monsoon rain were prohibitive, as well as my health in the last cycle. Flexibility with a ritual is important in the upheaval of transition. Furthermore, photography and walking seemed to be diminishing in their importance to help me see and connect with God. However, I noticed an increased openness to God in my daily life.

If I combine the number of SoJournal and My Journal entries, these match the days I completed the exercise quite well, but there was a definite shift away from the SoJournal to my own personal journal. The exercise moved from being an SGM project, to my real and private life. I see this as a healthy integration of the exercise into my life. The similarities of Cycle 2 and 3 reflect being stuck in the winter chaos of transition due to an unforeseen crisis in our family.

Qualitative analysis is also important. In the first cycle, my priorities became clearer: my time with God was more important than walking or taking photos, and God's agenda was more important than mine. I was learning to see, not only what was there, but also what was not there. Seeing became a way of taking time in prayer and I noticed that I began to pay more attention to my seeing even when I was not on my intentional contemplative walk. Movements I noticed were from a striding pace to a slower one, from complaining to appreciating, from greed and hunger to contentment and satisfaction, from sadness to acceptance, and from understanding shedding as loss to seeing it as lightness. I also noticed a beginning to move away from analytical thinking and words. Dominant images were autumn trees as a picture of loss and shedding, and light. This fits well with Bridges' first phase of transition: endings and letting go.

In the second cycle, I needed to hold my ritual loosely. Hope was beginning to swell about our return to Thailand, but was quickly lost in the bewilderment of crisis. Movements were from thinking towards feeling, from seeing to cultivating wonder, and from words to wordlessness. Dominant images were bare trees as a picture of transparency, and grasping hope in darkness. This also fits well with Bridges' second phase of transition: the neutral zone of chaos with creative potential.

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<sup>21</sup> The term *Walk* includes driving or flying. *Other* means not intentionally walking but seeing something wherever I was and responding to that. Examples include writing poetry, being on a retreat day, journaling at church etc.

In the third cycle I had begun reading Benner's *Opening to God* and accepting prayer as my stance of openness toward God.<sup>22</sup> I began to accept God's initiation and action within me, rather than prayer as an activity that I perform. Movements were from activity to openness, expecting to experience God to accepting his presence in small moments of wonder, and from 'it's all about me' to 'it's all about God'. Even in scary moments, God initiated love (a squirrel dancing in the tree outside the doctor's window) and held me in my anger as my false image of God was spewed out and explored. The dominant image of this cycle was the invitation to see sky in a mud puddle (to see beyond what life initially presents), and this continues to nurture and challenge me. My life as a messy garden, and themes of pain and trust were also images of this cycle. I am not sure how my experience fits with Bridges' third stage of transition; there was much uncertainty, but I think beginnings were suspended due to the ongoing crisis and the concept of 'normal' not finding a place to settle.

## 6. Relevance to Spiritual Direction

Times of transition can be opportunities for new understanding and connection with God. This project shows the importance of non-verbal encounters with God in this case by a daily ritual of walking and seeing. Components that were important for this ritual were:

- walking alone (but accepting the gift of others at times also)
- noticing my pace (both walking and breathing) and slowing down
- breathing as an initial body awareness
- opening myself to God<sup>23</sup>
- opening my senses to the outside world and using my eyes to see, my ears to hear, my hands to touch, and even my nose to smell
- giving attention to that which grabs my attention<sup>24</sup>
- discerning God's communication
- allowing it to touch my deepest centre
- responding to God's communication honestly

Perhaps this way of connecting with God could be suggested to directees. I have put together a pamphlet for this purpose.

Another aspect of my 'wonder wander' is that different Myers-Briggs personality types will enjoy and be challenged by it. Using the framework 'I see, I think, I feel' encouraged me to enjoy using my slightly dominant mode of thinking, but also challenged me to get in touch with my feeling. I am also a sensor and, although I find it easy to enjoy God in nature, I was challenged to limit and focus on what captured my senses and take that into my intuiting and discerning God. I would hope that intuitive types would be drawn out of themselves to see God in the physical world around them and give attention to that.

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<sup>22</sup> Benner p.156 *Prayer is living with openness to God. Our life becomes a prayer, and our prayer becomes our life as we begin to live with this openness as the core posture of our hearts.*

<sup>23</sup> At best, this is an attitude of quiet, expectant waiting that does not demand God's revelation, but accepts and is satisfied with Immanuel in the physical world around me also. But it has also been angry, silent, and restless!

<sup>24</sup> The camera is a tool for paying attention to, focusing on and capturing the image, which may have been triggered by my hearing (birdsong), touching (the bark of a tree) or smelling (a fragrant flower).

While I did not have a continuing relationship with a spiritual director through my transition, a lifeline for me was having regular contact with a pastoral caregiver, who has done spiritual formation training. I would recommend that directors try to stay in touch with someone going through transition until the directee finds a new director. This is possible with skype and email, even if only in an informal way.

Appendix A has personal poems from each of the three cycles and Appendix B has my favourite quotes and scriptures under topics. Appendix C has three pieces of writing that I have found helpful. These may be useful resources for directors as well.

## **7. Conclusion**

*Transformation is the true destination of transition.*<sup>25</sup> I had hoped that my documented experience would produce clear principles that would benefit others going through transition. Instead I found that my focus was on my own connection with God and the resulting transformation during a time when I was personally struggling. This has been a much more vulnerable piece of writing than I first intended. Perhaps the value of this research is actually in the personal experience of God that I have revealed. I hope that this project will encourage others in times of transition.

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<sup>25</sup> William Bridges

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## Appendix A: My Poems from the Three Cycles

### From Cycle One

#### Suitcases

I'm packing a suitcase of sadness  
With things I hold in pain  
Things I can no longer carry  
I'm trading my losses for gain

Broken relationships and hopes  
Things I cannot repair  
The darkness of my shadows  
The deep things I still fear

I'm letting go of losses that  
Age, change and moving bring  
My children growing up  
My inadequacies in parenting  
Regret and disappointment  
Self-pity and poverty thinking  
My desire for control, familiarity and favour  
These also I'm relinquishing

Lord, is there any more?  
I don't want to miss one bit  
You collect each tear I shed  
You love me in all my ... mess!

Living by other's opinions  
Time for my inner critic to get out  
Childhood hurts and memories  
Midlife questions and doubt

Death, dying and sickness  
Lord, these are too big and heavy for me  
I close the bag, zip it up  
And place it at Calvary

And I see another suitcase there  
Filled with joy and love divine  
Brightly coloured and bulging  
"Excuse me, Sir. That's mine!"

## **From Cycle Two**

### **Set apart**

Snatching time with you.  
A pukeko in the swamp  
And then I see an evergreen tree  
    'Set apart'  
    is all you seem to say  
    and it is enough for me.  
I understand the loose connections  
The sometimes loneliness  
    and not quite belonging  
And I yield myself again  
    to your will for my life  
    Set apart.

### **Day Ten**

I don't feel the same sadness as before.  
Mark walks behind and beside me  
In silence.  
I see all the fallen leaves  
But I am ever greening.

A new playground  
And then I see it –  
    the tree goes right through the  
    middle of the playhouse.  
That's what I want, God.  
I want you slowly expanding  
Right through the middle of me.



## After Cycle Two

I want to hurl myself at you God  
So hard that it hurts your chest,  
But you catch me and hold me and love me.<sup>26</sup>

I am angry with you and want to  
Pound you, demanding, 'Why?'  
And 'What do I do?'

I am broken and crying  
Wanting you to pick me up  
Tenderly and tell me it will be okay.

I am tired and still trying  
To hold together what won't be held  
Cycling between hope and dread.

I want to dance with you again  
To find joy and peace and strength  
In my empty soul.

Fill me  
Fill me  
Fill me

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<sup>26</sup> See Susan Lenzkes' poem in Appendix C

### After Cycle Three

Where are we – you and I?  
I have been scared of you  
I have skirted around you  
    Tiptoed passed you  
Not daring to disturb the sleeping giant.

And you –  
You have longed for me to come  
You have ached to take the pain that I  
    Clutch to myself like a buoy  
    In the wild ocean  
Asking me to do what I cannot: To let go.

Job 14:15

And if I am lost?  
It will be in your love.  
And if I drown?  
It will be in your love?  
And if I die?  
It will be into your resurrection and rebirth.

Separated by my own aimless wanderings  
Around you, avoiding you

And I will come again  
Wandering to you  
And not around you

Mr. Terrible  
Scary God  
Mask removing  
Skin wrinkled by emotion<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Oliver Sack's patients suffering sleeping sickness had smooth skin because they had not experienced emotion for over 40 years! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QNum0dTYalk&feature=related>

## Appendix B: Bible verses and Quotations

### 1. Change and transition

*Now we live with great expectation, and we have a priceless inheritance—an inheritance that is kept in heaven for you, pure and undefiled, beyond the reach of change and decay.* 1 Pet 1:3-4 NLT

*This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is bearing fruit everywhere by changing lives, just as it changed your lives from the day you first heard and understood the truth about God's wonderful grace.* Col 1:6 NLT

*Transformation is the true destination of transition.* William Bridges

### 2. Nature

*Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation!* Is 65:18 NLT

*For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.* Rom 8:19-21 NLT

*But the basic reality of God is plain enough. Open your eyes and there it is! By taking a long and thoughtful look at what God has created, people have always been able to see what their eyes as such can't see: eternal power, for instance, and the mystery of his divine being. So nobody has a good excuse.* Rom 1:20 MSG

*I look up at your macro-skies, dark and enormous, your handmade sky-jewelry, Moon and stars mounted in their settings. Then I look at my micro-self and wonder, ☐ Why do you bother with us? Why take a second look our way?* Ps 8:3-4 MSG

*Life is so hectic today it seems a ridiculous idea to spend any of our precious hours in search of a tree that has a message for us, but nature does hold some keys to our well-being and demands nothing in return but some time and attention. Whether we're in the desert, at the ocean, in a forest, there's an abundance of life there that mirrors our own, offers a perfect metaphor for our own changes and challenges. If we look deeply enough, we will find those symbols that are waiting for us, whispering our names into the breeze – perhaps in the trunk of a burned-out redwood, in the half-faded footprint on a desert dune. There are messages for us out there, words from the wild calling us home.* Jan Phillips

*This natural world is only an image and material copy of a heavenly and spiritual pattern... Thus the sage sees heaven reflected in Nature as in a mirror, and he pursues this Art, not for the sake of gold or silver, but for the love of the knowledge which it reveals.* Sendivogius in Jan Phillips

### 3. Walking

*Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you.* Ps 143:8 NLT

*You keep your covenant and show unfailing love to all who walk before you in wholehearted devotion.* 1 Ki 8:23, 2 Chr 6:14 NLT

*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne. Unfailing love and truth walk*

*before you as attendants. Ps 89:14 NLT*

#### **4. Contemplative Prayer Walking**

*A contemplative prayer walk is a simple procession of peace. Where and when we walk are not as important as the open and receiving attitude with which we walk. When we walk contemplatively, we meet God on the path. In the contemplative walk, conscious attention to breathing is important. We breathe deeply, uniting our breath with an invocation to the Holy Spirit, willing God to awaken our own spirit. We are conscious of the blessing of all those who have walked this path before us, and we remember them with gratitude. As we walk, there is an attitude of respect for the life of all creation around us. We give silent thanks as we see color and texture, feel wind or heat or cold, hear chirping birds or rustling leaves or the rush of cars and the roar of airplanes. And we remember that all is worthy of prayer. With each step, we begin to release our own agendas and embrace God's peace and plan for our life's path. <http://springfieldop.org/prayer/forms-of-prayer/prayer-walk/>*

#### **5. Photography**

*Every step in the process of taking pictures is a step toward the light, an experience of the holy, an encounter with God who is at eye level, whose image I see wherever I look. Jan Phillips*

*To make images is a way of ordering one's world, of exploring and understanding one's relationship to existence.... The images we make are often ahead of our understanding, but to say 'yes' to a subject is also to have recognized, however dimly, a part of oneself; to live with that image, to accept its significance is perhaps to grow in understanding. John Blakemore quoted in Jan Phillips*

*My satisfaction came not from taking effective photographs, but rather from the wonder of being able to capture moments that mattered to me. Dorothy Norman quoted in Jan Phillips*

*On days when I walk for the sake of walking, with no camera in hand, my mind is besieged with random thoughts ... On days when I walk for the sake of seeing, the act of looking consumes my consciousness. The mind quiets down, giving way to the eyes, and the world enters through the silent portals. What thoughts occur in that timeless movement seem not to come from outside myself, but to surface from a place deep within, rising from a soul in search of expression. Jan Phillips*

*In my view you cannot claim to have seen something until you have photographed it. Emile Zola quoted in <http://contemplative-photographer.com>.*

#### **6. Seeing**

*Your eyes are windows into your body. If you open your eyes wide in wonder and belief, your body fills up with light. If you live squinty-eyed in greed and distrust, your body is a dank cellar. If you pull the blinds on your windows, what a dark life you will have! Mat 6:22-23 MSG*

*Show<sup>28</sup> us your unfailing love, O LORD, and grant us your salvation. Ps 85:7 NLT  
O my Strength, to you I sing praises, for you, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me  
unfailing love. Ps 59:17 NLT*

*That was the beginning of my **seeing** – that shift in noticing not just what was in front of me, but what was behind that, and behind that. Seeing wasn't just visual anymore; it was visceral. I wasn't looking; I was searching, feeling, finding, reflecting, taking in and releasing. Jan Phillips*

*I am deeply impressed by the fact that our spiritual seeing is conditioned by our physical seeing. If we go through life oblivious to the things that our physical eyes invite us to notice, it is almost impossible for us to be truly attentive to spiritual realities. Juliet Benner*

*It is not enough for us to look. He has to reveal himself interiorly in our hearts... He is expert at opening our hearts to himself, as he gently opened the heart of the Samaritan woman. He will reveal us to ourselves. He will show us our sinful hearts and thus reveal himself to us as our needed Savior. Paul Hinnebusch*

## **7. Contemplation/wonder**

*I am praying to you because I know you will answer, O God. Bend down and listen as I pray. Show me your unfailing love in wonderful ways. Ps 17: 6-7 NLT*

*For I am always aware of your unfailing love, and I have lived according to your truth. Ps 26:3 NLT*

*Praise the Lord, for he has shown me the wonders of his unfailing love. Ps 31:21 NLT*

*Contemplation can be defined as the faculty of wonder. Andrew Dunn*

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<sup>28</sup> The definitions of *show* include:

- to bring or put in sight or view; cause or allow to appear or be seen; make visible; exhibit; display
- to guide; conduct
- to direct to another's attention; point out
- to reveal, manifest, or make evident (an emotion, condition, quality) by behavior or outward sign
- to exhibit or manifest (oneself or itself) in a given character, condition
- to grant or bestow (favor, kindness, mercy) <http://www.yourdictionary.com/show>

## Appendix C:

### **The Unspeakable**

From *When Life Takes What Matters Most* by Susan Lenzkes

It's all right -  
    questions, pain, and  
    stabbing anger  
    can be poured out to  
the Infinite One and  
    He will not be damaged.  
Our wounded ragings will be  
    lost in Him and  
    we  
    will  
    be  
    found.  
For we beat on His chest  
    from within  
    the circle of His arms.

### **Seeing Pennies**

From Chapter 2 of *Pilgrim at Tinker's Creek* by Annie Dillard

When I was six or seven years old, growing up in Pittsburgh, I used to take a precious penny of my own and hide it for someone else to find... I would take a piece of chalk, and, starting at either end of the block, draw huge arrows leading up to the penny from both directions... I was greatly excited, during all this arrow-drawing, at the thought of the first lucky passer-by who would receive in this way, regardless of merit, a free gift from the universe.

I've been thinking about seeing. There are lots of things to see, unwrapped gifts and free surprises. The world is fairly studded and strewn with pennies cast broadside from a generous hand. But – and this is the point – who gets excited by a mere penny? If you follow one arrow, if you crouch motionless on a bank to watch a tremulous ripple thrill on the water and are rewarded by the sight of a muskrat kit paddling from its den, will you count that sight a chip of copper only, and go your rueful way? It is dire poverty indeed when a man is so malnourished and fatigued that he won't stoop to pick up a penny. But if you cultivate a healthy poverty and simplicity, so that finding a penny will literally make your day, then, since the world is in fact planted in pennies, you have with your poverty bought a lifetime of days. It is that simple. What you see is what you get.

### **Child of Wonder**

From *Seasons of Your Heart* by Macrina Wiederkehr

My bare feet walk the earth reverently  
for everything keeps crying,  
*Take off your shoes!*  
*The ground you stand on is holy*

*The ground of your being is holy.*

When the wind sings through the pines  
like a breath of God  
awakening you to the sacred present  
calling your soul to new insights  
*Take off your shoes!*

When the sun rises above your rooftop  
coloring your world with dawn  
Be receptive to this awesome beauty  
Put on your garment of adoration  
*Take off your shoes!*

When the Red Maple drops its last leaf of summer  
wearing its "burning bush" robes no longer  
read between its barren branches, and  
*Take off your shoes!*

When sorrow presses close to your heart  
begging you to put your trust in God alone  
filling you with a quiet knowing  
that God's hand is not too short to heal you  
*Take off your shoes!*

When a new person comes into your life  
like a mystery about to unfold  
then you find yourself marveling over  
the frailty and splendor of every human being  
*Take off your shoes!*

When, during the wee hours of the night  
you drive slowly into the new day  
and the morning's fog, like angels wings  
hover mysteriously above you  
*Take off your shoes!*

Take off your shoes of distraction  
Take off your shoes of ignorance and blindness  
Take off your shoes of hurry and worry  
Take off anything that prevents you  
from being *a child of wonder*.

*Take off your shoes;*  
The ground you stand on is holy.  
The ground you are is holy.

